



In His Blood

The Bruce McLaren Story

by Paul Mason



School Journal Story Library is a targeted series that supplements other instructional series texts. It provides additional scaffolds and supports for teachers to use to accelerate students' literacy learning.

In His Blood: The Bruce McLaren Story has been carefully levelled. While the contexts and concepts link to English, technology, and social sciences at level 3 of the curriculum, the text has a reading year level of year 4.

Teacher support material (available at www.schooljournalstorylibrary.tki.org.nz) contains key information to help teachers to provide the additional support and scaffolding that some students may need to meet the specific reading, writing, and curriculum demands of *In His Blood: The Bruce McLaren Story*.



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The Bruce McLaren Story

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The Muriwai Hill Climb, 1953



The race is on. The Austin's tiny wheels spray gravel as the car climbs the hill behind Muriwai Beach. Fifteen-year-old Bruce grasps the wheel. He wants to finish first and take the winner's flag. Never mind that it's just his first race.

The truth is he shouldn't even be here. This is meant to be his father's race, but Pop is sick.

Bruce feels his heart hammering. He keeps his eye on the red lines he painted on the speedometer. They tell him exactly when he needs to change gear. If he gets it right, he can push the car over 20 kilometres an hour faster.

There isn't much about this car he doesn't know. Building cars and winning races run in the family. They're in his blood.

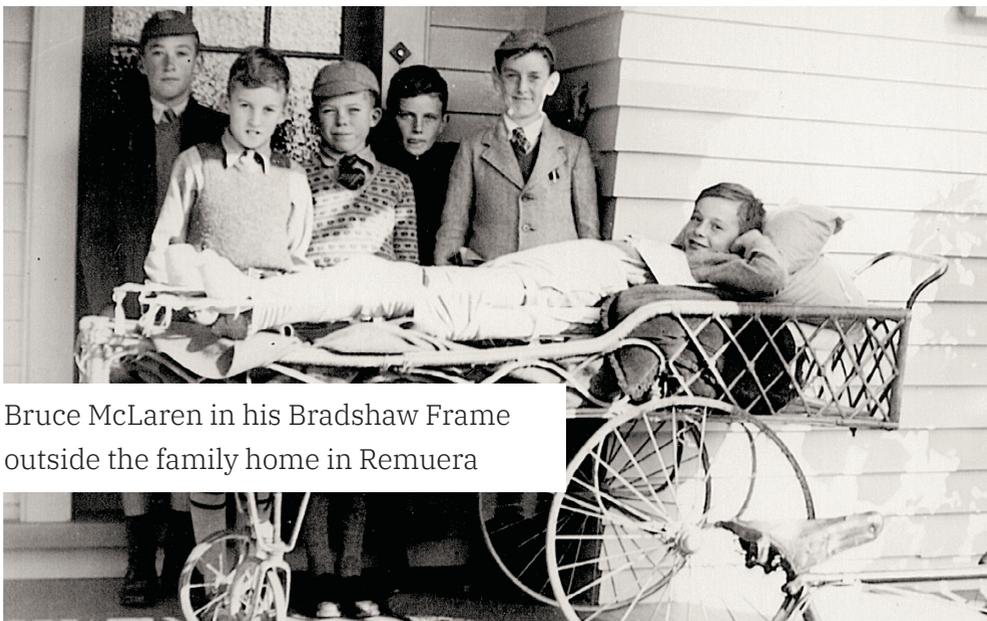
Raised on Wheels

Bruce McLaren was born in Auckland in 1937. His father owned the McLaren Service Station, and his family lived above it in a small apartment. When he was a child, the smell of engine grease was never far away.

If tools went missing, the shop mechanics knew where to look. Bruce would have taken them for his tricycle. The family soon moved to a larger home just around the corner, but Bruce was still a regular visitor to his father's garage. He developed a curiosity for machines that would last a lifetime.

Perthes Disease

When Bruce was nine years old, he started complaining about a pain in his left hip. Doctors discovered that he had Perthes Disease – a rare illness that weakens the top of the thigh bone. He was sent to the Wilson Home for Crippled Children. To help him recover, he was strapped into a bed with wheels called the Bradshaw Frame. It would be two years before he could walk again.



Bruce McLaren in his Bradshaw Frame outside the family home in Remuera

Racing Begins

Climbing His First Hill

Perthes Disease left Bruce with a lasting limp, but it didn't hold him back. He soon turned his attention to a broken-down Austin that his father brought home. Before long, the McLaren kitchen table was covered in engine parts. Piece by piece, the father-and-son duo put the old car back together.

Bruce's dad took the Austin out for a test drive, but he could barely keep it driving in a straight line. He wanted to sell the car, but Bruce had other plans. He marked out a track around the trees in their large back section and learnt to drive. As he practised, he kept tinkering and making improvements to the car.

Bruce learnt that engineering and racing went hand in hand. New Zealand is a long way from the rest of the world. This meant that local mechanics often had to improvise and do their best with what they had. They became skilled at using spare parts to come up with new solutions. It was a skill that Bruce quickly picked up.

In 1953, Bruce and his Austin entered the Muriwai Hill Climb. His first race; his first win.

Bruce alongside his father, Les, and his growing collection of trophies

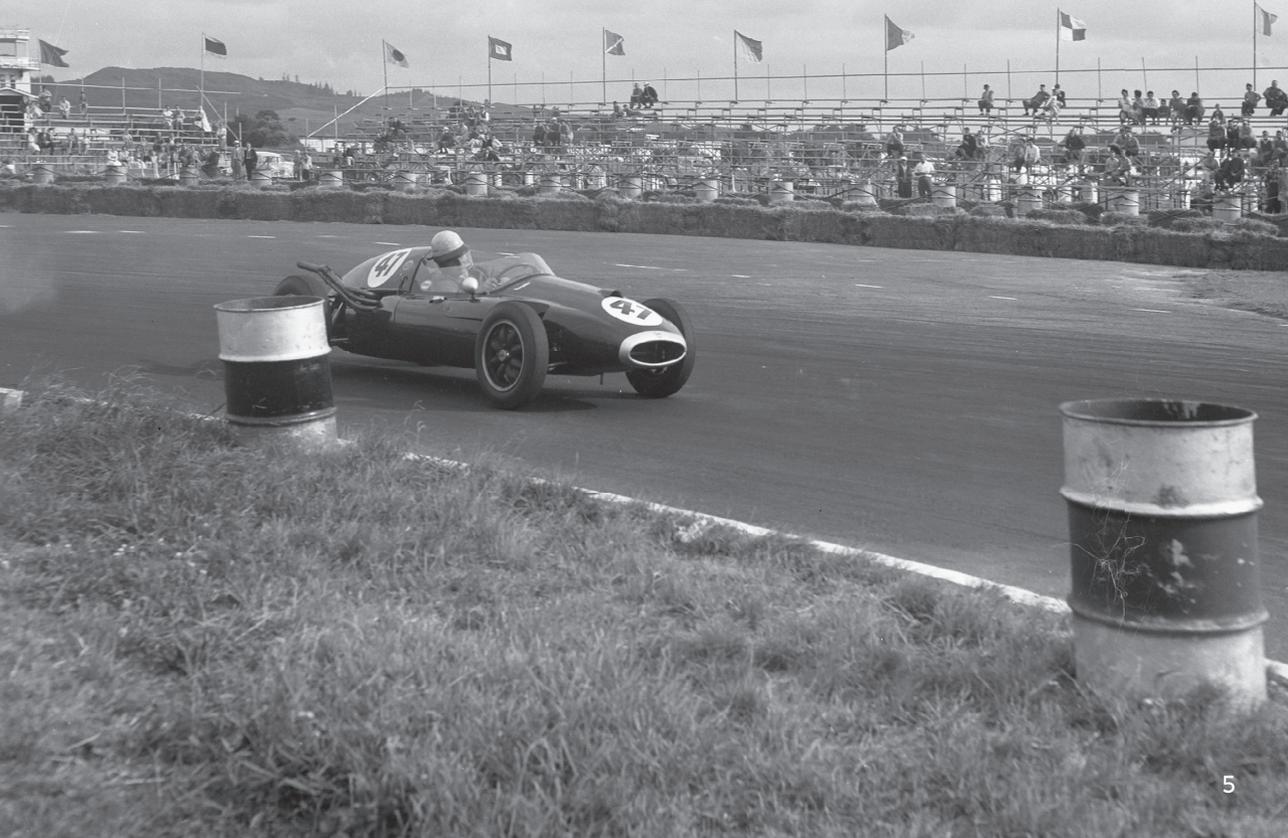


The New Zealand Grand Prix

Bruce continued to win local races. In 1958, he was driving so well that he earned a place in the New Zealand Grand Prix (pronounced *gron pree*) – the most important race in the country.

On the day of the big race, Bruce didn't take the winner's flag, but his driving was noticed by the racing community. Bruce won a scholarship that gave young New Zealanders a chance to drive racing cars in Europe. As part of the scholarship, he was invited to join the famous Cooper racing team in England. His career was about to take off.

Bruce racing in the New Zealand Grand Prix



The Cooper Years

When Bruce arrived at the Cooper Car Company, he was given a space in the workshop and his own racing car. But there was a catch. His “car” was a pile of parts on the factory floor. All those years in the garage back home became valuable. Bruce knew that to win races, you needed to understand how your car worked. And to do that, you had to spend long hours in the workshop.

It didn’t take long before Bruce was driving well enough to earn a place in Cooper’s Formula One team. This time, he didn’t need to build his car – it came ready-made: the Cooper-Climax T51.

FORMULA ONE

Formula One is one of the top motor-racing competitions in the world.

The Formula One season is made up of a series of races held in different countries. Each race is called a Grand Prix. Teams enter races with cars they’ve designed themselves. They also have their own drivers. At the end of each season, a team and a driver are each crowned World Champions.

The “formula” in Formula One is the set of strict rules that all the cars have to follow. These rules set out things like engine size and car body shape. Despite these rules, Formula One teams have built some of the fastest racing cars in the world.





Sebring Grand Prix

In 1959, Bruce entered the United States Grand Prix at Sebring, Florida. On the forty-second and final lap, Bruce was in the lead. But French driver Maurice Trintignant was gaining on him. For a while, they were neck and neck. Bruce held his nerve and watched as the winner's chequered flag waved him through.

Bruce had just won his first Grand Prix. He was twenty-two years and 104 days old – the youngest person ever to win a Grand Prix. It took until 2003, forty-four years later, for his record to be beaten.



Sebring track map, 1959

A Taste for Winning

Behind the wheel of a Cooper, Bruce developed a taste for winning. He took the chequered flag again at the 1960 Argentine Grand Prix and the 1962 Monaco Grand Prix.



Bruce winning the Argentine Grand Prix



But Bruce wanted more. Always an engineer at heart, he wanted to design and build cars carrying his own name.

Bruce McLaren Motor Racing

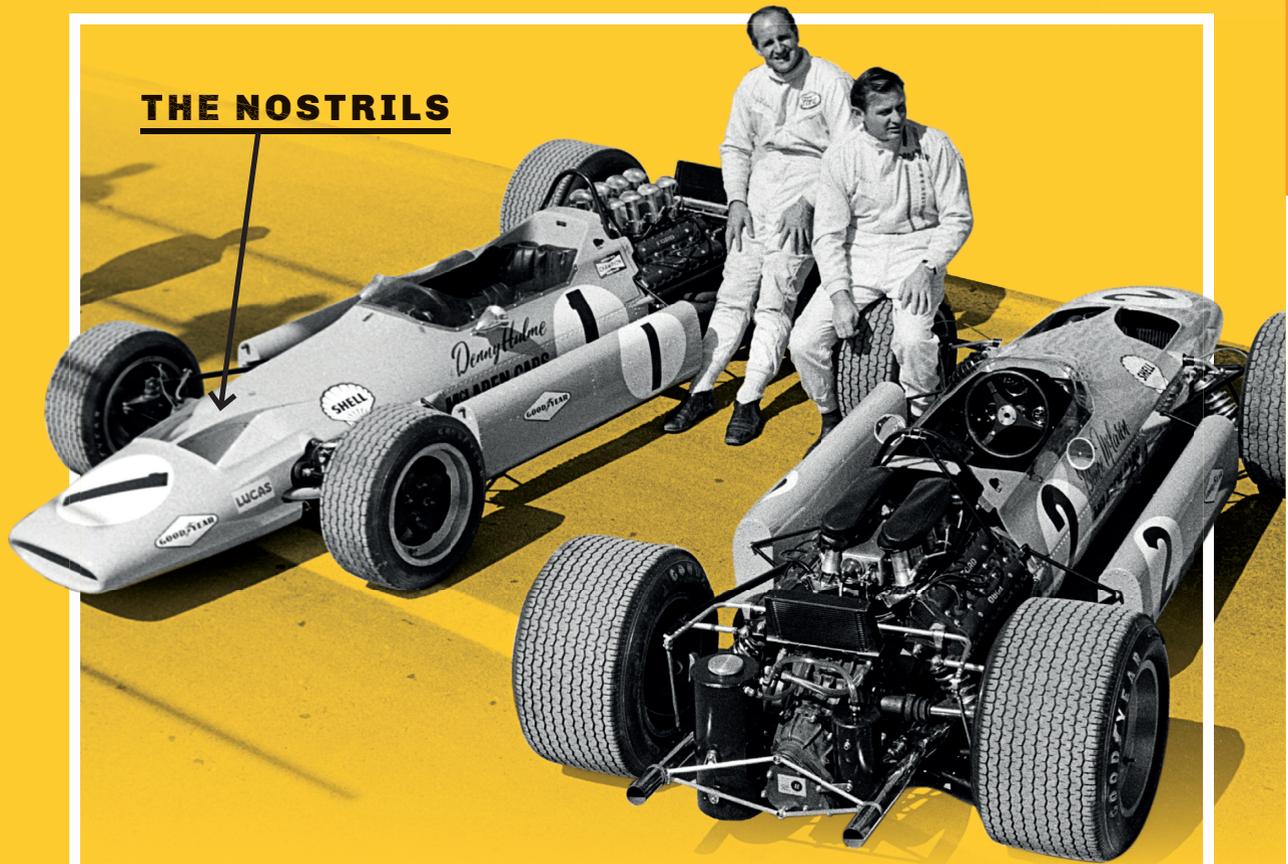


In 1963, Bruce founded Bruce McLaren Motor Racing Limited with his wife, Patty, and his friend Eoin Young. They rented a small corner in a London garage and got to work.

The workshop was very basic. It had a dirt floor and a simple work bench. There weren't many tools, and the workers used wooden crates to keep the cars raised.

Bruce knew they were up against bigger, richer teams, but he rose to the challenge. He carefully picked a small team of mechanics, designers, and drivers and pushed them to do their best. All of them, apart from one, were New Zealanders.

THE NOSTRILS



At McLaren Racing, Bruce encouraged his workers to improvise and be creative. He often turned up to work with new design ideas and plans for cars.

Once, while testing a car, Bruce noticed a small hatch at the front of the car was flapping up and down. At first he was annoyed that it hadn't been closed properly. But then he had an idea.

Bruce realised that hot air was building up behind the hatch and pushing it open. He stopped the car and got his chief engineer to cut another hole in the top of the car's body. This improved the flow of air through the car, helping it to better grip the track. Almost immediately, the car was finishing laps faster.

From that day on, these "nostrils" became an important part of McLaren car design.

The McLaren Team Takes Off

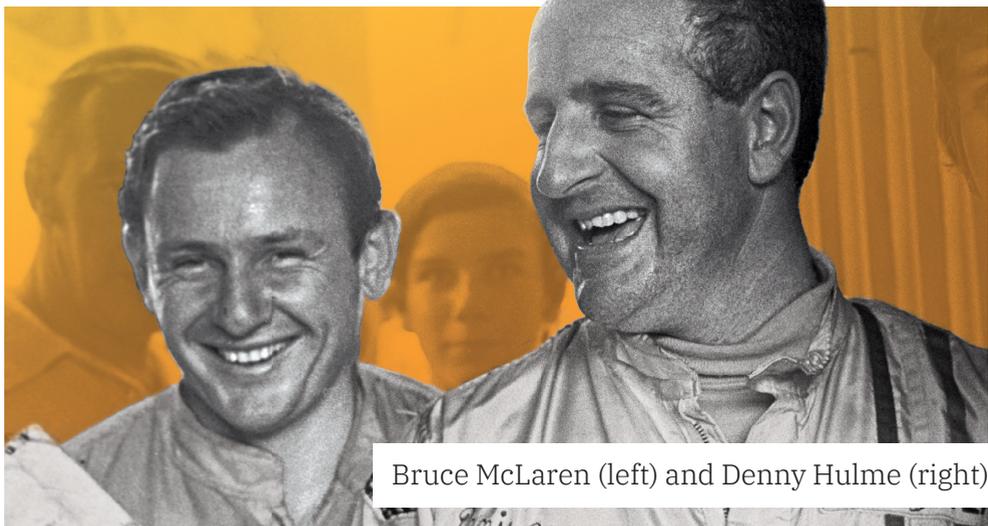
The McLaren team entered their first Formula One race, the Monaco Grand Prix, in 1966. Although the car broke down after nine laps, the determination, teamwork, and vision of the team would eventually pay off. In 1968, the McLaren team won the Belgian Grand Prix with Bruce behind the wheel of his very own car. And the logo on the body? A black kiwi.



The Bruce and Denny Show

While Formula One racing had strict rules, the Canadian-American Challenge Cup (Can-Am) had very few. The Can-Am encouraged new technology and new designs. This suited Bruce McLaren.

With Bruce driving alongside Denny Hulme, his teammate and fellow New Zealander, the McLaren team ruled the competition.



Bruce McLaren (left) and Denny Hulme (right)

Bruce was champion in 1967 and 1969, Denny in 1968 and 1970. The Can-Am's nickname became the Bruce and Denny Show.

Bruce McLaren and Denny Hulme line up at the start of the 1968 Los Angeles Times Grand Prix.



A Life Measured in Achievement

Accident at Goodwood

On 2 June 1970, Bruce took the team's latest car for a test drive at Goodwood in England. It was two weeks before the next Can-Am race. As he raced around the track, the car's rear bodywork came loose. Bruce lost control and crashed at high speed. He died instantly, aged thirty-two.



The McLaren Team Drives On

The team at McLaren Racing were shocked and heartbroken. But they stayed true to Bruce's example. The day after his death, every employee turned up ready to work. The McLaren team entered the 1970 Can-Am – and they won.

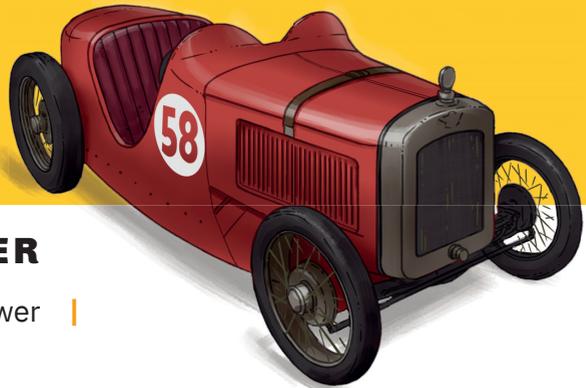
In Formula One, McLaren Racing went on to become one of the most successful racing teams in history. To this day, the McLaren team boasts over 180 Grand Prix wins, second only to Ferrari. And to think it all began with a tiny red car racing along the cliffs at Muriwai – a young boy behind the wheel.



*“It would be a waste of life to do nothing with one’s ability,
for I feel that life is measured in achievement,
not in years alone.”*

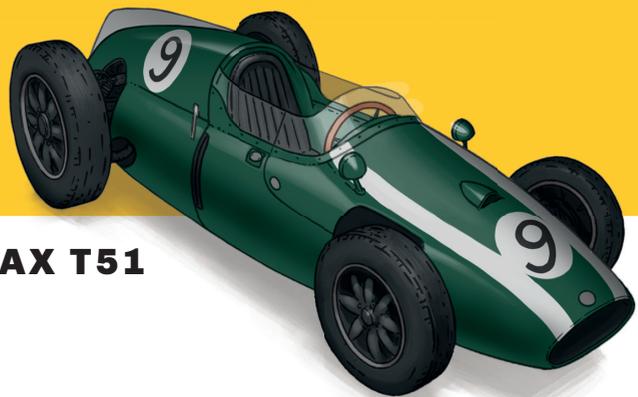
BRUCE McLAREN

Under the Bonnet: Bruce McLaren's Cars



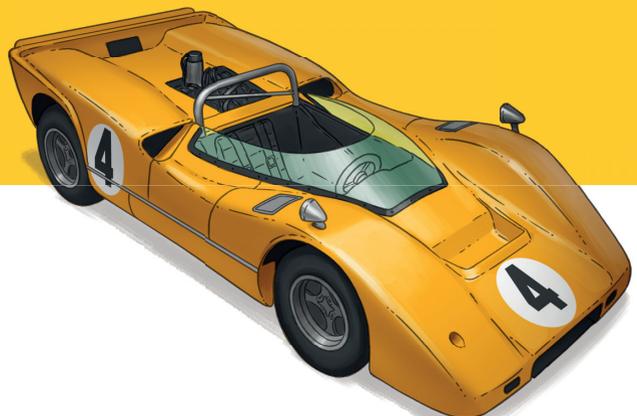
1929 AUSTIN 7 ULSTER

3 speed (3 gears) | 24 horsepower |
Top speed: 110 km/h



1959 COOPER-CLIMAX T51

4 speed | 240 horsepower |
Top speed: 225 km/h

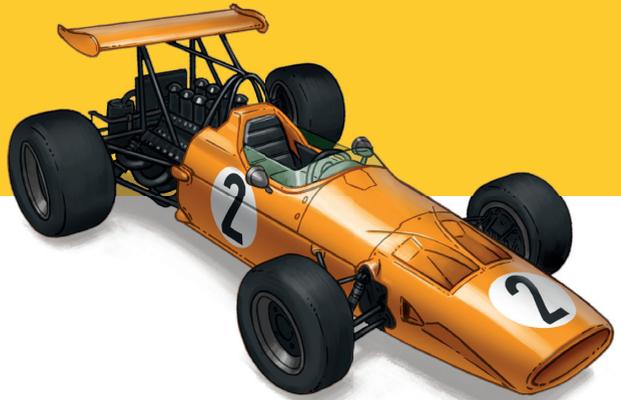


1967 MCLAREN M6A

5 speed | 525 horsepower |
Top speed: 320 km/h

1968 MCLAREN M7A

5 speed | 430 horsepower |
Top speed: 290 km/h



1969 MCLAREN M8B

4 speed | 635 horsepower |
Top speed: 346 km/h



2017 MCLAREN MCL32

8 speed | 750 horsepower |
Top speed: 370 km/h



To this day, McLaren Racing continues to build some of the world's fastest racing cars.

Acknowledgments

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