CHAPTER 12

Stories from the 1970s

In January 1970 the sleet whistled across the barren Lancashire moors and lashed the windows of our sitting room. Surprisingly, a call came from the Porsche racing department at Weissach.

'Herr Redman, please come to test the new Porsche 908/03.' Certain that the 908/03 would be selected for the next Targa Florio, I flew to Stuttgart where I found that it was snowing as well. Engineer Helmut Flegel picked me up at the airport and, on the way to the Porsche's private track at Weissach, I asked politely how we expected to test in the snow.

'Herr Redman, don't vorry. Herr Director has some special material from ze airport.'

Ferdinand Piëch, the august director of Porsche motorsport and grandson of Ferdinand Porsche, the company's founder, was not a man to be dissuaded from his decisions. In fact, when I arrived at the Weissach track, it had been neatly ploughed and its surface indeed was black.

I did three slow laps to feel out the track and warm up the car before accelerating to race pace on the fourth. Whistling down the straight at a mighty clip, the car suddenly rotated 360 degrees and slid off into a snow bank, fortunately without damage. As I walked back onto the track to understand what made me spin, I instantly found myself seated on the asphalt. A few minutes later, Herr Piëch and his coterie arrived to investigate.

'Vat is ze problem, Herr Redman?' he asked.

'This is the problem,' I replied, taking a few quick steps and sliding for yards on a layer of black ice. That revelation proved to be sufficient for everyone to call it a day.

'This iss the last time vee ever test at Weissach in ze vinter,' declared a frustrated Piëch. I flew home to England the same afternoon.

The vicissitudes of racing fortunes

Friends, teammates and even team owners have suggested that I was too reserved in public and with the press, a proxy way of saying that I was terrible at self-promotion. So ingrained is my reputation for unproductive modesty that it has become a cornerstone of my humble mythology. Sam Posey delights in emphasising this embarrassing fact in his Afterword to this memoir, an eloquent tribute originally written when I was the honoree at the Road Racing Drivers Club's 2013 Legends banquet. (This and other driver salutes are in his latest book, *When the Writer Meets the Road*.)

In truth, Sam's characterisation isn't wrong. I was shy in many ways, particularly when it came to self-promotion. Yet, attendees at the Kyalami Nine Hours in 1967 might have concluded I was an extrovert. Name one other driver with the temerity to serenade his peers with *On Ilkla Moor Baht 'at (On Ilkley Moor Without*

OPPOSITE In the 1970s my career evolved towards maturity and contentment with racing success in America, above all in Formula 5000. *Porsche-Werkfoto*

ABOVE Following Piers Courage's death in 1970, Frank Williams asked me to drive his Formula 1 team's De Tomaso: the car was withdrawn during practice for the British Grand Prix at Brands Hatch and I failed to qualify for the German Grand Prix at Hockenheim. *Sutton Images*

a Hat) in an incomprehensible Yorkshire accent while expecting them to like it? Yes, copious amounts of alcohol were involved, the signature conclusion of every racing weekend. It would be a cop-out to say that I always let my driving do the talking because there were racers around me who drove brilliantly and marketed themselves with equal skill; Sir Stirling Moss, Sir Jackie Stewart, Mario Andretti, Derek Bell and David Hobbs come to mind. I don't deny that I could have done better in managing my opportunities, some of which were simply foolish but others tragic. With Frank Williams, I experienced both.

Piers Courage, heir to the Courage brewing fortune, was not only Frank Williams' driver but also Frank's close friend. Williams had purchased a De Tomaso Formula 1 car that proved to be heavy and slow, and Piers struggled in the early 1970 races. At the Zandvoort circuit in Holland, something broke in the front of the car at the high-speed *Tunnel Oost* corner, launching it into an embankment where it came to pieces and caught fire. This inferno was especially vicious, fuelled by the magnesium that Gian Paolo Dallara, the car's designer, had employed in the chassis and suspension.

Piers Courage was 28 years old.

When drivers died, teams carried on and one family's tragedy became another's good fortune. Shortly after the accident, I received a call from Frank. Would I like to take over Piers' seat for the British Grand Prix at Brands Hatch? We came to a quick agreement. Early in practice, Frank and the race crew had an intense conversation and suddenly withdrew the car with no further discussion. I never knew what the mechanics found but was always unsettled that they may have discovered a flaw that led to Piers' death, and might have injured me.

Frank, who remained a believer in my abilities, put me in the car again for the German Grand Prix at Hockenheim and hinted at a continuing relationship. Nowhere were my poor PR skills demonstrated to worse effect than in a conversation with Frank at that time.

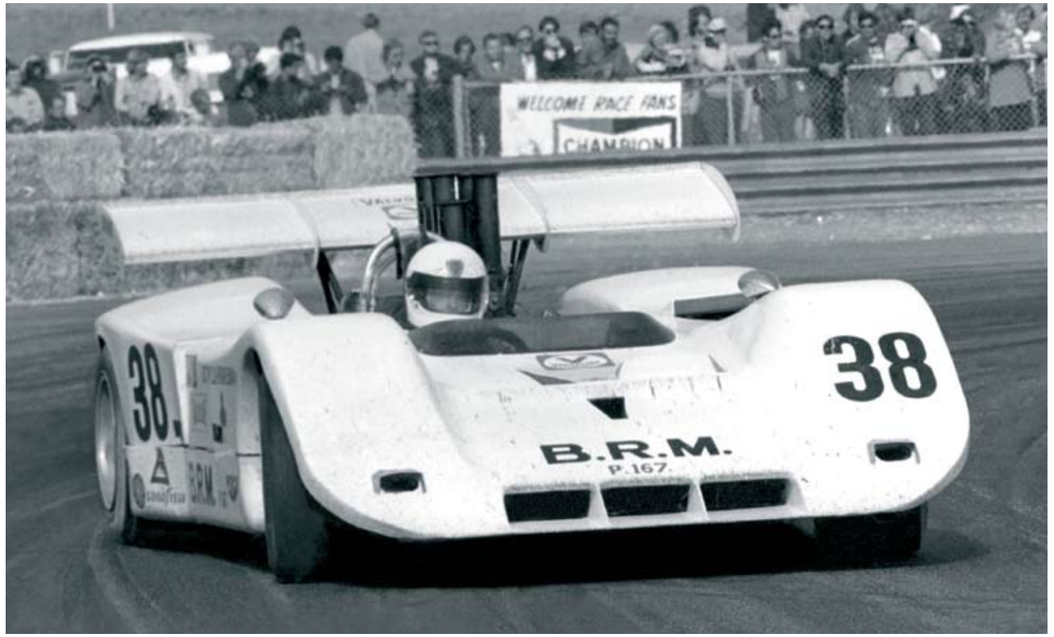
'Brian, you are going to be World Champion, aren't you?' Frank inquired. Instead of responding with a casual, *'Yes, of course I am'*, I reacted in typical Redman fashion. *'Good Lord, Frank, I shouldn't think so.'*

Frank Williams went on to build a series of Grand Prix cars that made him one of the most successful Formula 1 entrants. Williams Grand Prix Engineering won no fewer than seven World Championships, four after a road accident that rendered Frank a quadriplegic. The Williams list of World Champions is distinguished: Alan Jones, Keke Rosberg, Nelson Piquet, Nigel Mansell, Alain Prost, Damon Hill and Jacques Villeneuve – with no Redman among them. Damn!

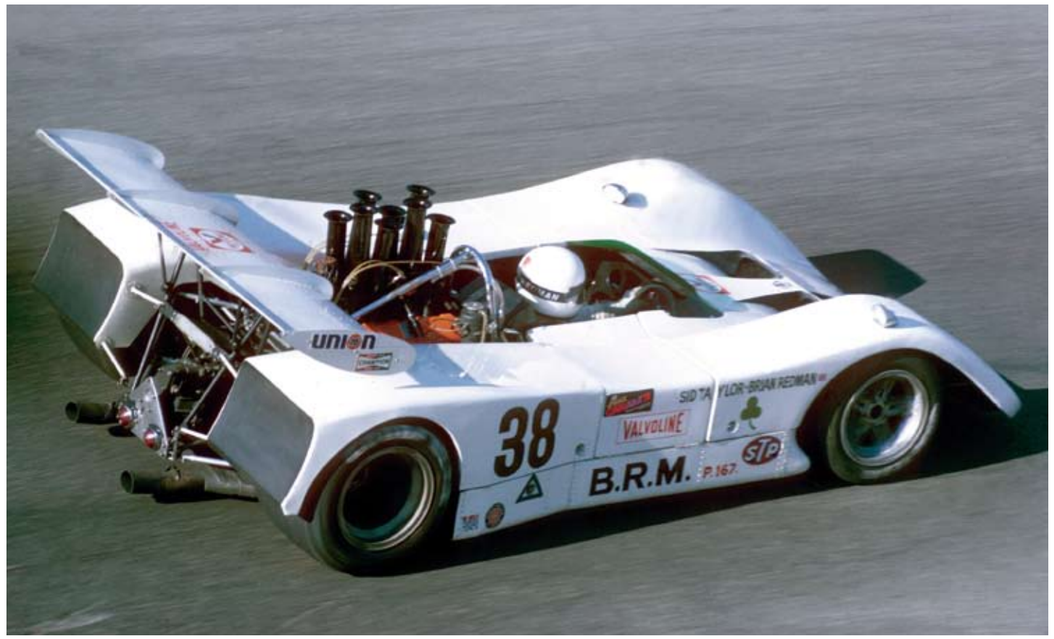
A leg up from Big Lou

When fans asked Peter Gethin about the symbolism of the two circling sharks on his helmet, he would shrug it off as *'just a design'* but insiders knew better. One shark represented Sid Taylor and the other Louis Stanley. The rather unpopular Gethin was, ironically, Sid's most successful driver as they won the 1969 European Formula 5000 Championship together with a McLaren M10A, but Peter was also Sid's most caustic critic. Whilst one can only surmise why Peter viewed his relationship with Sid as predatory, the story behind his disdain for Louis Stanley was legend.

Following Bruce McLaren's death in 1970, Peter was drafted into that sombre team as Denny Hulme's partner in Formula 1. When Gethin's relationship with McLaren team principal Teddy Mayer turned sour, he left mid-season in 1971 and was hired by Stanley to drive the BRM P160 for the rest of the year. During the Italian Grand Prix at Monza, only Peter's second race with the team, Stanley spent the entire weekend openly soliciting Frenchman François Cevert to replace his existing driver for the following season. Peter's ultimate indignity came at Saturday night's pre-race dinner when he was directed by Stanley to move to the foot of the table so that negotiations with Cevert could be conducted at the head. A delicious twist of circumstances



BELOW Sid Taylor orchestrated three races for me – two Interserie, one Can-Am – with this BRM P167 in the autumn of 1971. *Bob Tronolone*



ABOVE After Interserie wins at Imola and Hockenheim, Sid Taylor took the BRM P167 to America, where I finished fourth in the Can-Am race at Laguna Seca.
Bob Tronolone

unfolded the following day. Exiting the final corner on the last racing lap, third-placed Peter's BRM unceremoniously shoved second-placed Cevert's Tyrrell out of his way and stormed on to pip Ronnie Peterson's March at the line. It was the unappreciated Peter Gethin who gave the unappreciative Louis Stanley a fine BRM Formula 1 win at the Italian Grand Prix, by a slim one-hundredth of a second.

Louis Stanley – 'Big Lou' as Dan Gurney had nicknamed him in 1960 – may have been imperious, bombastic, vain and intransigent, but he was a true lover of racing. After marrying the sister of Sir Alfred Owen, industrial magnate and saviour of British Racing Motors, Stanley assumed BRM's chairmanship and engaged the sport at large. In 1967, as Jackie Stewart was facing uphill odds in the battle for racing safety, Stanley founded the Grand Prix Medical Service. Later he served as a trustee of the Jim Clark Foundation, originated the Jo Siffert Advisory Council (honouring the only driver ever killed in a BRM), and worked to improve fire safety in motor racing. Stanley even tested early forms of fire-retardant racing suits himself, walking through flames in them.

His obituary in *The Independent* ended in this salute. *'With terrifying frequency, like many of his contemporaries, [Stanley] was obliged to pay dues in the currency of lost friends. But he was not prepared simply to don a sad but tolerant face while mourning each tragedy. Instead, he did everything he could to bring about the changes that are taken for granted today.'*

Around the time of Gethin's famous victory at Monza, Stanley agreed to a suggestion put to him by Sid Taylor. In preparation for the 1972 Can-Am season, BRM upgraded its P154 (commissioned in 1970 by Canadian stores millionaire George Eaton) to P167 configuration, and Sid borrowed it for the last two Interserie races of 1971. Interserie racing rules were similar to those of the North American Can-Am series, and attracted the same sort of 'big-banger' sports cars. The costs were reasonable, the racing was exciting, entrants were plentiful and the level of driver competence quite good. For BRM, it was a great way to put an undeveloped Can-Am car to a real-life test without attracting much attention. Castrol provided the sponsorship and I was hired to drive.

In early September we took the BRM to Imola, Italy for our first event. It poured with rain from start to finish, favouring drivers and cars comfortable in wet conditions. The P167, typical of every car designed by Tony Southgate, was excellent in the rain and I was able to fly. Not only did I win, my advantage was so commanding that I lapped the entire field. As recounted in Chapter 6, Ferrari's Mauro Forghieri, there to run the *Scuderia*'s new 312PB, was among the embarrassed entrants. After the race *Ingegnere* Forghieri invited me to visit the factory to discuss a possible drive in one of the 312PB sports racers for the 1972 World Championship for Makes.

He met me at Maranello and immediately the Ferrari politics began. It seemed that my Formula 2/Formula 1 demurral had not been forgotten and I was reminded of Ferrari's habitual shortage

ABOVE Back in the Ferrari fold, here in 1973 at Dijon where Jacky Ickx and I followed the Pescarolo/ Larrousse Matra-Simca home.
Getty Images/Rainer Schlegelmilch

BELOW Jacky Ickx and I, with the entire Ferrari team, savour our triumph in the 1973 Monza 1,000Kms. Winning for Ferrari in Italy is an indescribable feeling.
Brian Redman collection

of forgiveness. When Italian posturing had run its course, we worked out a contract with little difficulty and I signed. Drivers in that era received no share of the prize money but my salary was something of a breakthrough at the time – the princely sum of £20,000 a year – and the first time Ferrari ever paid its sports car drivers.

Three weeks after Imola I won again with the BRM P167 at Hockenheim. Encouraged by these successes, Sid arranged to have the car shipped to California for the last two Can-Am races of the season, at Laguna Seca and Riverside. I qualified sixth at Laguna Seca and finished fourth. At Riverside Howden Ganley replaced me so I could attend Jo Siffert's funeral in Switzerland and he finished a very creditable third.

More Formula 1

The 'Heritage' section of the McLaren website says this of me. *'[Redman] had a handful of races for McLaren in 1972 during which period he convinced those he worked with on the team that he had the talent for F1 if not, perhaps, the inclination.'* For the record, the 'handful' comprised four races: I finished second in the non-championship Rothmans 50,000 at Brands Hatch, fifth at Monaco and the Nürburgring, and ninth at the French Grand Prix. McLaren's historian is only part right in the opinion expressed about me. I was a driver for hire and, as a matter of timing as much as preference, more financially attractive offers came through sports car racing and Formula 5000 than Formula 1.

In 1973 Don Nichols asked me to drive a third Tony Southgate-designed Formula 1 Shadow in the end-of-season United States Grand Prix at Watkins Glen. The race itself wasn't particularly noteworthy – dirt in the Shadow's throttle slides stopped the engine and the restart push resulted in disqualification – but the weekend will always be remembered for a different reason.

I had pitted during Saturday morning practice when the activities suddenly were red-flagged and the track was closed. Jacky Ickx rolled into the pits to tell us why; an appalling accident had just taken the life of François Cevert. Handsome, charming François drove the second Formula 1 Tyrrell as Jackie Stewart's understudy and, considering the ground he had made up on his mentor, was destined to be his racing heir. There was much speculation on what caused the accident but Jackie later provided a careful analysis of the situation.

'Cevert crashed violently in the uphill Esses heading onto the back of the circuit. Fighting the car... he brushed the curb on the left, whipped across the track and hit the guardrail on the right. The car began to spin, and he swerved back across the track at 150mph and hit the outside guardrail almost head-on.'

François Cevert was 29 years old.

Stewart, who secretly was planning to retire immediately after Watkins Glen, chose to quit on the spot, foregoing the completion of his 100th Grand Prix but still claiming that season's World Championship title. The rest of us raced, as we always did.

My abbreviated drive in the Shadow at Watkins Glen impressed Don Nichols sufficiently for him to ask me to join his Formula 1 team full-time for 1974. I turned him down, not out of fear for my safety but because I thought I'd be better off staying in the USA with the Carl Haas/Jim Hall Chaparral Formula 5000 team with which I'd just had a successful season. In my place, Don hired Peter Revson.

Peter was the nephew of Charles Revson, the Revlon cosmetics magnate, and exemplified every gossip column's concept of a wealthy, handsome, daring driver. Peter was casually at home with everyone in the paddock, especially the beautiful women. His racing motto, 'Speed with Style', summarised perfectly his approach to life. In practice for the South African Grand Prix, a poorly machined titanium ball joint caused a suspension failure that resulted in a crash and Peter's death. In tribute, Bob Akin, his friend and mine, adopted Peter's 'Speed with Style', perfectly expressing the standards by which Akin ran many immaculate and successful race teams.

Peter Revson was 35 years old.

Before the next race, Nichols called to ask me to take Peter's place for the rest of the season. Since his invitation came just after I'd learned that the

BELOW The 1972 Monaco Grand Prix, the first of my three McLaren Grand Prix drives, was run in torrential rain from start to finish. I brought the M19A home in fifth place.
Sutton Images

ABOVE I close on Tim Schenken's Surtees TS14 in the 1972 United States Grand Prix, but this one-off outing in a BRM P180 ended with engine failure.
Bill Oursler

ABOVE In 1974, I did three early-season races in Don Nichols' Shadow DN3, my final foray in Formula 1, before returning to the more congenial – and better paying – world of Formula 5000 in North America. *Getty Images/ Rainer Schlegelmilch*

1974 US Formula 5000 Championship had been abandoned because of the oil crisis, I signed up immediately. Our results were mixed.

For the Spanish Grand Prix at Jarama, our first race together, Tony Southgate had replaced all of the Shadow's titanium ball joints with steel, adding a bit of unsprung weight but eliminating our mutual concerns about safety. During practice I flattened the rear wing for more overtaking speed and in the race I dragged the Shadow and myself from 21st to seventh place, a decent finish but not without controversy. At the airport, Denny 'The Bear' Hulme accosted me, ranting that he couldn't pass me on the straight, and I held him up in the corners. I found this confusing as Denny finished ahead of me in sixth. Still, Hulme's tirade made me long for the friendly, respectful atmosphere of Formula 5000 in America.

The Shadow failed to finish the Belgian Grand Prix at Zolder but Monaco was next and I hoped for a better result on the principality's anachronistic circuit. During Saturday's practice I received a call from Carl Haas, who told me that the 1974 Formula 5000 season in America was back on. The lure of driving for Hall and Haas again was irresistible. Moreover, the American series promised to be the most competitive open-wheel racing in the world. Nichols was gracious and we parted friends, but not before sharing an unfortunate racing drama.

On the opening lap of the Monaco Grand Prix, Hulme's McLaren caused a cascade of smash-ups by tangling with Jean-Pierre Beltoise in his BRM, taking them both out and leading to crashes by Arturo Merzario (ISO Marlboro), Carlos Pace (Surtees) and me, while Vittorio Brambilla (March), Vern Schuppan (Ensign) and Tim Schenken (Trojan) also sustained damage and had their races ruined by lengthy pit-stops. As far as I know, not one of we seven abused drivers lectured Hulme on racing etiquette as he had me.

Don Nichols' Shadows were good cars run by professionals, but the team was snakebitten by bad luck. On my return to Formula 5000, my Shadow Formula 1 seat was filled by Tom Pryce. During the 1977 South African Grand Prix, the talented Welshman was in a string of cars dicing for position. Directly ahead, Hans Stuck's March-Cosworth swerved to avoid two marshals running across the track to put out a small fire in the Shadow of Renzo Zorzi, Tom's teammate. Only one marshal made it. Pryce, foot to the floor with his view blocked by Stuck's car, hit the second, killing him instantly. Tom, struck on the head by the marshal's fire extinguisher, sadly died too.

Tom Pryce was 28 years old. Frederik Jensen van Vuuren was 19.

Vasek Polak

I first met Vasek (*Vah-shek*) Polak in 1969 at Daytona, where I was driving a factory Porsche 908. By that time, Vasek, a Czech emigré who fled his native land in 1948, had built his independent Porsche and Volkswagen repair business into such a phenomenon that Porsche allowed him to open its first single-marque dealership in America. That entrepreneurial success fuelled a growing stable of increasingly sophisticated racing cars, all Porsches of course. When it came time for Vasek to name his driver for the 1973 Can-Am season, he spoke with me but ultimately selected Jody Scheckter. Many years later, Vasek spent a long evening drinking and sharing stories with historic racer Joe Hish.

'*Why Jody and not Brian*,' Hish asked?

'*Brian was a more experienced driver but more laid back*,' Polak admitted, '*while Scheckter was more aggressive and the better talker.*'

Better talker? I now feel doubly insulted! Vasek then went on to make an extraordinary admission.

'*Not giving that ride to Brian was the biggest mistake of my racing career.*'

While I appreciate the retrospective compliment, Jody was a hot property at that time and, while he was often quicker over a single lap, I was better at finishing races. If only I had sold myself harder and helped Vasek not make that mistake!

Vasek and I would meet once or twice a year at races scattered around the USA but nothing happened between us. In the autumn

BELOW My Formula 5000 performances in America in 1973 led Vasek Polak to invite me to join his Can-Am team alongside Jody Scheckter for the last two races that year. *Porsche-Werkfoto*

of 1973, perhaps he was feeling some regret. My phone rang.

'*Brian, this is Vasko!*' he shrieked, using his preferred nickname. '*You know I run Jody Scheckter in Can-Am in Porsche 917/10? Now, I have second car for you to drive at Laguna Seca and Riverside. Come to Willow Springs and test your car, and also you drive Jody's.*'

Willow Springs is a fast and somewhat remote circuit about an hour north of Los Angeles, private enough to be the destination track for car testing. I arrived there one blustery day in September to find Vasek's two identical 917/10s sitting in pitlane. I met with crew chief Alwin Springer to go over the idiosyncrasies I would encounter in testing these fearsome 1,100bhp turbocharged monsters. Alwin was one of the few people in the world who could build a 917 engine from scratch and later became head of Porsche Motorsports North America. My trust and confidence were high.

After I drove both cars, Vasek impatiently waited for my comparative assessments.

'*What they like, what they like?*' he asked. I replied that my car was a bit loose and difficult to drive quickly, but that Jody's car had a much more solid feel and could be driven harder, with more confidence.

'*They same, they same*,' Vasek insisted. Well, I thought, my car probably just needs a bit of development. Quite happily, I signed on to drive Vasek's second Porsche 917/10 in the last two races of the 1973 Can-Am.

Following a rather miserable experience at Laguna Seca where engine problems cut short our day, the team went on to the Riverside International Raceway. A long-legged track nestled beneath the San Bernardino Mountains just 55 miles east of Los Angeles, Riverside was the preferred location for most important west coast racing and the outdoor set for many Hollywood films. Racers knew Riverside as a fast, dangerous and wonderful circuit. In 1973 the track hosted the grandly titled *Los Angeles Times Grand Prix*, the last round of the Can-Am series. The Porsche 917/10 field was strong – George Follmer and Charlie Kemp racing for Bobby Rinzler, Hurley Haywood in a single Brumos-sponsored car, Jody and me in Vasek's twin entries – but we were all resigned to racing for second place.

Mark Donohue dominated that year's Can-Am driving the ultimate iteration of the Porsche 917, the Penske-owned and Sunoco-sponsored 917/30, winner of all but two races. Not only had the Porsche 917/30 made obsolete the once-dominant 11-car McLaren juggernaut, but also it was a full generation more advanced than our five 917/10s. And, of course, Mark's car was beautifully developed and perfectly prepared, signatures of every Roger Penske entry, then and now. In practice, Donohue quickly proved to be in a class of his own, turning laps that were an astounding three seconds faster than the best of the rest.

Late Friday afternoon, I felt something wasn't quite right in the rear of my car while pressing on at 190mph through the fast kink, the absolute worst place for a problem to happen. The kink was near the end of Riverside's drag strip that doubled as the back straight for the road course. This fast left-hander had been created artificially by a line of temporary cement barriers that directed our cars away from the drag racers' finish line and linked the kink to a short chute leading to a banked bowl at the track's southern end. It wasn't hard for any good driver in a well-prepared car to stay flat through the kink, but the barriers left no run-off area when something went wrong, as it did for me. After getting the car under control, I returned the car to pitlane where the mechanics and I conducted an inspection. To our surprise, we found a broken right rear suspension support tube, a major structural component of the chassis. It is always serious when the integrity of the chassis is compromised as the reduced stiffness sets off a cascade of handling problems.

Vasek's mechanics competently welded the broken tube but again, on Saturday afternoon, I felt something in the car suddenly go amiss. One more pitlane inspection exposed one more fractured structural tube. For a driver, a single break in the chassis would have been rare

and worrisome, but two were deeply alarming. Curiously, Friday's repair held perfectly and this was a new break in a different part of the same right rear suspension. By now, I was becoming extremely concerned. Following my usual sleepless Saturday night, I told Vasek on Sunday morning that I didn't think the car was safe and that I didn't want to race it.

'*Brian, the guys work all night*,' he said. '*The car is perfect, perfect, but – you don't wanna drive, it's okay. I understand.*'

Vasek's sincerity was convincing. He had a solid reputation as a very good mechanic and a savvy team manager. Besides, he left the choice to me, without conditions. I softened. Vasek was probably right, the car would be perfect, perfect.

'*OK, Vasek, I'll drive.*'

In Sunday's qualifying heat race, I outran the other four 917/10s, finishing second behind Donohue. In the Cup Final, the car's demons returned; something significant broke at close to 200mph in the same high-speed kink that earlier had twice fractured a chassis tube. The car swerved sideways, pointing to the outside of the track. When I caught the slide, it demonically switched back and headed towards the cement drag-strip barriers. Sawing vigorously at the wheel, I eventually managed to get the car to face in the right direction, although the rear wheels continued to slew side to side in a frightening series of violent fishtails.

Gingerly, I crept back to the pits, to be confronted by a screaming Vasek.

'*What the matter, what the matter?*' he roared.

'*What's the matter?*' I shouted back. '*Something big let go in the rear of the car.*'

ABOVE The first lap of my Can-Am qualifying heat at Riverside International Raceway, Mark Donohue leading in his all-conquering Porsche 917/30, me close behind in Vasek Polak's older Porsche. We finished in this order. *Getty Images/ Rainer Schlegelmilch*

ABOVE In the Can-Am Cup Final at Riverside, my Porsche suffered an unusual suspension failure – and eventually a disquieting truth emerged about the car. *McKlein*

The mechanics lifted the tail, disclosing a broken Heim joint, one of the articulated bearings connected to the rod that controlled the directional stability of the right rear wheel. Heim joints are so critical that they are routinely over-engineered and so strong that failure is very rare. As I peered closely at the suspension with suspicious intensity, I became chilled to the core, suddenly aware of the distressing truth behind the car's difficult handling and terrifying sequence of structural problems.

My car was not equipped with the twin parallel-linked suspension characteristic of a true 917/10, which meant that I had trusted my life to a car that was not a 917/10 at all. Now that I looked at the suspension carefully, I realised that Vasek's second car was the 1969 ex-Siffert Porsche 917PA disguised as a 1973 factory-built 910/10. It was the same car I had driven during John Wyer's pre-1970 testing, recently purchased by Vasek, inexpensively no doubt. What made the realisation so disquieting was that the four-year-old 917PA chassis had been designed for a relatively modest 580bhp engine, almost exactly half the power of the behemoth that, moments earlier, propelled me around Riverside. When the combination of the engine's huge torque and the kink's heavy cornering forces twisted the car's chassis, the lighter tubing couldn't handle the stresses and broke, three times. Then and only then, did the confronted Vasek and his mechanics admit their deceit. Cunning Vasek had cloned the bodywork of Scheckter's real 917/10, fitted it to the well-used 917PA, and inserted his 'spare' 1,100bhp turbocharged engine. Vasek had made no upgrades to the original frame nor had he prepared the suspension for the immense torque of his turbo motor. Unsurprisingly, my weekend was over. Surprisingly, my relationship with Vasek Polak was not.

Vasek became very wealthy catering to Southern California's insatiable appetite for new Porsches while quietly and economically acquiring wonderful racing cars rendered obsolete by newer models. He also bought all the NOS (new-old-stock) parts that dealers, disbanded teams and the factory itself decided to dump. Thirty years later, Vasek's vintage 917s, 908s, 906s and RSRs became extremely valuable. The affluent collectors who purchased them at eye-watering prices also required Vasek's stream of replacement components to restore the cars and keep them running in historic racing. Vasek had cornered the historic Porsche market.

Despite the fact that Vasek almost killed me, he and I became personally very close. He died in 1997, in textbook manner, following an accident when driving his recently collected Porsche Turbo S on an *autobahn* near Regensburg, Germany. Something made Vasek lose control and the officials estimated that he left the road at over 100mph. Badly injured, he was flown back to America in a private jet air ambulance. Whilst it was stopped for fuel in Great Falls, Montana, Vasek's heart said 'enough', and he succumbed. His collection manager, Carl Thompson, and I were appointed as the estate trustee advisors on the disposal of his vast number of Porsche racing cars and his huge inventory of equally rare spare parts. All proceeds funded the Vasek and Anna Maria Polak Charitable Foundation, his philanthropic beneficiary.

Unhappily, Riverside's demise preceded Vasek's. California's frenetic late 20th-century development was omnivorous and, in 1989, Riverside became another example of 'Where the hand of man hath trod'. To the regret of every driver who flicked a car through turns two and three or chased a competitor across the up-and-down terrain between eight and 13, or flew down the 1.1-mile back straight and through the kink with his right foot planted, Riverside International Raceway succumbed to the tender mercies of 7mph bulldozers. When the developers had completed their work, 'The House that Dan Gurney Built' had mutated into yet another boring Golden State residential tract where life centred on a requisite perky mall, with 'shoppes'.

My Can-Am drives continued to be difficult even before my near-fatal accident at St Jovite, Canada in 1977. Two were memorable for opposite reasons.

LEFT Vasek Polak and I share easy camaraderie before our brief, bizarre and incredibly dangerous Can-Am experience in 1973. Despite my mishap, we became close friends and I served as an executor of his motorsports estate. *Brian Redman collection*

ABOVE I drove a Can-Am Ferrari 712 at Watkins Glen in 1974 and wished I hadn't – the rear suspension failed at 170mph.
LAT

Can-Am in a Ferrari

In July 1974, for the Formula 5000 race at Watkins Glen, a Can-Am race was added to the weekend's schedule. On the Saturday afternoon, just before the Can-Am heat race, Luigi 'Coco' Chinetti Jr, son of the Ferrari distributor and organiser of many racing programmes, asked if I would like to drive the NART (North American Racing Team) Ferrari 712 in the race because its regular driver, Sam Posey, was feeling unwell. Since I hadn't practised in the car, I was concerned that I wouldn't be allowed to take part, but Luigi said he had it all arranged. I was to start at the back of the grid and do my best, and he thoughtfully added that I could retire if I were uncomfortable driving the car. For $1,000, I agreed.

The five-minute warning horn had just sounded when a journalist ran up and asked what I was doing climbing into Posey's Ferrari. When I replied that Posey wasn't feeling well, he warned me that Sam had strained muscles and ligaments when the 712's brake pedal suddenly went to the floor. This didn't fit my definition of 'feeling unwell'.

'*Yes, that's true*,' Luigi conceded, '*but Sam got hurt because we tried an experimental brake fluid. Now everything is in order.*' With hard driving and some inherited positions, I overcame my back-of-the-grid handicap and finished second to George Follmer in the UOP Shadow. Before Sunday's Cup final, my Formula 5000 mechanic Franz Weis looked over the 712 and offered his opinion.

'*Brian, what are you doing driving that piece of shit?*'

In the race, attrition was my friend until, abruptly, it wasn't. Having worked the car up to second place, I was feeling quite good about myself when a suspension link broke on the main straight at 170mph, sending me down the track in a series of violent swerves. Fortunately, I hit nothing and the car eventually stopped in perfectly fine condition – this time. I should have listened to Franz Weis.

Can-Am in the ultimate Porsche

In October 1973 OPEC took control of the world's oil and pushed up fuel prices by limiting supplies. By March 1974 oil prices had quadrupled. This gave Can-Am's SCCA sanctioning body the perfect excuse to kill off the all-conquering Porsches, particularly the 917/30, by mandating that every entrant had to average more than 3mpg. Those 917/10 owners desperate to hang on retro-fitted their cars' normally aspirated engines with carburettors or fuel injection. Many others simply dropped out and the series was cut to just five races.

In July I received a call from Roger Penske asking if I'd like to drive his fire-breathing Porsche 917/30 in the following month's Mid-Ohio Can-Am race. Surprised, I said that I thought the 917s were unable to meet the new fuel regulations.

'*Come and see me*,' Roger simply replied. Obediently (and hopefully), I went to Reading, Pennsylvania and found myself sitting across from Roger at his perfectly polished mahogany desk.

'*The car can run*,' he explained. '*How much do you want?*'

Bravely, I asked for $5,000. Roger smiled, and made a comment I now realise was dubious praise.

'*Brian, you're the most reasonable racing driver I ever met.*'

The 917/30 and I were united at Mid-Ohio for its one-and-only 1974 contest, the fourth meeting of the season and the last hurrah for the fastest road-racing car of that era, possibly all time. It promised to be a triumphant weekend. Mark Donohue had retired from driving (temporarily, as things turned out) to become Penske's Can-Am team manager but was looking particularly uncomfortable in this new role. Mark acted like a man assigned to help me steal his girlfriend, and beautiful the 917/30 certainly was. With exquisite handling and 1,100bhp available at the driver's whim, the 917/30 could reach 200mph from zero in a little more than 10 seconds, and not be breathing hard when it got there. Given a long

ABOVE Monte Shelton's McLaren M8F follows me in Roger Penske's Porsche 917/30 at Mid Ohio in 1974, just as every other Can-Am car had followed Mark Donohue in this same fearsome car in 1973. With 1,100bhp, the Sunoco 917/30 was undoubtedly the most powerful racing car I ever drove.
Getty Images/ Bob Harmeyer

RIGHT Mark Donohue and I flank Miss Mid-Ohio in 1974. Mark dominated Can-Am in 1973 but the fuel consumption of his Porsche 917/30 ruled it out for the 1974 series, apart from its single outing at Mid-Ohio, with me at wheel.
Rob Neuzel

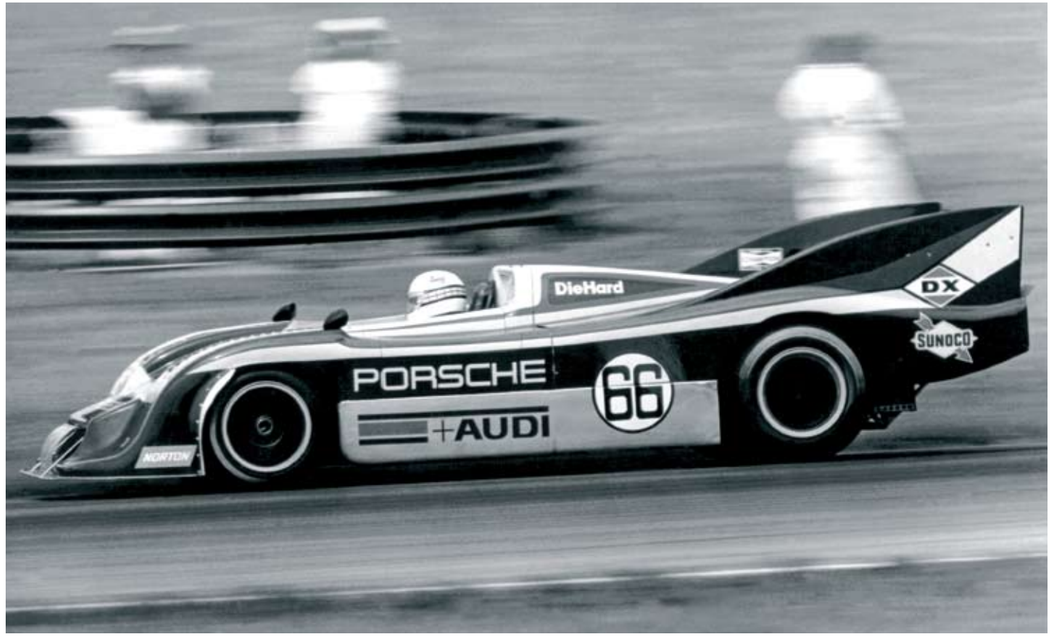
BELOW Strong competition in the Cup Final at Mid-Ohio came from the two Shadow DN4 cars. Jackie Oliver makes a wild pass on teammate George Follmer, who later returned the favour but put himself out of the race.
Brian Redman collection

enough straight, it was capable of speeds in the range of 240mph. Mark once called it *'The perfect racing car'* but others damned it as *'The car that killed Can-Am'* – it was that dominant.

As fuel allocations for racing were slim that season, the SCCA officials decided to run the event in two sections: a sprint qualifier that set the grid (since lightly fuelled cars consume less over more laps) and a Cup Final. My only real on-track competition would come from George Follmer and Jackie Oliver, both in Shadow DN4s, but another challenger showed up that I hadn't expected – wet weather.

I handily won the sprint heat in steady drizzle using Firestone's excellent rain tyres but the skies definitely were brightening as the main event approached. If I started the race on full wets and the racing line began to dry, the soft rain tyres would degrade rapidly, necessitating a stop for replacement. If I started on slicks and conditions remained wet, every car with tyres designed to siphon away the water would roar past. I asked Mark, a superb race engineer, what he thought about manually grooving a set of slicks, essentially creating intermediates, something halfway between wet and dry tyres. The hand-cut channels would throw off the lesser amount of water while the tyre's harder compound would be tough enough to last the race.

'Let's do it,' said Mark, inferring that he had tried this previously.



When the track did dry, as expected during the Cup Final, our grooved slicks turned out to be an unmitigated disaster. The 'perfect car' went from brilliant to painful, ploughing through corners with what drivers call 'terminal understeer'.

Jackie Oliver won in dramatic fashion after his teammate George Follmer attempted an impossible pass and took himself out of the race. I finished a disappointed second driving the world's fastest racing machine, 14 seconds behind Oliver. It turned out that the Porsche 917/30 was a racing car that could only be beaten by itself.

With OPEC woes continuing, entrants' cars becoming obsolete and spectator interest flagging, the 1974 Can-Am series limped through just one more race and into the dustbin of history.

Facing reality

Racing in my era was like a game of deadly musical chairs. We competed driver-on-driver and marque-on-marque but, on a global scale, our real adversary was mortality and history left its cumulative scars. This wonderful, terrible ten-year span claimed many distinguished drivers with vital lives outside of their racing cars, some my teammates and companions, a few my friends. To bring things full circle, there is one little-known driver who deserves to be noted, despite the fact we never met.

As recounted in the chapter on my early years, John Taylor drove David Bridges' 2-litre Brabham-BRM BT11 at the Nürburgring in the 1966 German Grand Prix where he suffered a fiery collision on the first lap, succumbing to infections a few weeks later. David asked me to succeed him in a replacement car, the opportunity that impelled me into a career in racing.

John Taylor was 33 years old.

Each time Marion and I parted, we both knew the potential consequences; the children, thankfully, were oblivious. Without driving, I was unemployable and without employment all the pleasures of seeing my family thrive would have been lost.

So, I drove.

ABOVE A misjudgement resulting in the wrong tyres when the damp track dried, meant that I had to settle for second place at Mid-Ohio, behind Jackie Oliver's winning Shadow.
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