

>> WHEELS

PERFORMANCE DRIVING EXPERIENCE

# Lapping up the thrills at Old Mosport

Grandmother arranges for blind grandson to take wheel with help of race champ vet



Kathy **Renwald**

Dorothy Davey wanted to do something special for her grandson, Robert Hampson. The 20-year-old has been blind since he was 4, when surgeons had to cut his optic nerve during an operation for a brain tumour.



KATHY RENWALD FOR THE TORONTO STAR

**Blind since he was 4, Robert Hampson, left, drove around the Canadian Tire Motorsport Park with the aid of racer and driving instructor, Rick Bye.**

But blindness has never stopped Robert from living life to the fullest. He recently went skydiving.

Dorothy suspected the thrill of skydiving might be matched by a spin around a race track.

"I called all over Canada, I didn't know where to start," she said. "Then I called Rick Bye and the doors opened."

Dorothy is telling me this story at the Canadian Tire Motorsport Track on a perfect July day. With help from Gluckstein Personal Injury Lawyers of Toronto, and others, Bye — a race driver and driving instructor — invited Robert and a number of other injured and challenged people to enjoy a day at Canada's most famous road-racing circuit. She is watching her grandson get behind the wheel of a Mitsubishi Lancer Ralliart. Yes, the wheel. Beside him in the passenger seat, champion racer Bye is ready to guide him around Old Mosport's Driver Development Track.

Robert will work the gas and brake pedals; he'll have both hands on the wheel while Bye's left hand will be beside his for guidance.

Robert has three sessions on the track with Bye, building up confidence and speed and collecting another once-in-a-lifetime experience.

"It was unbelievable, thrilling," Robert says, as he peels himself out of the Lancer.

"I don't know who was having more fun," Bye adds. "The only glitch was a moment of inattention by me. I went to move my seat forward at the same time Robert gunned it and I went flying backward!"

As they chat, two Porsches pull off the track and in behind the Mitsubishi. What originally started out as a one-on-one session with Robert has turned into a Performance Driving Experience for sight and mobility challenged people.

"I thought, 'What the heck, let's make a day of it,' " Bye says.

Bye has the nicest way of strong-arming people. His current passion is Roll With it Racing ([www.rollwithitracing.com](http://www.rollwithitracing.com)). He's built a team to get former ski instructor Brian Donato through the challenge of the Targa Newfoundland in September. Donato is in a wheelchair after his spinal cord was severed by a falling tree.

For this day at the track (Donato is there as a co-host), Bye put the friendly squeeze on two old friends, long-time racer and now broadcaster, Bill Adam, and David Deacon, founder of the Rothman's Porsche Challenge Cup Series of the 1980s.

"Eight years ago, I came up from Miami to help Rick drive kids in a Children's Wish event at Mosport; I couldn't say no to this," Adam says as he puts his arm around 15-year-old Austin Riley. The two have been lapping in a Porsche Cayman.

Austin has autism, but is no stranger to turning in fast times behind the wheel. He's a three-time karting champion. But it's his first time in the driver's seat of a Porsche and he's excited to be learning from Adam, who raced everything from Corvettes to Jaguar prototypes during his career with class victories at Mosport (now CTMP), Road America and the 12 Hours of Sebring.

Austin, who seems to naturally inhabit that cool, collected space reserved for race-car drivers, says the Cayman "handled well."

In all, eight "experience seekers" teamed up with instructors Bye, Adam and Deacon for the lapping sessions. Ten others who weren't up to driving were taken for rides.

In addition to blindness and autism, participants had challenges including spinal cord and acquired brain injuries. And the day was underwritten by Gluckstein Personal Injury Lawyers, who invited the group and shared their belief that "life isn't over," for those coping with serious injuries and disabilities.

Bye became a client and lifelong friend of company principal Bernie Gluckstein after a serious road accident in 1998 left him in a coma and facing months of rehabilitation. The long journey that he took to rebuild his life left him with an empathy for those facing the same challenges.

"I find it so incredibly rewarding to be able to share some of the excitement from my life with others and particularly those that thought they would never have the opportunity," he said. Diana Mansell is rather enjoying the fact that her legs "turned to jelly" after her track time with Bye. She's recovered from serious spinal cord injuries after being hit by a car while cycling. "He told me to push it to the floorboard; I thought that was great," she says of the experience.

It was an experience that was also made possible by Porsche Cars Canada and Mitsubishi Canada who supplied cars and support from Canadian Tire Motorsport Park.

From a grandmother's gift to her grandson, to a group of people who like to give back, the day at the track couldn't have been more gratifying, according to Bye.

"I hope it's the first of many," he said.