

New Zee-land, land of the long galvanised wire

Glenn Dwight reveals his list of great Kiwi inventors.

As New Zealanders we love our 'number 8 wire' tradition; it's the Kiwi version of MacGyver's duct tape. In fact, a modern-day Fred Dagg battling various villains with his trusty roll of number 8 wire and Kiwi know-how is perhaps something worthy of New Zealand On Air funding

But as a country of great inventors, we are also a country of modest men and women; so humble, in fact, that even our beers look down on themselves (and we love our beers).

You'll only find three stars on a Speights bottle, when surely it deserves at least four... And then there is the ever-humble Wakachangi, with its equally humble tagline 'Quite nice beer'.

As a nation it's time to celebrate our number 8 wire tradition and the great inventors of New Zee-land – land of the long galvanised wire (and some bailing twine for those finer jobs).

So here is my list of great Kiwi inventors and their inventions, or gifts to the world, as I see them.

Glimpse of the future

Coming in at number five for me is *Glenn Martin. for inventing the Martin Jetpack. Basically (and I am no rocket scientist), he strapped a ton of fireworks to his back, put on his scooter helmet and took to the skies.

Bloody genius and for all the fans of *Back to the Future* who have patiently been waiting for a hoverboard, Mr Martin, I thank you for at least giving us a glimpse of the future, today! Up, up and away!

Thing of dreams

At number four, Alan Gibb, the man behind the world's first high-speed (and yes, that is important) amphibious vehicle. The amphibious car was the thing of dreams. So much so that even that great dreamer himself Richard Branson took it across the English Channel.

Electric entertainment

Number three is the great man Bill Gallagher, the man behind the electric fence. And yes, I recognise the electric fence for all its cattle-corralling ability, but as an instrument of pure entertainment, the electric fence has brought so much joy to so many. Nothing like a game of Pass the Electric Shock or the ultimate challenge of mind over matter, Pee Between the Wire.

Again, the possibility for some New Zealand On Air funding for the Kiwi version of *The Wire*. I can imagine the quote "you pee on the fence, you better not miss" being as much part of our culture as "cook me some eggs".

Prolific pioneer

And with that cooking reference, we arrive at number two on my list, Ernest Godward. Who, you ask? Ernest could go down as one of New Zealand's most prolific inventors. He's the man behind the eggbeater, designed to prepare eggs for a sponge in a record three minutes.

He also invented the burglar-proof window and his greatest gift, the spiral hairpin. Privately, I have my suspicions that he might have worked with Woolf Fisher of Fisher and Paykel on this, because every washing machine pump has at least three hair pins stuck in it – and those vanishing hairpins can only be good for business for both Mr Godward and Mr Fisher.

Rubber bands and doggy-dooos

So who is number one? Before I reveal that, I must give an honourable mention to A J Hackett. Who the bloody hell fastens rubber bands to his ankles and jumps off a bridge? Not even Wile E Coyote, in an attempt to catch that pesky Roadrunner, would have attempted such insanity.

Okay, the winner and number one inventor is...drum roll... Eion Scarrow! 'What?' I hear you say. Wasn't he a gardening guru, famous for planting seeds that developed into plants, but hardly an inventor? WRONG. He is my king of the number 8 invention, even if it did get New Zealand's wires crossed.

The story goes that in 1989 the great gardening guru was being interviewed on a radio show and told listeners that a plastic bottle of water on the lawn would stop dogs using your lawn as a toilet (he completely invented the story).

Within days and without any evidence of this working, mums and dads across the country were draining their plastic bottles of Coke or Fanta and replacing it with water and then placing these bottles strategically on the lawn to stop those pesky pooches pooing.

I remember often seeing a dog relieving itself next to said bottle, but never doubting the power of the lawn water bottle. So how can this be a great inventor? Well, my belief is that Mr Scarrow (soon to be Sir Eion, I am sure) was all about being prepared for a natural disaster and wanted Kiwis to have an adequate supply of water should disaster (not a pooch poo) hit.

Eion, you are a man before your time. So come on New Zealand, fill those bottles and place them on the lawn, they might not stop Rover relieving himself, but you will be disaster ready. ■

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