

MARSHALL LAW

IN THE EARLY YEARS OF THE NZ RALLY SCENE, MIKE MARSHALL WAS THE MAN TO BEAT. ROB SCOTT, A MAN WHO HAS TAKEN MANY A BEATING OVER THE YEARS, TALKS TO HIM ABOUT HIS RALLYING FUTURE AND HIS TREASURE TROVE OF RALLY-SCARRED PEUGEOTS



Photos: Tom Gasnier / FS / Ross Cammick / Marshall collection



Mike Marshall. The name may mean very little to motorsport enthusiasts today, but for a kid growing up in the 70s, he was the closest thing to a superstar in the nascent sport of rallying.

Because he was blindingly fast. And debonair in his jet-black overalls. And he drove Escorts fitted with the very best competition parts emerging on the market. He became THE driver to beat, and was the first local capable of mixing it with the visiting internationals like Hannu Mikkola.

Then business and family responsibilities took priority, so rallying assumed a back seat in Mike's

life until his teenage sons developed an interest in Dad's old sport.

He started building club-level cars for the youngsters to compete in, mainly with his beloved Ford badge on the grille. Yet somewhere along the line their sporting path took a quite different tangent, and the Marshall family are now more frequently associated with the Peugeot marque.

NZ *Autocar* called in on Mike, intent on seeking his thoughts on the flurry of new 'Pugs' entering the New Zealand rally scene. But the old fox was full of surprises and the interview headed off in directions we certainly weren't expecting...

NZA: "Before we discuss the Patrick Malley 208, or even Alex Kelsey's fire-

spitting 'Mad Creation' (both featured previously in NZ *Autocar*), perhaps you'd better explain how your interest in Peugeots came about."

MM: "My son Craig was working for Randall Edgell when he was contracted to turn twenty-five Peugeot 106s into race cars for a one-make series. Craig became very comfortable working on these cars at the various race meetings, so when one arrived with a full rally kit, he was the logical one to develop it. The owner then let Craig run it in the Rothmans Rally of New Zealand that year."

A relationship formed with Peugeot NZ, that blossomed when the Marshalls upgraded to a 306 Maxi. This partnership was further cemented with



TOP LEFT - Mike in his Mount Wellington workshop. MIDDLE LEFT AND CENTRE - The Marshall family trophy haul. MIDDLE RIGHT - Craig Marshall contesting Rally Canberra in the 106 with French co-driver 'Tilber'. BOTTOM LEFT - Scott Marshall in the 306 Maxi with Rob Scott at the inaugural International Rally of Rotorua. BOTTOM CENTRE - A youthful Mike as part of the two-car CRC team with fellow driver John Couch





parent company PSA, when Craig's points score at the 1995 Smokefree Rally NZ helped Peugeot secure the FIA Formula 2 title.

NZA: "I remember that Maxi well. Craig and I were comfortably leading the factory Hyundais and Daihatsus at Rally Canberra..."

MM: "...until you rolled it into a drain. Incidentally, we still have that car - we just don't sell 'em."

'Not selling them' means the Marshalls still own a 1600cc 106 Maxi that youngest son Nick first cut his competitive teeth on, though a 1300cc Clubsport version died an ugly death and was relegated for parts.

MM: "We're also just completing the rebuilding of Nick's 206 GTi 180 that Craig crashed at Paihia (Rally of the North 2012). And of course there's the WRC car."

Pardon?

A tour of the Marshall workshop quickly revealed that the 206 WRC car is indeed the real McCoy, purchased from an Irish privateer after being run by 'Fast' Freddy Loix in the world championship.

MM: "We bought it without a transmission or engine, but then picked up an engine that Peter (PJ) Johnston had intended for his 205. We'll fit it with a Hollinger 'box, as the factory electronic gearboxes are a bit too complex and expensive for us to maintain. I had intended it as my retirement project but I just never got around to retiring."

NZA: "So what are you going to do with it?"

TOP LEFT - Cockpit of the 208 GTi is all business. **TOP MIDDLE -** Mike on the charge at Hahei. **BOTTOM LEFT -** Mike in the 106 Maxi at Rod Millen's Leadfoot Festival

MM: "It's too valuable to run too hard in it, so I'll probably just keep it for hillclimbs and ralliesprints. Or, if things go well, I could run it at Rally Barbados in 2016."

Say what?

It transpires that about fifteen years ago, Marshall Senior was quite entranced

by an article in the now-defunct 'Car and Car Conversions' magazine. The vision of competing on the Caribbean isle lingered, so in 2014 he finally treated himself to a vacation timed to coincide with both the Barbados round of the Red Bull rallycross series and the international rally.



CHEQUERED HISTORY

I've navigated for a number of the Marshall offspring over the years, with varying levels of success. Craig is the most naturally gifted driver, but was also prone to the greatest crashes. We contested the Streetskills Scholarship together in a naturally-aspirated 4WD Laser which unfortunately expired when the engine hydraulic'd in an Ohakune water crossing. His outright pace in the 306 Maxi was staggering, especially on smooth gravel.

I competed in the inaugural APRC Rally of Rotorua with brother Scott Marshall. Scotty is the more circumspect of the rallying family

– nevertheless, we were cruising to a reasonable result when the gearbox died in Manawahe forest.

Youngest brother Nick is the most entrepreneurial brother, setting up 'Speedbitz' as a TradeMe-style motorsport website. I still remember hurtling over blind brows in the north, bellowing pace notes over the engine noise because the intercom had failed.

I just need to add Mike to the list to complete the full set. I wonder if he needs someone for Barbados?

MIKE MARSHALL GAVE NZ RALLYING A PUBLIC PROFILE THAT WAS NOT TO BE REPLICATED UNTIL THE RISE OF POSSUM BOURNE

TOP RIGHT - the Marshall/Scott 306 buried in a Canberra ditch. MIDDLE RIGHT - Mike and codriver Arthur McWatt were the crew to beat in their iconic Woolmark Escort. BOTTOM RIGHT - Nick contesting the Ruby Rallyfeste in the 106



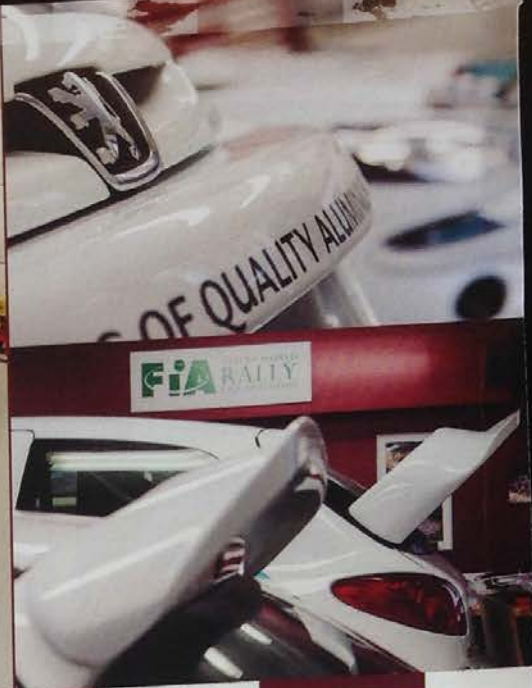
THE MAN, THE LEGEND

Mike Marshall gave NZ rallying a public profile that was not to be replicated until the rise of Possum Bourne. A steady diet of English motoring magazines meant the backyard engineer knew exactly how to design and build a rally car when the sport was first mooted on these shores. But even he was surprised to find himself the fastest local.

He led the 1970 Shell Silver Fern in an Anglia, then switched to a homebuilt twincam Escort with a Ron Rutherford bodysell and Don Halliday engine. He led Rally New Zealand in 1971, and again in 1972 with an 1800cc BDA, before taking Ford's first-ever international win for a Mk2 Escort in 1975.



Curiously, it was not his devastating speed nor successes behind the wheel that gave Mike his greatest satisfaction – it was the knowledge he could create high-performance machinery with his own hands.



MM: "The plan was to catch Emma Gilmour and Rhys Millen in action, then participate in the official rally reconnaissance, to see if it was the type of event that might appeal to my son Nick."

However, a chance encounter with another visiting parent threw that plan into disarray.

MM: "We were having a few rum punches in a bar when we met Dick Major. His son Simon has arguably the fastest alloy block Escort in the UK, and Dick was out to do an exploratory recce with his wife. Next thing I know, there's a wager on the table for next year..."

The 69-year-old Major ran a 1400cc Nissan Micra in that 2014 rally with the Marshalls assisting, but intends returning with a Group A Cosworth for 2015.

MM: "I did suggest to him that he bring the fastest car he can get his hands on, if he wants to beat me."

But this left the 72-year-old kiwi with a problem of his own.

"I just assumed I'd take the Maxi, but then I thought - bugger it - why not get the Lynx going?"

The 4WD Lynx is yet another early Marshall project, the initial building of which was serialised in the fondly-remembered 90s-era *NZ Speedsport* magazine. It now bears a six-speed sequential gearbox and has been fitted with a fuel-injected V6 engine from a stadium race truck. It's also adorned with some attractive Peugeot-style flares after the Marshall menfolk decided to create moulds off the Loix car sitting next to it.

"We've still got a lot of preparation to get the Lynx ready; it has to be on a boat by the end of March to make the rally start on May 31st. Ideally, I'd like to take some time off work to finish both the Ford and Nick's (now tarmac-spec) GTi 180, but I need the money to pay for it all!"

TOP - The 'Fast Freddy' Loix WRC Peugeot on stands, with the GTi180 in the foreground.
BOTTOM - Mike still gains as much pleasure from building cars as competing in them

With so many years away from the hot seat, Mike is circumspect as to his likely pace in the Caribbean.

"I've never done notes before so it'll have to be the old school way - learning the route by heart during reconnaissance. The roads are very technical, so not ultra

high-speed. Even though they're centuries old, they're fortunately pretty smooth (a blend of hot mix and coral sand) so there's no potholes. And with stages only around 6km long, it won't be too tiring for us old guys!"

We left Mike tinkering with one of the many Peugeots, and had to agree with his parting comment - it probably was going to be "all a bit of a laugh" at Barbados.

And we completely forgot to ask him about the Malley and Kelsey cars... **EC**

RALLY OF BARBADOS

The International All-Stage Rally had its first running in 1990, and has steadily grown from its small beginnings. The two-day tarmac event is run in a largely party atmosphere, with massive crowds lining the roads to watch visiting stars like two-time victor (and now Citroën works driver) Kris Meeke.

"It's like being at the rugby Sevens" explains Mike. "There's grandstands

and barbeques everywhere, and the grouped stage format means there's a car coming past every thirty seconds."

2015 will see the 25th anniversary event, and the organisers are promising something memorable. They're probably not expecting the planned grudge match between a group of Gold Card holders, though.

Mike is adamant that he and Dick Major will not be the oldest competitors. "There's a guy there who's the owner of the local massage and... ah... 'device' shop in a Porsche GT3. He's 79!"

