

Joe Scalzo's

City of Speed and elsewhere

“DEAR FANGIO...

The letter read:

“Dear Fangio,

“By your failure to compete at Monza against U.S. drivers, I contend that you are not only a poor sportsman but a phony champion of the world. Thousands of other race fans feel as I do. I think you know that our U.S. drivers would have beaten your pants off.

“Actually, I don’t think anyone should again refer to you as a “world’s champion” after your run-out at Monza and when you have never driven at Indianapolis...

“To prove my contention that you are a phony champion I would like to make the following offer to you and really see how you handle a car against our U.S. drivers at Indianapolis.

“HERE IS MY CHALLENGE –

- 1. I will pay you \$500 the day your entry for the 1958 Indianapolis 500 is accepted by the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Corp. Your entry fee will therefore cost you nothing.**
- 2. I will pay you \$1000 on the day you qualify for the 500 (and I’m not convinced that you can even qualify).**
- 3. I will pay you \$2500 if you finish better than fifth place in the 500 in any completely U.S. built car that you may care to drive.**
- 4. I will pay you \$5000 if you finish better than fifth place in any foreign-built car.**

“Here is your chance, Fangio, to show what you can do on the world’s toughest race course...Frankly, I don’t think you will accept this challenge, but if you do, you will at least partially offset your Monza run-out....

And so erupted the maddening “Clymer Challenge,” which was what the preposterous publicity hound Floyd Clymer named the outrage.

Foolishly over-reacting to Clymer’s ranting and bullying, the five-time World Champion of Formula 1, Juan Manuel Fangio took the potty old fool’s bait and set out to establish himself in Indy’s 1958 500.



Not only did he fail, but his ill-advised effort ended in disgrace for himself but none for Clymer, whose name was ballyhooed shamelessly.

Self-aggrandizement was the life’s work of Floyd Clymer, and his death in the 1970s left a void nobody could fill, because he almost pure-dated the automobile and the motorcycle.

As Clymer endlessly blared the story, he’d been instantly besotted by the first cars and bikes that he laid eyes on, in turn-of-the-century Colorado. He soon began playing all ends against the middle, and the gullible public wasn’t long kept in the dark about his self-touted “accomplishments”:

“I established the Official World’s Dirt Track Record...I also broke the World’s 100-Mile Dirt Track Record...Among many records that I established was a stock car record up Pikes Peak...I set a new record from Denver to Casper, Wyoming...from Denver to El Paso...from St. Louis to Denver...from Denver to Chicago...and from Chicago to Detroit...”

Then Clymer turned inventor. The Clymer-Automatic-Air-Gauge, an apparatus that blew a siren when a tire was fully inflated, was a flop. But the Clymer-Through-The-Windshield-Spotlight made him some money, although a patent fight broke out when he sold it.

And then Clymer authored three major mistakes in a row.

He rejected Chrysler’s offer to make him its distributor for Colorado, which might have made him a tycoon; he became assistant manager for a disgraced ex-governor hoping to serve as Denver’s new mayor, but the bitter, damaging, losing, campaign that he and the ex-governor waged won them powerful enemies; and lastly he invested what was left of the Clymer-Through-The-Windshield-Spotlight profits in real estate and lost everything.



Regrouping, he did lots of advertising by post. Using the mail to defraud is a criminal offense not taken lightly, and earned Clymer a stay of a year and three months in the House of 1,000 slammers in Leavenworth.

It was while he was enjoying the ambiance and comforts of the Federal pen where Clymer found yet another new vocation: editor and publisher of “Jailhouse News.” This

encouraged him, once he no longer was a jailbird, to do more writing and publishing on the outside, where he subsequently created a vast but parsimonious publishing empire.

Fangio's refraining from competing in Monza's "Race of Two Worlds", 1957-1958, gave Clymer's empire the opportunity to attack the five-time champion of the world and, naturally, to promote Mr. Floyd Clymer himself.

Then something unexpected happened. Much to what must have been Clymer's surprise and delight, Fangio succumbed to his taunting and entered Indy's 1958 500. But the Offy roadster assigned to him was a dog --it took ten days just to carry him through his freshman exam.

And then, amid somewhat alarming reports that he was going to try and crack the code of Indy's hoodoo-ed Novi; Fangio called everything off and returned to the Argentine with a tarnish on his record where none had been before. Bad show, Clymer. -JS