Kiwi Bikers

85 New Zealanders and their motorbikes

Ken Downie

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JOHN DOWNIE

Dedicated to Patricia (Paddy) Downie

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INTRODUCTION

For much of my 1960s Dunedin childhood, we were a one-motorcycle family. Dad had a 1949 BSA Bantam, which had survived some extraordinary expeditions for such an ancient and underpowered machine. He had replaced the original, old-fashioned saddle-style seat so he could carry a pillion passenger. I can remember going to church on Sundays, one kid at a time. It was quite a process — there were four of us. God knows what the other families must have thought.

Eventually, Dad got a crash helmet, for either him or us, a luxury especially as wearing a helmet wasn't a requirement back then. Around 1970 we got a Ford Consul Mark II; and, rather as Puff the Magic Dragon 'sadly slipped into his cave', after that the old BSA languished at the back of the garage. The bike is still in the family, I'm pleased to say, and one day we're going to restore it.

In 1974, my mother, Paddy, bought a Suzuki 50 'step-through' so she could get around town. She never drove a car, but she loved that little scooter. It was the first of a few Suzukis before she switched to Hondas. I learned to ride on Mum's first scooter, getting my licence not long after my fifteenth birthday. I must have looked all of 12; I can still remember the traffic officer putting down my occupation as 'schoolboy'. I've often wondered if my designated occupation has ever been updated.

A year later, I bought my first motorcycle, a brand-spanking-new Suzuki GT185. It was gold, and I will never forget the day I picked it

ABOVE LEFT: Paddy Downie in the kitchen of the Downies' Dunedin home in the 1970s.
RIGHT: Ken Downie (left) with his brother Greg at home in 1976.

ABOVE LEFT: Three of the four Downie brothers, Joe (left), Greg and Ken, practising some two-wheeler steering and pillion riding skills. Their father John's BSA Bantam is parked behind them. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Paddy Downie upgrading to a Suzuki FR80 at Holland & Bell Suzuki, Dunedin. The Downies bought a number of bikes from Brian Evans, the salesman at right.
OPPOSITE PAGE: Greg Downie, 23, in 1984 with a 1975 Honda CB750 Four, his prized fourth bike. This photograph was shot and printed by Ken, in an early foray into serious photography.

up from the Holland & Bell dealership in North Dunedin. It cost about $750, money I'd saved up from my Saturday night *Star Sports* pub run. The newspaper is now ancient history, but back then I could make five to six dollars in an hour and a half, mostly through tips. That was big bucks in the mid-1970s.

One night, not long after I'd bought the little Suzuki, I was heading out of the Bowling Green Hotel car park with a pocketful of change and newspapers loaded up on the carrier. Just as I pulled up at the red light outside the pub's entrance, the front door swung open and one of the punters, who may have had a little too much to drink, swayed his way across the road in front of me. Suddenly, the old guy recognised me. He stopped in his tracks and stared at me as I sat astride the shiny new contraption. 'You little bastard,' he said. 'That's the last time I'm giving you a tip.' The following week he flicked me a 20-cent coin for the 12-cent paper and said, 'Keep the change.'

Of the many motorbikes that cycled in and out of the Downie driveway, most were road bikes. I briefly owned a 1955 BSA 500 single, but it wasn't me and it spent more time keeping Dad's old Bantam company in the garage than it did on the road. That didn't put my brother Greg off British bikes — he thought it would be cool to own one when he was a student at art school. Norton Commandos certainly qualified as cool, but they could be hard to start, as Greg quickly discovered with his black 1972 750cc Commando. We rode to Christchurch on it once, ending up at a New Year's Eve punk gig at the old Star and Garter Hotel. Something happened — a scuffle, perhaps — and the management closed the venue down early. Hundreds of people mingled outside with nothing to do. When Greg mounted the Commando, he quickly became the centre of attention. The crowd gathered around as he tweaked the carbs and threw his not-very-substantial weight onto the kick-starter to turn over the big twin-cylinder engine. Miraculously, the Norton roared into life at first kick. I jumped on the back and the crowd parted like the Red Sea as we chugged through, feeling for all the world like Peter Fonda and Jack Nicholson.

Since then, it's been strictly Japanese bikes for both of us, although we're stuck in a time warp, preferring the older models. Greg's most recent venture on two wheels was a 1972 Honda CB750 — an old favourite. Sadly, I've just sold my 1970 Honda CB350 to finance a spiral staircase, which I thought I needed more than a motorcycle. But that hasn't stopped me dreaming motorbikes . . . I'm already picturing myself riding something Japanese, hopefully from the 1970s. I'll keep looking for that little piece of the past, which is fast becoming more and more like the Auckland property market if the advertisements on Trade Me are anything to go by.

A book like this had been on my mind for a while. I like to think it's modelled ever so slightly on another book of portraits that came out 40 years ago, *Working Men*, by Christchurch photographer Glenn Busch, which featured a series of portraits along with short biographies of each sitter. It's been an inspiration to me, both then and now.

Here I've tried to make a book that's as much about the rider as it is about the bikes, and I have attempted to create a snapshot of this very Kiwi phenomenon.

Armed with a Canon 5D, and tiptoeing my way around Covid-19 lockdowns, I was able to take photographs of unique biker events all over the country, from the Burt Munro Challenge to the Classic Racing Festival at Pukekohe. I was lucky to be able to visit and document the last-ever Brass Monkey Rally, held for the final time in a not-so-frozen Ōtūrehua in Central Otago in early 2021.

Alas, far more photographs were made than I could ever possibly use, but it was a fun way to find people, or people who knew people, for this book. The New Zealand bikers I met are far from your stereotypical Kiwi petrol-heads. They're a broad range of ages and genders and from all backgrounds. Among them I found people whose passion for motorbikes has often turned them into innovative engineers or just confident backyard fixer-uppers in the Kiwi tradition.

In most cases they are, in one way or another, in love with their motorcycles. None are fair-weather riders; freedom was a word I heard a lot, and of course many love the thrill of speed. One chap sums that up, telling me moments before he was about to compete at Pukekohe, 'This Ducati is so fast that sometimes it makes me feel just a little nervous, but that's what I love about it.' His name is Dave Morley, and he told me that the day before his eighty-second birthday. Says it all. •

THE BIKERS

HUGH ANDERSON

HAMILTON

1989 Honda NX650 Dominator

A 1946 motorbike magazine article on the Isle of Man racers captured the imagination of then 10-year-old Hugh Anderson. 'I can still remember that article — it had quite an effect on me,' says the retired motorcycle racer from Hamilton. 'I thought to myself, I'm going there one day.' Not only would he go to the world-famous racing event, but between 1961 and 1966 Hugh was also a two-time Isle of Man winner. He was also a four-time motorcycle GP world champion, racing for Suzuki. He is one of New Zealand's most successful motorcycle racers and was awarded an MBE for services to motorsport in 1994.

But back in 1946, the kid with the motorcycle magazine had only begun riding on the wet grass on his mother's farm at Ōhinewai, near Huntly, learning how to spin the wheels on a 1927 Douglas.

'I figured out from an early age that only when you have semi-lost control of the motorcycle is the moment when you can gain control,' he says. He would experiment by spinning the back wheel or locking up the front, preferably without coming off. 'I came a gutser a couple of times. Mum patched me up, and all she said was "blimming motorcycle".' It was a discipline that came in handy a few years later. 'Riding around a paddock isn't that different to being on a race track,' Hugh says.

By the time Hugh was in his teens he was racing at a national level. A determined competitor, he once put methanol in his BSA. 'It took off like a rocket, left everyone for dead,' he recalls, until everything went silent: the barrel sleeve ended up in the crankcase.

Along with 'never say die' courage, crucial to Hugh's success was his ability to problem-solve. 'Racing for Suzuki in those early days we had lots of problems,' he recalls. The Suzukis were particularly prone to seizure, and going behind the backs of the official GP team, Hugh would often quietly tinker with the engines all night. 'I can remember coming in tenth once when everyone else in the team had seized halfway through.'

He won the best prize of all racing in the Dutch TT. 'I came a real cropper and found myself in a drain with the bike on top of me.' Next thing Hugh was in hospital with his leg in plaster, suspended above the bed for five weeks. 'Well, who should walk in but this beautiful eighteen-year-old nurse,' he recalls with a smile. 'Janny and I have now been married for fifty-eight years.' Hugh thinks at one time he had about 50 motorbikes in the garage, but now he's only got the Honda Dominator. 'I still like to do a bit of trail-riding,' he says. 'I like getting the back wheel spinning, just like that kid on the 1927 Douglas.' •

LEFT: Between 1961 and 1966 Hugh Anderson was a two-time Isle of Man winner. He was also a four-time motorcycle GP world champion, racing for Suzuki. He is one of New Zealand's most successful motorcycle racers and was awarded an MBE for services to motorsport in 1994.

JULIE ASHTON

DUNEDIN

1963 BMW R60

Julie Ashton's late father, boat-builder John Ashton, was keen to get his two daughters onto motorbikes when they were young. 'Perhaps he wanted boys, though he never said so,' says Julie, an operations manager for a Dunedin real estate firm. 'With Dad we did things that he was into, like yachting and motorcycling, and I was only eleven when I got my first motorcycle, a Yamaha DT125.'

John enrolled both Julie and her sister Keri in a motorcycle riding course. Once Julie turned 15, she quickly got her licence. 'I was the only girl who rode a motorbike to school, Dad's Suzuki GSX450.'

Julie is still riding her father's bikes; these days, however, it's a 1963 BMW R60, a bike that's a real head-turner. 'It won best classic bike at the Brass Monkey Rally at Ōtūrehua in 2021,' boasts Julie. She rode it there, but it was only a quick twenty-minute ride from Naseby, where she has a crib.

As well as the BMW, John Ashton owned a couple of 1980s Hondas and an old Sunbeam. 'The Sunbeam was fun to ride but not very reliable,' recalls Julie. 'He got the BMW in partly restored bits and pieces and put it all back together again.' Once it was restored, he would do vintage runs like the Dunvegan Rally. Sometimes Julie would join her father on these adventures, usually riding the BMW while he took the Sunbeam. 'At one rally they announced that a woman — me — had ridden a classic bike, but because I wasn't a member I wasn't eligible for a prize.' That didn't put her off: 'We came back the following year.'

More recently, the bike has started to show a little wear and tear. 'It's been about twenty years since Dad did the restoration, and because he kept it in a big workshop not far from the beach at St Kilda, corrosion and rust had developed around the chrome areas, like the wheel rims and hubcaps.' Her brother-in-law and fellow motorcycle enthusiast Craig Ballantyne came to the rescue and gave the bike a thorough refurbishment.

'This BMW is not just good-looking, it's also a really fun bike to ride,' Julie says. 'It's got a low centre of gravity that makes it very comfortable and manoeuvrable, more like riding a modern bike. Apart from the brakes, that is. You have to plan your braking!'

Julie's not afraid to take the BMW out on a long-distance run, even if the old 600cc boxer twin is pushing 60. 'I've taken it to Cromwell, the Catlins, the Maniototo . . . no problem,' she says. 'It's not just for riding around the block.' •

LEFT: 'This BMW is not just good-looking, it's also a really fun bike to ride,' says Julie Ashton. 'It's got a low centre of gravity that makes it very comfortable and manoeuvrable, more like riding a modern bike. Apart from the brakes, that is. You have to plan your braking!'

COLIN BAYNE

MILLERS FLAT

1968 Yamaha Landscout YG5T

Colin Bayne is very knowledgeable when it comes to the history of the farm bike in this country. He's collected plenty of them over the years, either dead or alive, and today they're stored in various sheds around his Millers Flat property in Central Otago.

'I'm trying to bring some of these old bikes back to life,' says the retired fitter and turner. 'It's not always a full restoration but at least I'm making these unloved machines go again.'

In New Zealand, the motorbike's relationship to the land is relatively recent. It used to be horses, tractors and, if you could afford it, a Land Rover. The first Kiwi-made farm bike, the Mountain Goat, was produced in New Plymouth in the early 1960s by Johnny Callender. It was the first purpose-built farm bike in the world. 'I had a Mountain Goat for a time,' Colin says. 'It was ugly and had wheelbarrow wheels but it worked, and now I regret selling it. They are becoming cool.'

Colin grew up on a Southland farm, where his father used a Honda CT90 K0 to muster sheep and cattle, among other things. 'It was either that or the Massey Ferguson,' says Colin. The nimble little Honda must have been a godsend compared to the cumbersome tractor. 'My brother and I would take it to the top of Kuriwao Peak, 640 metres, two-up. I don't know how we did it.' It was even more challenging coming back down. 'If anything went wrong there was no stopping it. That little Honda was pretty good.'

The Japanese really nailed it with their reliable and functional motorbikes; you could ride them, put them in the shed overnight and then ride them again the next day. 'They never needed fixing, because they never broke down,' says Colin, whose Yamaha Landscout would also have fallen into that category. Beside the Mountain Goat, was this bike the height of sophistication? 'These bikes killed the Mountain Goat,' he says.

Colin has had the Yamaha for 10 years, having paid $160 for it at a Mosgiel Lions Club sale. It needed a lot of work, and that's when Colin noticed that the serial numbers belonged to a very narrow band. 'I realised this was a genuine YG5T, a very rare motorbike. They only made about 180 of these in 1968.'

There's a good reason why it's so rare: the bike had an unfortunate four-up, four-down gear pattern with neutral at the bottom. If you ran out of gears going up a steep hill, suddenly you would be in neutral going backwards fast. 'They didn't think this out very well, and it must have put a lot of people off,' says Colin, 'but that's what I love about this motorbike.' •

LEFT: Colin Bayne has collected many farm bikes over the years. He has owned this Yamaha for 10 years, having paid $160 for it at a Mosgiel Lions Club sale. 'I realised this was a genuine YG5T, a very rare motorbike. They only made about 180 of these in 1968.'

LINDSAY BANKS

AUCKLAND

1951 Velocette 500cc OHC KSS MTJ

There are a few nice motorcycles in Lindsay Banks's garage, all under dust covers. He's got a 1928 Douglas DT5 racing bike that belonged to his late father, Fred. 'Dad really liked these bikes. He owned twenty-two of them at various times,' says the West Auckland engineer.

Pulling aside a second cover, Lindsay unveils another of his father's bikes, a pretty little art deco motorcycle. 'This 1938 Panther 600 has been in the family for a while,' he says. His father worked for the Whanganui gas works during the Second World War and the story goes that Fred was on standby, ready to jump on the Panther and race down to the Dublin Street and Victoria Avenue bridges and turn off the city's gas supply if a wartime emergency ever required it. 'I guess they thought that if the Japanese were planning an air invasion they would take out the bridges first,' laughs Lindsay.

Then there's a beautiful black Velocette, Lindsay's favourite. 'They say this is the motorcycle Velocette should have made but didn't,' he says. After the war Velocette stopped production of its overhead-cam engines and went for the cheaper option of overhead-valve motors. Lindsay's old friend, the late John Jones of New Lynn Motorcycles, thought this was a mistake.

Forty years ago John decided to build the motorcycle he believed Velocette should have made in the first place. 'He'd done some training at the Veloce factory in Birmingham as an apprentice,' recalls Lindsay. So he knew what he was doing when he took a 1936 bevel-drive OHC 350cc engine and made it 150cc bigger. 'The trick was to fit the taller cylinder head into place, a complicated process requiring a placement of two degrees to clear the frame.' In the end John created the perfect Velocette 500, even if it was too late to save the company.

Lindsay revined the bike when he got it; officially it's now a 1951 KSS MTJ, one of maybe a dozen of its type in the world. It looks a little more modern than its real age, with the Thruxton pipes and petrol tank. 'I put Japanese internals on the front suspension,' says Lindsay. 'Before that it pogoed like any other British bike.' Now there no bad vibes. 'It's got heaps of torque, tons of power and it handles really well for a single cylinder.'

Lindsay knows he can surprise even the most modern bikers when he rolls up beside them at the lights. 'It's one of my party tricks,' he laughs. 'At first I get an interested glance, but that turns to shock when the lights change and I'm still there beside them. You should see the expressions on their faces when I pop it into top gear, and it takes off into front position.' •

RIGHT:
This beautiful black Velocette was revined once Lindsay Banks got it. Officially, it's now a 1951 KSS MTJ, although it has the appearance of a Velocette from the 1960s.

AVALON BIDDLE

RANGIORA

2019 Kawasaki Ninja ZX-6R

'When we were kids my brother got a dirt bike; of course I had to have one too,' says the 2019 SuperSport champion Avalon Biddle. 'Dad would take us kids to places like Woodhill Forest, north of Auckland, and we would go motocross riding.'

Avalon has a garage filled with bikes at her Rangiora home, and she goes dirt-bike riding some weekends. Back then, she wasn't so great at motocross — 'I wasn't that keen on leaving the ground' — though she quickly discovered she wasn't afraid of going fast. 'Speed didn't faze me at all.' She got her first taste on the tarseal doing bucket-racing when she was 13 years old — 'It was an affordable way to get into the sport'— swapping the handlebars for road clip-ons and changing the tyres on her Honda XR100. 'Riding on a go-kart track is pretty tight, but I was having fun and learning to go fast.'

By the time Avalon was 19 she was going very fast, racing professionally for the next six years. 'I did two years in the European championship, three years in the Italian championships and another year in the World Supersport 300 championships,' she says. 'I was very determined.' Her old school friends would boast that she was a motorcycle-racing superstar. 'They had no idea, it was all quite foreign to them,' she laughs. 'Although I don't know what people expect a motorcycle racer to look like. Strangers always seem surprised when I say I race bikes.'

It might have something to do with gender. Some seasons, Avalon's been the only woman competing, and she made history in 2019 when she became the first woman ever to win the New Zealand SuperSport 600cc title on her Kawasaki ZX-6R race bike. 'I'm always racing against men, though these days there are a few more women getting into the scene,' she says.

She and her motorcycle-racing partner Jake Lewis make a pretty fast couple. 'Sometimes we race against each other,' says Avalon. 'Recently I got third and he came in first. Who's got the most trophies? I've never counted.' Avalon loves the performance aspect of the race. 'I've been asked to race old classics, but why would I want to race something that doesn't go fast and handle really well? Bikes like my Kawasaki are so good, the tyres are so sticky, and everything is twenty seconds faster. For me you can't beat that.'

On top of her racing career she also has a background in marketing, and these days she works for a specialist bicycle retailer. She meets a few cyclist know-it-all types in the job. 'Some guys can be quite condescending, like they are the best riders ever,' she laughs. If only they knew. •

RIGHT:
Avalon Biddle made history in 2019 when she became the first woman ever to win the New Zealand SuperSport 600cc title on a Kawasaki ZX-6R race bike.

STEPHEN BRIGGS

WHANGAMATĀ

1992 Britten V1000

The hand-built Britten V1000 has become a Kiwi cultural icon. On the day the Britten factory closed in 1998, three years after the death of its inventor, the visionary John Britten, businessman Kevin Grant bought the original factory motorcycle raced by Britten's team for a sum that back then was equivalent to a king's ransom. 'He had vision, but most people thought he was mad,' recalls Whangamatā-based test rider and engineer Stephen Briggs, the current custodian of the bike. 'No one thinks that anymore, now everyone knows Kevin got himself a work of art.'

He's not exaggerating. Only 10 Britten V1000s were ever built, some of which are in museum collections around the world. The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa has one, bought straight off the factory floor. It may well be the only exhibit in the museum that can go faster than Phar Lap, the legendary racehorse whose skeleton stands in a glass case a few metres away.

Stephen rode this unique motorcycle for over 25 years, including in a world championship in which he came in second. But then 'John died and the bike eventually died with him, and finally the factory closed'. For a long time Stephen didn't give the bike a second thought, until one day he got a phone call. The Britten was back in his life again.

Since 2015 he has been the bike's custodian. However, it's his job as a demonstrator that has taken him and this famous motorcycle to events around the world. But it's not all about showing off. 'I made that,' he says, pointing to the signature spaghetti-style configuration that makes up the Britten's exhaust system. 'It had rotted out and had to be replaced.' No big deal to someone like Stephen, who among many other accomplishments helped develop the Gibbs Quadski.

Stephen gets asked all the time what the Britten is like to ride. 'Because of the bike's carbon-fibre construction it's very light and nimble,' he says. 'I would describe it as riding a 125cc that goes like a superbike. It's almost unnerving.' When he first got back on the Britten after so long, he had to learn how to ride it all over again. 'It's a bike that doesn't want to go slow. The faster I ride it, the better it gets.'

Once upon a time the most sophisticated and technically advanced motorbike in the world came from a little factory in Christchurch. 'It was so fast and so versatile, in a race it was like putting a jet fighter up against a Spitfire,' says Stephen. 'Who knows what might have happened if only John had lived?' •

RIGHT:
Only 10 Britten V1000s were ever built, some of which are in museum collections around the world. Stephen Briggs has been riding this unique motorcycle for over 25 years, including in a world championship in which he finished second.

LEFT: One day Captain Tony Brooking (or 'Rev' as he is known) got pulled up by a cop who thought he had stolen the bike. The police officer scoffed when he gave his occupation. 'It was a close call for a while there,' says Rev. 'When I went to get my driver's licence, she went for her taser. It happens a lot more than you might imagine.'

REVEREND TONY BROOKING

WAIOURU

2016 Indian Chief Dark Horse

There is only one motorcycle in the Reverend Tony Brooking's garage in Waiouru, and it takes up almost the entire space. 'Yes, my wife Sonya often reminds of me of that,' he says as he pushes the big 2016 Indian Chief out onto the driveway. You'd expect it to be a two-man operation, but Tony handles the enormous 1800cc motorcycle with ease.

'I think I'm the only Anglican minister in Aotearoa who has a motorcycle,' says Tony. He's almost certainly the only man of the cloth with an Indian Chief Dark Horse. Tony is based at Waiouru, where he's an army chaplain, and everyone knows him as 'Rev', but if we were to be formal it would be Captain Brooking.

Rev is also a member and past president of the Christian biker group The Redeemed Motorcycle Ministry. The multi-denominational, multicultural group was started by Amos Perese Ale, an ex-Head Hunter who found God. 'We're spreading the word in a different way,' says Rev. 'The jacket patch has a big cross with "Jesus is Lord".'

That doesn't stop some people from getting the wrong end of the stick, however. One day, minding his own business, Rev got pulled up by a cop who thought Rev had stolen the bike. The police officer then scoffed at him when he gave his occupation. 'It was a close call for a while there,' says Rev. 'When I went to get my driver's licence, she went for her taser. It happens a lot more than you might imagine.'

Rev's always been into motorbikes. 'I've had tons of them, but I've never had a Japanese bike. I started out on British bikes and moved to American.' His first bike was a Triumph. 'When my uncle gave it to me, it was in bits. He said that if I could get it together it was mine. No one else in the sixth form rode a Bonneville 650 to my school.'

Rev bought the Dark Horse new in 2016. 'It's a selfish bike,' he says, 'with the single saddle seat.' But he does have a spare seat in the garage if Sonya ever wants to come for a ride. 'My old Harley-Davidson Ultra Classic was such an armchair that she would fall asleep on the back,' he says.

Devilishly handsome, the Dark Horse is a mean machine; you'd think it was designed for the Desert Road. Sometimes Rev must feel like he's riding through his own private John Ford movie.

'Some days when I'm on the Desert Road it almost feels spiritual. That big white mountain at sunset draws you in,' says Rev. 'When you're on the bike it's as if you're seeing everything in high definition. When I get home and get off the bike, physically and spiritually I'm completely rejuvenated.' •

LISA BROWN & ANDREW CHAMPION

GISBORNE

1955 AJS 350 and 1963 Matchless G15 750

Gisborne graphic designer Lisa Brown remembers the first time she went for a ride on a motorcycle. 'I think I would have been about nine when one of my brothers plonked me on our Suzuki TS50,' she says. 'Off I went doing big, wide circles while they opened the farm gate. My circles got tighter and I fell off.'

Her partner, building inspector Andrew Champion, can also claim an early encounter with a motorcycle. The story his father would always tell is that moments after Andrew had been delivered, the nurses handed over the new baby boy for his father to see. 'He took me straight over to the window and pointed out his motorcycle parked below. "Look, son," he said, "there's a real motorbike".' Andrew laughs. 'I'm pleased to say I've still got that motorcycle, a 1949 Matchless 350 single. We keep it in the spare bedroom.'

In the family tradition, Andrew is a true Matchless man from way back. His favourite's a 1963 Matchless G15 750, which looks fast and streamlined; his dad would have agreed that it's a real motorcycle.

Lisa and Andrew often work together in their workshop. Today Lisa is busy banging out the dents on the mudguard of her AJS, trying to panel-beat the mudguard with a hammer despite being in a wheelchair. 'A little over a year ago I was diagnosed with motor neuron disease [MND],' she says. 'The disease is in slow progress, thank goodness, but I'm not just sitting around waiting for something to happen.' She has plenty to do, including getting her bike race-ready for Pukekohe in a few weeks.

'Lisa is very competitive, both on and off the track,' says Andrew. 'You should try having a pillow fight with her — she's brutal.' Although Lisa got into bike racing only in the last few years, Andrew says she's 'annoyingly good'. In her second season she came second in the championships. 'I've been racing my fast Datsun 240Z since my twenties. I've had quite a few wins in the ladies' class,' she says. 'And I'd also give the boys a run for their money quite often.'

In her late teens Lisa tried, but failed, to join the air force. 'They didn't train women as pilots back then,' she says. A few years later she got her pilot's licence anyway. Suspended from the workshop roof is part of her Pitts Special biplane, while next door the 1969 Datsun 240Z she's owned 'forever' awaits restoration. 'That's my next big project.'

Dents removed, Lisa's 1955 AJS 350 is ready to go: one thing's for certain, she's not letting MND get in her way. 'Come race day I can get very nervous,' she admits. 'But once those wheels roll, I'm off, and there's absolutely no stopping me.' •

LEFT: 'A little over a year ago I was diagnosed with motor neuron disease [MND],' Lisa Brown says. 'The disease is in slow progress, thank goodness, but I'm not just sitting around waiting for something to happen.' 'Lisa is very competitive, both on and off the track,' says her partner Andrew Champion.

TRACEY & STEVE BRYAN

TAURANGA

1981 Suzuki Katana

Tracey and Steve Bryan have a small bar filled with motorcycle memorabilia in the basement of their Tauranga home. Four helmets lined up in a row stand out like an artwork. 'Those are the helmets I've crashed in,' says Tracey, a rural postie and sidecar racer. 'Had a few good ones,' she admits. 'I've even been crashed into by the same guy twice.'

The bar is sandwiched between two large garages, overflowing with cars and bikes, some of which have made their way into the house. Steve's old Honda CB750 Four is parked in the hallway, a Triumph Rickman Métisse is suspended above the kitchen cupboards, and a strange-looking little Motocompo greets visitors at the front door. 'This tiny motorcycle was designed to fold up and fit in the back of a Honda City,' says Steve, an automotive engineer. 'It was going to solve Tokyo's traffic problems.' Forget Tokyo: it could also be the answer to Tauranga's congestion.

Steve and Tracey met through sidecar racing. Tracey has been riding sidecars for 15 years and currently she and her passenger, Jo Mickleson, riding a Honda CBR 600cc sidecar, are the Formula 2 New Zealand champions, while Tracey (as passenger) and her brother Bryan Stent have held the sidecar lap record at Whanganui Cemetery Circuit for the last four years. Steve and his old mate Andy Scrivener won the New Zealand championships in 2007, with Steve as the passenger.

Tracey is itching to start racing again. 'After all the Covid cancellations, I'm getting lethargic,' she says. 'I need an adrenaline fix.'

As women in sidecar racing go, Tracey and Jo are pioneers, spearheading the recent shift to more women competing. 'Plenty of women are competing in sidecars nowadays,' says Steve. 'Even couples do it, but Tracey and I are unique in that Tracey is the rider and I'm the passenger.'

Riding a three-wheeled motorbike is second nature to Tracey, but 'when it comes to two wheels, sometimes it feels like I'm still learning,' she says. She got her Triumph Speed Triple just for fun two years ago. 'It's a fast, sexy bike,' she says.

Steve is the collector in the family. The motorcycle he's had the longest is a 1981 Suzuki Katana, which he bought back in 1984 when he was 18. Back then he and Andy Scrivener would do the track days at Baypark in Mount Maunganui, where they would race all weekend. 'On Monday I'd be back on the Katana, riding to work,' he recalls. 'I did 100,000 kilometres in three years — rain, hail and racing, I almost wore it out.' •

RIGHT:
'Plenty of women are competing in sidecars nowadays,' says Steve Bryan. 'Even couples do it, but Tracey and I are unique in that Tracey is the rider and I'm the passenger.'

MARK BRYANT

CHRISTCHURCH

1969 Honda CB750 Four K0

LEFT: 'This was the bike Honda put into production when they realised that they were going to sell these by the truckload,' says Mark Bryant. 'It's an absolute tribute to Soichiro Honda and his design team, who would never have imagined that more than half a century later people would be loving and restoring these bikes. With this motorcycle they really hit the nail on the head.'

'I've ridden a few modern sports bikes and they just don't do anything for me,' says Mark Bryant, a retired air traffic service operator from Christchurch. It's no surprise, then, that the most modern bike in his collection is a 48-year-old Kawasaki Z1.

Mark is currently restoring a Honda Cub, but otherwise everything in his garage is mint, including a bright green, drop-dead gorgeous Suzuki Stinger, a very cool 1971 Datsun 240Z and a nice little Suzuki AC50. And to top it off, Mark's also got himself a 1969 Honda CB750 K0. Famous for being the world's first real superbike, it's enough to make any motorcycle fan of a certain age green with envy.

'This is the diecast model,' says Mark. 'It's not quite as rare as the earlier sandcast version, but who's complaining? This was the bike Honda put into production when they realised that they were going to sell these by the truckload. It's an absolute tribute to Soichiro Honda and his design team, who would never have imagined that more than half a century later people would be loving and restoring these bikes. With this motorcycle they really hit the nail on the head.'

Mark was 15 when he got his first bike, a Suzuki 50cc step-through, but he soon moved on to bigger stuff when he bought himself a 650 BSA. 'I was a teenager with a lot of people to impress.' However, when he met his future wife, Cathy, his motorcycle didn't seem to make the expected big impression. When he suggested she come for a ride, 'her reply was something like, "It's best you don't kill both of us at the same time." She's not a vehicle person. She's only been in my 240Z once, and that's a car.'

'Twice,' interjects Cathy. 'It's jerky and noisy.'

After their youngest child left home, Mark got back into motorcycles. He started looking at Hondas on eBay and imported this one from San Francisco in 2005. He paid about US $5000, a fraction of the prices these bikes fetch today. He rode the bike all over the South Island until it got dropped in the Catlins in 2007. That's when he decided to restore it, a project that took him 13 years.

Mark is pretty lucky to own two of the most important bikes in motorcycle history. Is there much difference between the CB750 and the Z1 900? 'The Honda is awesome to ride, but perhaps the Kawasaki is a bit more edgy,' he says. 'You have your Z1 diehards and you have your Honda 750 diehards. I love them both, but then I'm a polybikerist.' •

LEFT: Mark and Cathy Bryant with Mike's 1970 Suzuki Stinger T125.

SEAN BURKE

WAIHEKE ISLAND

1974 Vespa Rally 200

‘I’ve got two scooters: one that I’m slowly restoring in the shed and the other that I’m riding all the time, which I’m not touching. It goes perfectly fine without a new paint job,’ says Sean Burke, a landscape architect from Waiheke Island. A keen cyclist as well as a scooter rally enthusiast, he has owned this little Vespa since the late 1990s.

It’s done 80,000 kilometres — not bad for an ‘oversized hairdryer’, as these bikes were described in the Mod film *Quadrophenia*. Sean has clocked up most of the mileage over the past 17 years. ‘I bought this scooter in London and I ended up taking it to Italy in a van. For the return, however, my partner Angela, who was pregnant at the time with our eldest child, Reuben, rode pillion all the way from Rome to London . . . so all three of us.’ It wasn’t the only time. ‘I’ve done that trip twice on this scooter,’ he quips.

For a little 200cc, this Vespa has made some serious trips, certainly more than some bike owners with machines pumping many times the muscle. They don’t call it the ‘Rally’ for nothing. Back in the 1950s and 1960s, when these scooters were often the equivalent of today’s family cars, it wasn’t unusual for Europeans to travel great distances on them. ‘I’d say it can cruise all day at close to 100 kilometres per hour, which is not far off the top speed. I haven’t had it past 110 kilometres per hour,’ says Sean.

Sean has always liked scooters and never really graduated to larger motorbikes, although he admits to having briefly owned a Yamaha 100 as a student. The love affair began when he was a kid. ‘I used to hear the guy next door start up his Lambretta scooter and ride off to work every morning. Little did I know then that one day it would be mine. I bought it from him years ago and I’ve still got it; it’s just been on ice for the past twenty years,’ he says, referring to the restoration project in the shed.

A Vespa is more than a commuter ride — it’s a lifestyle. With his braces and boots on, Sean’s getting ready for another half-hour ‘Roman holiday’ as he starts up the engine for a quick blat over to Ōrapiu at the other end of the island. ‘I do this all the time,’ he says, ‘just go for a quick ride. The roads here on Waiheke really suit the Vespa.’ •

RIGHT:
‘I bought this scooter in London and I ended up taking it to Italy in a van. For the return, however, my partner Angela, who was pregnant at the time with our eldest child, Reuben (pictured), rode pillion all the way from Rome to London . . . so all three of us,’ says Sean Burke.

KEN CAMPBELL

MATAKANA

c.1935 Indian V8 2600

Ken Campbell turns the key of what must be the world's largest Indian. 'It's got a kick-starter if you want,' says the Matakana auto engineer, though he makes no attempt to use it. 'Eight cylinders, 2600cc — it's the only one of its type.'

Ken's V8 version is no monstrosity; if anything, it's very compact. 'It's nothing like a Boss Hoss,' he's quick to point out, referring to the American brand that puts enormous V8 car engines on its bikes. 'When pictures of my Indian first ended up on Facebook, people said I'd Photoshopped it.' That didn't stop thousands of views in the first couple of weeks.

Styled on the old Indian Four, the engine is all brand new. The castings were made in Australia and machined in Ken's workshop, the pistons were bought new from the US, and a firm in Napier engineered the crankshaft. 'Virtually everything else was made here,' Ken says. 'No original Indian parts were modified in any way to make this motorcycle.'

The end result has a stock-standard feel: 'It's meant to look factory,' says Ken. With a hand gear lever and foot clutch, the engine is an overhead-inlet side exhaust, and looks as though it came straight off the showroom floor circa 1935.

'It's very smooth, torquey as hell, and more economical than I had expected,' says Ken. He doesn't know exactly how fast it can go. 'The old-style frame is a limiting factor.'

Ken has been making motorcycles for years, and his creations have ended up all over the world. Like a sculptor, he uses precision engineering to make everything harmonise into perfect, handmade two-wheeled works of art. As one visitor to Ken's workshop put it, 'The guy's a genius.'

Ken never really took to the moderns. His first motorcycle was a 1942 Matchless, when all the other kids were riding Japanese. It's all old-school around here. Not a 3D printer in sight. It's the engineering that Ken really loves, not unlike John Britten or Burt Munro, who famously built and modified their motorcycles in that unique do-it-yourself Kiwi tradition. 'I knew Burt,' he says, picking up some old parts that came from Munro's workshop. However, he doesn't think he's anything like the famous Invercargill backyard engineer and record-breaker. 'Burt was about pursuing speed,' he says. 'I'm only pursuing a passion.' •

LEFT: 'When pictures of my Indian first ended up on Facebook, people said I'd Photoshopped it,' says Ken Campbell.

SHARON CAMPBELL

ARAMOANA

2017 Kawasaki Z650

'I wanted a motorcycle real bad when I was in my teens, but my dad put his foot down big time,' says Sharon Campbell, a painter and decorator from Aramoana, on the Otago coast. 'I can still hear him saying that if I ever brought one of those things home he would drive his car over it and then he would reverse again just to finish it off. He'd had motorbikes himself when he was young, then all of a sudden motorcycling was too dangerous for his daughter. It seemed like hypocrisy to me.'

Once she left home Sharon defiantly got herself a little Honda Nifty Fifty, although she admits that a Nifty Fifty 'doesn't really count'. She thinks it would have been better had she been able to learn to ride properly on a real bike from the start, but she has no regrets and is certainly making up for it now.

'Confidence comes with time, and that's why I took up trail-riding a few years back, to learn how to ride in preparation for when I got on the road. I loved the trail-riding so much I forgot all about the road for a while there.' Now, however, she's 'totally into the tar'. Her first road bike was a Suzuki Intruder 250. 'I bought it to do my licence on and ended up riding the wheels off it.'

In 2017 she upgraded to a brand-new Kawasaki Z650. Fast? 'Hell yeah, it's got lots of grunt, gets you past real quick.' She uses the bike every day, taking it on the 40-minute ride from Aramoana to Mosgiel, where she works. 'Usually I arrive on the job pretty happy.' On her way back home, Sharon loves the windy road to Aramoana. 'It's a really nice ride to do every day; I just love the bends, love leaning. It's always a thrill.' On a recent 10-day South Island tour with a friend who rode a Ducati, she noticed her bike 'did better than the Ducati on the tight corners'.

In the long run her father's threats didn't put her off bikes — they just delayed things for a while. 'It's the freedom a motorbike offers that always attracted me, and that was never going to go away.' What would her father think of that fast little Kawasaki? 'He did live long enough to see the Nifty Fifty, and he never attempted to run it over, so I guess I'll never really know.' •

RIGHT:
Sharon Campbell uses her Kawasaki Z650 every day, taking it on the 40-minute ride from Aramoana to Mosgiel, where she works. 'Usually I arrive on the job pretty happy.'