

He came, he saw — he loved it

By ARTHUR LOWE

Brownridge, Earl

APRIL 10, 1968.

Earl Brownridge, a new Mississaugan like the rest of us, had just finished one career and was starting another when I first met him. He had resigned as president of Orenda Engines — receiving much of the credit for that firm's success — and he had taken on the challenging job of directing the activities of American Motors in Canada.

I interviewed him for a magazine story not long after he got the plant going, and what most impressed me was his pride in Canada — a pride amounting almost to fanaticism. He talked like an overseas representative of the Department of Immigration working on commission.

Strange, I thought, for the president of an American subsidiary. But it wasn't so strange, I discovered. His company was theoretically a subsidiary. In practice, however, and under Brownridge management, it was virtually autonomous.

There was a show on at the plant when I visited Earl that first time — a show specially arranged for Canadian parts manufacturers. On display were the various assemblies and components which went into the making of American Motors' products, nearly all of them manufactured in the United States. The idea of the show was to persuade Canadian parts manufacturers to get into the business. Earl's ambition, I gathered, was to make the parent company's automobiles sold in Canada 100 percent Canadian.

A FOR ACHIEVEMENT

He must have come pretty close to achieving it for the Ontario Department of Economics instituted a special award to go to the company promoting the maximum

amount of new manufacturing in Canada. The first award — A for achievement — went to American Motors.

Under the automotive free trade pact a different system is in vogue today, but American Motors is still doing very nicely — for Canada.

Earl had not changed much when I talked to him a few days ago — an unmogul, blunt, completely without side. He told me of his early life which I had not asked him about before. He attended Oakwood Collegiate in Toronto, but dropped out in Grade 10 to take a job at Eaton's paying \$8 a week. The job suited him but not the pay, so he struck out for the north country and the mines.

But these were depression years and there were armies on the march for work. Earl toughed it out in the lumber camps, where at any rate he got enough to eat, and between times he took on the sort of jobs which were handed out to transients. He figured he was lucky when he was taken on as a skimmer at the Inco mill in Sudbury and started earning big money — 66 cents an hour.

When World War II started he joined the army, but after a two months' stretch the M.O.'s discovered that he was completely deaf in one ear, and he was discharged. During the war years he worked at fill-in jobs — an insurance salesman part of the time — and it was not until May 1944 that his big chance came along and he found employment with Victory Aircraft.

BIG CHANCE

It didn't look like a big chance at the time. He went to work as an assistant in the time study department at \$140 a month — small potatoes even for 1944. But Earl was mar-

ried now and it was a case of necessity.

Earl is not an egg-head and makes no claim to being particularly astute, but he has two qualities which enabled him to turn the time-serving job in the time-study department into an up-reaching ladder.

One quality which he shares with most blunt-spoken men is a demand for simplicity. He doesn't like problems wrapped around with verbiage. His other quality is knowing what he doesn't know — and freely admitting it.

In 1955 he became vice president of manufacturing and received the McCurdy Award for the outstanding contribution to aviation in Canada. In 1958 he was made executive vice president of Or-

enda and later president. In 1960 he resigned to join American Motors.

PEOPLE FIRST

"I'm neither an engineer nor a mechanical genius," he told me, "but I have a certain piece of knowledge that a lot of industrialists seem to lack. I know that whatever you undertake, you are dependent upon people, and whatever success I have achieved is because I try to understand people and to work at that level — with people."

I got his point. He has an intercom in his office and he had occasion to use it while I was there. He wanted to see one of his department managers, but he didn't tell him to report to the office. It was the other way around.



EARL BROWNRIDGE

"I want to see you about so-and-so George," he said. "I'll be along in 10-15 minutes."

Earl, probably one of the few industrialists to serve on a municipal police board, accepted the job at the request of Chief Garnet McGill.

He took it, he

told me, mainly because of his interest in youth, and Mississauga.

"When I first came here and drove down the Mississauga road, I knew it was home," he said "I made up my mind right then that this is where I would settle and raise my family . . ."

PEEL COUNTY - BIOGRAPHY
(BROWNRIDGE)

THE MISSISSAUGA NEWS, April 10, 1968 M5

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