

Joe Scalzo's

City of Speed and elsewhere

Daly

A wild Irish rascal named Derek Daly knew that when he grew up he was going to become a racing car driver. He saw his first race, aged 12, at Dunhome, near his home Dublin. And just four years afterward , at 16, he was racing an old Anglia Ford.

Racing plunged him into debt, and his poverty escalated in England, where he started campaigning open-wheel Formula Fords. Times were hard. He lived inside a broken-down old bus and had to sleep in his overcoat -- thieves broke into the bus twice, and the second time even took Daly's overcoat.

Then Daly heard of something that sounded almost too good to be true. Astronomical salaries were being paid to work in the ore mines of northwestern Australia. You could work seven days a week, eight hours a day; nobody, however, was interested in the first eight hours. It was the second eight that paid overtime.



Daly was there for a year and a half, some weeks working 140 hours. Returning to England, he had more than enough money to resume racing , and one of the first races he saw, in the rain, was the 1975 International Trophy Race for Formula 1 cars. Just three years later, in

1978, having sped through Formula Ford, Formula III, and Formula II, Daly was racing in the same race.

Again it was raining. From the fourth row he rocketed into first in one lap then veered off the road. He got back into the lead again and when he was ahead by 18 seconds he left the road a second time. This had been his Formula 1 debut.

By 1979 Daly was a well-paid member of the world Grand Prix tour, living with the rest of the stars in Monte Carlo. He was free to indulge himself, and did. After making the mistake that caused a big accident at one race, he bought a yellow Ferrari to make himself feel better. At Monza he was one of three drivers who stopped and risked their lives pulling a fourth driver, who later died, from his flaming car. Daly was afterward almost in tears. But when his team manager ordered him not to be soft-hearted, and to get back into the race, Daly obeyed.

By 1982, having competed in 49 Formula 1 Grands Prix, and raced for five different teams, Daly suddenly found himself without a ride.



So Daly came to America. The opening Indy car race of 1983 was his first race on an oval, and a head-on crash into the wall in 1984 almost killed him. After his car snapped in two he could see both his feet resting on the track with one shoe missing. There was lots of blood. Among other wounds he had a broken hip joint, a broken pelvis, a broken tibia, a broken fibula, a dislocated right foot, an amputated left toe, and a burn to the third degree on his left arm.

Convalescing, Daly lost 23 pounds. He climbed out of a wheel chair for the first time on Christmas Day. Five months later he was racing in the 1985 Indy 500, qualifying 31st slowest

in a dog of a car. Then, following a month of trouble at Indy in 1986, Daly took a last-instant kamikaze, time trial. Rain aborted it. "I don't know if I can take this anymore," he confessed to Beth Blackburn, the American girl he'd married.

MISPO92302-9/23/84-BROOKLYN, MICH: The legs of Derek Daly, of Dublin, Ireland, hang out of his car after hitting the turn 3 wall at Michigan International Speedway 9/23. Daly spun and hit the wall on lap 26 of a 200-mile Indy-type car race and then was struck by John Paul Jr.'s car. Daly was sent to the hospital with severe leg fractures and a possible broken left hand. UFI do/ Bob Brodbeck



Eventually, inevitably, somebody else's misfortune put Daly back to work. It happened at the June 1987 Milwaukee race. The Raynor Motorsports Group was seeking a new driver after crashing both its cars at Indy the week before and Daly was chosen. He qualified 13th, led for six laps, and finished third. He was signed for the rest of the season as well as for the 1988 Indy 500.

*

From the Sunday afternoon when Indy opened until the Saturday morning when time trials began, Daly practiced for almost the equivalent of three 500s – 1700 miles. The Raynor car was a 1988 Lola-Cosworth, and every mile was to test something different. Even so, there never seemed sufficient miles to test everything that John Ward, Raynor's brilliant American engineer, who'd worked in a dozen 500s, wanted tested.

Every day found Ward studying computer readouts and filling pages with notes. Regular evaluations of the Lola, occurred during debriefing sessions between himself and Daly who sometimes used a pencil to draw a map showing the engineer what was happening.

“In turn one I can drive flat out all the way to the entrance,” Daly explained one day. “But in four I have to turn, then turn again, just a flick of the wheel. You know what I mean, John?”

“Is the rear end stable?” “Very,” Daly replied

“So with the present chassis setup, the car is better in turns one and two than it is in three and four?” “Yes, Daly agreed. “Amazing,” Ward answered.

He and Daly dealt closely with each other, each one respecting the other, each one utterly dependent on the other. One minor driving error, and Daly would explode Ward’s endless hours of calculations against the wall; one slip of his arithmetic, and Ward could send Daly – going better than 200 mph -- to the crash ward, or worse.

Years earlier, when he was racing in the Netherlands, Daly had watched a wheel fall off his Formula 1 car. He was traveling 180 mph and in the two or three seconds before he crashed, his mind took it all in: he wondered if he would break both legs...wondered how many Grands Prix he would miss...wondered which driver would replace him...and wondered how his mother would hear of his accident.

And, what with all his wondering – he wasn’t seriously hurt – it had never occurred to Daly to feel frightened. His earlier traumatic experience at Monza had taught him how to empty himself of any emotion.



Nor had it occurred to Daly to feel frightened on the Saturday morning of the Indy 500 time trials as he sat inside the Raynor Motorsports Group garage in Gasoline Alley. In about 90 minutes he'd be turned loose and expected to average in excess of 210 mph with a quarter of million people watching, not to mention TV's worldwide audience.

Around noon, when it was almost his turn to qualify, Daly walked from the garage to the starting line where his car and John Ward were waiting. Ward's instructions were sharp: "We've already practiced in the heat of the day. So we know we can do it. Now reproduce it." Ward's were the last words Daly remembered as he sped onto the Brickyard beginning his ten mile –four-lap – run. It was 12:45 p.m.

Coming off the fourth corner with his tachometer reading a hard 10,000 rpm, Daly took the green flag. The revs climbed higher, to 11,000. To his ears, the engine scream changed to a wider, smoother, more flowing sound. Along with the engine came the wind going shhhhhh -- a wind noise like you'd hear in a passenger sedan with its window cracked 1/2 inch.

Daly's eyes already were on the first corner. He was going to hurl 1700 pounds of Indy car and himself into the corner without his foot lifting off the throttle. But something told him

not to, and he raised his throttle foot 1/8th inch. The car hit a bump at the corner apex, settled, and Daly leaned into his shoulder pads just as for a flashing instant the wall was on his right elbow.

He aimed the car at the second corner. He flew out of the second corner. The long back straightaway followed. Daly ate it up. Corner three always looked like it carried more banking than the others and he didn't lift at all. But between corners three and four his tires ran over a succession of bumps and he lifted slightly. Hitting the front straightaway and finishing his first lap, Daly thought he'd been averaging 210 mph and was startled to the Raynor blackboard saying "212."

Now he had to experiment with making an entire two-and-a-half-mile lap without lifting his foot. He didn't manage it in corner one but came close. Corner two also felt better. Corner three again was flat. Four was a bit improved. The Raynor blackboard repeated "212."

The news Daly's car was giving him was "All is well." He careened into and out of corner one without lifting at all. Corner two, usually his worst corner, this time felt better. Three again was flat. Four remained a problem.

He read "213" on the board and, encouraged, again tried one without lifting. But he had to lift because the car suddenly jumped sideways. This was Daly's fourth and final lap and deterioration was setting in.

The car was understeering. No longer could Daly take three flat. Four was as grim as ever. But with three laps in the bag Daly knew that Ward, his engineer and the rest of the Raynor team would be unimpressed if he'd clobbered the wall now. So his last lap fell to 211.342, and his four lap average became 212.295. Had time trials ended at that point, Daly would have won a starting place on the front row of the Indy 500.

Daly took the checkered flag. "That's it," he said to himself. "It's over. It's good." He noticed Indy's hundreds of thousands of spectators for the first time. Upon pulling off his helmet and emerging from the car, he felt completely out of breath, as if he'd just jogged the length of the pit lane. That was when he realized he'd been holding his breath for all ten miles.

Interviewed over the public address, Daly exclaimed, "I feel great! My car ran great!" But what Daly really was thinking was, "I was on knife's edge. If I had to concentrate for 500 miles as I just did for ten I never could do it."

(Mechanical problems overtook Daly and the Raynor Motorsports Group in the 1988 Indy 500, and they completed only 18 laps, finishing 29th)

DO NOT COPY