

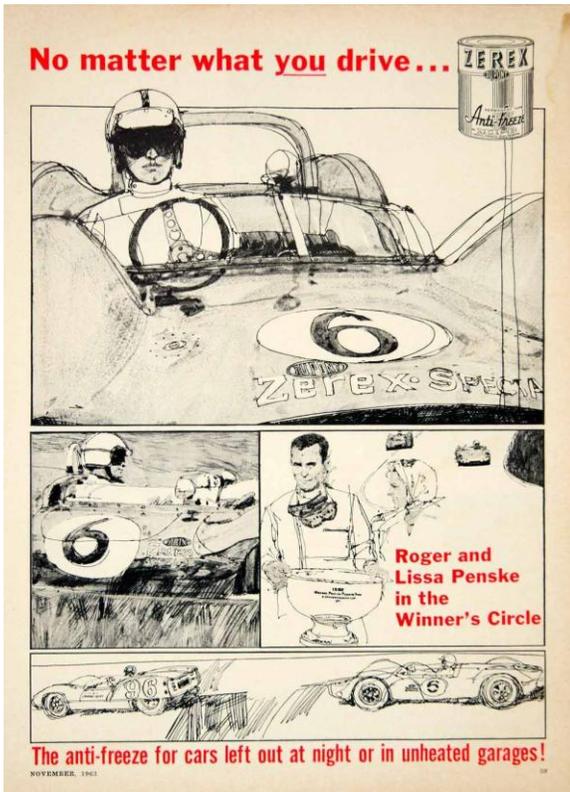
Joe Scalzo's

City of Speed and elsewhere

October 3, 1965

Playing cute and slippery with the rules, Part One: In 1962, Roger Penske – who is a long way from being today’s Team Penske Corporate mogul -- travels west to southern California; and pulls a fast one by bringing to Riverside Raceway a spurious single-seat Cooper Formula One machine with fender coachwork; enters the mutant in a newspaper Grand Prix for sports cars (two-seaters) and, before anybody raises a stink, Roger and his cheater-mobile, the “Zerex Special”, ruin the LA Times Grand Prix by winning.

Playing cute and slippery with the rules, Part Two: Team Penske comes to Indy’s 1994 500 and pulls another fast one, flummoxing a rule created to encourage less expensive racing engines, by getting Mercedes-Benz to tool up custom panzer V-8 engines that blow off the opposition by hundreds of horsepower.



But before anybody at the 500 can protest, “Hey, wait a minute! The rule wasn’t suppose to work that way!,” Team Penske wins again, and Indy 500 expenses continue skyrocketing.

So which of these two world-class examples of turning-a-rule-on-ts-head was the most epic?

Give it hands down to the Zerex Special. And how was Penske, “The Captain”, able to railroad his cheater into Riverside’s winner’s circle when, per Appendix C of the International Sporting Code the Zerex should have been disqualified on sight?

Much of the credit rested not with Penske stealth and deception, but with the U.S. Auto Club, (USAC), an erratic sanctioning body which hadn’t a clue of what sports cars were supposed to look like.

USAC was born in 1956. Following five deadly and despotic decades, the senile American Automobile Association had abruptly abandoned racing, protesting that nobody had ever told it that the game was dangerous, and USAC stepped in as Three-A’s replacement.

From the beginning, it was the most carnivorous acronym going --- a true red-meat eater. During its controversial decades of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, it wasn’t content to gorge on its own Indy 500,

and on all the other faces of oval-tracking, but also wanted to consume the Sports Car Club of America and Big Bill France's National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing.

To provoke NASCAR, USAC traveled to North Carolina and scheduled a race right in the NASCAR heart. It was a farce with ten wrecks – three of which had gotten dragged off a used-car lot that morning -- but the hook was that NASCAR turncoat and white-lightning merchant Curtis Turner was racing one of them.

The Turner name was so potent that an enormous crowd showed up just to watch him power-slide this was on a dirt track --- but when Turner left the race the crowd left with him.

Messing around with the Sports Car Club of America was another big USAC mistake. Although USAC stole away from SCCA the right to sanction Riverside's big newspaper matches, 1962's GP was marred by the swindle of Penske's Zerex Special, and 1958's by a USAC steward, there to protect Riverside's racing drivers, taking a poke at one. The errors mounted.

Ever determined to make itself Maximum Leader of All Known Racing, USAC, jerking the rug out from under Watkins Glen, tried feasting on Formula 1: It flim-flamed the Federation Internationale de l' Automobile, the FIA, into replacing the Glen with its own mickey mouse road circuit, Indianapolis Raceway Park, as the site of the U.S. Grand Prix on October 3, 1965.

Two winters earlier, however, back at Riverside in 1963, at a big NASCAR meet called the Golden State 400, USAC, typically without realizing it, had engineered for itself a fiendish comeuppance. The GS 400 carried a full FIA sanction, making it fair game to names from NASCAR, SCCA, and of course USAC. Objecting to sharing its names, USAC roused Foyt, Parnelli and Gurney, and threatened them, if they competed, with forfeiture of their competition licenses, making all three bolt. One named who refused to bolt, and raced in the GS 400 anyway, was Paul Goldsmith, "Goldy," USAC's own national champion of stocks.



Goldsmith was not your ordinary, namby-pamby, run-of-the-mill, racing star, he was a biker daredevil-- half of his 17 racing years had been spent on hot-shoe, brakeless, Harley Hogs. Winner of the first stocker race he ever entered, Goldy made himself the only winner of Daytona's beach-front 200-milers on two and four-wheels.

First becoming a NASCAR affiliate, Goldy switched camps and became a USAC one, hired to be captain of Chrysler's Dodge and Plymouth squadrons, as well as Firestone's chief tire-tester for the Indy 500; in his spare hours he was a flying fool and big aviation hero.

But after Goldie had defied USAC by racing in the GS400, Tom Binford, then boss of USAC, ordered Henry Banks, his director of competition, to confiscate Goldie's competition license, Banks promptly did so, taking away Goldie's livelihood with gusto.

Which puzzled Goldie. This being the United States of America, a great democracy, it occurred to him that what USAC had done might be, well ... AGAINST THE LAW. So he hired a shark to go to USAC's home parish of Indianapolis and sue USAC for big dollars. Goldie lost his suit. But USAC's woes were only beginning.

Ruling that the sanction-body's blackballing of Goldie was a foul violation of the International Sporting Code, the FIA implored USAC to return Goldie's license. Hanging tough and dumb, USAC refused – and immediately was stripped of its IRP date of October 3, 1965, which the FIA restored to Watkins Glen.

Next came an even bigger case of indigestion for USAC -- the little sanctioning body was about to get landed on by the Federal government! Goldie's new advocate, one Hugo H. Black, Jr, whose father

was a member of the U.S. Supreme Court, was certain that rules which suited USAC would create a far different impression back in Washington where monopolies were discouraged and statutes like the Sherman Anti-Trust Law taken deadly seriously.

Acting on the advice of Big Bill France, Goldie canceled his law suit and called off the sharks. Nobody more lusted to see USAC take a flogging than the dictator of NASCAR, but France was just recovering from his own bitter courtroom battles with Curtis Turner and the Teamsters, and inviting the Feds into racing seemed like a recipe for destroying racing.

And so, Big Bill invited Goldie to return to his NASCAR family, and let USAC continue with its wild appetite and blunderings until it atomized itself, which is exactly what happened.

The U.S. Grand Prix, run on October 3, 1965, at Watkins Glen, was won by Graham Hill. **-JS**