

# MEDIA RELEASE

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### THERE WAS NO ONE BETTER

Geoff Lange was an experienced co-driver who had driven in National Championship rallies before he met Barry Robinson and their rallying combination was born.

Geoff was originally going to co-drive for Barry's brother Darryl but sadly Darryl passed away before that happened. "Sometime after that there was a knock on the door one night and there was Barry. He said he needed a co-driver. We got on well. I was working in the Lange family bakery at the time. We did one event in the Viva GT and we got caught in a water table and got sucked in and bent a wheel so it didn't last long. I left thinking this guy is rapid!"

"John Keast was building the Chevette at the time. Keastie did the fabrication and Russell Murray the engine and the first event was at Timaru, a gravel downhill rallysprint. We finished the car at 2 or 3am and got there just in time for scrutineering, Barry drove up the hill and Russell was still in the car, tuning carbs. I had to remind him I was the co-driver and tell him 'out you get' for the first run. Barry was very quick. I remember we were in third gear coming up to a downhill, right hander with a sheer drop on my side and Barry puts his hand on the gear lever and I have my foot on an imaginary brake on my side of the car thinking he is going to drop it down a gear but Barry changes up to fourth. We came out the other side and he then turns to me laconically and says, this thing handles like shit!"

"I was keen to do more so I quit the corporate life at the bakery and bought A1 Auto Services – so I could go rallying."

"I sat with Barry for eight years and initially he considered the co-driver as a sack of spuds to get the corner weights right. At first, I would say left at the intersection and he would go right. I would quiz him and he would say it looks like a right and I had to tell him, do what I say, if you don't listen, I'm off."

"I had to have a serious talk to him as he had no real relationship with his co-drivers' before. You drive, I will do all the other stuff, I said."

"He drove with his sub conscious. He was unbelievable. There was no one better!" He had an ability to read the road and the terrain and he would never get damage, although there was the broken window in the Maramarua Forest when we only had to finish to win the National Championship. The car broke down and cost him the title and he kicked the door and broke the window. We had made a big decision for that final round whether to use a 2.6 litre twin cam or our 2.3 litre engine. We went for the 2.6. We did ten laps around Western Springs and won that stage and had a 20 second lead when the engine nipped a piston, a mistake by the engine builder. While disappointed that we had put that engine in we put the other engine in to finish the season in a non-championship rally at Timaru and it broke a cambelt so it would have happened no matter which engine we used."

"In summer I would drive the car on tarmac at Teretonga and Timaru and iron out any bugs and in March it would become a rally car again and Barry would drive it again in the winter. Everything on it was handmade."

"I eventually quit as I had my business to run. I was loyal to Barry throughout that time and the only other driver I co-drove for during that time was Reg Cook at Timaru. Barry wasn't going to enter because of lambing and Reg asked me and we won the rally."

"Barry was an interesting character, he was so, so, talented. He had little nuances but I was able to read what he was up to. The one thing with him was always on the first kilometre of a rally stage he would be thinking about the 20 or 30kms. I would say just drive, and when he did that, he was unbeatable."

We won the Otago Rally three years in a row at a time when cars broke down a lot more than they do today. We always had good tyres to avoid punctures as well. The gaps were getting bigger and bigger each time and if we got to the end we generally won. I said to Barry it will be a long time before anyone beats three in a row. Hayden Paddon has now done ten."

"There was nothing going on in car, you could drive it with one finger and a thumb, it was a car you could thrash it and trust it. It does everything you want it to do."

Geoff remembers the Gore Rally one year. "We were in fifth gear, flat out at about 125-130mph. There was a big

stand of macrocarpa's and a 90 degree, left hand corner. There was a house to the right with a grass frontage with a low fence and crowd of people about 200 metres out. Flat out in fifth he gave it the Scandinavian flick 100 metres out and we did a big drift. We were so backwards we could both see rocks flying out the back. The homeowner had put scrim up to protect the fence and we both saw that and Barry said he was trying not to damage it but rocks were flying up and hitting the roof of the house! Through all that there was no flailing on the wheel because he knew how to set up cars."

"He was a champion snorer and we used to give him a room of his own. He had a unicycle for fun. He was a great guy and he is my son Chris' Godfather. He and his family were very, very, special people and we were so fortunate to know them. He was an exquisite talent. He worked hard at it."

"There were a number of people who saw Barry's car during that time and went and brought a car of their own to compete with. Many times, Barry and I would give them Barry's four basic philosophies. If you don't do anything else make sure you have a decent seat. It was no good if you weren't settled in the seat to feel what the car was doing. You needed decent shocks, a pedal box with bias adjuster and a limited slip diff. That was all that was needed."

Barry also mentored many over the years including Hayden Paddon.

Only three people have driven the Chevette, Geoff, Barry and David Glasson, Geoff's late wife Judy's brother. "I have never done a skid on gravel in it," says Geoff.

Geoff will be coming from Queenstown for the Wyndham Rally to watch Chris drive it as the Double Zero car. "I am the Team Manager, whatever that means. Barry's wife Jane will be there and their daughter Anna will co-drive with Chris meaning for the first time in thirty-five years the Lange/Robinson names will be together again in rallying. I am really excited to see the car in action again," says Geoff.

The rally will be centred on the township of Wyndham, 45 kilometres east of Invercargill and 25km south of Gore. It will start at the MLT Three Rivers Hotel in Redan Street, Wyndham at 9.30am on Saturday 7 October from where competitors will embark on five Special Stages consisting of 126km of magic, gravel special stages with no stage repeated throughout the day.

The rally then ends where it began, at the MLT Three Rivers Hotel in Wyndham after 126km of Special Stage competition linked by 110km of touring stage mileage.

With the start and finish plus two Service Parks in Wyndham, the township will be a real focal point of the event.

The event prizegiving will take place in Gore at the MLT Croydon Lodge with the winning crew awarded the Barry Robinson Memorial Trophy. The rally also carries points toward the Eastern Southland Car Club Rally Championship.

Rally Secretary, Roger Laird says, "we are delighted to have the support of Matura Licensing Trust, as our naming sponsor, plus that of Traffic Management Services Ltd, Rayonier NZ, the Southland District Council, Gore District Council, Prime Range Fresh Shop Lorneville, Matt McRae and the landowners on the rally route plus of course all of our Special Stage sponsors.

Those in the region can pick up a copy of The Ensign (4 October edition) for the complete rally guide while the event will be livestreamed on the Eastern Southland Car Club facebook page.

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Photograph – Barry Robinson/Geoff Lange in the Vauxhall Chevette during a National Championship Rally in the North Island in the 1980's. Photo credit Wayne Churton.