

Joe Scalzo's

City of Speed and elsewhere

Fun Fellows

Racing needs its fun fellows – the sport is so dry without them. And after billionaire Ted Field quit Indy car racing 500 to become an entertainment impresario seeking company of hard-edged rap crooners and crooners Snoop Doggy Dog, Dr. Dre, and Eminem, the Indy 500 car wasn't the same.



For the first part of his life, Ted, one of the lucky heirs to the vast Marshall Field department store and newspaper empire was in the deep freeze, existing in lonely exile in Alaska. Growing old enough to get his mitts on the family trust fund enabled to do anything in the world he wanted to, and a light went on. Why not try racing?

But purchasing pedigree Porsches, plus road-racing Formula 5000 Lolas, and at last moving into the outer-limits of Indy cars, proved troublesome plus painful. One of his Lola stalled on the track and as it was being roped back to the pits the rope slipped and one of Ted's fingers was amputated.



That terminated forever Ted's dream of becoming a racing driver in the Indy 500 but he still could be a fun fellow among the Brickyard's car owners – all he had to do was lasso the right driver for his Interscope team.

This was in the middle 1970s. Ted knew that A.J. Foyt and Mario Andretti already were spoken for, but plenty of other talent was there for the taking, the Unser boys, Gordon Johncock, Wally Dallenbach, Tom Sneva, Gary Bettenhausen, more – But because he was a fun fellow himself Ted decided he needed a fun – or perhaps unusual – Indy 500 driver. So he went with Danny Ongais, the mute Hawaiian with the war god face who was envied by all because Linda Vaughn, voluptuous “Miss Hurst Golden Shifter,” was his girl friend.

Danny may have been Hawaiian, but when belted inside an Indy car he turned pure kamikaze. Nicknamed “Danny-on-the-Gas,” he might better have been called “Danny-into-the-Wall:” In his very first race for Ted, he was crashing and killing himself every lap without realizing it, until finally wearing out the Interscope.

But Ted, still a fellow full of fun, and against the advice of everybody else, regarded On-the-Gas as a work in progress and became obsessed with out-spending and out-speeding everybody else becoming Danny's candy poppa.

In that regard, he dropped a million or so purchasing for Danny a tour de force Parnelli-Cosworth from the formidable Vel's-Parnelli Jones stable, Indy car racing's best. It was a wise move by Ted, and a dumb one by VPJ, because the elder Al Unser, VPJ's Hall of Fame employee, was incensed that by the close of 1977, On-the-Gas was on the receiving end of faster hardware than himself. Subsequently quitting VPJ to race for the brainy Texan Jim Hall, Unser achieved his third Indy 500 score – thanks to fun fellows Ted and On-the-Gas.



The re-make of On-the-Gas continued, and with excellent results – Interscope won five Indy car races, but never the 500. Then it became hard going. On-the-Gas started having more adventures with walls, crashing and divining the concrete in 1979, 1981, and 1985. This wasn't what Ted considered fun, so came the 1987 Indy 500, he rented Danny a steering wheel at Team Penske, which had bypassed VPJ as the Brickyard's best.

Unfortunately, that season's crop of Team Penskes were such wildcats that the team's pair of stars, Rick Mears and Danny Sullivan, decided to sit it out in the pits until Roger Penske

gave them something better. But On-the-Gas continued trying to subdue his. And after he predictably went slap into the wall again, Team Penske made the inspired decision to withdraw its failed wildcats and replace them with the previous 500's antiques.

One went to Mears, the other to Sullivan, but because On-the-Gas was still to dingy from his latest spill, the one that by rights should have been his went to Unser, again. And, thanks again to fun fellows Ted and On-the-Gas, Unser proceeded to win a record-tying fourth Indy 500. Feeling that On-the-Gas could benefit from a change of scenery, Ted shipped him and Miss Hurst Golden Shifter off to Europe for a couple of Formula 1 tournaments. On-the-Gas didn't win anything, but at least didn't hit anything either.



And about then somebody must have pointed out to Ted that race car drivers weren't the only fun fellows and how about frolicking with hard-edged rap musicians, and also retooling InterScope into a record label? Ted was down with that. So, in no time, Ted was making himself the world's numero uno party animal, with bashes at St. Barts, Aspen, East Hampton, and Paris, or aboard a luxury yacht, on a tropical island, or inside an ocean-front mansion.

Today, just uttering the words "A Ted Field party" makes a hot buzz resonate among the planet's full-time party pros and prime specimens. All the beautiful people will be in attendance: "An eclectic group with great backgrounds - a mixture of decadence,

sophistication, good cheer, fellowship, and lots of gorgeous women.” In other words, plenty of fun for a fun fellow like Ted.



Commoners ordinarily are persona non grata at a Ted Field party, but one New Year’s even a society reporter for the Times of New York succeeded in snaking under the radar and crashing Ted’s soiree at the Big Apple’s Studio 54. She brought back a hypnotic account of corks popping, oceans of bubbly flowing, and a cavorting, overcrowded, dance floor swirling with “men in suits and leggy, wiggling, size 2 women” with “the ratio of women to men about two to one,” and where, right at the stroke of 12, one of the chesty young things was widely imitated after she “tore off her top and started dancing.”

Seated on a black leather couch on the dance floor’s perimeter, and carefully taking everything in was party host Ted, everybody’s favorite fun guy – “a huggy bear figure.” “When Mr. Field got up to dance,” the story went on, in typical deadpan Times style, “two or three women got up to dance with him. 2 a.m. he and a pair of women formed a sandwich, one rubbing up from behind him, and another, in a black halter top, wiggling in front of him. They were joined by a third woman, and then Mr. Field sat down to watch. He was surrounded by two more women in backless dresses.” The action ripped along like that until Ted quit his

party to do a “Hugh Hefner” and beat a retreat to his hotel suite surrounded by security guards and a harem of half a dozen stunning women.

A lot of entertainment for only 700 grand – the reported price tag for this Ted Field party.

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