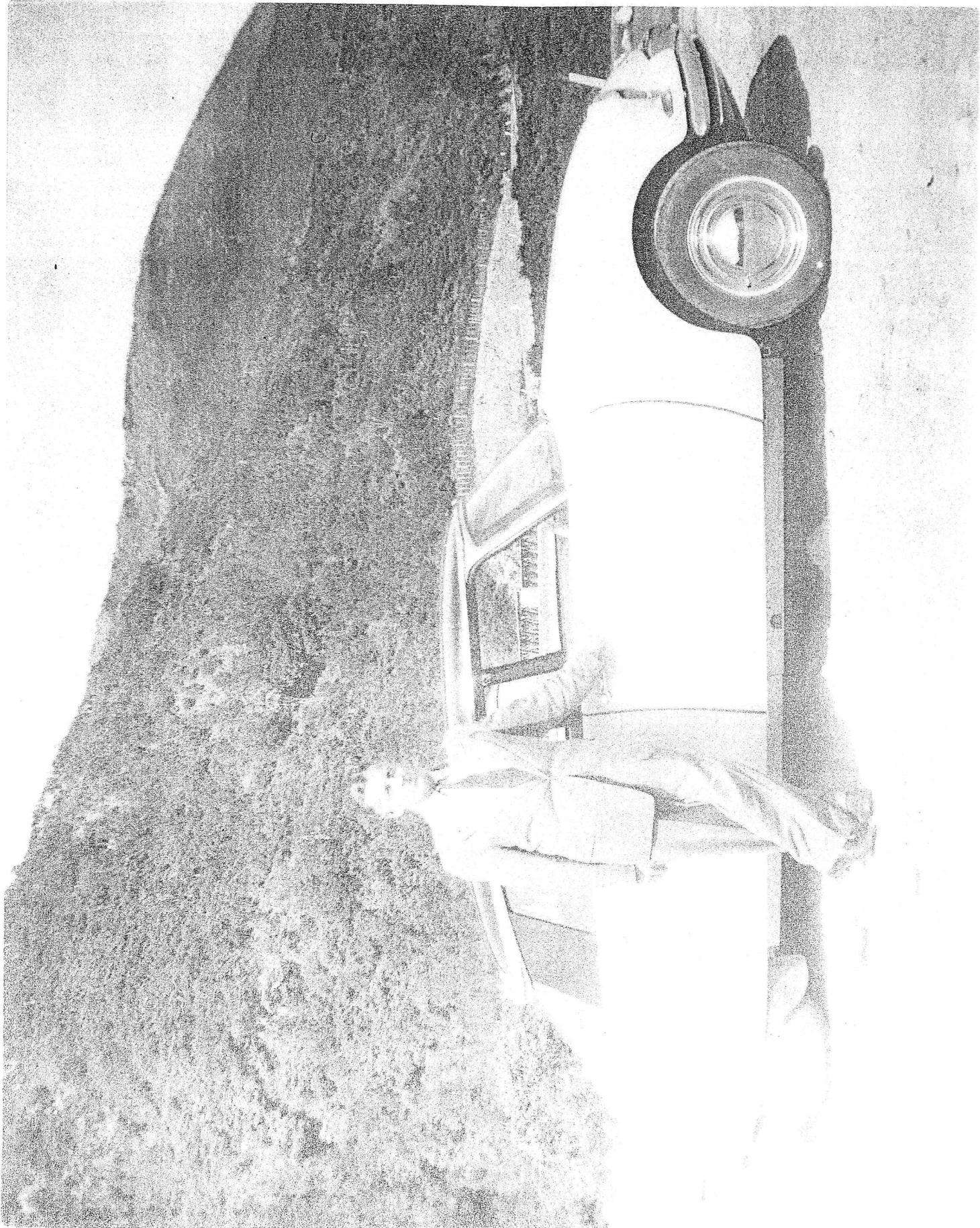


More Citroens than Paris

MAX McKAY

An Appreciation



The following article was penned by John Kuriger, a long time resident of Manaia and friend of Max McKay. It was originally written some years ago on behalf of the Taranaki Citroen Car Club as a contributory article for the "New Zealand Citroën" the National magazine of the combined Citroen Car Clubs.

The original hand written notes surfaced again recently and have been kindly lightly edited and re-typed by Allan Wills of Rotorua.

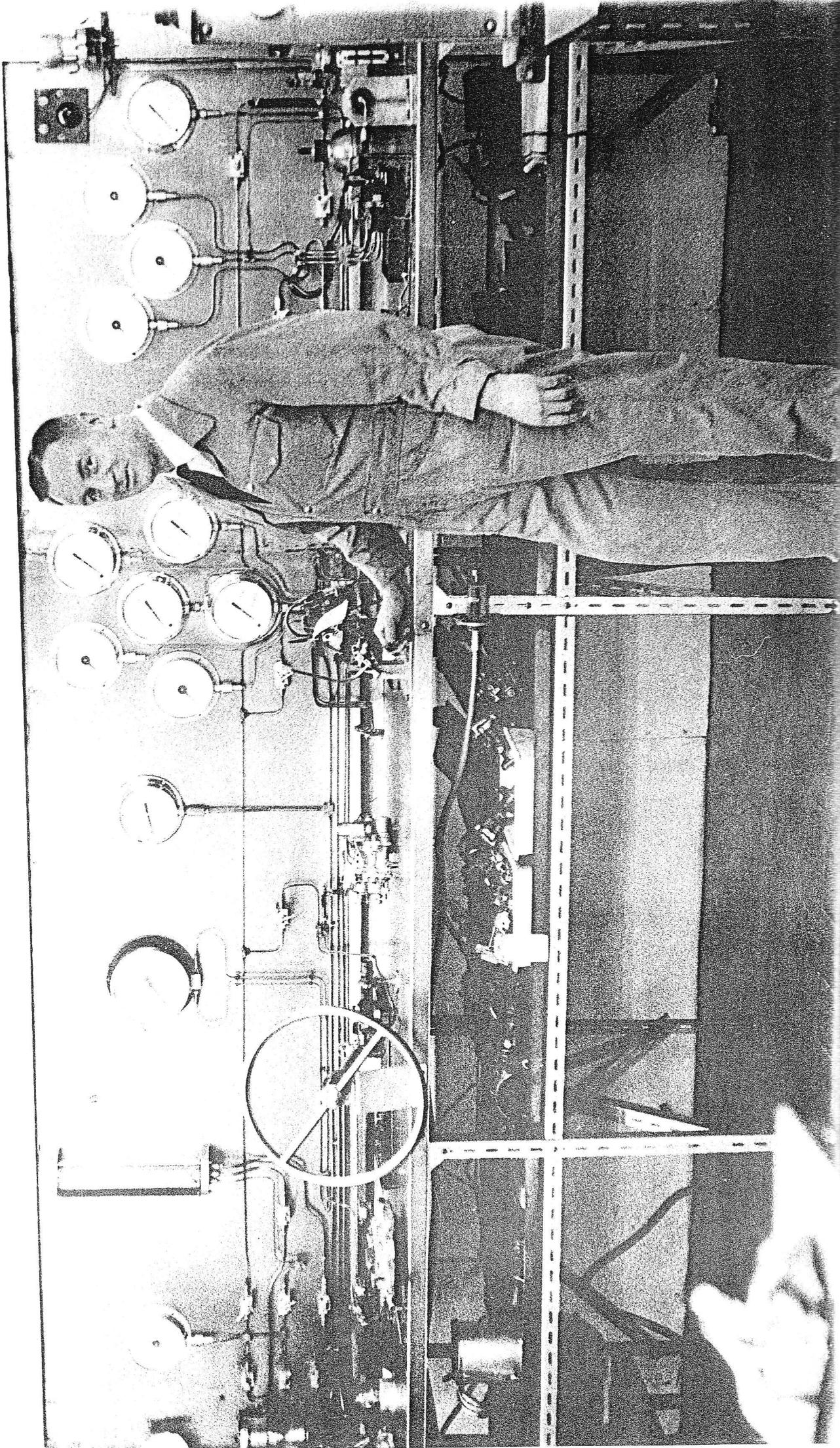
I myself knew Max for many years and indeed worked for him for a short time in an informal capacity. When I started operating as a panelbeater in Manaia, I worked in co-operation with Max with our complimentary businesses.

Max was a true character of the old school and a brilliant engineer dedicated to the Citroen Marque. This booklet is an appreciation of the man and his skill.

John Kuriger has recently crossed the ditch with his family to take up a new farming challenge in Warrnamboul, Victoria.


Stuart Craig

October 2002



From the Taranaki Citroen Car Club

'MORE CITROENS THAN PARIS'

Most people who have been associated with Citroens for more than a year or two will have heard the odd story about something, or someone around Manaia – a fairly normal country town in Southern Taranaki with a little over 1100 people. This small town in the mid 60's had more Citroens per head of population than Paris!!!

Who was the person who was single-handedly responsible? – Max Suter McKay – more often called Mad Max, Metric, MS, and at times a few other choice words as well.

This fine chap who I knew for about 15 years or so, was absolutely dedicated to the superb Citroens of France that we all know, although I believe he only visited there once, and the only French he could speak was out of a parts manual.

He just believed in Citroens!! He knew them inside out and backwards.

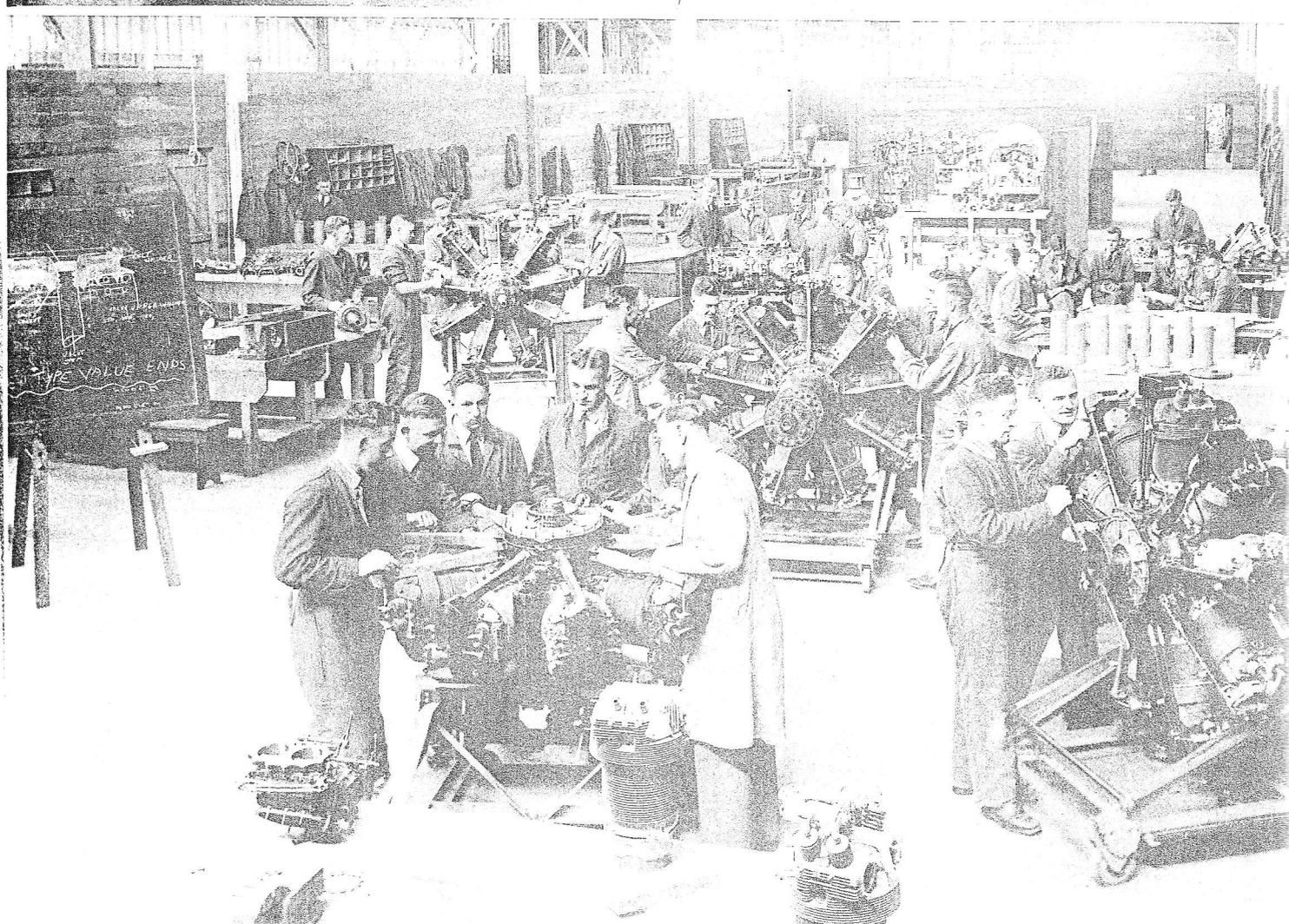
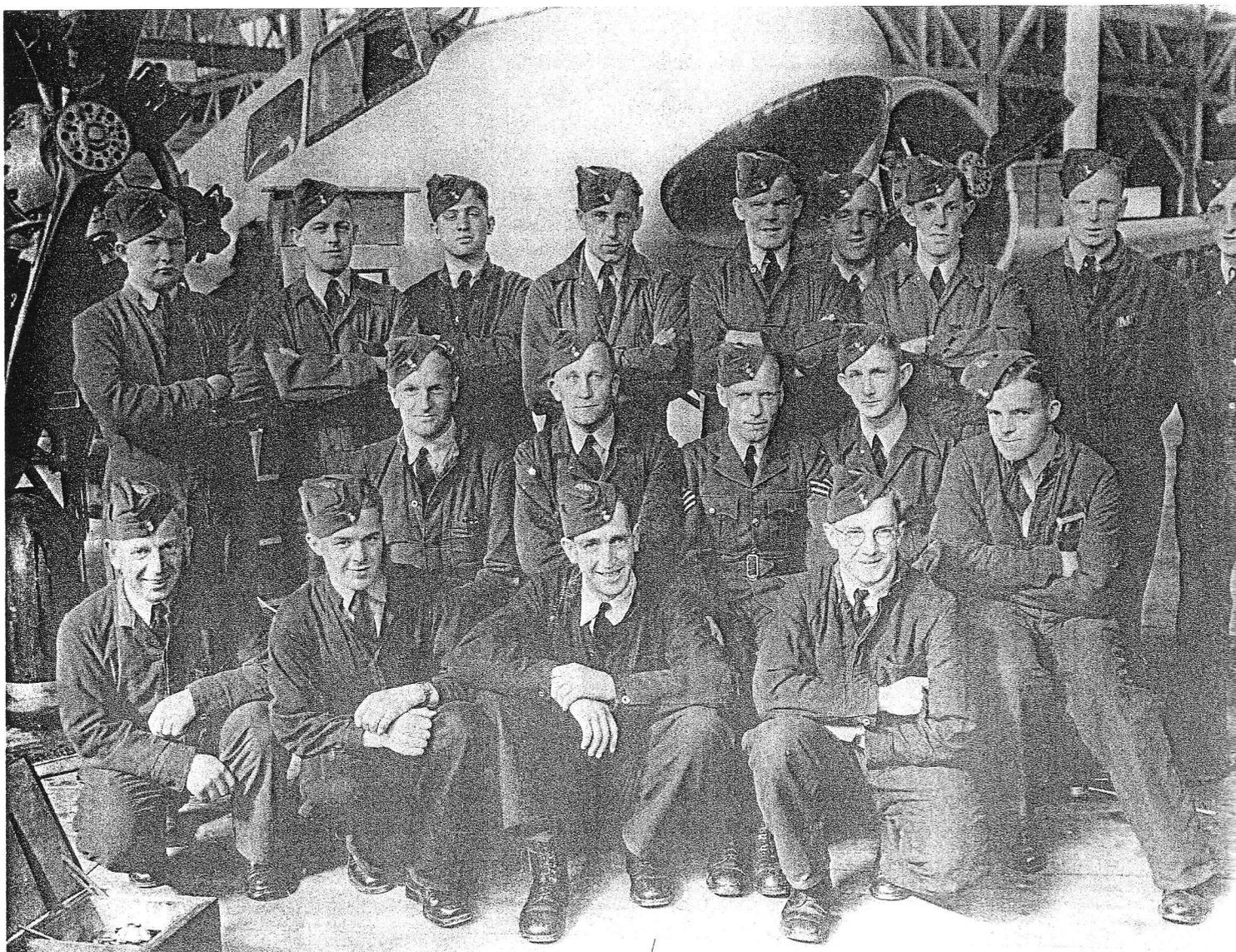
MS as I called him, was a top student through his school career, and went on to become a top mechanical instructor in the Air Force – after milking cows for his father – a job he detested, even though he later inherited the family farm.

On visits to the Southward Museum on two occasions, Len Southward told me that the Air Force hierarchy remembered MS as a top Pratt and Whitney radial engine man. Len had been given two such engines for the Museum, and was willing to pay MS to strip and check them. I told MS about this offer of work, and he said that he had already been contacted by Len, but that he had people out there who needed their Citroens serviced and that they were far more important to him than some old engines!!!

He loved to show off in Citroens, and often got quite upset by automotive magazines and adverts claiming quality and safety in other vehicles.

MS would quote 10 or 20 names of local people who had Citroen D's that had done between 100 000 and 400 000 miles on untouched engines and drive-trains, and without a serious accident. He would talk about contacting a newspaper and getting this information published, but he never did, probably because the goons who drive conventional cars wouldn't have believed it anyhow. They didn't really matter. It was their loss not to be enlightened.

I guess all of us have heard the old Sunday morning children's request sessions when "Sparky Thinks the Train Talks" and the problems they have with the front wheel of the train. Well MS was a bit like that. He would get into a GS or Traction Avant, although D's were his favourite, and he would drive out of his workshop and head south



towards Hawera. He would approach the Inaha hill at 50 mph and accelerate in top gear, and on reaching the top of the hill, he could tell you the compression on number 3 cylinder, and the brake shoe wear on the right rear!!

He was uncanny in his feel for Citroens and would believe none of his customers when they came in with a problem, and always did his own test drive and diagnosis.

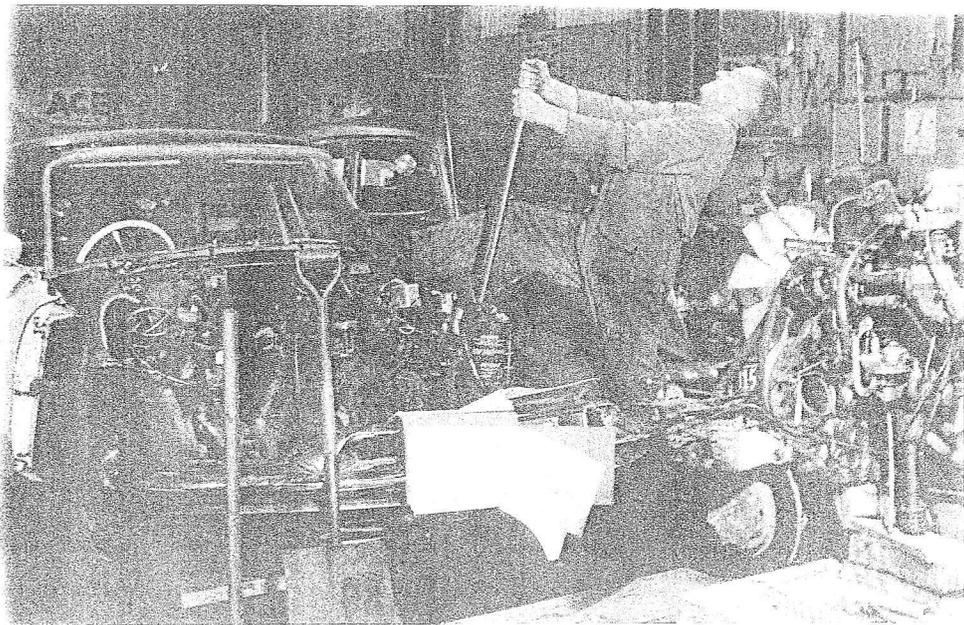
A cuppa tea was never too far away, and a pretty mean brew it was at times. With the well oiled tea cosy, and the draught through the door just beside the Zip heater and sink. More than once in my more youthful days, or nights, I would see the lights on at 2am and call in for a cuppa. He would usually have just let some poor soul go home after a 300 mile test drive via Taihape and return to make sure that that person or family appreciated the special aspects of this remarkable car.

Most of the local car salesmen knew MS only too well, and some of the braver ones actually took their new models out to show him. I remember the day when one such salesman brought out the new Morris Marina 1750GT and revved it loudly several times outside the workshop to attract Ms's attention. Ms simply invited the man into the workshop where he got into a GS and revved it to 7500rpm – several times!! We in the workshop heard a bit of a rattle coming from the GS, but thought nothing more of it, until a couple of weeks later when it was noticed that the GS in question, had shed all of it's fan blades!! – probably centrifugal force!! The car belonged to one of the mechanics, and had not over-heated although it seemed to be a lot quieter running!

The swivelling lights on the D's were, on first release, illegal, and had to be locked in a fixed position. MS promptly unlocked them, and drove to Wellington where he picked up the local MP who drove Citroens, and then went to visit the Minister of Transport. Our local MP was a school friend, and a rugby team mate of MS, when the Waimate team was in its' more victorious years.

They picked up the Minister of Transport, and his teenage son, and drove out to a windy dark country road, and did several runs around some bends with the lights fixed. Then the teenager was stood on the side of the road and the Minister was asked to indicate when he first saw his son appear in the lights, and MS would stop quickly. Then MS reattached the lights and did the same test again several times. Well, as you would guess, there was a law change very quickly, and MS had won again.

On a number of occasions, MS was apprehended by the Transport Department for seemingly stupid antics in a car. He would defend himself and was never convicted of a traffic offence in a Citroen. He had the ability to convince the Courts, and officers, after many long visits to the appropriate authorities, that his actions were completely safe in these cars.



Many times before the court case was heard, he actually got the apprehending officer to go for a drive and try it for himself. It seemed to work wonders, - or was it that they let him off just to get rid of him?

One Saturday afternoon in the mid 70's an old Air Force mate of MS's called in with his family in a brand new Mercedes Benz. Well, did MS rubbish it. He looked under the bonnet and said, "How do you keep this un-guided missile on the road?" "That steering box must flex the chassis, and you most certainly wouldn't have full control!"

MS got a magnetic base and dial gauge and put it between the motor and the steering block, and then moved the steering wheel from side to side. The gauge went wild. MS yelled with joy and called for all to come and see. He then went over to a D model and did the same. No movement at all!!

"Look my good fellow, you have been sold an unsafe machine. Take it back. I am surprised that cars like this are allowed on the road!"

The poor Mercedes owner had just had his pride and joy ridiculed, and he had been humiliated in front of his own family.

MS felt this was just desserts for a person who should have known better.

MS was a complex fellow who would lend the right person a car for two years, but then refuse to sell another a car, regardless of the offered price.

The local doctor had a D Safari, and one day he dropped it in, unarranged, to have a small job done.

A while later he came back to collect it. "Now listen here my good fellow, just because you are a doctor and can save lives does not give you priority. When I want to visit you as a patient, you make me wait two or three days for an appointment. Then I have to sit in your waiting room for an hour, and you expect me to pay before I leave, with no guarantee of satisfaction!"

The doctor left very indignantly, and in a rush. He was not to be seen for quite some time.

The Apprenticeship Board used to have problems with MS, because he hated his mechanics going off to Trades School and coming back with fancy ideas. Wasn't he a person with teaching abilities? Wasn't his tuition good enough? He taught people to repair cars. Modern mechanics as far as he was concerned were just parts fitters.

When the Apprenticeship Board said that Citroen were only one make of vehicle, and did not have the latest technology, MS hit the roof. "What is technology? Technology is just technical knowledge, and some technical knowledge is useless!"

Many of the Waimate Motors mechanics went on to get top marks in exams and were sought after by other workshops for many years.



“Would you like to see something remarkable?” was a favourite introductory line of MS as people entered the workshop door, often only to ask directions to Mt Egmont. He would hold them captive for several hours, showing them the finer points of the Citroen cars, known only to the enlightened.

Rugby, clarinet music and the occasional drop of Drambuie were all enjoyed by this man. He was nobody’s fool, and had an interest in world affairs and an extremely broad general knowledge - once you got off the subject of Citroens.

It was a rare time that he missed a Waimate Senior rugby game.

Unfortunately these things can not go on forever, and sadly, one night it all ended. I had a cuppa with MS that last afternoon, and he seemed to be in a bit of a mood, - but that was not too unusual.

The 120 plus Citroens were a fitting tribute at his send off – in a D Safari, and I guess he is responsible in a rather odd way for organising the biggest collection of Citroens in the Southern Hemisphere.

I am sure my few words and limited knowledge of MS will remind many of you of another story involving this remarkable fellow, and those of you who were not fortunate enough to meet him, I hope this has enlightened you just a little.

John Kuriger



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