

The small team at the GSM factory at Bottelary (pictured left) between Kuils River and Stellenbosch, made cars until 1965 when 'I was given four hours to clear my desk and the factory was closed down by Paddy Goodall on behalf of Bonuscor, the part of Sanlam that invested in various industries. We were then making 14 cars a month, and I guess that the market was just getting saturated.'



Ultimately the UK enterprise produced around 70 cars 'though the numbers are difficult to ascertain' admitted Van Niekerk. In total, around 116 Darts and 128 Flamingos were produced. As Van Niekerk put it forty years later, 'I saw one recently advertised for €39,000. Shit, man, I wish I had made a few more!'

Bob spoke English, remembers Johann van Blerck, with 'a lovely measured Afrikaans accent. On his office desk were always books, technical magazines, notes, calculator, and slide-rule. His 'laptop' was a notebook and pencil. He never needed to make space for a

computer and his back-ups comprised meticulously-kept diaries dating back to the 50s.'

Bob spoke often of his four university educated daughters with tremendous pride. His eldest, Janin, put aside a degree in languages to work with her father, building and testing scale models of his designs. Laura has been in publishing all of her life, now running the Woolworths online magazine. Jaci, next, is a doctoral student and lecturer in sustainable development at UCT, while the youngest, Karen, who holds a PhD in Marine Archaeology, lives in Norway. Bob got the spelling of their names wrong 'here and there', remembers Laurette, when he registered their births.

After GSM's demise, Bob's interest switched to boats. He joined Liebenberg and Stander in 1978 to start a maritime section, and so began a career that lasted up until his death when, assisted by Janin, he was still active in everything from aluminium landing-craft to 85 tonne floating hotels for Russian clients. Among his many achievements was the Namacurra harbour-patrol craft for the SA Navy. Originally powered by two marinised high-performance BMW engines, thirty of the ten metre, four tonne alloy-hulled craft were built in the early 1980s, of which number of examples found their way to Malawi, Mozambique and Namibia. Admiral Steve Stead, a highly-decorated former SA Navy officer says of the vessel, "It was ahead of its time with a cat hull and tunnel, and corrosion resistant materials offering a stable, yet manoeuvrable weapons' platform. Indeed, the only thing that has changed in more 25 years with them was that the original Z-drive BMW engines were replaced by much simpler and cheaper outboards.' Admiral Allan du Toit, a former SAN officer and now Head of Navy Capability: Royal Australian Navy, says the Namacurra 'have proven to be very agile, robust and surprisingly seaworthy craft, which is great testament to Bob's design ability.'

Bob had a multitude of military projects to his name, not only for South Africa, but Israel, Nigeria and a few others.

He also made an indelible mark in powerboat racing, as the originator of the asymmetrical catamaran design. He came onto the offshore power-boating scene at a time when it was a growing and dynamic sport with the likes of Stephens and his various Meteor craft, Paul Winsley, Gordon Lanham-Love (and his twin-V8 boat *On On*), the father and son Gary and Anthony Cocks in various Miss Muffett designs, Koenie Rontgen, Morris and Frank Waynick, and Andrew Louw. Bob raced on into the 1980s with Kenny Stephens until the latter's death from a heart attack while competing in the all-conquering Spindrifter Supercat in the 'Round