

Joe Scalzo's

City of Speed and elsewhere

Colin

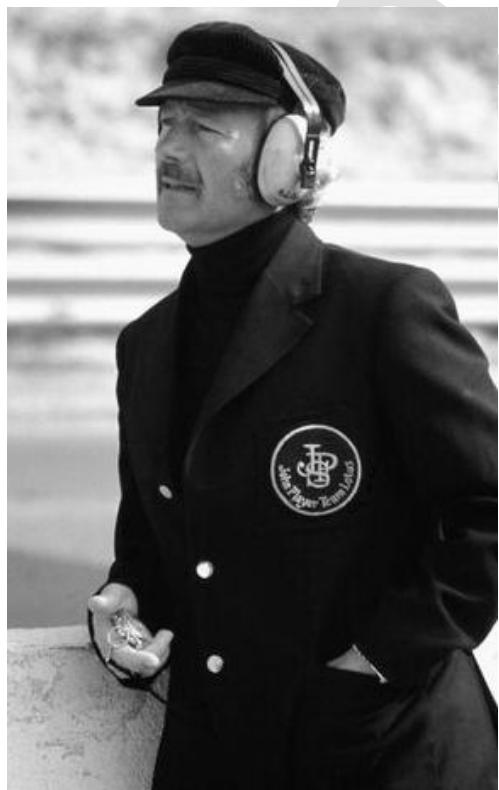
On the night of October 19, 1982, after undercover agents for the FBI videotaped a sting operation at a hotel in Los Angeles, John Z. DeLorean, tycoon and fraudulent father of a nonexistent stainless-steel sports car, was arrested and charged with trafficking in a cocaine-smuggling operation. The collapse of DeLorean Motor Cars followed. And less than two months later, the death from a mysterious heart attack of DeLorean's partner from the UK, Colin Chapman, manufacturer of Lotus racing cars, the world's most deadly, was announced. Coincidence?



Chapman's death, and, despite Chapman's previous protestations that he'd been paid nothing from DeLorean's Swiss-based, Panamanian-run, DeLorean Motor Cars, an honorable magistrate at the subsequent trial of a Lotus Groups accountant declared that were Chapman alive and himself in the dock, that he, the magistrate, would gladly have sentenced him to ten years, minimum.

All this was on account of the DeLorean/Chapman criminal conspiracy which had cost the tax-payers of the UK 54 million pounds. The DeLorean/Chapman rip-off – an extremely attractive - sounding one - had been to base DeLorean Motor Cars in financially-depressed Belfast. And this actually occurred.

Quickly, however, everything, fell apart. The UK first smelled a rat when only 8,500 DeLoreans were ever built; and secondly discovered that millions of their subsidy pounds had disappeared into the pockets of DeLorean, Chapman, and a few others.



The scandal peaked when the tabloids got into the act, reporting that Chapman wasn't dead at all; that his "heart attack" was bogus; and that he was living under a false name in South Africa, existing comfortably with his share of the UK's stolen subsidies.

All of Chapman's Lotuses were egg shells on wheels and so flyweight and fragile that the instant they hit anything they broke like eggs, flying into a million pieces, and turning their drivers into martyrs. Yet Chapman was never held to account for the deadly path they cut worldwide. Lotuses killed two champions of Formula 1, Jimmy Clark at Hochenheim in 1968

and Jochen Rindt at Monza in 1970, and they nearly got a third, Mario Andretti, at Indy in 1969; they also annihilated Ronnie Peterson at Monza in 1968, Mike Spence at Indy in 1968, and Alan Stacy at Spa-Francorchamps in 1960; along with the young champions of Canada and Mexico, Peter Ryan at Rheims, and Ricardo Rodriguez in Mexico City plus the Rhodesian motor-bike world champion Gary Hocking in South Africa, all in 1962; and Bobby Marshman, of Indy 500 fame, at Phoenix International Raceway in 1964. But

perhaps the most disturbing martyr of all was the Formula Junior star Pat Pigott at Riverside International Raceway in 1962. Pigott's father-in-law was the head spymaster of the CIA and attending Pat's funeral had almost made him late to the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Yet another Lotus driver who – narrowly—escaped was Frank Monise, fastest under 1500cc driver on the Pacific Coast, and one of Colin Chapman's best customers. In 1991, long after he'd retired from active racing, Monise had joined the yuppies and ne'er-do-wells at the Laguna Seca Historics to drive an ancient Elite model Lotus coupe. Losing its brakes, it next flew out of control and, typically, splintered down on its back. Monise had had to be cut free. It

had been the only time he'd let his guard down when racing a Lotus, and the experience had almost killed him.

A fiery Portuguese-American, Monise was an anomaly. Out on the Pacific Coast, a territory made infamous by the Scarab, Ol' Yeller, and other gargantuan and malevolent seven-liter V8 specials of ungodly power, Monise, perversely, chose to enter Los Angeles



combat with minuscule Lotus model 11s possessing the engine capacities of pop-guns, and many of his races became legend.

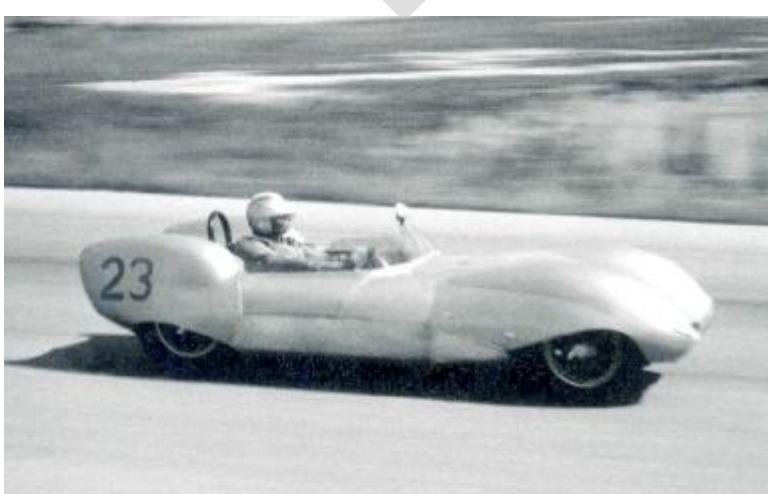
Half a century ago, for example, his David-and-Goliath conflicts with the Coopers and Brabhams of the Witchita banker, ex-Indy 500 car owner, and Sports Car Club of America pharaoh Jack Hinkle were the gossip of the Southwest; 45 years ago, at Santa Barbara, Monise and one of his pop-gun Lotuses up-ended all the full-race Ferraris and Porsches in the epic Sunday main event; and 40 years ago, again at Santa Barbara, Monise and a bigger model 23 Lotus with four cylinders and one-and-a-half liter pushrod power mowed down every seven-liter V8 in sight, a slaughter which roused the huge, hooligan, Labor Day crowd.

Frank Monise raced through five decades, probably longer than anybody else with an SCCA license. It all began when racing on the Monterey Peninsula didn't mean Laguna Seca but the public lanes of Pebble Beach. Monise got into a neurotic Allard with diabolical flathead V8 power and a stuck throttle. Somehow he held this creature on the narrow road between the pine wall of the 17-Mile Drive by flicking on and off the ignition.

Shortly afterward he lost all patience with big cars. Over at Willow Springs, going across the sweeper corner at full speed, a hub snapped and his Jaguar bounded into the boondocks, doing endless flips and sending him to the hospital.

His conversion to little cars was at hand. In order he possessed a pretty Roger Barlow Simca, unsuccessfully fitted with a hot rod MG motor; a Lotus model VI; a pair of Lotus model 11s; another pair of Lotus model 23s; a Lola; and a Ralt. It was the two Lotus X1's which provided classic Frank Monise.

His competition included Dr. William Molle, jawbreaker dentist; Art Snyder, kindly grandfather who raced at such a pitch he ripped steering wheels from their moorings, Jack Nethercutt, slow scion to the Mabel Norman cosmetics fortune; and a not-yet-successful Hollywood actor named Steve McQueen who energetically joined in the jousting, admired Monise, and never beat him.



In 1962 came the arrival of the rear-engine Elva and the obsolescence of the front-engine Lotus XI. Monise took part in the vehicle's swan song battle, a thriller fought on the long course at Riverside.

Opposing him was a fast driver named John Timanus who had acquired the model XI that

future Lotus martyr Pat Pigott had guillotined at Vacaville by wrapping around a telephone pole.

The battle fought by Monise and Timanus went into the Valhalla where all great racing battles go. Monise, fittingly, won.

I myself once was a candidate for Lotus martyrdom. It was in 1962, the, most lethal of all Lotus years. An Englishman named Peter Hassler, Colin Chapman's distributor in America, had invited myself and various other scribblers out to Riverside for a day of joy-riding in most of the Lotus models - Elites and open-wheel Formula Junior 18s and 20s.

This, of course, was insane, but I couldn't say no. None of us scribblers knew anything about fast driving and Riverside with its switch-backing esses and long, long straghtaway was no place for joy-riding amateurs. Getting off the race track meant entering a no-man's-land of deep ruts guaranteed to flip you and to be followed by the standard Lotus breakup. None of us went fast enough to go off the road and it was fortunate because no ambulance was standing by.

The epilogue was sad. The following week Peter Hassler went back to Riverside for some joy-riding of his own. But he only got as far as turn eight when something fragile broke as usual and his model 20 formula junior jumped on top of him.

Afterward nobody bagged the evidence for an autopsy. None was necessary. Unlucky. Hassler had become one of Colin Chapman's five Lotus martyrs of 1962.