



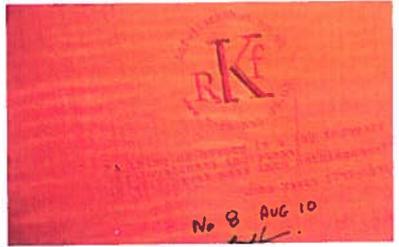
Carving out a career in his retirement

SOME people don't know what to do when they retire. Devoid of hobbies and lacking in major interests, they have real difficulty in putting in their day. But surgeon **Robert Kernohan** is different. Rather than taking a backseat in his semi-retirement, he's making his own magnificent rocking chairs. And it's harder than surgery, he says.

ROBERT Kernohan is almost definitely the busiest man Country Eye has ever met. If he's not building his own racing car, he's plumbing his entire house and even manufacturing parts that need replacement, to a finely honed spec on one of his many lathes or benches. Sadly, he's now had to give up his motor-racing and his car, which he says was heartbreaking. "There were tears, absolutely, but it was time to be a bit more sensible, especially coming up to my sixtieth birthday. I used to do speed hill-racing, in a Formula Three single-seater, with a Formula One engine, but it was time to leave that to the younger chaps." But now Robert's major passion is for wood. He began making furniture initially as a hobby to relieve the

stress associated with his profession as a surgeon. Now after attending several specialist courses in the west country in England and Virginia USA, he has completed a succession of varied projects. He still attends some private patients as part of his very successful career in urology, one of the most competitive areas of surgery and one at which the Co Antrim farmer's son excelled, but Robert confesses that his new passion for working in wood is immensely satisfying. "When I was at school, I'd grown up on my father's dairy farm here in the heart of Co Antrim, with no really clear idea about what direction I was going to go in, educationally, but I was always very interested in physics. One day they were asking people in my class at Ballymena Academy what careers they were

looking at. All the smart ones seemd to be talking about 'going into medicine' so when it came to my turn, that was what I said as well. I did my six years of training at Queen's university, then my year as a houseman, went to London, then came back to the City hospital, then set up the urology department at Coleraine, a lovely hospital and that's where I've worked most recently." Robert says that there is absolutely no connection between carpentry and his skills as a surgeon: "Making furniture is much more difficult than surgery. Surprisingly, you have to be more precise, although the forty to sixty hours it takes to make a rocking chair aren't reflected in the remuneration, but I prefer my work in wood now. It's more satisfying." Now his tremendous dexterity in



fashioning wood into heritage pieces of furniture is breathtaking. Robert has taken early retirement from the NHS, just keeping on some private patients, so that he can devote more time to his passion of furniture making and he's become an expert in woods from all over the world. "I prefer to work in hardwoods such as cherry, walnut, oak, white maple and beech, but when I get the chance, I'll do pieces in unusual woods, such as steamed pear and curly or tiger maple. One of my favourite commissions involved a rocking chair made from ancient Kauri wood from New Zealand." The Kauri tree is a species native to the Pacific rim. Like the dark bog oak locally, many of these trees have been unearthed from peat bogs in New Zealand, using environmentally sound extraction techniques and