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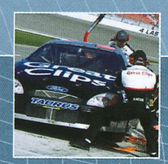
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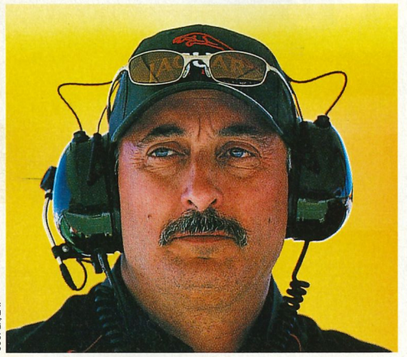
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ROCKINGHAM 500


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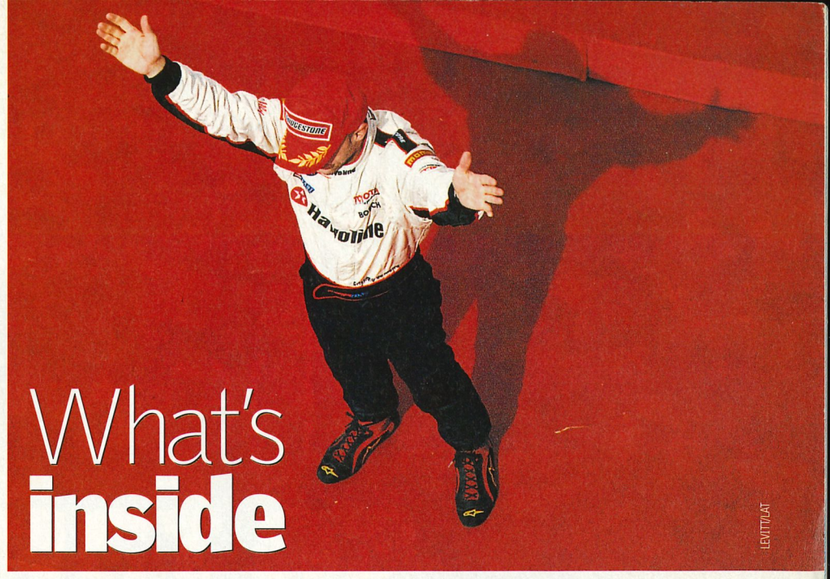
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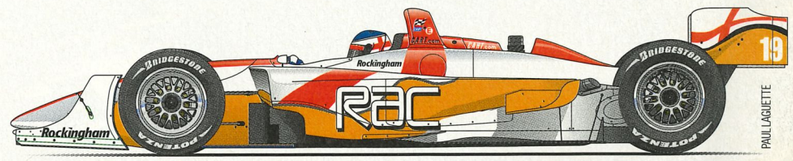
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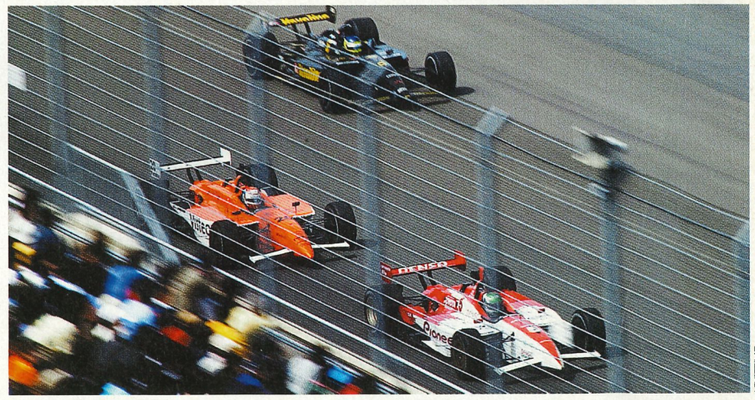
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PAUL LAGUETTE


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ROCKINGHAM 500

CART 2002 Season recap

The story so far...

The Rockingham 500 is more than just a race – it's the latest instalment in a thrilling season-long battle between CART's gladiators. By CHARLES BRADLEY

FUNDIDORA PARK 08.03.02
MONTERREY, MEX

Pole A Fernandez
Winner C da Matta



➔ CRISTIANO da Matta starts the year as he means to go on with a well-judged win, despite a scare when backmarker Shinji Nakano spins in front of him.
➔ Second-placed Dario Franchitti blasts Tora Takagi for ignoring blue flags at a restart with just four laps to go.
➔ Local hero Adrian Fernandez thrills the crowd (below), which numbered 95,000 on race day, by setting pole position. He leads for 14 laps until brake problems drop him to the tail of the field.



PHOTOSPORT

LONG BEACH 14.04.02
USA

Pole J Vasser
Winner M Andretti



➔ MICHAEL Andretti scores a sensational win in CART's 'jewel in the crown' street event from 15th on the grid, although his team is fined £14,000 when his car is found to be running too low.
➔ Da Matta's chances are scuppered (below) when he collides with Fernandez in the pits. He still finishes eighth.

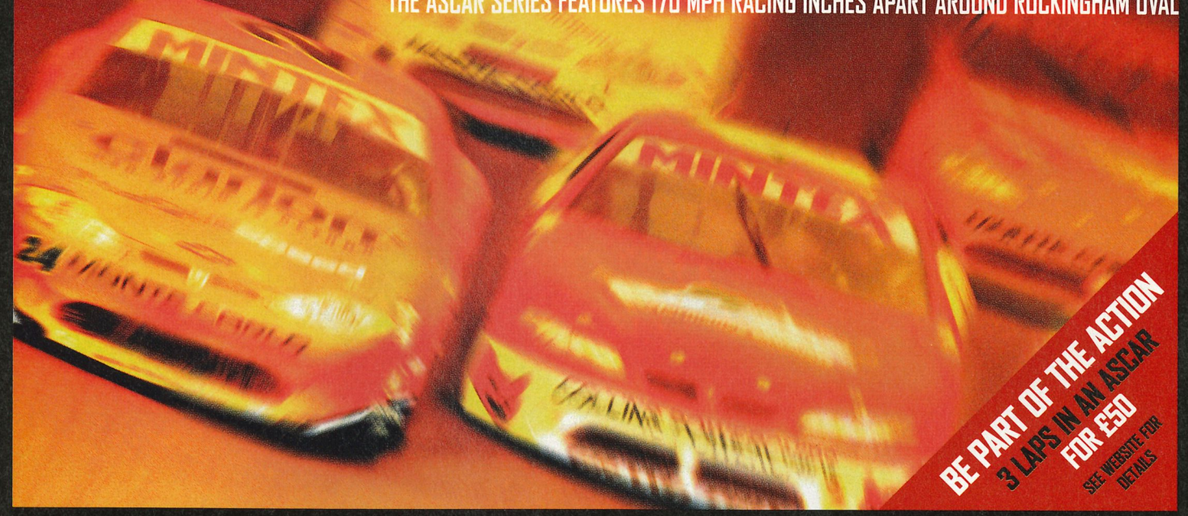


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➔ Jimmy Vasser scores his first pole in 50 races but misses out on the win when his team tells him to cruise under a yellow flag, allowing Andretti to grab the lead.

HARD CORE AMERICAN MUSCLE CAR ACTION

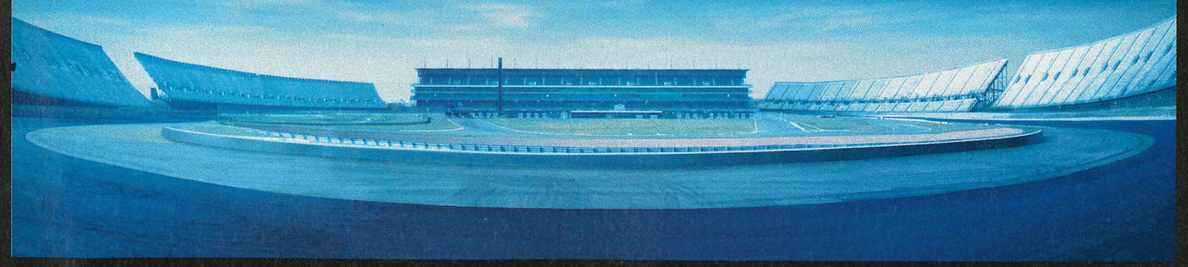
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A NEW CIRCUIT *Rockingham* A NEW ATTITUDE

TWIN-RING MOTEGI JPN 27.04.02
Pole B Junqueira
Winner B Junqueira

→ BRUNO Junqueira wins his second CART race (main picture), his first on an oval, to score Toyota's maiden CART victory on home soil.
→ Third-placed Franchitti grabs the series lead as da Matta struggles for pace and finishes out of the points.
→ Townsend Bell suffers minor injuries to his knees in a major crash at Turn 3 while running two laps down.

MILWAUKEE USA 02.06.02
Pole A Fernandez
Winner P Tracy

→ FOLLOWING his controversial defeat in the previous week's Indianapolis 500, Team Green star Paul Tracy (below) takes the chequered flag around America's oldest track, the Milwaukee Mile.



TAYLOR/LAT

→ Polesitter Fernandez is livid with Tracy, however, accusing the Canadian of jumping the start. He finishes second.
→ Ultra-consistent Mexican Michel Jourdain Jr becomes the surprise championship leader by finishing fifth.

LAGUNA SECA USA 09.06.02
Pole C da Matta
Winner C da Matta

→ DA MATTA becomes the first man to win more than one race when he dominates ahead of Newman/Haas team-mate Christian Fittipaldi.
→ It isn't all plain sailing for da Matta, however. He is fined almost £7000 for coating the track in oil during qualifying.
→ A first corner pile-up puts Franchitti (below) and Fernandez out of the race, while Tracy crashes out when his left-rear wheel falls off after a pit-stop.



ABBOTT/LAT

PORTLAND USA 16.06.02
Pole C da Matta
Winner C da Matta

→ DA MATTA (below) scores back-to-back victories after a bungle in the pits by Kenny Brack's pit crew, who send him out with only three wheels attached to the car.



MILLER/LAT

→ With Brack out, Ganassi Racing team-mate Junqueira pushes da Matta all the way to the finish, with Franchitti a distant third.
→ Bell enjoys his best Champ Car weekend to date with a strong fourth place, despite stalling during his final pit-stop.

CHICAGO USA 30.06.02
Pole D Franchitti
Winner C da Matta

→ SPURRED on by his nation's victory in the World Cup that weekend, da Matta's hot streak continues with his third successive win of the season at the one-mile oval.
→ An overly-ambitious Brack (below), who tries to run five-wide into the first corner, crashes out along with Vasser.

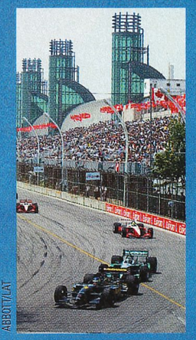


ABBOTT/LAT

→ Japanese drivers Takagi and Nakano enjoy a brilliant weekend, finishing in fourth and fifth place respectively.

TORONTO CDN 07.07.02
Pole C da Matta
Winner C da Matta

→ THERE is just no stopping the mighty da Matta once again as he scorches to yet another win in Canada (below).



ABBOTT/LAT

→ Title contender Junqueira is outraged when the lapped Bell takes him out of the race. Townsend is fined £6500 and placed on indefinite probation.
→ Atoning for his Chicago error, Brack's second place finish is his best for Ganassi Racing.



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13th & 14th September



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CLEVELAND 14.07.02 USA
Pole C da Matta
Winner P Carpentier


MILLER/LAT

➜ PATRICK Carpentier (above) scores his second Champ Car victory, his first on a road course, around the runways of Burke Lakefront Airport.
➜ Poleman da Matta's winning streak finally ends when he has engine problems, but his series lead stays at a massive 50 points after title rival Junqueira also drops out.
➜ Carpentier's life is made easier when his nearest challenger, Franchitti, retires when his engine gives out.

VANCOUVER 28.07.02 CDN
Pole C da Matta
Winner D Franchitti

➜ DARIO Franchitti scores an emotional win (main picture) in the home town of his great friend Greg Moore, who was killed in 1999. Team-mate Paul Tracy loses out due to a poor pit-stop strategy.
➜ A massive crash is sparked when Carpentier spins at the fastest part of the circuit. Fernandez injures a hip as Junqueira's nosecone penetrates his cockpit.
➜ Da Matta is robbed of another victory due to driveshaft failure.

MID-OHIO 11.08.02 USA
Pole P Carpentier
Winner P Carpentier

➜ A RARE mistake from da Matta (below) hands victory to Carpentier, as the Brazilian spins while pressuring the race leader. He finishes out of the points in 13th.
➜ Da Matta's team-mate Fittipaldi fares much better, achieving his second runner-up spot of the season.


LEVITT/LAT

➜ Max Papis replaces the injured Fernandez. He qualifies 14th, but engine problems put him out.

ROAD AMERICA, ELKHART LAKE 18.08.02 USA
Pole B Junqueira
Winner C da Matta


LEVITT/LAT

➜ DA MATTA (above) ends his recent run of bad luck with his sixth win of the year, thanks to better fuel mileage over rivals Tagliani and Junqueira.
➜ A misjudged pass by Brack on Tracy at Canada Corner takes them both out of the race. Despite receiving an apology, Tracy comments: "Sorry doesn't get me points."
➜ Tony Kanaan scores a top four finish, despite a scary crash in qualifying when his rear wing snaps at 190mph.

MONTREAL 25.08.02 CDN
Pole C da Matta
Winner D Franchitti

➜ FRANCHITTI scores his second win in four races (below) with a brilliant drive at the home of the Canadian Grand Prix. His win is all the sweeter as he carries the number 27 on his car, made famous by Gilles Villeneuve, after whom the circuit is named.


ABBOTT/LAT

➜ A gamble on fuel costs da Matta, but his runner-up spot keeps him well clear of nearest rival Franchitti in the title race.
➜ The Champ Cars lap about six seconds off the Formula 1 pace, although restricted turbo boost and a control tyre is cited as the reason for their relative lack of speed.

DENVER 01.09.02 USA
Pole B Junqueira
Winner B Junqueira

➜ JUNQUEIRA rules in the inaugural race on Denver's streets, leading from start to finish.
➜ Franchitti is taken out by Team Green team-mate Paul Tracy on the very first lap, leaving the Scot to fume: "When your own team-mate takes you out, what can you say?"
➜ Team play from Ganassi Racing allows Junqueira (below) an easy passage to victory as Scott Dixon plays tailgunner to take second place – his best finish of the season.


MILLER/LAT

ROCKINGHAM 500

Meet you at the crossroads

Team-mates Dario Franchitti and Michael Andretti will travel to Rockingham with the same objective – to win. But their careers may be about to head in different directions. By ROBIN MILLER



Andretti (left) and Franchitti: Old school and new in the 200mph world of CART racing

CART 2002
Dario and Michael



Michael Andretti and Dario Franchitti share the same professional address, equipment, engineers and desire: to win every Champ Car race they start. They are undoubtedly two of the best drivers in the CART series and both harbour realistic chances of success at Rockingham this weekend. But as the FedEx Championship unloads in England for the second time, the paths of both these high profile drivers are heading in opposite directions.

After 19 years and a record 42 CART victories, Andretti is nearing his 40th birthday and the end of his fabulous open-wheel career. He becomes the majority owner of Barry Green's team in a couple of months and the second-generation star wants to give the Indy 500 one more shot before probably calling it a day. Franchitti, meanwhile, is in the form of his life – when his machinery allows him to finish. The 29-year-old Scot won the ninth race of his CART career at Montreal last month. Just a few hours before Franchitti took the chequered flag, I sat down with him and Andretti to chew the fat.

First and foremost, I asked if there was a chance of them continuing their partnership next year, albeit from a different perspective. "I hope we can keep Dario and I'm working as hard as I can to make that happen," says Andretti, who is tipped to switch the team to the rival Indy Racing League series. "My heart is in CART but you've got to do what your sponsors want."

Franchitti, however, remains undecided on his immediate future. "I love the variety and competitiveness of CART and that's where I'd like to stay," he says. "But I also want to race where the best competition is and right now there are just so many unanswered questions."

Andretti knows how he wants to run a team. He reckons the trick is to hire good people who he can trust, and then let them get on with doing their jobs. "I know what a team needs as far as people and structure go," he says, "I know what it needs because I've been in a lot of good teams. Right now I know the weaknesses and strengths of teams and that's what I'd work on. Getting people in the right places. But I'm not going to get in the way of everybody's job."

PHOTOS LEVITT/LAT



But whether that will be enough to keep Dario on side remains to be seen. For starters, it could be a little awkward to have your team-mate suddenly become your boss, couldn't it? "It will be strange, if it happens," admits Franchitti, "but I think it will be a good thing. Providing, you know, Michael pays me what he usually makes." Franchitti laughs, patting Andretti on the back. "There is nothing like having somebody there to whom you can say: 'Hey, we need this to happen'. Michael knows what it feels like. He's been through it as well."

Both drivers have indeed been through it this season. There have been some mixed results and both could have benefitted from greater consistency with the car. But, as well as running a three-car effort, the team has also had to cope with a chassis switch to Lola early in the year after Reynard went bust.

Franchitti's view is that the team manages well with three cars instead of the usual two. "We had some teething problems last year," he says, "but I reckon this year it's pretty good. We're just missing it a bit. It's not quite there.

"But I don't think there is any difference between two or three cars. We're struggling to keep up with [series leader Cristiano] da Matta. You can get it right sometimes and that's what is frustrating because he always seems to have it right."

Andretti, who holds the joint record with Al Unser Jr for eight wins in a season (a record which da Matta is threatening to overhaul), says Newman/Haas has provided a vital element to the Brazilian's title effort. "Da Matta is in a nice position from a driver's standpoint," says Michael, who won the championship with Newman/Haas in 1991. "When you know you have a little bit of an edge [with the car] you drive more relaxed and with a lot more confidence."

Franchitti has scored two wins this year (Vancouver and Montreal) and reached the podium a further five times. He actually feels his third place in Chicago has been his best race.

"We won pole and had the field covered, we just screwed up in pit-stops. We could drive away from everyone but we had to settle for third."

Andretti, meanwhile, has won just once this year at Long Beach. But the victory was significant – it was also the scene of his first CART win in 1986.

"I had a great reception last year; it was good to be back racing in England"
Dario Franchitti

"My family has a lot of history at Long Beach and that one was very special," he says. "We were pretty good at Cleveland [second] and decent at Mid-Ohio [third], but we've struggled in qualifying and that really hurts you nowadays.

"It used to be more fun because you could be 14th on the grid and it didn't matter – you knew that if you had a good car you could pass people. Now we've got 18 guys running the same speed and there is no way we're going to pass. It all comes down to using a different pit strategy."

Last year, CART's sojourn to Rockingham and Lausitz in Germany provided some of the series' best racing, with lots of overtaking. This was particularly impressive when you consider the drivers had had little track time, especially at Rockingham, where rain caused the track to leak water. This year, Lausitz is off the menu with the oval falling into receivership, and Andretti and Franchitti are both sad to lose the event. They are wary of Rockingham's lightning-fast layout, but enjoy the enthusiasm of the British fans.

"Germany was a good race track, I really liked it," says Andretti. "Rockingham needs to figure out a way to tighten up Turns 2 and 3 because right now they're just like a video game and you can't see either one of them. Thank God we only ran one day there last year. That saved some equipment. But it's great to go there because the fans really know racing. They know the engineers and team managers like Americans know pro football coaches."

For Franchitti the experience is made better as he is the 'home favourite'. "I had a great reception last year and it was good to be back racing in England," he says. "It was like a home race for me. And Germany was awesome. We'll definitely miss it. It was a great little track."

If the pair have known good times together in CART, they have also both been through the mill in Formula 1. Andretti's one year with McLaren in 1993 had more bad days than good, although outright speed was not so much of a problem. It's easy to forget that he did have a couple of memorable runs – including going from last to third in his final grand prix at Monza.

"Looking back, it was not an ideal situation – I only had one and a half days of testing before my first race," says Andretti, whose team-mate Ayrton Senna was a constant reminder that the American couldn't have ➡

"It's great to go to Rockingham again because the fans really know their racing"
Michael Andretti

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picked a worse year to race for McLaren. "We had some good runs, but it was quite an ugly atmosphere with all the politics."

Of the little testing he did get in, Michael says that he was always quicker than test driver and future champion Mika Hakkinen and only one-tenth slower than Senna when they tested together at Magny-Cours.

Franchitti's test with Jaguar in 2000 left an equally bad taste in his mouth. "My test was a farce," he says. "Some of the guys on the team didn't want it to happen. Ask [Bobby] Rahal about it. He was as pissed off as I was."

Andretti, head nodding, agrees: "Yeah and that's all they're going to know you by now. That's the trouble with F1. Perception is so big over there. Look at Jean Alesi. He finished second or third in his first race and became a big hero even though he ran 201 grands prix and only won once. But he got that good reputation because of his first race."

Franchitti, whose smooth, smart style would seem to be perfect for F1, isn't sure what the future holds, but he did learn a valuable lesson. "I wouldn't do it again without better knowledge. I just wanted a car with the latest spec and I wasn't given that. My car had different engines and a different aero package. I should have stayed at home. But Cristiano did it right [when he tested for Toyota]."

Both feel da Matta would have done a good job had he landed a seat with Toyota next year, and they would have pulled for him as they do Juan Pablo Montoya. "I cheer for Juan just like I used to cheer for Jacques [Villeneuve] because they're our benchmarks," says Andretti, who staged some great duels with Montoya during the Colombian's two years in CART. "If Juan does well it makes us look better because we beat him. The guy has real talent and he'll win the world championship before his career is over."

Franchitti was much friendlier with the cocky Colombian than Andretti and commisserates with what it must be like to try and beat Ferrari. "I think Juan is struggling with the car a bit," he says. "You see that in qualifying, although he pulls out some pretty phenomenal laps. He's a buddy of mine and I want to see him do well and win. He's always exciting to watch."

The question of whether there will be another American driver in F1 draws a negative response from Andretti: "I don't think they care, it's not that big a deal to them. The US market is too competitive, but F1 doesn't have much competition in other countries. Over here they compete with all the stick-and-ball sports plus NASCAR, CART and the IRL, and it's a tough market for them. An American can make it, but will he get the chance to do it?"

Still , there is talk that CART may soon have a jewel in the crown that F1 is not likely to reclaim. Word is that the series could run at Brands Hatch next year, and it's a prospect that Franchitti relishes. "I think the Brands Hatch GP circuit would be spectacular," he says. "It would be our Elkhart Lake in England."

But, even if the series does make it to Kent, Andretti is not likely to enjoy the experience as a driver. Rockingham will be the 15th stop on his farewell tour – although nobody seems to realise it. There has been none of the fanfare that greeted father Mario's last season in CART in 1994. "I guess that's not my thing," says Michael quite simply. "It would be nice for all the fans who supported me all these years, but it's just not me. I'll quietly fade away."

Or will he? If you're going to watch on Saturday, spare a whoop or two for Michael.



COATES/LAT



LAT ARCHIVE

Top: Franchitti was unhappy about how he was treated by Jaguar Above: Andretti did not feel at home in F1

"My test was a farce. Some of the guys on the team didn't want it to happen"

Dario Franchitti on his Jaguar F1 test

"I only had one and a half days of testing before my first race"

Michael Andretti on McLaren

BARRY GREEN

Racing pedigree

MOST people know Barry Green as the man who steered Jacques Villeneuve to the 1995 CART title and Indy 500 glory. He is also the force behind one of open-wheel racing's top teams in the US and the guy British American Racing wanted to run its Formula 1 team.

But what most folks don't realise is that, in his day, Green was a pretty fair racing driver and gathered a lot of his motorsport savvy first hand.

"I won a lot of Formula Ford and stock car races in Australia but, when I got to the British Formula 3 Championship, I didn't know which way they went," says Green. "I guess I had a lot of car control because of my experience on dirt tracks, but I'll never know whether I had the ability to make it. I just didn't have the money to test and the fast guys tested every week."

Green's early successes in Australian FFord led him to England, where he drove in the British F3 series in 1978 and '79. "I should have stayed another year in FFord but Ron Tauranac offered me a deal to come to England, work for Ralt and he'd help me race," recalls Green. "It didn't last long because I was offered a similar situation with Chevron and took it. Looking back that was a mistake because Ralt was the superior chassis.

"I probably competed in 60 percent of the races because I rented out my car for Monaco, the British Grand Prix and Australian GP. Leasing my car kept me on the track, but I'll always remember the kindness of Eddie Jordan. He not only loaned me a set of tyres, but he guaranteed one of my cheques so I could buy a new set."

Jordan was one of Green's many F3 rivals who would go on to F1 stardom. He also raced against future world champions Nelson Piquet and Nigel Mansell, as well as Derek Warwick, Stefan Johansson, Chico Serra and the late Jim Crawford.

"I didn't see much of Piquet because he was usually so far in front of me but I had a lot of great wheel-to-wheel battles with Mansell in the middle of the pack," he says. "My greatest memory was at Silverstone. We were all at a test, about 30 of us. I was quickest by sheer luck and Warwick was on the pitwall shaking his stopwatch.

"I also qualified third at Mallory Park once, but I had electrical problems in the race."

Green, whose best results were a couple of sixth and seventh places, was offered a Formula Atlantic drive in Ireland in late '79 only to suffer knee injuries in a big shunt two weeks before in an F3 race. He never raced again.

"I was smart enough to realise after those years it was the way I didn't want to do it because I didn't have the ability to sell myself and raise money," he says. "I never really retired, I just came to the States to build a Can-Am car for Paul Newman and never went back. But I'm not complaining."



LAT ARCHIVE

Barry Green raced with Mansell and Piquet in British F3

ROCKINGHAM 500



SPINNEY/LAT

CART 2002
Christian Fittipaldi

Be **afraid**

Champ Car star Christian Fittipaldi says fear in the cockpit keeps him out of the wall at 220mph. By ANDREW VAN DE BURGT

In the world of sport there's little that can compare to the sensation of watching a pack of Champ Cars streaming through your field of vision at 220mph around an oval. The speed, the sound, the blast of warm, swirling air that accompanies them is unlike anything else British fans will get a chance to see this year.

With its wide bodywork and slick tyres, a Champ Car looks like a potent racing machine when standing still, but at full speed… they take your breath away. If the spectacle is exhilarating from the relative comfort of Rockingham's grandstands, image what it's like to drive one of these high-speed projectiles as they run three abreast just inches from a solid concrete wall.

"I think everyone gets a bit scared," confesses Christian Fittipaldi, who's established himself as one of the stars of the series since he made the switch from Formula 1 in 1994. "It doesn't matter what car you're driving. But I think the fear factor helps you find the limit.

"If the car is not handling that well the fear factor tells you that if you push a little bit harder through that corner then you're going to have an accident. I guess if the fear factor wasn't there then you'd go through every corner wide open."

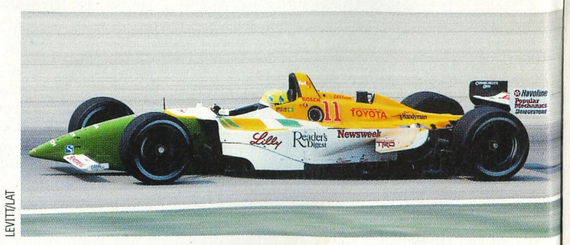
Despite his concerns, Fittipaldi predicts that in qualifying for this year's race his foot will be planted flat to the floor through each of Rockingham's four corners. Although visually similar to many of its American counterparts, Fittipaldi says the Corby track presents its own unique challenge.

"They may look pretty similar, but ovals are just as varied as road courses," he says. "Different tracks have different characteristics and this means a different approach. At Rockingham, the straightaways are so short that you're practically turning all the time. There isn't really a track like it in the States. Although the layout is completely different, the track it reminds me of the most is Motegi in Japan. The corners there are long and the speeds are similar."

If Fittipaldi's estimates are correct, the Champ Cars could approach a 220mph average over a lap with a low fuel load. At this speed he reckons Turns 2 and 3 pretty much blend into one. With laps disappearing in just over 20 seconds, Fittipaldi says a unique type of racecraft is needed if a driver is to prosper.

"Oval racing requires a different type of driving skill to any other sort of racing," he says. "On a road course you may be looking two or three cars ahead of you, planning what you are going to do, but on an oval that could be as many as 20 cars. And because everything is happening so fast you don't have a lot of time to make a decision, you have to decide what you are going to do and just do it."

Fittipaldi knows the lines at Rockingham (main pictures). Below: Christian driving the Newman/Haas Lola-Toyota



LEVITT/LAT

In the same way that jet fighter pilots become accustomed to the effects of extreme g-forces and deep sea divers are comfortable being underwater in near total darkness, Fittipaldi reckons that he's no longer aware of exactly how fast he's going when he's 'at work'.

"On ovals, and superspeedways in particular, it's very easy to get comfortable with what you are doing in the car and sometimes you forget just how fast you are going," he admits. "It's only really when something strange happens ahead of you and the car gets a little bit loose or you go a bit sideways that you're reminded of the speed at which you are travelling."

Last year's inaugural CART race at Rockingham featured a grandstand finish with the lead changing twice over the final two laps. Both came after the leader was unintentionally balked by a backmarker, and Fittipaldi reckons that fans can expect more of the same this year.

"There's really only one groove around the track. You could probably go high or low through Turns 2 and 3, but most of the guys will choose to go low. Because of this, timing your run in traffic is really important to make sure that you get in the draft and catch a tow down the straightaway so that you get a run going into a corner."

Track time for last year's race was limited and this left some teams and drivers struggling to get a handle on the right set-up. A new coating of asphalt has been laid to ensure there's no reoccurrence of last year's 'weeping', where the porous track surface allowed rainwater to seep back up through the surface.

If practice is uninterrupted this year it should give teams enough time to get the cars working at their best and make the field even more tightly bunched than last year. If this is the case, then the self-proclaimed fastest race in Britain could earn the title of being its most exciting too.



SPINNEY/LAT

LOGISTICS

Express delivery

TRANSPORTING well over 30 race cars (each team brings a spare) and several tons of assorted parts and equipment to a place thousands of miles from home is always going to be a tough task. Luckily for CART it has Federal Express as a title sponsor, so getting things to where they need to be is less of a problem.

Travelling from America to Europe or Asia is enough of an odyssey without worrying about taking along the cars and 17,000lbs of parts and equipment – from spare engines and wheels to helmets and firesuits for the pit crew. FedEx is in charge of the heavy lifting once teams deliver their payload to the FedEx hub at Indianapolis International Airport, just minutes from where seven of the nine CART teams are based.

The cars go in custom two-tiered carrying racks, which are then loaded into a pair of MD-11 jets. The 180,000lbs of freight each of the jets carries is worth about £45 million, and the whole loading process takes nearly three days.

"Loading the pallets into an MD-11 cargo hold is like putting a puzzle together," says Gary Molinari, managing director for FedEx Charters. "Once the cars are in place, the rest of the pallets are assigned space to ensure weight balance and distribution."

But the planning starts long before that. Technically the cars and equipment are not imported or exported out of the host country as everything returns to the US on the same aircraft, but there is plenty of Customs paperwork nonetheless. And basic elements like flight plans and requests for aircraft refuelling and maintenance must be filed up to 60 days in advance. The whole operation requires military precision and about 1500 man hours

"We wouldn't be able to accomplish putting our show on overseas without FedEx," says CART's director of logistics, Billy Kamphausen. "They have kept us on schedule for more than 10 years."

"The amount of co-ordination needed between FedEx, CART, the race teams and suppliers and the officials from each country is incredible," adds Molinari.

Getting people overseas is easier. The numbers are reduced for international races, but it's still a task for team travel co-ordinators to book flights, hire cars and locate lodging for 20 to 30 people. And since teams don't bring their hospitality units and staff with them to international races, they also have to contact local caterers to arrange for food to feed the crew.

"Overseas races represent a challenge for CART in a lot of respects, says Kamphausen, "but the welcome we receive makes it worth the effort." *JO*

For further information visit **www.rockingham.co.uk**

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ROCKINGHAM 500

Pass masters

Driving around ovals at 200mph-plus within inches of a big concrete wall requires some very special skills. JOHN OREOVICZ investigates



CART 2002
How to overtake

It's easy to dismiss oval track racing as a simple discipline. After all, there are only left turns, and those turns are often symmetrical at both ends of the track. Set your car up to handle that one corner, and you're on your way to Victory Circle, right?

Wrong. As usual, the difficulty is hidden beneath the surface. While most experts will tell you it's easier to make an oval racer out of a road racer than vice-versa, riding the banking requires a skill all of its own. Even Formula 1 drivers admit ovals require unique talents which aren't used on other tracks.

Of course, it's one thing to drive a car quickly round somewhere like Indianapolis on your own. What happens when there are 20 other cars on the track, all standing between you and that champagne-wasting moment on the podium? Even passing lapped traffic can be a hassle when there is little more than a tenth of a second per lap between competitors.

"I wouldn't say there is a specific trick or art to accomplish a pass on an oval," says defending Rockingham winner and last year's CART champion Gil de Ferran. "It's more about seeing the opportunity develop and taking advantage of it. It depends on how you set up your car and how your car handles in turbulent air."

Turbulence is the biggest difference between running solo in oval qualifying and the race itself. The dirty air created by a Champ Car's wings – especially the Handford Device used at California Speedway – is unpredictable and sometimes brutal.

"You can't see it, but if you were riding with me in the car you sure as hell would feel it," says Kenny Brack. "The turbulence grabs the car and you have no grip, so you're always correcting. You're constantly fighting the wind like when you overtake a line of trucks on the freeway."

Brack raced for three years in the Indy Racing

For further information visit **www.rockingham.co.uk**

"You have to be quick – 100 percent switched on"
Cristiano da Matta





ABBOTT/LAT

Trying to get close to the car ahead when running round corners requires big bags of bravery

FLASHBACK
Last year's flying finish

THOSE present at Rockingham Motor Speedway last September will never forget the fantastic finish between Gil de Ferran and Kenny Brack – neither will they...

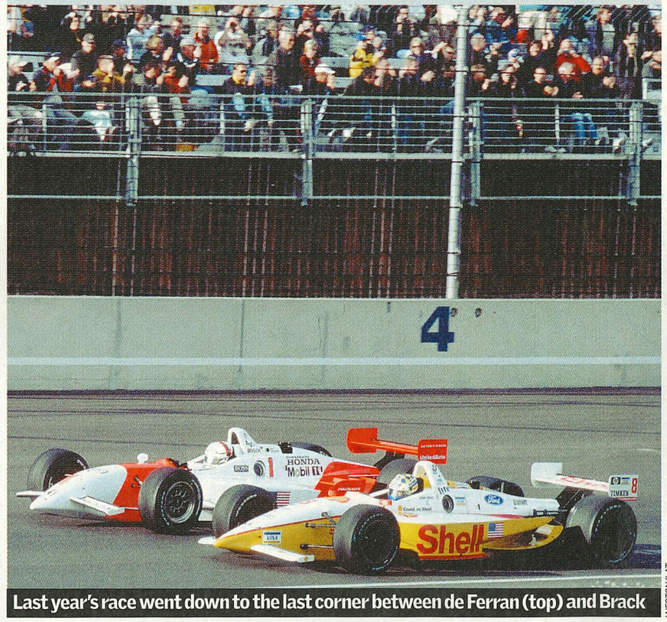
De Ferran: "I thought I had the race under control, but I caught Max [Papis] and somebody else. I made a dive going into Turn 3, but I started to understeer off and I couldn't get back on the power because I was running off line. So I came out of Turn 4 just about stopped, and Kenny just zipped by me."

Brack: "Now it was my turn and I had two choices. I could run flat-out and catch Max and get by him somehow, which in retrospect maybe I should have tried. But we'd had our problems last year, so I didn't really want to do that. So I tried to back off to try and slow Gil down as well. Then I could get going so I wouldn't encounter anything on the last lap."

De Ferran: "I kind of saw that happening. I thought, 'You cheeky bastard!' and I backed off too. We both came off Turn 1 going very slow, almost like going for a restart. I was probably two or three car lengths behind him when I nailed it. He nailed it too, but a smidgen of a second later."

Brack: "I misjudged it, or Gil was able to get a little bit of a run and he got around me on the outside of Turn 4 and then slammed down. I gave him a little bit of room, not because I wanted him to go around me, but because had I not done it, we both would have crashed. He came down a little bit too low, but it was still a great finish."

De Ferran: "I went through Turns 2 and 3 flat and I had a really good run, so he pulled down to the inside to protect his line into Turn 4. That turned out to be good for me because I had the draft from Max and huge momentum. That carried me halfway past Kenny and it was kind of a drag race to see who was going to lift later going into the turn. I had a better line, a wider entry, I went a bit deeper than him and I managed to close the door. So that worked out pretty good."



Last year's race went down to the last corner between de Ferran (top) and Brack

WESTON/LAT

League (winning the 1998 season title and the '99 Indianapolis 500) before coming to CART, and all four of his Champ Car wins have come on ovals. All that time running in circles has taught the Swede what to look for.

"Without a comfortable car, you can't do anything on an oval," says Brack. "Then you have to be smart and use the advantages you are presented during a race, whether it's getting off a corner well and getting to the inside of somebody, or coming up behind some traffic that slows him down and getting a run. But with differences of hundredths of a second between cars, if you have the slightest disadvantage, you're stuck. That's the bottom line."

Sometimes a driver can be stuck in line for 20 or 30 laps, waiting for the guy in front to make a tiny error. That's when lapped cars come into play, especially on short ovals.

"Traffic is just as much a feature as a turn," says de Ferran. "You have to be very opportunistic because things change all the time. You have guys beside you on the inside, on the outside, somebody in front, somebody behind, and they're always at a different place at a different time. Instead of the rhythm you find in road racing, it's about seeing an opportunity and reacting fast and taking advantage of it."

Max Papis used a lapped car to pass Paul Tracy for the win at Homestead in 1999 and has excelled on the superspeedways.

"Passing on ovals can be very easy or very difficult," says the Italian. "It's easy when you have a good car. Other people get loose and they come back to you like they were standing still. I always kind of look two or three laps ahead to see who they are going to catch on the straight and prepare mentally in order to catch the opportunity."

Adrian Fernandez has raced Champ Cars since 1993, before Honda and Toyota arrived with technology that produced the ➡

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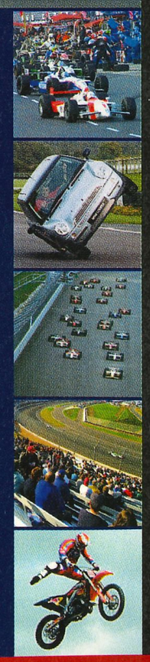
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A NEW CIRCUIT Rockingham A NEW ATTITUDE



ABBOTT/LAT

1000-horsepower engines of the late '90s. CART reacted by reducing the size of front and rear wings in an effort to reduce cornering speeds, making the cars much harder to drive – and even harder to pass.

"In the old days it used to be a lot easier to pass," Fernandez notes. "You had two types of tyres and people went off quicker. The competition wasn't as close. These days even momentum doesn't help because the fields are so tight, and the line starts getting narrower and narrower throughout the race. You try to go out a little bit wider to try to get clean air and you get into the marbles. That really limits passing on small ovals."

Fernandez agrees timing and momentum are the keys to executing an oval pass – along with a little luck and a lot of co-operation from the guy you are trying to overtake.

"You get awful close to the other guys and you have to trust them, especially if you're on the outside so you don't get run into the wall," he says. "It gets hairy."

CART championship leader Cristiano da Matta says that using traffic is the secret to getting by the driver you are racing, but he adds that sometimes even passing backmarkers can be a real challenge.

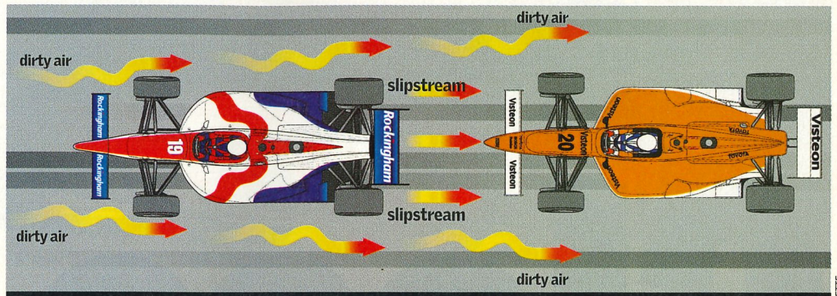
"It's difficult – it's definitely not an easy thing," he says. "If the guy you're racing gets too close to the car ahead of him in a corner and he has a slow exit, you just choose the side you want, inside or outside. You're going to make it. But you set up your pass in your mind.

"Your car control skills aren't going to make much difference – it's all about timing and your ability to predict what is going to happen in front of you. You have to be quick and 100 percent switched on. There are a lot of things to think about in a very short time."

Papis believes the cornerstone of being a successful oval driver is a comfort with speed – and an ability to tune out the ever-present concrete walls.

"On an oval, you have it or you don't," he says. "You don't need to be brave. If the speed isn't inside of you, maybe you can do it one time. The second time, you're going to be in the wall. You need a very high familiarity with speed and to feel friendly with it. It's a question of being smart and very aggressive, and it's not easy to be aggressive when you are travelling at 200mph."

Simple, huh?



The wings of the leading car create a hole in the air so the car behind is able to close up on the straights. But in the corners dirty air comes into play, reducing the second car's downforce and grip

PAUL LAGUETTE

Running close to the car ahead (main pic) is a crucial part of racing on ovals

BLACK ART

Tricks of the oval trade

RENOWNED engineer Don Halliday has seen and done it all in his long career, from designing the Kraco and Truesports Champ Cars to race engineering drivers from Dario Franchitti to Kenny Brack. Currently the technical director for Fernandez Racing, he talks about setting up a Champ Car for ovals.

"The main thing you need is a consistent balance through a variety of different corners and a variety of different aspects to those corners," he says. "On top of that, you need to get as much grip as you can, both mechanically and aerodynamically as a combination. Then you work for the race and see if there are two grooves involved and whether you can run both. That's a perfect situation because you can run with confidence and potentially overtake, depending on the circuit.

"One thing the Europeans won't be used to is the asymmetry to our cars within the rules. We have a lot of left-hand side positive camber and right-hand side negative camber. We play with the toes of the car to create various characteristics and different tyre pressures left and right and maybe a little split between front wings.

"For qualifying, you'll play with the balance right on the knife-edge because you're trying for that hundredth of a second that makes a difference to where you qualify. Weather is a factor – the air that the car sees, and the effect of temperature on your small front and large rear tyres and the pavement. But if the balance is right, it's difficult to wreck.

"During the race, the driver has a weight-jacker that changes the crossweight dynamically for one corner, and he can play with anti-roll bars. That's great because you can change the function of what the four corners are trying to do at any one time. We can help out in pit-stops with front wing or tyre pressure changes.

"Engineering for ovals is more about how you create a solution for the driver. The driver's feedback is vital because he's the dynamic sensor that points you in a direction with what you know is on the car. The clever team, the driver and the group, will continually improve."



Don Halliday (left) now uses his extensive oval knowledge to help Adrian Fernandez

GRADY/LAT

ROCKINGHAM 500

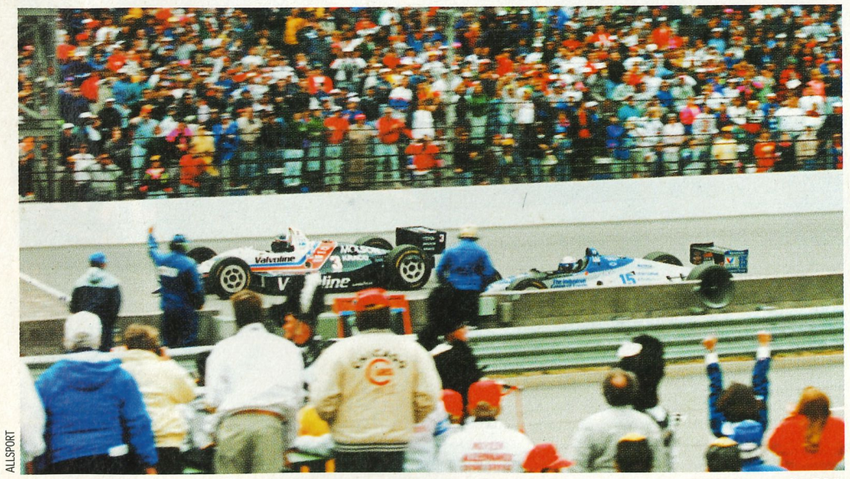


LEVITT/LAT

Kanaan had Montoya hot on his tail at Michigan in '99, but he hung on to cross the finish line first

Close encounters

If you thought last year's Rockingham 500 was a tight finish, it was a country mile compared to the top six closest finishes in Champ Car racing history. JOHN OREOVICZ is your guide



ALLSPORT

Unser Jr used all of the track to triumph over Goodyear in a seven-lap shoot-out at the '92 Indianapolis 500

CART 2002 Fights to the finish

Last year's fantastic finish at Rockingham Motor Speedway between Gil de Ferran and Kenny Brack might have been close by most standards, but it didn't even make the top 10 in terms of the closest Champ Car race finishes of all time.

After executing his thrilling outside pass on Brack in the final turn of the final lap at Rockingham, de Ferran pulled away to win by 0.634sec – an eternity compared to other memorable CART races. Here are the top six finishes of all-time.

1. Mark Blundell wins at Portland 1997 by 0.027sec from Gil de Ferran – and 0.055sec ahead of Raul Boesel in third

This remarkable wet race came to a most unexpected conclusion, culminating in Blundell scoring his maiden Champ Car win. The first 60 laps were dominated by his PacWest team-mate Mauricio Gugelmin, who was untouchable when conditions were at their wettest, but he spun after a pit-stop.

Blundell then had a clear track and was soon taking up to five seconds per lap off leader de Ferran, who was trying to nurse his rain tyres to the finish. Adding to the confusion, no-one knew precisely how many laps would be run, because it had been declared a timed race.

For further information visit www.rockingham.co.uk



ALLSPORT

De Ferran was understandably driving defensively as he tried to coax his wets through the final lap, but Blundell got a better run off the last turn onto the finish straight. He nosed ahead of de Ferran just as Gil thrust his fist in the air to celebrate what turned out to be second place. Had the race gone another lap, Boesel might have passed both of them!

"The team came on the radio with a couple of laps to go and said the leader was six seconds ahead," Blundell says. "When I crossed the line, I didn't know I had won. Normally the team comes on the radio and says, 'good job', or something less complimentary. This time nothing. Then I saw the scoreboard with #18 on top and I let out the biggest whoop ever."

De Ferran says: "I knew the guys on slicks were catching up. I had a lot of wheelspin and Mark just got off the corner better than me. I didn't know whether to smile or cry."

2. Tony Kanaan wins the 1999 Michigan 500 by 0.032sec from Juan Pablo Montoya

Max Papis was the man to beat all afternoon, but his Team Rahal Reynard-Ford ran out of fuel entering Turn 3 on the final lap. Kanaan just missed hitting Papis, and by the time he regained his composure, Montoya was steaming up behind. They crossed the line side-by-side, with Kanaan just ahead.

"I had to back off when Max slowed, and I didn't really think about Montoya," recalls Kanaan. "He was about three seconds back, but all of a sudden he was right there in my mirror. I tried to stop him – he was coming strong on the inside. But he didn't quite make it. I felt sorry for Max, but that's the way things go sometimes."

3. Juan Pablo Montoya beats Michael Andretti by 0.040sec in the 2000 Michigan 500

Every one of CART's races at Michigan Speedway after the introduction of the Handford Device rear wing in 1998 has featured dozens of lead changes. But the 2000 race produced one of the most exciting finishes of all time, even if it wasn't officially the closest.

Montoya's Lola-Toyota was quicker in Turns 1 and 2, but Andretti's Lola-Ford had the edge in Turns 3 and 4. They actually crossed the line side-by-side on laps 241 and 244. On the final tour (250), however, they were side-by-side through Turns 3 and 4 heading towards a photo finish, only to encounter the slow lapped car of Tarso Marques. Astonished by the speed at which the leaders approached (the final lap was run at nearly 228mph), Marques stayed to the outside and conveniently provided Montoya with a draft, allowing him to nose ahead of Andretti.

"I was flat, and I think he was flat as well," says Montoya. "It was just a matter of who crossed the line first. He pushed me up high in the last corner, and the backmarker [Marques] moved up. If I had to, I was just going to tap him."

Andretti says: "I thought Tarso was going to help me. If he'd moved over just half a car length, I think I would have won. But he stayed right out on the wall, trying to stay out of our way, and by doing that, he allowed Juan to get a tow and that was the difference. Juan was good to race with. We took care of each other, but he just beat me."

4. Al Unser Jr wins the 1992 Indianapolis 500 by 0.043sec from Scott Goodyear

America's most famous single-seater race was decided by a hair's breadth when Unser Jr won his first Indy 500 from Goodyear after a thrilling seven-lap shoot-out. Michael Andretti had looked set for victory, but a broken fuel pump caused him to coast to a halt, prompting the last-gasp dash to the flag. To make matters worse, both his father Mario and brother Jeff had been hospitalised during the race after big crashes.

Goodyear tried everything he could to pass, but Little Al just fended him off. "I never lifted until the last corner, where my car got a little loose," says Unser. "I tried to make my race car as wide as I could."

Goodyear counters: "I don't know if I'd call it blocking; I'd call it using the race track and I would have done the same thing. I was catching him in Turns 3 and 4 and started to get a good tow. He knew it and he weaved."

5. Scott Pruett wins the 1995 Michigan 500 by 0.056sec from Al Unser Jr

This was the best Michigan race in the pre-Handford era. Unser and the Penske team were keen to prove they could compete on superspeedways after he and Emerson Fittipaldi sensationally failed to qualify for the Indy 500 earlier in the year. But Al's margin faded late in the race because Pruett had the advantage of Firestone tyres, and he executed a clean outside pass in the final turn to win. It was Firestone's first victory in CART.

6. Mario Andretti wins Portland 1986 by 0.075sec from son Michael

Michael was the dominant CART driver in 1986, but he was often let down by the unreliability of his March-Ford. At Portland on Father's Day, Michael had a big lead entering the last lap, but his fuel-starved engine began cutting out. He kept going into the final turn and looked to be home free. But the Cosworth coughed again, and Mario won the drag race to the line.

"That wasn't the Father's Day gift I had in mind," said Michael afterwards, to which Mario replied: "At my age [46], I'll take 'em any way I can get 'em."

Above: De Ferran thought victory was his at Portland in '97 but Blundell had just edged ahead. Below: Michael Andretti's fuel-starved engine gifted dad Mario a CART win for Father's Day in '86

"That wasn't the Father's Day gift I had in mind" Michael Andretti



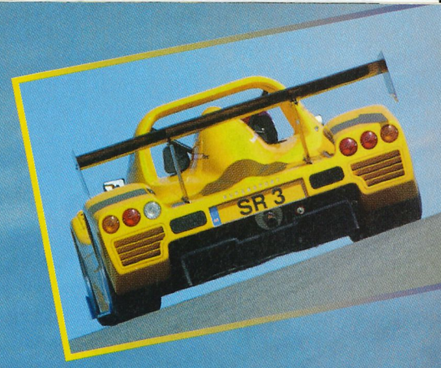
LAT ARCHIVE

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ROCKINGHAM 500

Home comfort

His trying time as the boss of Jaguar's Formula 1 effort has convinced Bobby Rahal he's better off in CART. By GORDON KIRBY

CART 2002 Bobby Rahal

In the 12 months since he was fired as head of Jaguar Racing's beleaguered Formula 1 squad – a role he held for just under a year – CART team owner Bobby Rahal has settled happily back into life in America.

Despite his absence for most of 2001, Rahal's CART squad came close to scooping the title with Kenny Brack. But this year, with Jimmy Vasser and Michel Jourdain Jr driving, Team Rahal started well and then faded mid-season, a situation that the owner and hands-on team boss Scott Roembke are scrambling to turn around. Bobby is also putting together a Toyota Atlantic team for promising young female racer Danica Patrick, and hopes to run an Audi in the American Le Mans Series next year.

Rahal's a busy man. He has a fleet of historic cars that he races occasionally, including a Porsche 917, a 903/3, an F2 Brabham BT23C and the selfsame Lola T296 two-litre sportscar he raced 25 years ago in CanAm. With all of these things going on in his life – as well as a string of Honda, Toyota, Lexus, Jaguar and Mercedes-Benz dealerships in Ohio and Pennsylvania – it isn't surprising that Bobby doesn't really miss the high pressure, dog-eat-dog world of F1.

"There are certain aspects that I really enjoyed in my brief experience with Jaguar," Rahal muses. "Obviously, in Formula 1 there's a lot of very talented people and I had the opportunity to work with a few of them, and I enjoyed the creativity process of designing and building your own cars. I thought that was quite unique and attractive. It's a huge expense to do it. It doesn't necessarily make much economic sense but if you've got to do it, it certainly proves an interesting experience."

It's fair to say Rahal encountered quite a culture shock when he took over at Jaguar. "Obviously, the paddock is quite different compared to CART or perhaps even any other form of motorsport that I've been associated with," he says. "While there were certain aspects of that which I enjoyed, there were some other aspects that I did not. The big difference between CART and F1 is that in Champ Cars, the racing is the show, and in F1 the show is the show. Racing is almost incidental.

"All in all, I'm disappointed that I did not get the opportunity to do what I set out to do at Jaguar. In some aspects it was a good experience. In some aspects it was a bad experience. But what's done is done and I'm happy to be where I am now."

Rahal's F1 interlude has given him even greater respect for his peers in racing, such as Frank Williams and Ron Dennis.

"Racing is a very entrepreneurial business," he says. "You have to have that kind of freedom to act if necessary. That's what's made Frank Williams and Ron Dennis so successful. Big corporations act differently than entrepreneurial corporations. Even though they try to act entrepreneurially at times, the sheer mass of the company doesn't allow it.

"I have tremendous respect for Frank in particular, and Patrick Head. There's no secret to me why they are successful. And it's the same with Ron. He's got much more on his plate than Frank seems to have, but these are guys who were there in the beginning and they'll be there at the end, and there's a lot to be said for that."

Rahal says that he gained rather than lost friendships during his time in F1, and that his pal Adrian Newey made the right decision to stay with McLaren, despite the fact that it could have secured Rahal's own future at Jaguar had he convinced the design ace to join him there.

"In the end, Adrian made the right choice, didn't he?" Rahal acknowledges. "Perhaps he saw something that I didn't see, or didn't want to see. In the end I don't know if it would have made any difference had Adrian joined. I don't really blame him. If anything, I developed some friendships there that I didn't have before, so I don't look at it as a negative experience at all, other than that I would liked to have seen it out."

Rahal says it's impossible to assess from the outside the state of Jaguar, but he believes the structure of F1 makes it extremely difficult to challenge the top three teams.

Not that he feels there's a lack of effort on Jaguar's part – Rahal believes there were a lot of good people in the team, but that all the controversy didn't help. "All it took was one or two good ideas that are put into effect and voila, you're competitive. But being competitive and winning races are two different things.

"The task of beating McLaren, Ferrari or Williams is huge. When you see the effort that people make just to be the fourth or fifth team, it's a hugely difficult task and one that demands extraordinary patience and commitment. That's what makes F1 so tough."

Rahal says F1 and CART are poles apart in terms of what it takes to win. For one thing, the rules are very different and F1 is a meritocracy which makes it very difficult for teams to climb up the ladder. In effect, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

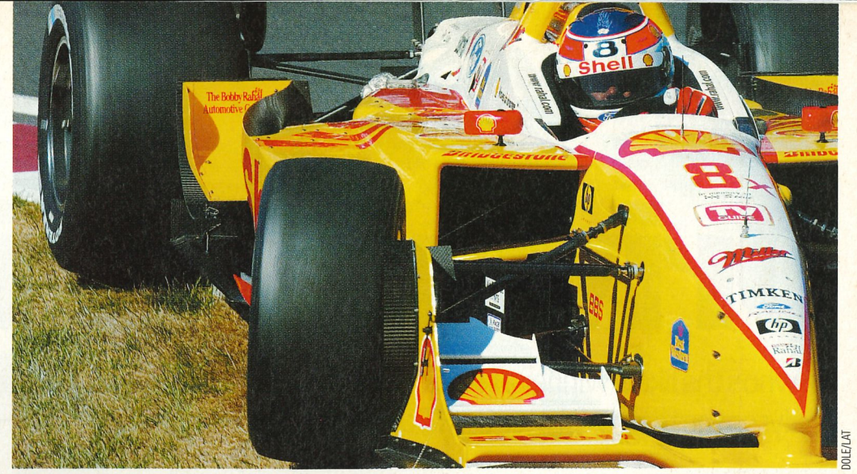
Now back in his natural habitat, Rahal says he has no ambitions to return to F1.

"At this stage of the game I really don't, unless I had my own team so I could control it," he says. "Actually, an area that I find more appealing is some of the junior categories, to have more of a role in bringing people up. I think that's something that might interest me. Who knows?

"Maybe I could go back and have a Formula 3 team some day, especially as more Americans make the trek to Europe. That to me would be interesting because I always enjoyed racing in Europe. I enjoy that scene. But I think F1's out."

The thing he says he misses least about the sport is the 'Piranha Club' atmosphere of the grand prix paddock. Rahal has learnt that handshakes, commitments and contracts "really don't mean anything", and that such an environment is one he doesn't want to be in. It's a unique situation that he believes could never exist in the United States.

As many people in the paddock argued at the time, Rahal was simply too nice to survive in F1. CART, however, is a different kettle of fish – and there are no piranhas there.



DOLEF/LAT

TESTING TIME

Team is staying in the fight

BOBBY Rahal's CART team has been disappointing this year, although Michel Jourdain Jr's unbelievable consistency has kept him in the top 10 in the points.

"More often than not Michel's race pace is more competitive than his qualifying pace," says Rahal. "That's a frustration for all of us and I'm sure for him as well, because you can't win races if you're qualifying 16th.

"The fact that he's gotten where he has in some races came by strategy,' argues the team owner. "Obviously, he has to drive the car but it was the strategy that got him in the position to finish fourth.

"Early in the year," adds Rahal, "we were quite competitive both in qualifying and the race, but we seem to have lost our way a little bit. There's no doubt that Honda and Toyota – even though they're leaving the series at the end of the year – are continuing to push the limits, and I'm not sure we're in the best situation. Obviously, Ford's not willing to commit the resources that Honda and Toyota are, but everybody's working the hardest with what they've got."

Rahal says his team has short-changed its star driver Jimmy Vasser. "We haven't been helping Jimmy," he admits. "He's better than what's being shown. We've had some good races with Jimmy but we've had some races where, frankly, I think he's been embarrassed and I'm embarrassed. We're definitely turning over stones here to ensure that the rest of the season is very competitive. I've no doubt that Jimmy is a damn good driver."

Rahal says that even though the year has not gone to plan, his team is determined to fight on.

"We've got the reliability down," he says. "Michel's finished every lap of the series, but we're not happy at finishing fifth or sixth. That's not what we've worked so hard for and that's not our history. We're not giving up – we're looking under every rock and going through what we need to do."



LEVITT/LAT

Jimmy Vasser (left) and Michel Jourdain Jr have struggled to get results for Team Rahal this year



ROSE/LAT

Top: former CART champ Vasser has had a tough time in 2002. Above: Rahal did not stay smiling for long at the Jaguar Formula 1 team

ROCKINGHAM 500

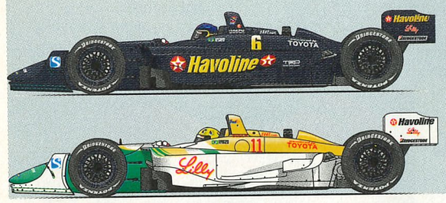
Driver by driver

So who's the likely winner at Rockingham and who hasn't got a hope in hell? JOHN OREOVICZ analyses the teams; former CART ace turned F1 wannabe BRYAN HERTA rates his old rivals

NEWMAN/HAAS RACING

CHASSIS **LOLA**
ENGINE **TOYOTA**

TEAM Back at the top of their game after a few sub-par years. Da Matta has energised the team and engineering changes have paid dividends; it seems to get more out of the Lola-Toyota package than its rivals. Could be looking at two new drivers for '03 if da Matta joins Toyota F1.





CRISTIANO DA MATTA BR #6

Herta says: Technically he is extremely good. He's got the team behind him 100 percent and he's got that magic element, success, on his side too. Success breeds success, but Rockingham will be interesting because the team struggled last year. This will be a test for him.

Age	29
Starts	74
Wins	10
Poles	6
Career points	459
Last year	5th (140 points)
Career best	2001, 5th



CHRISTIAN FITTIPALDI BR #11

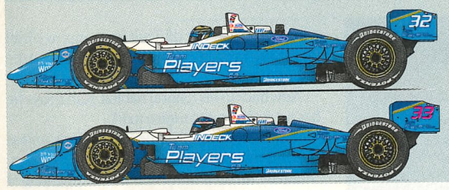
Herta says: It's his final season before he switches to stock cars and he's done a very solid job. He hasn't quite shown the pace of Cristiano and he's been a lot less lucky. Still, he's a good all-rounder and I expect him to run well at Rockingham.

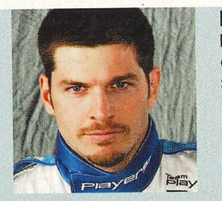
Age	31
Starts	129
Wins	2
Poles	1
Career points	647
Last year	15th (70 points)
Career best	1996, 5th

PLAYER'S FORSYTHE RACING

CHASSIS **REYNARD**
ENGINE **FORD**

TEAM The closest thing in CART to a Formula 1 team, the Forsythe squad is developing the Reynard chassis. Still a potent tool on road courses, as demonstrated by Carpentier's two wins. Will he be back? And when will Tagliani break through for his first win?





PATRICK CARPENTIER CDN #32

Herta says: For me, he's the revelation of the year. Six years in and he's started winning races. He seems to have stepped up his game and is brimming with confidence. He's always been strong on ovals, although he's won on road courses too, so he's a dark horse for a win at Rockingham.

Age	31
Starts	103
Wins	3
Poles	3
Career points	394
Last year	10th (91 points)
Career best	2001, 10th



ALEX TAGLIANI CDN #33

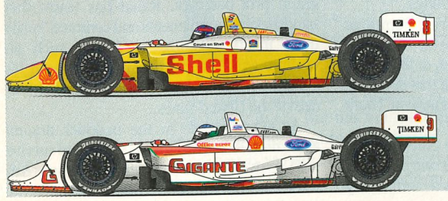
Herta says: Tagliani is a lot tougher to evaluate than his team-mate. The guy has got loads of natural ability, but just hasn't been able to find the consistency. He's fantastic one week but struggles the next. I'm not sure which Alex we'll see at Rockingham.

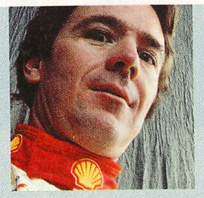
Age	29
Starts	54
Wins	0
Poles	3
Career points	216
Last year	11th (80 points)
Career best	2001,11th

TEAM RAHAL

CHASSIS **LOLA**
ENGINE **FORD**

TEAM Much was expected of the Rahal/Vasser combination, but it has disappointed so far. On the engineering side the team misses Don Halliday, who left for Fernandez Racing. The cars are very reliable, with Jourdain leading the mileage stakes, and the team ran well here last year.

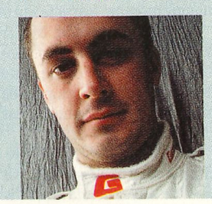




JIMMY VASSER US #8

Herta says: Jimmy's had a miserable season, but I still rate him very highly. The team nearly won the race here last year with Kenny Brack, so hopefully that will be an advantage for him. If he gets through the first corner, Jimmy will be a factor in any race.

Age	36
Starts	191
Wins	9
Poles	8
Career points	1121
Last year	12th (77 points)
Career best	1996, 1st



MICHEL JOURDAIN JR MEX #9

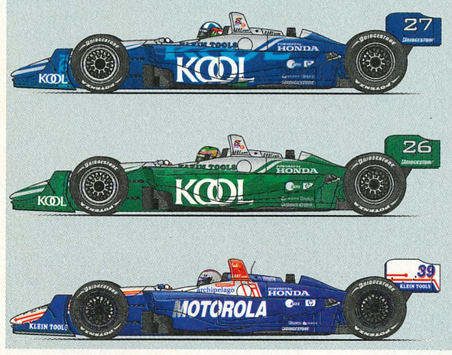
Herta says: It's a little bit of a mystery with Michel because he showed tremendous pace and consistency early in the season. He's still got the consistency, but he seems to have lost a bit of the pace at the moment. But he could be a podium contender here.

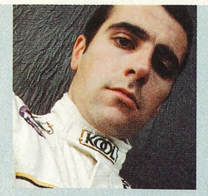
Age	26
Starts	115
Wins	0
Poles	0
Career points	153
Last year	20th (30 points)
Career best	2001, 20th

TEAM KOOL GREEN

CHASSIS **LOLA**
ENGINE **HONDA**

TEAM A remarkable year for owner Barry Green: A mid-season chassis change, wins in CART for all three drivers, and a near-miss for Tracy at the Indy 500. Also, the wheels were put in motion for Andretti to buy the team. Heading for the IRL in '03 with Honda – with Franchitti?





DARIO FRANCHITTI GB #27

Herta says: Dario is a super-quick guy everywhere. He has struggled the last year or two for consistency; the car hasn't seemed to have been to his liking week-in, week-out. If Team Green gives him a good car, he's particularly motivated to bring Great Britain a win this weekend.

Age	29
Starts	109
Wins	9
Poles	12
Career points	685
Last year	7th (105 points)
Career best	1999, 2nd



PAUL TRACY CDN #26

Herta says: Paul's just great, I like him a lot. He's just so exciting to watch out there. Regardless of where he starts in the race, you know he's heading to the front. His big Achilles heel has been his reliability. If Dario runs well, expect Paul to run well – that often happens.

Age	33
Starts	186
Wins	19
Poles	13
Career points	1182
Last year	14th (73 points)
Career best	1993, '94, '99, 3rd



MICHAEL ANDRETTI US #39

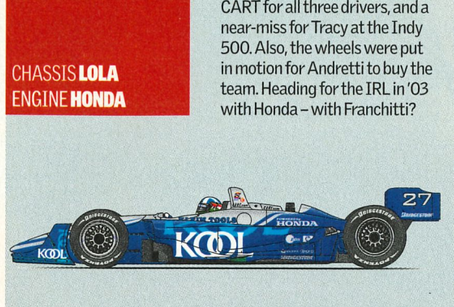
Herta says: I think he's due for a send-off win from CART. Certainly, the ovals seem to have suited him in the last few years. Not always the fastest in qualifying, I believe he's the quickest guy in CART on cold tyres. Don't write him off as a potential winner.

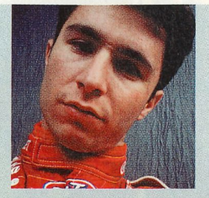
Age	39
Starts	304
Wins	42
Poles	32
Career points	2452
Last year	3rd (147 points)
Career best	1991, 1st

CHIP GANASSI RACING

CHASSIS **LOLA**
ENGINE **TOYOTA**

TEAM A powerhouse in the '90s, winning four consecutive CART crowns. But the titles dried up after Alex Zanardi and Juan Pablo Montoya left, and Ganassi has a lot on his plate with NASCAR and IRL efforts. Still very capable. Surprisingly, Junqueira leads the attack; newcomer Brack hasn't found chemistry, while Dixon arrived mid-year when PacWest folded.

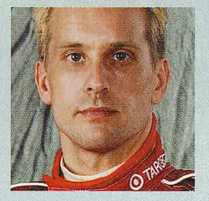




BRUNO JUNQUEIRA BR #4

Herta says: Bruno's starting to look like champion material. He struggled a bit last year, but he's been a bit of a star this year. He doesn't seem to have realised what he can't do in the car, so he's willing to try anything! On his Motegi form, he's a clear favourite at Rockingham.

Age	25
Starts	34
Wins	3
Poles	4
Career points	189
Last year	16th (68 points)
Career best	2001, 16th



KENNY BRACK SWE #12

Herta says: You can't discount Kenny, although he's been overshadowed a bit by Bruno this year. He's very strong mentally, so he won't let that get to him. I'm sure he's very motivated to turn the tables on his less experienced team-mate in the closing races.

Age	36
Starts	54
Wins	4
Poles	5
Career points	351
Last year	2nd (163 points)
Career best	2001, 2nd



SCOTT DIXON NZ #44

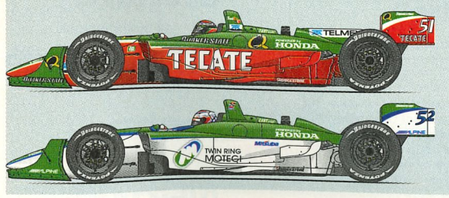
Herta says: I've been surprised by him, I think he's done a really great job coming into a team midway through a season. He's definitely making the most of his opportunity. He's not shown winning form yet, but constant top five pace all the way.

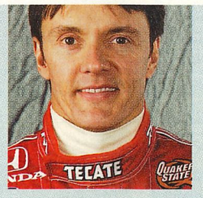
Age	22
Starts	34
Wins	1
Poles	0
Career points	175
Last year	8th (98 points)
Career best	2001, 8th

FERNANDEZ RACING

CHASSIS **LOLA**
ENGINE **HONDA**

TEAM Well-funded, well-presented and well-managed by ex-Ganassi boss Tom Anderson. Fernandez has long been known for his business savvy so it was no surprise that he took the owner-driver plunge. Tech boss Don Halliday had the magic set-up at Rockingham last year.





ADRIAN FERNANDEZ MEX #51

Herta says: Which Adrian will be at the Rockingham oval? I don't know. He'll either be extremely quick, and could actually pull off a surprise victory, or he'll have a poor weekend. What you can bet on is that he won't have anything between the two!

Age	37
Starts	158
Wins	7
Poles	3
Career points	767
Last year	18th (45 points)
Career best	2000, 2nd



SHINJI NAKANO JPN #52

Herta says: Shinji has struggled with the same inconsistency that Adrian has this year, but he has never shown similar pace at any point. The best I think he can hope for is a top 10 and to score a few points. That's about all I can say about his chances.

Age	31
Starts	51
Wins	0
Poles	0
Career points	66
Last year	26th (11 points)
Career best	2000, 24th



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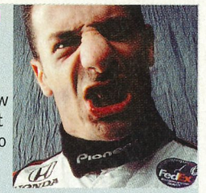
MO NUNN RACING

CHASSIS **LOLA**
ENGINE **HONDA**

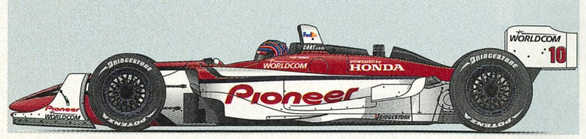
TEAM Kanaan suffered abysmal luck to start the season, failing to finish five out of six races. Has rebounded with three top-fours in recent weeks after matters came to a head at Elkhart Lake. Handicapped by lack of a team-mate to share information with.

TONY KANAAN BR #10

Herta says: The team has struggled. Tony is a guy who has great ability but he hasn't been able to show it on a weekly basis. I don't really see that changing, so they'll struggle at Rockingham again. That's not to say it's a lack of ability from Tony's side, but they just haven't seemed to get a handle on what he needs from the Lola.



Age	27
Starts	88
Wins	1
Poles	2
Career points	353
Last year	9th (93 points)
Career best	1998, '01, 9th



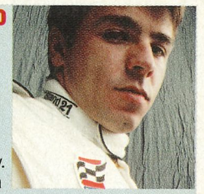
PATRICK RACING

CHASSIS **REYNARD**
ENGINE **TOYOTA**

TEAM Dismal season for one of CART's original teams. Took a gamble on rookie Townsend Bell, which failed miserably. The American crashed a lot of cars and created plenty of ill will. Servia had a good run at Montreal, but is a likely stop-gap measure as the team regroups for '03.

ORIOL SERVIA ESP #20

Herta says: He's in a situation similar to Dixon, but I really don't know what to make of Oriol. He keeps showing flashes of promise, but good results have been hard to come by. The Patrick team has been struggling this year, but in my mind the jury is still out on Oriol. As a team, they have to figure out where their problems are.



Age	28
Starts	49
Wins	0
Poles	0
Career points	110
Last year	19th (42 points)
Career best	2001, 15th



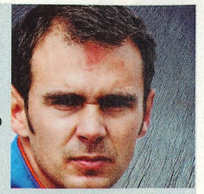
TEAM ST GEORGE

CHASSIS **LOLA**
ENGINE **FORD**

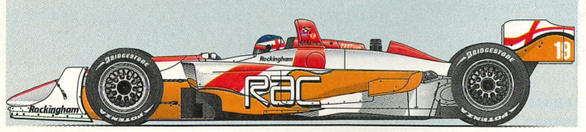
TEAM The Dale Coyne team hasn't seen much action for the last couple of years, but they answered the call to run Townsend Bell in the two European races last year and prepared a fast and reliable car. Low expectations but high anticipation.

DARREN MANNING GB #19

Autosport says: As Bryan doesn't know Darren, it's up to us to rate him. He is undoubtedly in at the deep end at Rockingham, and the patriotic nature of the team is bound to attract the lion's share of media attention this weekend. Manning is level-headed and deserves his chance to prove what he can do at this level. He's got nothing to lose and an impressive showing could lead to a full-time CART seat.



Age	27
Starts	0
Wins	0
Poles	0
Career points	0
Last year	n/a
Career best	n/a



WALKER RACING

CHASSIS **REYNARD**
ENGINE **TOYOTA**

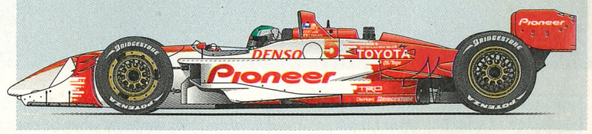
TEAM Veteran operator Derrick Walker soldiers on with Toyota support, and he solidified his base in the Champ Car industry with his purchase of the Reynard chassis project. Solid team with a family atmosphere that provides good training for up-and-comers.

TORA TAKAGI JPN #5

Herta says: Tora is extremely quick, and I don't think people give him any credit for that. But what he doesn't seem to be able to do is run quickly throughout an entire race. That's got to be his objective to improve on. He has to run every lap to the limit of his ability, not just when he feels like it.



Age	28
Starts	34
Wins	0
Poles	0
Career points	58
Last year	21st (29 points)
Career best	2001, 21st



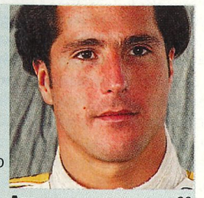
HERDEZ COMPETITION

CHASSIS **LOLA**
ENGINE **FORD**

TEAM A solid operation headed by ex-F3000 and F1 Pacific team owner Keith Wiggins. Gambled on replacing the steady Michel Jourdain Jr with rookie Dominguez, who has rarely shone. Hopes are high to expand to a two-car operation in '03.

MARIO DOMINGUEZ MEX #55

Herta says: He's a rookie, and I've never raced against him before. Has he done anything to impress me? No, not really. I don't know how much is down to him or how much might be down to a lack of finance on the team's part. It's difficult for me to judge, but it would have been nice to have seen some flashes of pace by now.



Age	30
Starts	14
Wins	0
Poles	0
Career points	15
Last year	n/a
Career best	n/a



For further information visit **www.rockingham.co.uk**

Timetable

Friday, September 13	
0700	Gates open
0830	Rockingham Radio on air
0915-1130	CART practice
1215-1300	ASCAR practice
1400-1530	CART qualifying
1545-1640	ASCAR race (60 laps)

Saturday, September 14	
0700	Gates open/Rockingham TV on air
0900-0915	ASCAR warm-up
0930-1000	CART warm-up
1100-1145	ASCAR race (60 laps)
1245	CART ceremony
1330	Rockingham 500 CART race (211 laps)

ROCKINGHAM 500

Duke of hazard

Quiet, reserved, cautious – all the words you wouldn't associate with CART's thong-wearing wild man Paul Tracy. By ERIC JOHNSON



ABBOTT/LAT



MILLER/LAT

Main: Tracy wows the fans with a series of donuts after winning at Milwaukee – one of the highs in a mixed season

Above: Outspoken Tracy is not afraid to say what he thinks

CART 2002
Paul Tracy

"You blew it, man. I was riding around in the mud and rain on this thing in a thong. You should have been there. You left too early. You really blew it."

Paul Tracy was sitting on the Team Kool Green Honda pit bike at Laguna Seca, looking up at me and my tape recorder and shaking his head. On hand for CART's 2002 sneak preview at the fabled California coastal circuit in February, he had just finished a timed session and was heading back to his rock'n'roll tour bus to get out of the chilly winter air when he ran across me.

"I hope someone got pictures of me riding in that thong because it was pretty damn funny," he adds.

What Paul Tracy was referring to was one of just many examples that make him one of the most flamboyant and outspoken racing drivers in the world. Two months earlier, in the dusty, heat-scorched badlands of Southern California's high desert region (way outside of Los Angeles), famed film director James Cameron, American helmet painter to the stars Troy Lee and a number of big-time Hollywood stuntmen had put together a large off-road motorcycle race dubbed 'A Day in the Dirt'.

Along with a wild mix of actors, musicians, motocross stars and film, motorcycle and motor industry types, Tracy, an avid motocross enthusiast, was on hand to compete with Indy Racing League star Jeff Ward.

Unfortunately, immediately after a *Lawrence of Arabia*-like sand and dust storm, a large winter tempest blew in off the Pacific over the dirt bike hootenanny. The racing was called off for the day, and Tracy and Jimmy Vasser – who was spectating – sat around in a motorhome until someone started riding a minicycle around a few beer coolers laying in the mud. Soon after, an ad hoc pit bike race broke out.

Tracy, on his Honda Cub, was in the middle of it and grinning like a madman. Soon soaking wet and covered in mud, he pulled off the track, went into his motorhome, reached into the dark recesses of a drawer, took off all his clothes and put a navy blue thong on. He then exited the bus, hopped back on the Honda and once again began cutting laps.

People laughed, people pointed, people shook their heads at the near-naked racer. Round and round went the Champ Car veteran in the driving rain. He was still going in circles when I decided to head back to Los Angeles. I never did find pictures of him riding around in that godforsaken thong.

Perhaps more so than any other CART driver, 33-year-old Tracy truly wears his heart on his Nomex-clad sleeve. A veteran of the tour since 1991, Tracy has had a long and eventful career – one which has produced moments of brilliance, mind-boggling crashes, record-breaking fines and an endless series of altercations with both drivers and officials.

Seventh on three of CART's all-time career lists (wins, most laps led, and most starts) Tracy has become, in recent years, a fan favourite due to his aggressive driving and tell-it-like-it-is approach to the sport.

The day after his 185th career start – at Montreal – AUTOSPORT tracked down Tracy at his home in Las Vegas. A bit jet-lagged, but in good spirits, upon recognising my voice he brought up the thong-riding incident.

"Nobody ever said anything about that," he guffaws. "I was having such a good time that day. I went out the first time and ended up getting all muddy and soaking wet. I went in my bus to change clothes, and was like, 'f*** it'. I took my clothes off, put the thong on and went back out.

"I don't care what people think," he adds, insisting that he's a driver who says and does what he feels. "I do a good enough job on the track and with my sponsors and team that I feel I can be myself. I don't get worried about what they all think. I mean, I don't get too far out of line. Sure I'll say some edgy things, but when I do, it's along the lines of the truth. I don't make things up and say things out of the blue.

"I've been in the sport a long time and I'm respected for what I do on the track. Because of that I'm allowed to do what I want away from the track without having to worry about what the sponsors or team think. A lot of drivers are more concerned about their image outside of the car than they are about their image inside it."

And how does the Canadian feel he is perceived by racing fans around the world?

"All I can say about myself is that I've been able to generate a lot of media – both good and bad – over the years. I mean, if you watch a CART race, you know something is going to be going on with me. Sometimes I win, sometimes I make mistakes. But I'm always out there doing things on the track."

It hasn't always been that way for Tracy, however. Hired by the clean-cut, ultra-conservative Penske team in 1992, the wild-eyed youngster was constantly kept on a tight leash. To that end, was he often warned to behave himself when media and sponsors were present?

"Oh yeah, all of the time!" he shoots back. "When I was young and just starting out, I couldn't be myself. [Roger] Penske's team really put a stranglehold on me. When I left Penske [at the end of 1994] and went to Newman/Haas, I got out from being underneath that stranglehold. Carl Haas and his wife allowed me to be me. When I went back to Team Penske a year later, I stayed like that because I knew I had proven myself.

"[Roger] Penske didn't like that, but I wanted to be me and not pretend to be something I wasn't. They tried putting a stranglehold on me again, but I wasn't going to be forced to be a person I wasn't. I didn't want be walking around leading two separate lives, you know what I mean?"

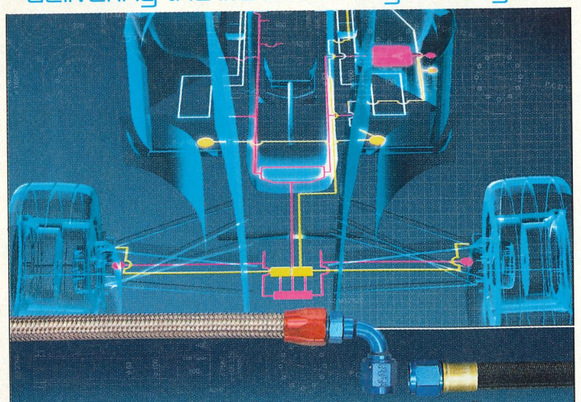
A driver who enjoys time away from the track, where he unwinds by riding his motocross bikes and hanging out with his girlfriend, Simona McNeeledge, and a few other close friends, Tracy, even after all he's been through, genuinely adores his chosen form of motorsport.

"You know I just love racing," he says. "To go out there like I did at Montreal and race 80 close, clean laps with a close friend, Jimmy Vasser, makes me realise just how much I love racing."

This year's Champ Car series has been an up-and-down affair, and while there have been bright moments (a win at the Miller Lite 250 in Milwaukee and two other podium finishes) there have also been a few dark ones. A litany of mechanically-induced DNFs and the much maligned – and politically charged – ➡

"Sure I'll say some edgy things, but when I do it's along the lines of the truth" Paul Tracy

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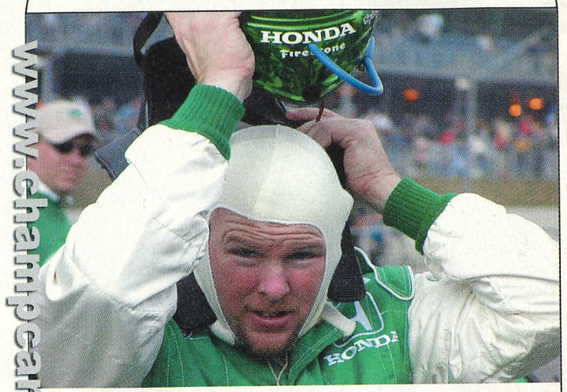
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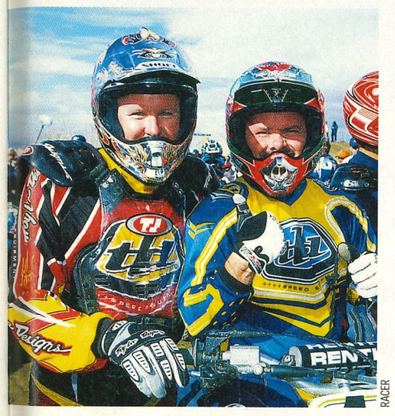
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"The Rockingham track is fast and that suits my style" Paul Tracy



ABBOTT/LAT

Tracy likes to go fast at work (left) and on days off, too. Paul (far left) poses with Jeff Ward at 'A Day in the Dirt' before the rain fell and that thong was produced... Below: Another pastime involves swapping CART for karting



RACER

Indianapolis 500 debacle, when he lost his post-race legal battle to Penske's Helio Castroneves, preceded a coming together with team-mate Dario Franchitti in the last round at Denver which ended the Scot's title hopes.

"This season has been both good and bad," he says. "Indy was also good and bad. The end result was bad, but I won the overall support of the fans there. A lot of those people love me now because of what happened there, so that was a big turnaround for me.

"As far as this season goes, we've been competitive at every race and I've been qualifying well. I've been there in the top five at every race, but we've had a lot of mechanical failures and that's really hurt us. To win championships you can't be doing that. Pat [Carpentier], Dario [Franchitti] and [Bruno] Junqueira have all been there, but have also had problems. We're all giving it away to Cristiano [da Matta], who has been really consistent."

A somewhat disappointing seventh in the points heading to Rockingham, Tracy is, nonetheless, excited about returning to the UK in his 220mph, 800-horsepower, methanol burning Champ Car.

"I'm really looking forward to it," he says. "We only got one hour of practice on the track last year before we raced, so hopefully we'll be able to be more prepared this year. The track is fast and suits my style. Our oval set-up is also very good. I'm looking forward to it. I hope the weather is good.

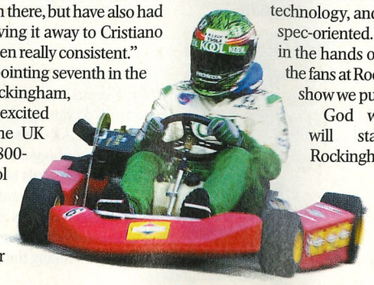
"The people really understand racing there," continues Tracy, citing his affection for the enthusiastic Brits. "England is at the epicentre of motorsport. CART going there is great for the fans. They're curious about us because they have not seen much of us or our cars. They only see Formula 1. When we go to England, the fans can get close to the cars and meet the drivers and they're fascinated by it all because they can't do that in F1. That is one aspect where CART is ahead of F1: the fans can get a real feel for what we do."

And while F1 and CART, for various reasons, will always be held up to the light and compared to one another, they are, in the eyes of Tracy, two completely different animals. For while Bernie Ecclestone's glossy, globe-trotting circus is the undisputed king of motorsport, CART, conversely, is something of a beautiful mess in which one never knows what is going to materialise on any given Saturday or Sunday.

"F1 is F1 and it's great, I really respect what they do," says Tracy. "What they do is much, much different to CART, though. We're not trying to be F1. CART is CART. We appeal to the same kind of fans, but our show is entirely different. It's like comparing baseball to football. They are both sports, but the rules and configurations are completely different.

"F1 is great – don't get me wrong. But I think what we do is great, as well. There is room for both of us. I mean CART is a series where anyone can win. F1 is more about technology, and our sport is more spec-oriented. That leaves it more in the hands of the driver. I hope the fans at Rockingham enjoy the show we put on."

God willing, the rains will stay away from Rockingham and in doing so will force Paul Tracy to keep his thong where it belongs – in his suitcase!



LEVITT/LAT

For further information visit **www.rockingham.co.uk**

F1 TEST RUN

When Tracy met Schuey

At Estoril, Portugal, in 1994, Paul Tracy was invited to test a Formula 1 car for Benetton. In a deal put together by team boss Flavio Briatore, Tracy performed brilliantly, his lap times good enough for fourth on the grid in that year's Portuguese Grand Prix.

"In 1993 and '94, I was beating [Nigel] Mansell in CART," recalls Tracy. "In fact, the year he won the championship ['93], I was third. Aware of my results, Benetton asked me if I wanted to come over and test. I did and it went well. I was happy with how I did.

"I was offered a contract on the spot, but it was not secure and there were a lot of vague loopholes in it. The timing just wasn't right, so I decided to stay in CART. Was it a good or bad decision? Ultimately, I'm happy with the way it worked out. I would have liked to go to F1, but it just didn't come together. But I've had a great career in CART, made a lot of money, and I'm real happy."

During the few days he spent at Estoril, Tracy worked side-by-side with a superhero in the making called Michael Schumacher. How did the two get along?

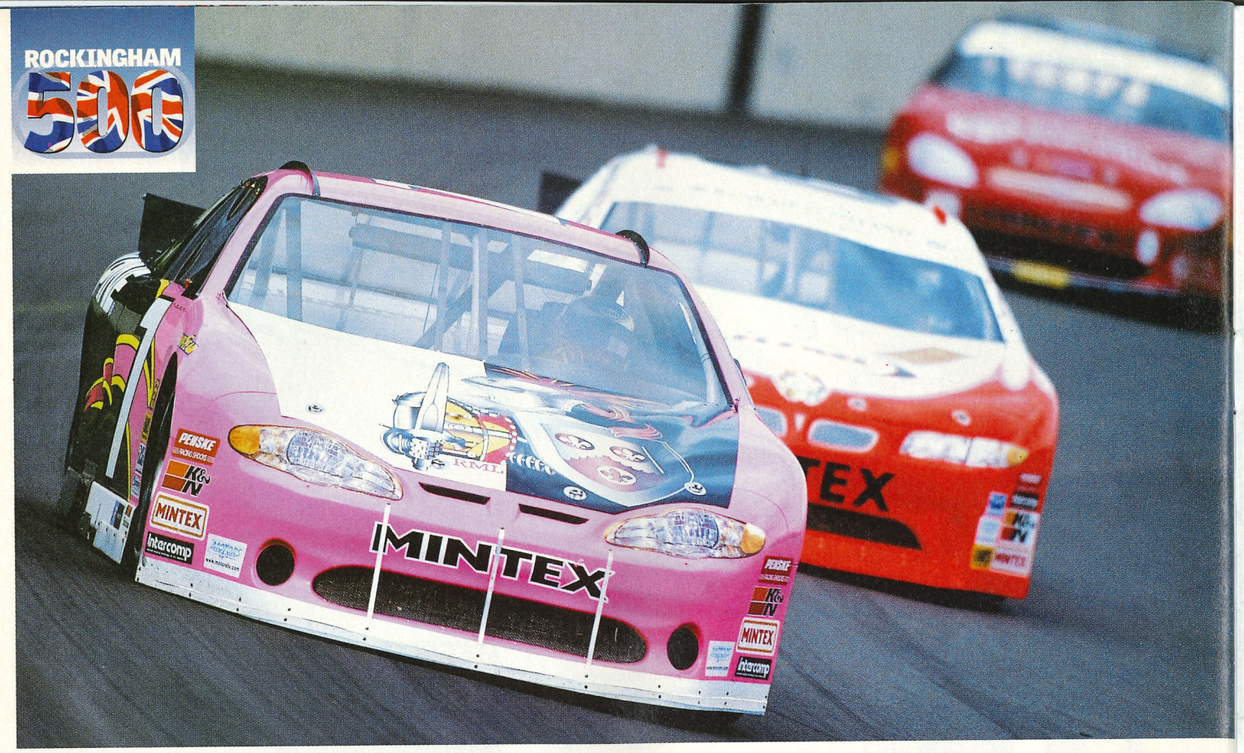
"He was great," remarks Tracy. "We raced karts against one another when we were 14 or 15. He has always been open and friendly with me. Maybe that's because we raced together as kids.

"I went to the US Grand Prix in 2000 and ran into him in the pitlane and he stopped and talked to me for 10 minutes. Some people may say he's difficult and not very friendly, but he's always been nice to me and has never turned his nose up at me like some F1 guys have. I really admire him. He's the best driver in the world."



Tracy shone in a Benetton test but rejected a race deal

LAT ARCHIVE



ROCKINGHAM 500

CART 2002 ASCAR preview

Rolling stocks to hit the track

With a host of star drivers, the thundering V8s of the ASCAR series will spice up the weekend's action. By ANDY BOTHWELL

When you go out for a meal, you generally look forward to the main course. But often the hors d'oeuvre is every bit as good. Most race fans at Rockingham this weekend will be thinking only of Britain's sole Champ Car round of the season. But those making the trip to the Corby oval should take a look at the burgeoning ASCAR championship.

The NASCAR-style stock car series will race twice during the weekend – after Champ Car qualifying on Friday and before the big race on Saturday – and the rumbling V8s are bound to fire the imagination.

ASCAR's first full season was always going to be a tricky one. After an aborted start, it finally got going near the end of the 2001 season, but this year it's really come of age.

Organisers Oval Race Management pulled out all the stops over the winter to attract some big names to the championship. Among those on show this weekend are former Champ Car racer Nicolas Minassian, reigning British Touring Car Champion Jason Plato and ex-Formula 3 champion and sportscar ace Kelvin Burt. BAR Formula 1 tester Darren Manning is also a series regular, but will be skipping this one to race for the Team St George CART squad in the main event.

Despite winning five races this year, McLaren F1 test driver Darren Turner is only eighth in the points but can never be discounted. He has put his HTML Pontiac Grand Prix in the top two places in every race he's finished.

Bringing in big names has meant the calibre of racing at the front of the field has been good all year. Several other stars have appeared this term, adding further spice to the flavour. They include MG Le Mans racer Kevin McGarrity, who is now contesting the remainder of the season, FIA GT champion Jean-Phillippe Belloc and F3 ace Derek Hayes.

Burt, who leads the championship after a hat-trick of wins at Rockingham last month, says: "The competition has been red hot. It has been very difficult to win races – it took me until last month to do it. You have to be in the top five percent to be at the top.

"It would have been nice sometimes to have some more cars running, but the organisers are putting a lot of effort in and it's still early days. This weekend is all about concentrating and protecting the championship lead. I need another positive, strong weekend."

Minassian, although disappointed to be lying third overall and 89 points behind Burt, agrees that this season bodes well for the future.

"There is a good atmosphere in the championship," he says. "There are some great drivers and there is an excellent level of racing. For me it has been quite a good challenge and gives me a bit more experience on ovals. My aim is still to go back to America."

The Frenchman admits that supporting the CART series he once raced in this weekend will seem strange, but believes ASCAR could become a springboard for drivers to get into American oval racing.

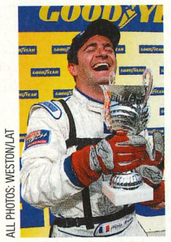
"It will be a bit weird. I had such a bad end to my time in Champ Cars but I would still prefer to be racing a Champ Car than an ASCAR. I will keep pushing and see what happens," he adds.

While Ray Mallock Ltd driver Burt will be aiming to maintain his points lead over Colin White, Burt's RML team-mate Minassian will be desperate to regain his early-season, race-winning form. Plato meanwhile is 127 points adrift in fourth and is hoping to bounce back from a crash at the last round. The otherwise engaged Manning lies fifth, just ahead of reigning ASCAR champion John Mickel.

Next year, a bigger series is planned, with two new European ovals bidding for a place on the calendar. A move towards longer NASCAR-style races with refuelling is also being looked at.

For now, though, simply sit back and enjoy the sound of rolling thunder.

Former Champ Car driver Nicolas Minassian will be hoping to return to his early season form at Rockingham

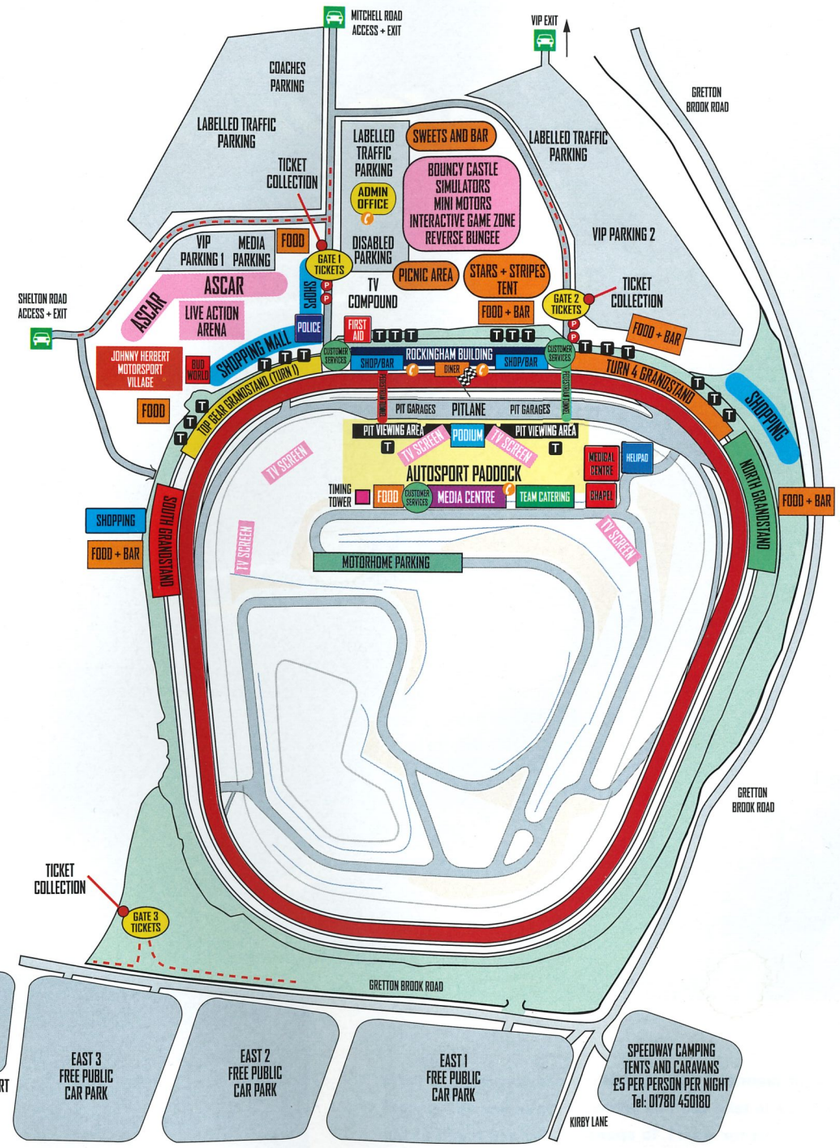


ALL PHOTOS: WESTON/LAT

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Your essential circuit guide

Never been to Rockingham before? Don't worry we've got it covered – we even show you where to find the bouncy castles!



AUTOSPORT PADDOCK

Be sure to visit the AUTOSPORT paddock where you can get close to the teams, garages and possibly the drivers. Access to this area is free on Friday and paddock passes can be purchased on Saturday from the ticket booths at either end of the Rockingham building. Passes priced at £20.

For further information visit www.rockingham.co.uk

THE ROCK'S 2001 MEMORY BANK

1 Gil de Ferran's final corner pass on championship rival Kenny Brack rewarded the patience of the crowd with the most exciting finish to an international motor race in Britain for aeons.

2 The track blowers ran in close formation for two-and-a-half days, sometimes reaching speeds of up to five miles per hour and going four-abreast on the straight. Rumours that Johnny Herbert might return to drive one of the behemoths proved unfounded.

3 Around midday on Friday, the 26 Champ Cars circulated at low speed around the 'weeping' track to give the crowd something to look at. It proved a false dawn, as rainwater continued to defy tradition and seep upwards from the ground rather than falling from the sky.

4 The sight of former CART champion and all-round superstar Juan Pablo Montoya being chased from pillar to post by a mob of autograph hunters while he attempted to catch up with his old rivals. The Colombian would now surely approve of an anti-hunting legislation.

5 The moment when the engines finally fired up in anger and Penske's de Ferran became the first driver to circulate at speed around the oval after two days of less action than at an average Hungarian Grand Prix.

6 Even the anticipation was better than the alternative that weekend – going to the 2001-spec British Touring Car Championship at Donington Park.

7 The reduction of the Rockingham 500 to the Rockingham 225 because of the low sun.

8 Fan access to the paddock made the first two days, which were bereft of on-track action, a far happier affair. Adrian Fernandez's determination to fit the entire crowd into his pit garage to play with his pair of Reynards is surely not behaviour befitting a team boss.

9 The realisation that, yes, you were at an oval watching a Champ Car race without needing to go beyond the confines of Northamptonshire.

10 AUTOSPORT News Editor Tim Scott – drafted in for commentary duties – and his magnificent seizure of American racing tradition in announcing: "And now for the most famous words in motor racing". And then an embarrassing wall of silence...

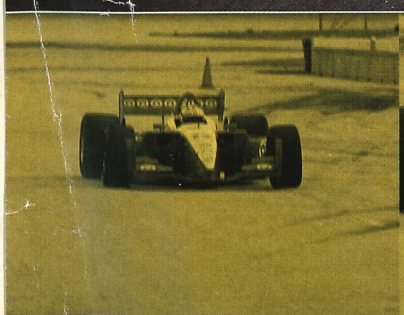
For directions to Rockingham, go to www.rockingham.co.uk



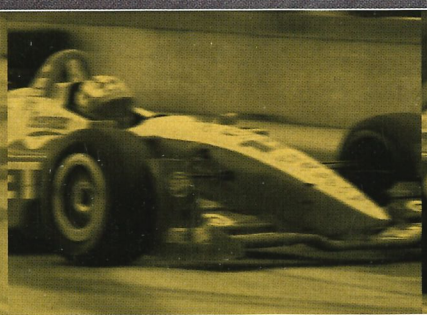
IT STARTS IN YOUR HEART,

takes hold of your head and works its way DOWN INTO THE ENGINE.

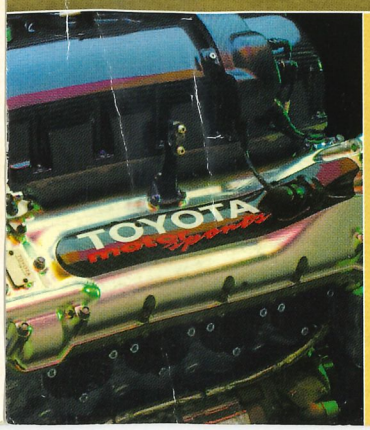












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