

AUSTIN GUNNING



what he had; it had to be right; his car, his boat, his house, his garden, everything had to be neat and tidy; he was a perfectionist. Those who knew his boats or indeed his cars know they were painstakingly researched, fastidiously kept and lovingly cared for. Austin did his homework before he bought anything. I remember he and Bernie going around the boatyards in England

I've known Austin Gunning for over thirty years and I'm proud to say he was my friend. Austin was someone larger than life itself, a bubbly, happy, carefree person who was popular with everyone, the sort of person everyone wanted to sit beside; just to be in his company ensured a great evening's craic.

He was one of the most senior members of the Erne Branch; I met him first when Alan Giff was Chairman and Jim Wilson was secretary. Those were the days when we were campaigning for the re-opening of the Ballinamore & Ballyconnell canal, the days when we had clean ups of the river from Carrybridge to Enniskillen, when we laid mooring buoys and when we had fun together in work parties. Austin loved to talk about his Tremlett speed boat with the original Mercury engine; his father had built it from a kit and it was Austin's pride and joy; he used it with a cloth in his hand, always at the ready to wipe away any blemish that might appear.

Austin was meticulous in everything he did; no matter

before buying his last boat, indeed I was proud to be consulted when he sought my advice as to what to buy.

He represented the Erne Branch at IWAI Council for many years. True to form he took his role seriously, he rarely missed a meeting and always arrived well prepared and briefed for any discussion. His views were respected; that was true too of his involvement with the Powerboat Branch; I smiled as I read one of the many tributes to him on our on-line forum; this was written by Richard Ellis:

Austin will be sadly missed for his willingness to help or provide advice, much of it on this forum at one time, always provided in the most gentlemanly manner. My first encounter with Austin was when he became almost our 'personal advisor' when we spent a summer on his home cruising waters of the Erne in 2010, generous and supportive with his advice at all times.

Always at his side was Bernie his wife; Bernie stood by him no matter where he went, no matter what he organised,

through rain hail and snow Bernie was there right to the end. Everyone was devastated when we first learnt of Austin's illness; it seems glib of me to say he bore it with dignity for he never lost his cheerfulness. When I visited him confined to a wheelchair; he insisted on seeing me to the door; always with that cheerful smile.

Austin's boating career really began in Belfast Lough with his brother John, when he competed in power boat racing, graduating to sailing in Belfast Lough before buying a cruiser and boating on the Erne. He often reminded me of his family connections with the Copeland Islands urging me to visit the family grave where the stone perpetuated the Gunning ancestry. The family bond was evidenced in the beautiful home built and designed for Austin by John, a home where every need could be met and that could deal with Austin's changing needs.

Austin didn't like the effects of the sun, Bernie always carried the sun cream for him which he lavishly applied before donning the straw hat that he wore while steering from the fly bridge. One amusing incident I recall was attending a Council meeting with him in Ballinasloe. When we arrived and unpacked I discovered I had forgotten my pyjamas. I'll never forget his reaction. He looked at his watch: 'Brian, the shops are still open, go and buy a pair, you're not sleeping in this room without pyjamas!'

Bernie was always by Austin's side, this was never truer than in

recent years when Austin was ill. I don't think I have ever witnessed anyone who devoted their complete life to caring for a loved one, denying herself even a visit to the shops. She was always bright and cheerful, longing for better days when once again they could take the wheelchair out in the specially adapted little van; sadly there were few opportunities due to the deteriorating condition.

Up until recently he was contributing to our on-line forum, to Facebook and other forums; indeed he was the Erne expert on water levels. In recent years he was an enthusiastic member of the Powerboat Branch. He told me of the regular visits and phone calls he had from folk who lived far from Bangor. One such was Conor Meegan who visited him, took him out for a drive and showed genuine Christian love. Bernie kept and cared for Austin in their home for as long as was possible. Sadly his condition deteriorated to such an extent that at the very end he had to be hospitalized. Austin will be missed by many but because Bernie and he were so much of an item, her loss will be greater than any. Austin was called away too soon. Bernie said to me recently, 'he still had much more living to do' sadly that was not to be. To Bernie and to Austin's brother John, we offer our sincere condolences and assure you of our thoughts and prayers in the days that lie ahead. May Austin truly Rest in Peace.

Austin died on 26 December 2014

Brian Cassells

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