

# Joe Scalzo's

## City of Speed and elsewhere

### Limeys

Feeling out-gunned by all the counterfeit Lotuses, Brabhams, and hybrid Lolas he was forced to race against during the Indy 500's copycat decade of the 1970s, an exasperated Cale Yarborough implored Gene White Racing, "We gotta hire us some of them long-haired Limeys."

A few of their nicknames were Slugger, Rabbit, Charlie Chins, Chalkie, and Angel. Canonized as shamans, wizards, and warlocks of Indy car design, they were alumni of the Team Lotus finishing school with the Beatles hairdos, and odd Chapmanesque pseudonyms to prove it.

It was a matter of quirky racing history. For better than a decade the Indy Motor Speedway had been a sealed and xenophobic fortress for the mighty Meyer-Drake Offenhauser roadster. But 1963's wildly successful arrival of the strange and singular genius Chapman and his equally strange Lotuses, threw the 500 wide open to English influence. The



resulting front-engine vs. rear-engine war was like a second Revolutionary War, and this time the Redcoats won. Afterward, though, Chapman did something it shouldn't be cricket to do: having set the revolt in motion, he returned to Europe and Formula 1 instead of staying to see it through. Left to carry on alone, American Indy car constructors, in the main, responded by unleashing upon the 500 imitation Lotuses whose horrors and miseries were beyond compare. Yarborough was not

the first throttle-shy chauffeur to ponder why another driver's American-built rear-engine went fast and his own dingbat did nothing but try to knock down Brickyard walls.

And this was when Yarborough, for one, was happy to discover that not all of the Redcoats had returned to Mother England with Chapman. Finding Indy far more congenial than their master had, Slugger, Rabbit, Chalkie, and other aide-de-camps, mechanics, and factotums of the old Lotus retinue had stayed – and now got pressed into emergency duty constructing rear- and mid-engine Indy cars.

**Maurice Philippe climbed the highest and fell the farthest. Unique among the Lotus alumni, he had neither long hair nor screwball nickname. And in 1972, for its great trio of**



**champions Mario Andretti, the elder Al Unser, and Joe Leonard, the Vel's- Parnelli Jones team Indy's richest, ordered Philippe to engineer something brilliant, and Philippe obeyed. Under security conditions that might have impressed the Pentagon, he disgorged a huge folly known as the Dihedral car, a freak dreadnaught with stubby wings sprouting from its fat bulk in a V. It was the Indy 500's biggest white elephant, causing VPJ's**

**champions fright and VPJ and its sponsoring Firestone Tire & Rubber an enormous financial bath.**

**But it didn't halt the hunt. And so the wretched Yarborough's abject cries for help from Gene White Racing were subsequently heeded by Rabbit, Slugger and Chalkie, who were just coming from assisting Team McLaren with its tall -winged machines. The new Indy car they created, called the Atlanta, possibly was superior to Phillippe's notorious Dihedral. But fate seemed against it. Gene White Racing had relied on the turbo Ford, and a lot of time was wasted switching to the turbo Meyer-Drake.**

**And Yarborough became frustrated and renounced Indy and switched back to the greener,**



**safer, pastures of NASCAR. Practically the only driver available was Jimmy Caruthers, and he was on crutches. So Rabbit, Slugger, and Chalkie took his crutches away from him at Michigan International Speedway's 500-miler. Caruthers qualified an impressive fourth fastest, but this was the Atlanta's only big moment.**

**Rabbit later followed Yarborough into the deep south to work among the door-slamming late models; Slugger vanished into the IMSA; and Chalkie made his own legend. His nickname was built around his reputation as an eagle-eyed player at darts in British pubs. A lively Irishman who accepted being mistaken for a Brit, his full name – amazingly – was Eamon Fullalove. He once pointed out that besides being expert mechanics and fabricators most of the alumni of Team Lotus knew how to enjoy themselves and have fun. He'd reminisce how he and Chapman's other squad members lubricated with oil the perilous cobblestones of Rouen**

the night before the French Grand Prix for the pleasure of watching the local motorists slither about negotiating them.

The Indy 500 also was rewarding .One year, for example, a major team went out of business, firing and stranding all its personnel. Sympathetic and angry fellow mechanics - Chalkie in the lead - gathered in front of the old Select Motel, where the team was lodged. At 1:30 A.M. in the morning, a station wagon belonging to the team manager responsible for the firings was commandeered by a phantom car-jacker, took five hot laps around the motel at great speed, then plunged to the bottom of the swimming pool. The case was hard to prove. Nobody ever determined the identity of the car-jacker, but Chalkie's name was mentioned with pleasure.

Chapman's mysterious death in 1982 made Indy stop being a diaspora for the vagabonds out-of-business Team Lotus. One of the last to come and have Brickyard adventures was John Waters, called "Angel," by Chapman because he worked like one: "Angel, it's a three-hour job to switch engines, and you have an hour and forty-five minutes. So see to it, there's a good lad." Upon departing the Lotus Formula 1 team at the time of Chapman's demise, Angel for a time piloted taxi-cabs around London. Then, on a whim, he flew to America, rode a Greyhound to Wisconsin to see his first Indy car race at Milwaukee, and accepted a cut-rate job with the Machinist Union band, led by the attack demagogue Andrew Kenopensky.

Angel's adventures were only beginning. His green card lapsed and he was flung inside a barb-wire Texas detention camp in El Paso. The experience was made doubly intense because this was the time of the Falklands War, and an Argentine contingent within the camp quietly were plotting to hang Angel. But he got out – his old employer Kenopensky had him sprung – and he found new Indy car employment at Team Intermedics.



His brief stay with Intermedics almost made him quit racing for good. This was the era of the new phenomenon called "ground effects," where the bottom of an Indy car was stuck to the bottom by suction. This was great in the corners but on the straight-aways dragged down speeds; the trick was to use ground effects as little as possible. The two Intermedics drivers, both probably buy-a-rides, were an American, Gordon Smiley, and a South African femme, Desire Wilson. Angel had the misfortune of being in the same Gasoline Alley garage with Smiley when he

went out to quality, and saw the mad look in Smiley's eyes, as if he were debating if he'd removed enough ground effects. Smiley had removed too much smote the wall head-on, at 200 mph, in the most devastating Indy car wreck of the period.

Rehabilitating – he had liked Smiley – Angel for a time left racing to install air-conditioners in Volvos. Returning to Indy cars, he joined Newman-Haas, whose mechanics had monikers like Dawg and Timmy the Hippie.

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