



# GIVING POTENTIAL *A NUDGE*

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Something about mentor and the success of Elise McDonald mixing it up with the boys on the road racing front and that the South Island seems to be a breeding ground of talent for future road racing stars at the moment.....

Most of us have some idea when it comes to knowing what being a mentor means. Older readers will remember traditional apprenticeships, a no nonsense education in which the accumulated knowledge and skills of the trade were progressively passed on to a new generation of novices - all under the watchful eye of a foreman who demanded respect and results. This all tempered by the fact that senior tradesmen on the factory floor were often given responsibility for looking after the young apprentices. These men not only assumed the role of mentor transferring knowledge and skill, but often acting as advisors and sounding boards when life and relationships turned to custard. I can't help feeling that over the past 20-30 years, we've lost a lot as a result of dismantling traditional approaches to education in general but to trade training especially. However, the effectiveness of this style of learning was not restricted to the factory floor. Over 40 years ago, I was employed as a probationary technician in the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research and my first boss had a very traditional approach to my training - in effect I served an apprenticeship in science. My boss Dr Ko Kingma became a father fig-

ure, someone who I looked up to, someone who demanded respect but most importantly a man who clearly believed in me and my potential.

In 2008, I think as adults we tend to undervalue potential in the young. We are quick at finding the negatives and reluctant to give the young credit where it's due; boy racers, texting, alcohol, teenage pregnancies, violence and tagging all grab headlines. This story is the flip side of that coin and one, which I think gives clear indication of the positives of mentoring.

### An unlikely pairing...

John Hecker has a long history in terms of involvement with motor-sport and motorcycling; the former maintenance fitter and manager (for the Railways) has committed a lifetime to both competing and to administration, starting with short circuit racing on his L21 Triumph at places like Sefton in the early '50s. Later he raced a 1948 Speed Twin Triumph, a Norton International and a Dunstall Dominator at the start of classic meets in the late seventies, along with his son Gary at places like Southbridge, Timaru, Dunedin and the old circuit by the sawmill in Hokitika. The pair shifted into speedway, first TQs and then Modified Sprints, before John built up a V8-powered



single-seater racecar, which he raced at classic events all over both islands. Since Gary moved to Australia, John's had a go at sidecar road racing and speedway, and even skydiving - "I was safety officer and would then do a display jump into QE II park in a Father Xmas suit for our end of year breakup," he says, anything stupid, I'd be a starter!"

Thanks to his job, and like most professional engineers of his era, John had a pretty decent workshop at home, which he says was a natural progression to his becoming a Stew-

ard in speedway for a number of years, before "getting sick of officialdom and the type of people it seemed to be attracting". After speedway, John got involved with road racing and eventually becoming a MNZ steward six years ago, which he continues to this day at meetings organised by CAMS and Motorcycling Canterbury.

Elise McDonald on the other hand has been involved in racing motorcycles for only two years and despite the fact that this diminutive racer is a mere 38kg, 1.57m (5'2") tall and is only 15 years old, John saw her potential. The young Cantabrian has got passion and ambition too. "I'd like to be at the top, I mean the fastest female racer in Australasia and then the world," says the lass from Christchurch with the pony tail (her signature). With sagely comments for one so young, such as "Riding bigger, more powerful bikes doesn't scare and I know I need more experience," and "I know if I am to represent a company then that will happen because I present myself well, clean and tidy, I'm reliable and get the results," John's decision to give her potential a nudge is easy to fathom.

### Project classic

After seeing Elise racing, about eight months John commented to Elsie's father Lochie that his daughter should also be riding a classic race bike to give her the experience of riding other bikes. Lochie jokingly said that if that's what he thought then he should buy her one, which is exactly what he did. "I'd seen her riding and she was just so neat and tidy, a good rider with a lot of potential. I just figured if I bought the bike she could ride it and then I could tinker around with it during the week getting it ready for the next meeting, another interest as well



as the stewarding. I got onto a guy in Dunedin, he'd had the bike for sale for a while, so I went down and got it. Came home and tidied it up and Elise has been riding it ever since."

Swinging a leg over John's classic race bike only six months ago is something that got Elise excited too as she recalls. "Uncle John (as she affectionately calls him) rang up Dad and said if he had a bike would I be interested in riding it? I said, 'yep, I'll give anything a go'. Not long after that he came to our place and told me he'd been down to Dunedin and bought the bike and that it was outside! It was on the trailer but I jumped on it straight away, it was an awesome feeling!" Elise's first ride made just as



## RIDER BIO

**How did Elise McDonald get into road racing?** "My Dad knows Robert Tinning whose son Victor was racing. Robert told Dad to bring me out to Ruapuna to have a ride on a small bike, it was a 50cc. Peter Jones loaned me leathers, boots and back protector. I rode around the pits for one meeting, but I was too scared to get out of second gear! The next day I went out on the track with Peter training me and then a few months later I got a KR150, by November of this year I will have been racing for two years."

**Name:** Elise Victoria McDonald  
**Age:** 15

**Height:** 1.57m

**Weight:** 38kg

**Current bike/s:** Kawasaki KR150, Suzuki T-250, Yamaha YB100

**Been racing for:** Two years

**First rode at:** Ruapuna when I had just turned 13

**First bike:** Honda Monkey 50cc "I rode it on grandma's farm when I was younger."

**Biggest influence/s:** Dad, Dennis Charlett

**Favourite racer/s:** Rossi, Stoner & Karel Pavich

**Favourite track/s:** Ruapuna & Levels

**Racing goals:** Top five at Nationals

**Other interests:** Hanging out with mates, music, training my two dogs to do tricks

**Favourite band/music:** Slipknot, Seether, Disturbed, T.I., Lil John  
**If not a professional racer, then what do you see yourself doing:** Motorcycle mechanic

big an impression, "It was so different, the handling especially, it needs a different style to get going properly; I have to be smooth. It is faster down the straight but the brakes are nowhere near as good as those on my small race bike, but it's so exciting!"

Her enthusiasm for racing and motorcycles obviously drives John too, seeing Elise ride the Suzuki for the first time "brought me back from being old to being young again!" he says. "The first time she took it out at Ruapuna, I felt like I was 16 again! I'm living my life through her now."

But Elise's attitude off the track impresses John equally. "She puts the effort in, is very determined and talks so very nicely, and she listens to what you say. But it really gives me a thrill to see her out there, it doesn't matter whether she's first or last, but I have to say she's usually in the middle of the pack or up front. As long as the bike performs well, and she rides to the best of her ability, I'm happy ... and she does look very good on it!"

## Steady progress

When the racing is over, Lochie drops the bike back at John's garage to ready it for the next meeting, where he spends 'a lot of time pottering around'. "It takes me four hours to do what used to take me 10 minutes, I'm happy as. Often Elise will call to see what I'm up to, but I just take whatever time I want to do what needs to be done."

Since that first outing at Ruapuna, Elise has gone on to race John's Suzuki at a Motorcycling Canterbury training day and a further half a dozen events, but so far most of the seat time has been in training, another field where she is showing wisdom and determination beyond her years. "The best thing to really ride that bike is to keep fit. The first time I rode it was really hard, but I find it a lot easier now that I'm getting used to it and figuring out how to do things so it's easier on me. At Timaru I went out on the classic, then on the KR, then on the classic and back on the KR, I think I did 12 races that day."

To keep her fitness up, Elise does deliveries on her bike for a chemist in town two days a week, walking, running, pushbike riding every other day. "I also run around the park with our dog and I'm now doing weightlifting to strengthen up my arms. I'm sure the muscles in my braking arm are getting bigger."

With the inherent dangers of racing motorcycles, crashing is



an unfortunate part of the game, but there's no girly attitude where coming off is concerned, in fact her approach is quite the opposite. "When I have come off I just think I did it wrong, I get annoyed with myself and if I can, then I'll get back on. That happened on the KR and when I went out next time, my lap times were two seconds faster. When I dropped the Suzuki, the first thing I

did was switch off the ignition."

With the future looking bright and with ambitions to become the world's fastest female racer, where does a 15-year-old South Island girl look for role models?

"I can think of eight or nine really good ones, like Jessica Zalusky in America, she rides a green Kawasaki, and New Zealand's Anita Lowther and Karel Pavich. Karel is



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the NZ 250 Champion and I’d like to race against her one day, she’s one of my role models. I will get faster bikes but also want to keep riding the two I have, get experience, progress to 125 and then bigger and faster.”

#### Talent showcase

One of the main reasons for John getting the bike he says, was to give

Elise an opportunity to show others how capable she really is and into the public eye. “There is no question it has done that, people have expressed an interest, after all I can only do so much. Motorcycling Canterbury and Peter Jones have been really great with the promotion of the juniors and Elise is a perfect example of how it works.”

A sentiment echoed by Elise her

self. “Peter Jones and the trainers like Geoff Cain and Victor Tinning have been so special, I wouldn’t have been anywhere without their help. Dennis Charlotte and Robert Tinning have also helped me huge amounts, especially with looking after my KR and how to best set it up, and Wendy Ashmore who is the secretary of our club and organises the meetings. And then Dad, Mum and Uncle John

have just made it all come together, it’s great!”

This is one motorcycling story full of positives, and with John and Elise’s partnership going strong it will hopefully go on to become one NZ’s greatest? As John says, “I love the stewarding, but Elise and the Suzuki, that’s the icing on the cake. Eventually I’d like to see someone give her the backing she deserves.”

**BRM**