

In the last 35 years of Bear Ridge Speedway's 40-year existence, C.V. "Butch" Elms has not missed a single race. Through racing-injuries, farm-injuries, illness, family events and anything else that has come up, Butch Elms has been the face of Bear Ridge. He's usually the first one there and the last one out. He's the one who visits the track several times during the week to make sure the Pepsi order showed up or the rut in turn one is worked out from last week. Whatever the job is at Bear Ridge, Elms has done it and is not afraid to do it again at any moment and for any reason.

Elms' relationship with Bear Ridge is a symbiotic one. It is hard to imagine either the man or the track existing without the other. When asked who would take care of the track when he is gone Elms pauses and simply answers "good question." He provides no more of an answer than that.

Bear Ridge Speedway was built in 1968 at the top of the highest peak in Bradford, Vt. It is not where you would expect to find a racetrack. And yet, for 40 years, it has survived as a site for racing entertainment not just for locals but also track chasers and diehard racers. Built by George Barber, the track was not expected to be in business for more than five years. Barber lost interest in the facility after four seasons and talked CV Elms II (Butch's father and an employee at the track from opening day) into buying the track so Barber could get out of the business. Elms Sr., along with Wayne Weeks, Robert Nutting and Marcel Dube, took control of Bear Ridge in 1972.

Over the years each of the investors gave up his share in the track until 1984 when Elms, Sr., became the sole owner and operator. In 1990, with his health failing, Elms, Sr., sold the track to Butch Elms III and Dale Fullerton. Fullerton left after a short time and Butch Elms III has since owned and operated Bear Ridge Speedway.

Elms was 14 when the track opened and was not allowed to be in the pits until he turned 18. His first job at the track was running notes between race officials. Since then he has worked as (in no particular order) track grader, waterer, cook, ticket-taker, pit steward, race-director, security official, scorer, announcer, flagger, accountant, public-relations person, radio personality, carpenter,

plumber, construction worker, janitor, racer, souvenir seller, purchasing agent and technical inspector. His favorite job? Flagger. His least favorite? Announcer. "I couldn't keep talking that long and coming up with things to say," Elms admits.

Throughout the years Elms has assembled a group of track workers who join him every week despite weather or other personal commitments or anything else that might keep someone from the racetrack. Arriving at the track before the crowds, Elms and his team appear more like a family than employer and employees.

At over six feet tall and 280 pounds, Elms seems like a leader but not just because of his size, but also because of his personality. Yet he's not so much a dictator as a father-figure. His employees work hard and are loyal to him because they see him working so hard and being loyal to the track. The phrase "leading by example" has never been demonstrated as clearly as it is with Butch Elms and his employees at Bear Ridge. The phrase "labor of love" also comes to mind. There is an undeniable feeling of love and respect between the racetrack and the people who are involved in its operation.

Elms' leadership style is revealed by his hands; they are dirty and calloused, with blackened, half-missing nails and the end of one finger chopped off. His hands are huge. These are not the hands of your typical track-owner.

Throughout the years Elms has worked not just as a track owner, but also as a racer and (his "real job") a farmer. When not being involved with racing, Elms buys and sells cattle, milks approximately 100 cows, and operates his farm in North Haverhill, NH. By his own admission, in tougher times it has been his work in farming that has helped pay for his involvement in racing. At any given time during the week his track ownership and farming often come together. Call him on his cell phone during the week and you can find him anywhere from a local radio-studio to shoveling manure to stopping into someone's race shop to attending a cattle auction. The only day Elm's farming and racing are not intertwined is on Saturday, when his focus is all

racing.

For several seasons, Elms not only ran Bear Ridge on Saturday nights and maintained his farm during the week but also operated the Canaan dirt track in NH on Friday nights and ran his own dirt mod at Vermont's Devil's Bowl on Sunday nights. It was a grueling schedule for any person but much more so for a guy in his early 50s.

These days, his track-management is cut back to just Bear Ridge and his racing fix comes as a car owner providing cars to two different Bear Ridge modified drivers and one coupe driver. Still, Elms the racer has not retired entirely. An IMCA car is parked in his garage.

Butch Elms is the type of track owner that drivers respect. When he comes down from the tower to congratulate the winner of an event he also seeks out the second and third-place finishers and tells them what they might have done to win. Suggestions for changing lines on the track, changing tire-staggers or shocks and general confidence-building are all handed out freely to all competitors at any time and place. Racers know that Elms is a racer, too, and this gives credibility to his words to other racers.

At 53 years old, Elms knows that as he gets older his role at the track is changing. He has given up some of the roles he used to do each raceday and is quietly grooming his employees to permanently take over some of the tasks he has regularly done. Unlike other track owners who do most of their work over the radio, Butch has always been a "hands-on" owner in the most literal sense of the expression. He admittedly does not know any other way than shoveling a ditch when one needs to be shoveled and the rest of his employees are busy.

Recent years have not been easy on Elms or Bear Ridge. On a Saturday night there are more activities than ever for possible ticket-buyers to choose from. Families are choosing to spend their expendable income elsewhere. It is no secret that the crowds are not what they used to be and land that tracks sit on is worth more

as real estate than it is as a racetrack.

Despite these factors, Bear Ridge continues to open its gates to fans on Saturday night. For all of its 40 years there has been an Elms at the track and for 35 years it has been Butch Elms III to greet those fans and run the night's events. That's not likely to change any time in the future.