

Transcripts: Brock Yates

The following is a transcript of a Center Conversations talk given by motorsports journalist Brock Yates on 3 Nov. 2001 at the Racing Research Center.

I expect, as the years move on, this place will be unique as a research center for motorsports worldwide. It's a marvelous start. I'm truly honored to be here.

I was just thinking, I'm not one to dwell on anniversaries, but it was 50 years ago that I first came to this place. My father brought me to the 1951 Grand Prix. I sat on Old Corning Hill up there and watched the Cunninghams run. I was intensely thrilled by that moment and Watkins Glen and has been sort of part of my life ever since.



My father was a writer. A very good one. He wrote 80-odd books for Harper Brothers, Harper Collins now, and was the managing editor for Popular Science magazine years ago. Even though I grew up in a household where the profession was the sole source of income, I spent a lot of time deciding I didn't want to be a writer. In fact, I didn't really get serious about it until I was almost 30 years old. Which is now about 300 years ago.

At that time, in the early 1950s, automotive journalism was really in its absolute infancy. Probably the thing that I suppose electrified an awful lot of it – and I was talking to Dan Gurney after he was here as grand marshal of the Zippo Vintage races. He and Evi spent a week with Pamela and I; they were planning on spending a day, but, as you'll recall, we had a certain terrible interruption in our lives, on 9-11. So Dan and Evi spent until the following Saturday. We sat around and laughed and drank and talked about a lot of things dealing with automobiles and racing and one thing or another.

He noted that like myself, the first book that triggered his imagination and elicited an enthusiasm for him, and it's happened with a lot of other guys our age, was "Motor Racing with Mercedes Benz" by George Monkhouse, which was published in the late 1930s. It was published in the United States by Floyd Clymer. Floyd Clymer was an incredible publishing company. He was a motorcycle enthusiast for the most part, an Indian dealer, but he started publishing automobile racing books on a small scale in southern California, right after World War II. The Clymer publications were an incredible core of interest for young men like myself and Gurney and a whole lot of our generation.

Automobile journalism really in a classic sense didn't really exist. Motor and Auto Car were English magazines that were published, but very rarely ever found in the United States. The first magazine, which you'll probably all know, the first automotive magazine of any consequence, was Hot Rod. It was produced by Robert E. Petersen as a program for the Los Angeles Hot Rod Exposition in 1946. It was sold on the steps of the Los Angeles Exposition Center.

"Hot rod" at that time was considered pejorative. It was not a nice word. Hot rodders were not nice people. Bob took the risk of calling his magazine Hot Rod, and, of course, it was the core, the heart and soul, of the Petersen Publishing Company for almost 50 years. It was for many, many years the leading publication in the United States.

Shortly thereafter, Road & Track was started on the West Coast in 1948. It became the first sports car magazine, road racing magazine, although, ironically, if you look back at an early

issue of Road & Track magazine in anything up until about 1955, all the advertising is hot rods. It was camshafts and Cole Muffler and all sorts of speed equipment because the Southern California hot rod movement was the heart and soul of the automobile in the United States, like it or not. The great drivers came from hot rods, from Southern California. The sports car movement really grew out of Southern California from the hot rod and the Petersen Publishing Company.

A classic example: Petersen was an enthusiast and imported a lot of cars from Europe. The Cisitalia was a beautiful car, and in fact is one of the cars in the New York Museum of Modern Art, a classic design. Bob Petersen imported one in late 1948 and Bill Burke and Mickey Thompson, two hot rodders, borrowed it, knocked it off in Fiberglas, and you will find that body still in collectors' auctions around the United States. Petersen's Cisitalia, which he was furious about because when he got it back it was all covered with kind of the remnants of this knock-off Fiberglas.

There was a great overlap of that culture on the West Coast, between hot rods and sports car racing. Out of that movement in California came the great car builders like Frank Kurtis and the great fabricators Lujie Lesovsky and Emil Deidt and the people that built the Scarabs. All those people were basically hot rodders, as were most of the guys who built the Cunninghams. Ted Tappett, nee Phil Walters, Bill Frick, all came from oval track racing and hot rods. So there was a great melding of two cultures in the very early going.

Motor Track was the first magazine to build against consumer automobiles. It was started in 1950, I believe. Again, a Petersen publication. And then Sports Cars Illustrated was started in 1954 and ultimately became Car and Driver magazine when Karl Ludvigsen changed the name in 1961. I went to work for Car and Driver in 1964, months after probably the most seminal automotive story which was ever written, the one story that triggered more outrage, more memory, more craziness, more insanity than any other story that I can remember in an automobile journalism. That was David E. Davis' comparison of the Ferrari GTO and a Pontiac GTO. An incredible story. Hopelessly bogus and full of absolutely incredible hyperbole.

I went to work for the magazine three months after that story had been published. In fact, I remember getting the magazine at my home and I looked at it and I said, "Are these people nuts? A Ferrari GTO being beaten up by this piece of Detroit iron?"

The mission was much broader than to merely express a kind of outrageous comparison. You had to tap the interests of both sports car people and American car enthusiasts. Which Dave Davis chose to do, to break it away from the simplistic loyalties that Hot Rod had established on one side of the table and Road & Track had established on the other. We tried with Car and Driver to bring those divergent interests together and to create a broad-spectrum automobile magazine, which was a pretty interesting effort. I was along for the ride.

I was hired as managing editor in 1964, and I've often reflected on the fact that I could neither manage nor edit. It was a wild business in those days. Our great enemy and our great rival was Road & Track magazine. David was fired from Road & Track for sloth and disloyalty. Mostly with Car and Driver it was an act of revenge against Road & Track. As the established magazine it had some wonderful writers, Henry Manney III and others. Bernard Cahier was the European correspondent. Car and Driver was a hopeless kind of shirttail relative of automotive publications. Car and Driver had a circulation of about 250,000; Road & Track was something like 400,000. It was absolutely a magazine of great power and influence.

But, interestingly enough, it had good writers, too. It had Grif Borgeson, who was a wonderful historian, who has since passed away. Dean Batchelor who later became the editor. Dean Batchelor was a classic example of this confluence of interests. Dean Batchelor came from the hot rod world. He held many records on the Salt Flats, was a terrific enthusiast, was a wonderful collector of cars and memorabilia and was also a fine photographer. In those days, and even today, there were a number of people who were attracted to automotive journalism. There was just the hard-core car nut, the person who was crazy for cars and had some engineering background or at least some backyard car mechanical skills and who went to work, for the most part, for Petersen Publications. Those were guys who were very, very hard-core guys. They were very knowledgeable about automobiles and automotive mechanics. Some of them were limited in their writing talents. That was the drive of Petersen, to make these hands-on, nuts-and-bolts magazines.

Road & Track was a little bit more esoteric, was much more given toward kind of the gentlemanly, European approach to the automobile. If you look back and you look at probably the September 1955 issue, which covered the Le Mans crash of June of 1955, where 88 people were killed, they were barely mentioned. In those days, nobody ever got killed, nobody ever got hurt. It was all kind of a vanilla treatment of motor racing. It all was nice stuff, gentlemanly. Nobody got hurt. Nobody got killed. Nobody had any arguments. We had a lovely day at the races.

Well, we took a harder edge at Car and Driver. We tried to tell the way it was. We were the first magazine ever to do comparison tests. If you read the magazines of those days, there's always some kind of a last paragraph that kind of waffles around. "Well, this might not be the car for you. It may be a nice one for somebody else. We certainly wouldn't want to tell you not to buy it." We did comparison tests and lost all kinds of advertising. No one had ever said, "This car's better than that car." It shook the industry. It rattled the industry. Nobody had ever done this before because they were terrified that they were going to lose advertising. And guess what? They did. The automobile industry, both the imports and the domestics, were so spoiled. These magazines weren't skills, but they certainly were not about to make any sort of critical judgments about all of this until the nutcases from Car and Driver came along and began to say this one's good and this one's bad. It changed the dynamics of the industry radically.

There were some fascinating people in the business at that time. The two giants of the early days of American automotive journalism were Ken Purdy who was a brilliant writer, a fine historian and a very interesting man unto himself, who wrote first for True magazine and then really was a major, major force in automotive journalism at Playboy. The Ken Purdy Award is still one of the most coveted awards in automotive journalism. He was a wonderful, wonderful guy. A very interesting individual.

The other one, almost the antithesis of him in journalistic style, although they were very close friends personally, was Tom McCahil who wrote for Mechanics Illustrated. McCahil was a mad man. He was a great playboy. He came from a very wealthy family, was kind of a black sheep. He went to work for this very obscure mechanical magazine – the giant magazines in that field were Popular Mechanics and Popular Science. Mechanics Illustrated was a third-rate operation until McCahil started to write these incredibly hyperbolic road tests. If you go back and read Mechanics Illustrated, I'm not sure if there's any here at the Research Center, but they're great fun to read. He was a unique individual unto himself. He was extremely influential to develop and to create an automotive enthusiasm. In the early 1950s, when the sports car movement started to take hold, when the hot rod movement was taking hold on the West Coast, there were

no publications and then there were guys like McCahil who suddenly said to America, “Hey, these cars are fun. This is wild stuff out there. Enjoy it.”

Roughly at the same time, Competition Press was started by Denise McCluggage in Greenwich Village as a weekly newspaper, a very tiny little operation. She and Steve Smith, who is my neighbor in Wyoming now, started that thing. It was very brightly written. Denise is a wonderfully witty and intelligent writer, who worked for the Herald Tribune, and started this thing on a shirttail and of course it grew and grew and grew and ultimately was purchased by John Bond at Road & Track, when I started to write for it and then was ultimately passed on to the Crain Publications, which now is AutoWeek. That was a development of Competition Press with Denise doing it. Of course Denise was a fine race driver and a major influence in early automotive journalism.

We had some wonderful photographers working around. Jesse Alexander is best remembered probably for that, although there were terrific other photographers working in the field at that time. In fact, Jesse’s got a major exhibition coming up in Santa Monica coming up in the next week or so. A terrific guy and a masterful, masterful photographer.

There was some photojournalism that went on. Jesse would write stories for Car and Driver. Bernard Cahier would do race reports from Europe and take the photographs. But for the most part, photojournalism has not really been a major part of American automobile journalism. There have been a lot of writers, and there have been a lot of photographers, but there been only one or two individuals that I recall who were good enough to do it all.

But there were some fascinating men and women that were very influential. Wally Parks, who was the first editor of Hot Rod magazine. Incredible. He started the National Hot Rod Association, and is a giant, one of the most respected men in international motorsports. Bob Petersen is still very vital and active. He started the Southern California Timing Association, which raced out on the Salt Flats, and then started Hot Rod, started the National Hot Rod Association. Incredibly influential in terms of creating the Petersen Publishing Company, which was until very recently the largest and now is part of Primedia. It was just purchased by Primedia, so Automobile Magazine and Motor Trend magazine are now under the same hat. And my old friend David E. Davis Jr. has now become the temporary editor-in-chief of Motor Trend, which was kind of an odd turn of events for him because that puts him in a unique position. Dave Davis and Steve Smith are the only guys that I know that worked for all three of them – Motor Trend, Road & Track and Car and Driver. I wrote a few stories for Motor Trend, but not enough to include myself in their camp, and it doesn’t really bother me a whole lot.

Then there are some wonderful racing drivers that have done terrific automotive journalism. Probably the greatest of all was Paul Frere, the French journalist who won Le Mans. That’s pretty good. Jerry Titus who was editor of Sports Car Graphic magazine, a Petersen Publication, was a very good race driver. He was killed at Elkhart Lake in a Trans-Am race in 1972, ’71. Pat Bedard ran at Indianapolis twice, crashed twice. Peter Brock, who’s now a very prominent photojournalist, was the original designer of the Shelby Daytona coupe and was a protégé of Bill Mitchell’s and when he was 19 years old he was working on the design team of the first Corvettes. Absolutely unbelievable career. But in his later years, we laugh, he’s turned to becoming a journalist, which is not good, not good.

One of the Vanderbilts, one of the third or fourth generation, was at a party with J.P. Morgan, and Morgan asked him what he was going to be when he grew up and he said, “Well, sir, I plan to be a journalist.” And Morgan said, “Well, all of two things can happen to a journalist. You’ll

either become a drunken wastrel or you will remain a journalist. And I'm not sure which is worse."

In the early part of this business, it was all magazines. There was some newspaper coverage. New York Times had a man by the name of Frank Blunk The Los Angeles Times had a fine, fine motorsports writer by the name of Shav Glick a major, major player from the West Coast at the time. Other good writers were working at some newspapers. But newspapers for the most part ignored motorsports really until the early 1970s when the Southern newspapers began to heavily cover NASCAR. For the most part, major dailies did not treat automobile racing with any seriousness and therefore there weren't many journalists working on newspapers on an auto racing beat.

But then of course, television began to come into play, first with organizations like Triangle Films in Philadelphia, mainly because the owner was enthusiastic for motorsports. He had a deal with Johnson's Wax to record the Can-Am series and some very good film was done. I worked for them on occasion. But it was all shot on 16-millimeter and very slow editing process. There was some television, but not much. The first Indianapolis 500 that was televised, I believe, was pay-per-view television in I think 1963 or '64. Very little television was even being considered as part of a major league effort in automobile racing coverage until really it gained tremendous acceleration in the middle 1970s.

So now we have the massive explosion in automotive journalism. Radio shows. Television shows. Cable television, Speedvision, now, soon to become the Speed Channel. In February there will be 24 hours devoted to our sport. We've got hundreds of magazines, literally. Go into a newsstand and you'll find 60 or 70 titles devoted to automobiles and not only to automobile journalism but to automotive products of all kinds. We've got Internet sites. Now we've got more coverage and more opportunity, by the way, for journalists than ever before.

When I think back on the days when I started scribbling there were just probably a dozen outlets, magazines and a few newspapers worldwide, and now we are inundated with the ability to cover our sport. And we are now blessed with this wonderful facility where much of that material is going to become part of the repository for all time. To me, it makes this room so special. I know everybody that has scribbled in the trade will hope one day to be represented in this room.

I'd be delighted to field some questions and answer what I can.

Q: Do you want to tell the people how you got involved with your little hot rod race car, The Eliminator.

A: I've owned race cars on and off, and I discovered a car that was rather significant in Southern California sports car racing, built by a man by the name of Duffy Livingston, who built the third go-kart. The first go-kart ever was built by Art Ingles, a Kurtis Kraft employee in Glendale, Calif., in 1956. Ingles was a wonderful craftsman. Then another guy built the second one, and Duffy built the third one. They used to race them around Hollywood Bowl parking lot. Then it exploded from there, and Duffy went on to start the Go-Kart Company. That's why if you've ever seen that Eliminator hot rod run at Watkins Glen it has a Go-Kart logo on the hood, because that's his company. Go-karting has now become worldwide. The first one driven by a man by the name of Ingles, by Kurtis Kraft shops, and that's how I got a hold of the car.

Q: (Refers to reacting to the Pontiac GTO/Ferrari GTO comparison story)

A: Everybody did, everybody went crazy. We were getting letters from that story a year afterwards.

Q: Did Car & Driver know about the Pontiac?

A: Oh yeah. The Pontiacs that were produced for road tests at that time were done by a Pontiac dealership called Royal Pontiac in Royal Oak, Michigan, which was a closet outlet for the Pontiac Motor Division. It was a race shop. The cars were basically raced on Woodward Avenue. Woodward Avenue was a great street racing scene in the 1960s and '70s, still is a little bit, but street racing was big-time stuff. The factories put cars out there to race. Royal Pontiac put street-racing cars out to compete. Chrysler had Hemis out there. Dodge and Plymouth had theirs. They'd go out Saturday night and they'd race each other up and down Woodward Avenue. It's hard to believe, but that was true. The guy behind the Pontiac GTO campaign was Jim Wangers, who was an advertising guy. He was a client representative kind of guy. He was very close friends with John DeLorean, who was then the general manager of Pontiac. DeLorean was the driving force behind the GTO. The GTOs that we would get and other magazines would get were "Royal Pontiacs," which were really steamy cars. They were a lot faster than normal GTOs, but the car that was tested by Car & Driver in that infamous test was a Royal Pontiac. They'd tried to get a hold of a GTO Ferrari and they couldn't. The test was done on back straightaway at Daytona International Speedway. It was an incredible story, but made no sense.

Q: What's your take on Formula 1 at Indy?

A: I'd like to see all that Mickey Mouse stuff taken out of the infield. Give them a couple of fast sweepers and put them on the back straight and let them run down the back straightaway and down the front straightaway and see how great they really are.

Q: Would you talk a little bit about the first Cannonball Run?

A: Ah the Cannonball. The Cannonball was first run in 1971. You've got to remember that in 1971, Ralph Nader was in full cry. The government was really moving in on the automobile in terms of the Clean Air Act. Safety legislation was becoming a major, major cause celebre in the automobile field. So I decided that we would have a race across the country, from New York to Los Angeles. The reason for that was there's kind of a symbolism about the great drive West. From East to West was sort of the great theme in those days. So we set up an event with one rule: There are no rules. We started at the Red Ball Garage, which was on 32nd Street. It was a public garage where we kept our automobiles when we tested them. The destination was the Portofino Inn on the ocean in Redondo Beach, California, which at that time was owned by Mary Davis who was an early Cal Club race driver herself. It was a hangout for racers. Peter Revson had a condo there. A lot of the guys who raced at Ascot hung out at the Portofino. So it was a racer's hangout and a beautiful little hotel.

The object of the event was you got time card and there was time clock on the counter at the Red Ball Garage. You got your time slip there, and there was a clock on the desk of the Portofino Inn. Lowest was the fast time coast-to-coast. It was very simple. The first one was done in February of 1971. It's an interesting story, and I won't bore you with it. At that time, legend had it that Wilt Chamberlain had driven across the country in 36 hours all by himself. It had never been proven that he did it. He claimed he did it, but he was unclear about what had happened and why he did it. That was kind of urban legend. So, nobody had ever really done any cross-country running except for a man by the name of Ernest G. "Cannonball" Baker. Baker was a real character. He was a very interesting guy. He was the first commissioner of NASCAR, but he'd run at Indianapolis; he was a great motorcycle racer and in the 1920s he did a lot of running for various companies as a test driver. He would take a car and he'd run from point to point, establishing some kind of a record. In 1933, he ran an Auburn speedster coast to coast in 56½ hours. Alone. To me that was a staggering effort. He took a half-hour's sleep somewhere in

Kansas. The roads were never really much. West of Phoenix there were no roads. Corduroy roads, dirt roads.

I thought this was an awesome, awesome piece of work. We decided that we'd do it and the first one we did, we did alone. Robert Redford actually talked about doing it. He was really fascinated with the idea, but never went. He dropped out, and some other guy couldn't go and dropped, and I finally ended up driving it alone with my son, who was 14 years old and couldn't drive and just went along for the ride. Also, Jim Williams who now lives in Western New York and works for an ad agency in Rochester, who was then a young art director with the magazine, and Steve Smith, who I had worked with at Car and Driver and was one of the co-founders of Competition Press, a terrific writer. So the three of us launched and drove across the country and got lost in Twenty-Nine Palms, California. It was a terrible drive. It took us 41½ hours coast to coast. We came home and I wrote a column about it in the magazine. We got a challenge very shortly thereafter from Polish Racing Drivers of America. You probably know Oscar Koveleski. Polish Racing Drivers of America said, "We challenge you to the next Cannonball." I had called the event the Cannonball Baker Sea-to-Shining Sea Memorial Dash in Baker's name. "We challenge you to a race. We will beat you, if we can find California." They showed up with a van that somebody had built for them with four 55-gallon drums of fuel. The drivers were Oscar, Brad Niemcek, who was a public relations guy in New York City, and Tony Adamowicz, who has raced here many, many times. I remember Smith saw that thing and he said, "If that thing goes up, it's going to make Hiroshima look like a white flash." It was unbelievable. They ran out of gas in Albuquerque, 800 miles short. Gurney and I ran a Ferrari. It was a very difficult drive. We were in about eight hours of horrible snow in the Rocky Mountains, though we managed to get across the country in just under 36 hours, which established a coast-to-coast record that stood for a long time. We had a great deal of fun with it. Gurney and I still call each other teammates because of that idiotic drive. It was a great car. That car is now in the Bruce McCaw collection in Washington. It's very well preserved. My Challenger that I drove later in other Cannonballs and some other cars are going to be featured at the Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance. The Ferrari will be there, and some other cars. There's been the Cannonball Run movie. Siskel and Ebert listed it as one of the 10 worst movies. And, believe it or not, another one of those things is the works. Cannonball 3.

It was a great period. The last Run that we did was in 1979. David Heinz, the late David Heinz who raced here at Watkins Glen a great many times, and a car dealer from Savannah, Georgia, drove an XJ6 across the country in just under 33 hours. That was the final record. The last record. The ambulance that was in the movie Cannonball Run was the actual ambulance run by my wife, Pamela, and I and a doctor, who shall remain nameless or he probably would be kicked out of his profession if they knew what we did with that car. I'm doing a book right now for Motor Books International which is a history of the Cannonball. It will involve the stories, not just my stories. Peter Brock who, of course, drove disguised as a priest, and Donna Mae Mims who with Judy Stropus had the only accident, rolled a Cadillac limousine outside El Paso, Texas. Broke Donna Mae's arm. There are all sorts of wonderful stories and we've got lots of people like Oscar Koveleski and George Willig, the guy that climbed the World Trade Center, the much-lamented World Trade Center. We had a mad collection of people who ran. I'm doing it for Motor Books International and at first I decided I didn't want to do it. I had some other projects to work on that were more important to me, and my wife, Pamela, said, "Do it for your grandchildren." It's going to be a good story. We've got lots of photographs and lots of funny stories from all the people who were in it.

Q: Speaking of another Cannonball, you had your own newsletter for a while. What was your motivation for starting that? What were your experiences?

A: It probably was a mistake because it got me fired at Car & Driver. Dave Davis took umbrage at that and so he canned me. I just wanted to do something that was kind of my own and amusing. Car & Driver at that time was not doing any motorsports coverage, and still doesn't. I just wanted to kind of have a voice of my own and I had a great deal of fun doing it. Unfortunately my business and my life was so active that it was hard for me to do it all by myself. I hired a fellow by the name of Chuck Dressing who's still writing for Racer magazine. Chuck Dressing is a very, very talented writer. He's a very, very good student of the sport and was a major help to me. Chuck got other employment for more money and moved away and then I just couldn't do it any more. I just didn't have enough time to do it by myself. But it was great fun.

Q: Are you still working on the street rod?

A: Yes, we've been working on a street rod that we'll have finished here probably in time for Amelia Island, where it's going to be shown. It's kind of a 1950s sports car-slash-hot rod. A Viper car. A six-foot Viper. Gearbox in it. It's going to be a pretty neat little car.

Q: What is your take on Robert Lutz joining General Motors? Do you think he'll be able to turn that company around?

A: Bob Lutz is a brilliant, brilliant car guy. Very, very devoted to the automobile as a product. He will have an influence there, there's no doubt about it. It's not easy. General Motors is an enormous bureaucracy, much, much larger by a scale of three than Chrysler was. It's going to be a lot harder for him because there are layers of management that are entrenched. It's like trying to turn the government around. It's going to be difficult for him. But there's very, very interesting things coming along. There's an aluminum V-12 engine that General Motors will be producing in the very near future. Four-valve twin cam, that's already in the works. We've seen those engines. There's going to be very interesting engines. They're going to be doing those things and they're going to be building very interesting automobiles. The new CTS rear-drive Cadillac is a very good car. We've talked to them and driven them recently and it's pretty impressive. I think Lutz will make it even better. The major challenge that Lutz faces is Chevrolet. We all remember when the Bel Aire and the Impala were sort of the standard of American highways, in terms of entry-level automobiles and now that brand has become in my opinion, and the opinion of a lot of the guys in the industry, blurred. It's lost that kind of panache and power at the bottom, entry level in this marketplace. He's got some big challenges ahead of him. But if anybody can do it, he can. I'd say, just off the cuff, that if I was Ron Zarella I'd probably be polishing up my resume because I don't think there's room for those two at the top.

Q: What's your take on CART?

A: You heard it here first. CART will go out of business by the end of 2002. It's over. Most everybody in the business is convinced that it's over. It's chaos. They've lost the handle. I predicted they'd go out of business when IRL started. Everybody said I was nuts. I've been late. They're in terrible trouble.

Q: Do you think that this could really spell the end of American open-wheel road racing?

A: It's an interesting question. CART could disintegrate as quickly as a lot of people in the industry think it's going to, or at least become a shadow of itself, weaker, or it could go overseas, where they're going to have a lot more trouble because they're facing Mr. Ecclestone. We don't know what's going to happen, but it's going to cause an enormous rift and a hole in the schedules of places like Long Beach and Road America and Laguna Seca, Mid-Ohio, Toronto. Big-market events where these tracks depend on a CART race for their major showcase of the season. What's going to happen, who's going to fill that hole? Is Dr. Panoz going to fill it? Is the Rolex? Will the Frances' Great-American series do that? Will another open-wheel series rise up

out of the ashes of CART? I don't think anybody knows. It appears that Tony George is not interested in developing any more road races, but we don't know about that. It's going to be a sea-change in the way American open-wheel racing is done. No question about that. Now, I could be wrong. Grosfeld and Jerry Forsythe could turn it around, but everybody believes, everybody in the business at the top level, believes that the only way CART can be saved is it has to be taken out of Wall Street because they are serving two masters. They cannot operate as a publicly operated company where they got to keep the stock prices supported and run a successful motor sports operation. Probably the only guy that can do it is Forsythe. It's not good at this point. It's a grim situation.

They basically made a major, major tactical error, in my opinion. They cut the umbilical between American oval track racing at its core level – that is DIRT, Sprint cars, Midgets – that was the farm system that American open-wheel racing created, whether we like it or not. We love road racing, but the core appetite for motorsports in America is of two forms: Drag racing and oval-track racing, like it or not. We road-racing nuts have an acquired taste, kind of like single-malt scotch. But the beer-drinking, pick-up truck driving guy in the United States is an oval track enthusiast. Anybody that attempts to make a massive breakthrough in this industry by ignoring that formula of sports makes a mistake, especially at that level.

They basically veered off. Most of the guys that formed CART – Gnassi, Penske, Hobbs and others – were road-racing enthusiasts. They came from sports car backgrounds. So it was obvious that they would concentrate on creating a major open-wheel series in road racing. The problem is there is one 1,000-pound gorilla standing in the way, called the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. There's no way around it in the United States. What the Frances did, of course, brilliantly, was to create a farm system so that every kid that showed up on the grid at Charlotte Motor Speedway dragged with him thousands of enthusiasts. They came out of little places like Dundee and hundreds of little bullrings around the United States. So there was a farm system that was created by NASCAR, and for the most part the Indianapolis Motor Speedway through USAC, even though it was a thoroughly mismanaged operation. Triple-A before that had a core movement toward Indianapolis and the Indianapolis Motor Speedway radiated outward to other races on the championship trail. Once that umbilical cord was cut, we began to bring in brilliant race drivers from overseas, wonderful drivers. But, as I've said in print, they were strangers in a strange land. It was like the Bolshoi Ballet playing at the Atlanta Holiday Inn. What happened, ultimately, that was what would spell doom for them. I don't care how brilliant Helio Castroneves is, you're not going to put bodies in the grandstands in God's own United States with him. It just won't work, and that's what happened. Television ratings were terrible. Somebody is going to have to identify the fact that if American open-wheel motor racing is going to exist, it's going to have to deal with Americans. NASCAR proves that over and over again. The NASCAR model is magic. It just works because its farm system is so logical. And now we're losing open-wheel drivers. Penske is going to send Ryan Newman, a brilliant young driver. You're going to hear a lot about Ryan Newman in years to come. He's going to NASCAR. Kasey Kahne who's a brilliant, brilliant USAC driver. You're going to hear a lot more of. He's going to go to NASCAR. Give them their due, they're brilliant. But it's sucking the wind out of American oval-track racing. And the IRL is nothing to write home about either, except they have the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. I talked to Humpy Wheeler about this a year ago and he said that a great percentage of the crowds that show up, especially at the more northernmost Winston Cup races – and that includes here, Charlotte Motor Speedway, Richmond, Darlington, Atlanta – are disaffected oval-track enthusiasts. They've given up on their kind of sport, that they grew up with in Pennsylvania and in Indiana and in New York State, where these bullrings were the core of their enthusiasm and they've given up and gone south. It's a bigger marketing problem than anybody recognizes. And money won't secure it.

Q: Do you know the whereabouts of the Fangio Chevrolet?

A: The Fangio car? It's at his home. Fascinating car. Fascinating driver.

Q: Do you see any entry-level, rear-wheel-drive cars coming on? Like Corvette, Monte Carlo? These cars are disappearing.

A: We're going to see the entry-level cars – if you ever saw the movie "Fast and Furious" – that's where it's at. The little guys, the little Japanese cars that these kids are producing incredible horsepower numbers from. It's hard to imagine. I don't ever watch them or see them, but there are guys driving Hondas around in Southern California that are 10-second cars in the quarter-mile. It's unbelievable. These little rocket ships. And that's where the major trend with kids is. I don't see any rear-drive, entry-level cars in the marketplace. Of course, every time General Motors got one that seems to work, they cancel it. They'd get it about right to get rid of it. I think we're going to see some performance cars coming out of Saturn and elsewhere that are going to try to compete on the domestic level. Neon and others. But we've got to answer that challenge, because Hondas and little Toyotas are really very, very popular with the young kids.

Q: Talking about open-wheel, how about your take on Formula 1 and a possible historic series.

A: Formula 3000 is their start-up series and it's a very good one in Europe. Of course, it doesn't come here.

Q: What I meant was Ferrari, Williams and such are looking at having a second series.

A: Split the season up? I don't know. I don't know enough about it. You'll have to ask Bernie, he owns the whole deal. Formula 1 has escalated to a level that is way, way beyond anything else in terms of worldwide motorsports. If any of you have been to Indianapolis, or to any recent Formula 1 race, you'll recognize that it's almost unrecognizable compared to any other forms of motorsport. It's hard to say what they're going to do with it. I'm sure that there's going to be some worldwide impact. The Far Eastern races. We're on the verge of some international turmoil here, and I don't think anybody knows which way that's going to go. It would be interesting to hear what their long-range strategies are based on the new world situation. I've heard nothing about a second series. I've heard talk about that for NASCAR, but it doesn't seem to gain traction.

Q: Would the 3000 work here in the United States as a replacement for CART?

A: There seems to be no question that they're going to go to the same IRL formula, although for some idiotic reason they decided they don't want to have a rev-limiter which will only add expense and cost and make designers and the car owners spend more money to get a couple extra rpms and keep people in the grandstand, who, by the way, don't care about it. I don't know if the 3000 series would work. It certainly isn't rocket science to build a 3½-liter road-racing car. It's in turmoil now. I don't think anyone really knows how it's going to shake out. I could be totally wrong. CART could rise up tomorrow and be the greatest racing series in North America. I don't see that.

Q: Speedvision and other ones show a lot of Formula 2000 and the Toyota Atlantic series.

A: The Toyota Atlantic series is a good series, a very, very good series and a lot of very good young drivers are coming out of there. That needs support probably more than anything. That's a very good series. It's interesting though. Where are the car drivers coming from? Where did Jeff Gordon come from? Tony Stewart? You know where they come from? Midgets. You know where they're coming from? Non-wing Midgets and non-wing Sprint cars. If I was going to put a kid in a car right now, I'd stick him in a USAC Midget. The demand of car control at that level and at that kind of competition is a very, very interesting starter place. The competition is so

intense and so difficult and relentless, that good guys will rise to the surface. It's interesting that the guys that have run World of Outlaws in Sprint cars are not successful in NASCAR.

Q: Pro-rallying is something which Americans don't know about, even though it's been over here for a long, long time. It's real popular over in Europe. Down in Pennsylvania, down in Wellsboro, they've got a nice rally. Do you think it will ever gain acceptance over here?

A: Cricket's popular in England, too. No, I'm sorry! It's a wonderful sport. It's a great participation sport. It's tremendous competition. A great bunch of people. But the fact that you can't put spectators anywhere near it is a problem. They've tried rally-cross and things like that. It's an acquired taste again in Europe, and it has been very important in Europe for years. It just doesn't seem to gain traction here. I'm not quite sure why. It's too bad that the guys in SCORE, the off-road racing guys on the West Coast, can't hook up sort of a universal formula with the East Coast rally guys, because it's basically the same philosophy: Drive like lunatics on dirt roads. But the twain shall never meet. It would be nice if they could because they're the same bunch of people, with just different cars.

Q: Why does it seem that over the last several years there are more major injuries and deaths in motorsports?

A: It's a dangerous sport. It's always been a dangerous sport. I've said in print, whether we like it or not, it is a sport that separates it from other sports. Ernest Hemingway said there are really only three sports: motor racing, mountain climbing and bull fighting. He said the rest of them are games. Unfortunately we don't like it to happen. But, on the other hand, and it's hard to say this, but it lends a certain kind of majesty, this danger, this element of danger and paying the ultimate price, is what makes motor racing special. And, if you turn it into a bunch of bumper cars, where everyone can go like blazes and never be hurt, some of that element of the pinnacle of this sport will disappear. We hate to see it happen and fortunately it isn't happening as much as it used to. If you look down at eight of the Indianapolis starting fields from 1915 to 1965 you will find out of 33 drivers, 50 percent died. Another half of that field received debilitating injuries. For example, in the 1955 Indianapolis 500, eight of the top 10 finishers died in race cars. That's unbelievable. The mortality rate is much, much lower than it was. We're shocked by it. It's terrible, but thank God, it's radically better than it was.

Of Formula 1 Grand Prix drivers, half of them were either terribly injured or died in a racing car. Burned up. We finally got the cars good enough and so that we finally got them to wear helmets and roll bars in the 1950s and seat belts so they weren't pitched out on their heads, and then we got fire. We went through fire all through the '60s. Finally we got fuel cells. Now we've got crushable body structures and halcyon systems and other things. It is safer. It is definitely safer. The speeds are up.

Q: What do you see, other than say go-karts that have to go to Europe, as the minor league of open wheel racing in this country? It seems to me there is no real support or not as much support for those types of racing here.

A: The problem is here, say, a young man wants to run as an amateur race driver. He wants to start out. He wants to drive a race car. He wants to obtain a road-racing career. He's got to join the SCCA, and if he's lucky, if he's lucky, and he's able to have enough money to do pretty much what he wants to, he might get a chance to race 30 times a year. Now in Europe, he can race 10 times a month. I think the question of our kids not being successful in road racing is the fact that they don't get enough seat time. There just isn't enough motor racing. Look, what's the Formula Atlantic schedule? Sixteen races or 18, there're not very many. So a kid who wants to start out in the United States flat doesn't get very much racing. Alex Gurney, Dan's son, is racing in that British Formula 3 series. He raced twice a weekend and they're in those cars literally

every day of the week. Not here in the United States, and I think that's primarily a question of just simple experience, just honing your skills. We don't have that much here. We're such a large country. We race here, and maybe next weekend you've got to go to Indianapolis Raceway Park and then you've got to go to Heartland Park. To chase the SCCA national schedule in the United States requires a lot of money and a lot of travel. So it's hard. I think that's one of the reasons. I think that's one of the reasons why we don't have that, and we should have. We've got 280 million people here and the biggest core of enthusiasm for this sport anywhere worldwide and we're still not very well represented in CART or at Indianapolis or in the IRL.

Q: Do you have plans to keep up the One Lap of America?

A: Oh yes. The One Lap of America is going to start in Rochester in the High Falls District next year. High Falls Brewing is very much involved. The City of Rochester is very much involved with it. It's going to start the third of May downtown. We're going to have a big crowd down there Friday night. We're going to have fun. We're going to go to Indianapolis Raceway Park, run the drag strip and the course. And then we're going to run a dirt track in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Then we're going to do the Continental Divide Raceway in Boulder, Colorado. Then a new little racetrack in Sandia, New Mexico, outside Albuquerque, and then Texas World Speedway. We're going to do Road Atlanta and then Summit Point and then back to Rochester. It will be fun. Going to do some serious car racing, too.

Q: (Question about the Trans-Am series)

A: I raced in Trans-Am in '71. It was one of the great series of all times. Without reflecting negatively on my friends at the SCCA, no other club's managed to botch up the three greatest racing series there's ever been in the United States: the Can-Am, the Formula 5000 and the Trans-Am. The Trans-Am is a hollow representation of what it used to be. The original Trans-Am cars were basically production-based cars. Five-liters. They were silhouette cars. Now you've got other idiotic representational cars. Paul Gentilozzi driving a Jaguar around? That thing is no more a Jaguar and less than that little TC out there. I don't know what they're doing. The Trans-Am is a great series, but it's got to go back to some semblance of production-based automobiles or else it's meaningless. That was the great charm of Trans-Am. And, of course, when the Trans-Am was in its prime, it had some the greatest race drivers in the world: Mark Donohue, Parnelli Jones, George Follmer. Good God, what a war that was! That was glorious motor racing. I wish Trans-Am would come back, but they've got to do some major, major re-examination of what they're doing. Jupiter chassis stock cars are interesting, but they don't belong on the course.

Q: (Question about the Trans-Am series and high-performance cars)

A: We don't have any more muscle cars, do we? They're all gone. It's going to be hard to do. We've lost all of the Challengers and the Barracudas and the 302s and the GTOs. All that stuff is gone. The rear-drive, high-performance American automobile is a thing of the past. I don't know how we're going to get it back. I know the guys at the SCCA do a good job are trying to get that thing right. But it should be a series that should stand on its own. It's kind of right now sort of a lounge act. It's a support series. It's not right. It should be a big deal. It was a great series, and I'd love to see it come back.