



**Hands on hips; Jack Fairman surveys work being carried out on the hopelessly outclassed Connaught. (Courtesy Indianapolis Motor Speedway)**

was perhaps inevitable that he should have a drive in the de Villiers Connaught, as he had raced for Connaught Engineering a number of times in the 1950s. It should perhaps be recorded that his laps in the de Villiers car meant that he was the last Briton to drive a front-engined car in practice for the Indianapolis 500, as well as the last man to start

a Formula One race with the engine in front of him when he qualified the Ferguson P99 for the British Grand Prix. Neither Fairman nor the Connaught were anywhere near making the grid for the Indy 500, but Fairman and the Ferguson will return to our story later.

We come back to Colin Chapman who, following his visit in

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## THE INDY CARS ARE COMING!

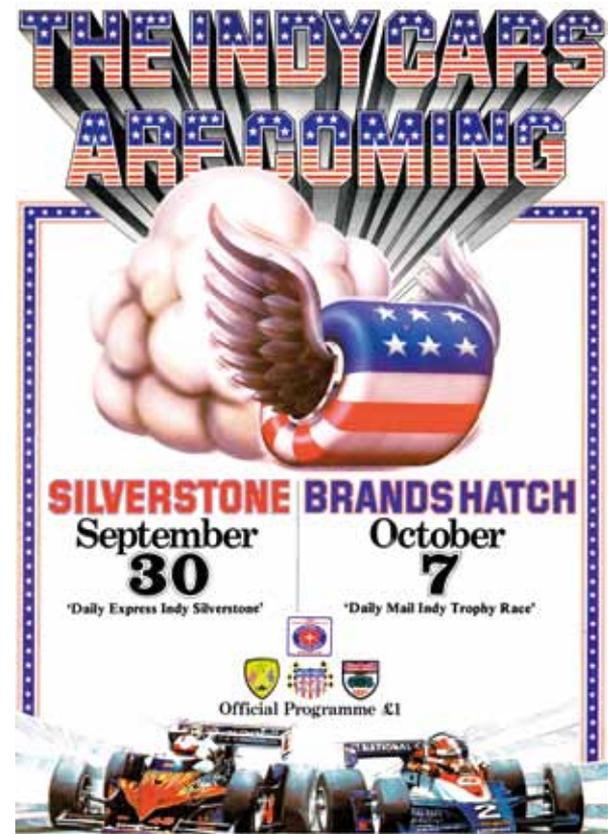
“I guess I’m cornering much slower ...”

‘The Indy Cars are coming!’ proclaimed the pre-race publicity. Sixty-seven years after the first Indianapolis 500, a full field of Indy cars were being shipped to the UK to compete in two rounds of the then USAC Citicorp Cup. Motor Circuit Developments, the owner of Brands Hatch, was to promote the races but they were to be held at both Brands and Silverstone.

In 1978 Indy cars mainly raced on ovals and that meant, as it is said in cricket, that rain stopped play. Even today, that is the case on the ovals; something that Dario Franchitti must have been pleased about when a downpour stopped the 2007 race not long after he took the lead. In England, the teams would be racing on road courses but there was no such thing as rain tyres. And, of course, it often rains in England.

MCD boss John Webb took a big gamble to bring the Indy cars to Britain. An inner core of enthusiasts was excited by the prospect but would they appeal to a wider audience? “To offer the public something completely new is always a risk but *Autosport* considers this venture tremendously exciting. At a time when many forms of international motor racing are falling by the wayside, we are now being offered the fastest cars in the world,” said one of the two UK weekly motor racing publications. It was hoped that the races would become a permanent feature on the calendar. Rick Mears and Tom Sneva had already tested the latter’s Indianapolis pole-winning Penske PC6 at Brands in the August and indicated that such cars would be more spectacular than the norm experienced in UK-based single-seater racing. There was even the promise of plenty of overtaking from the narrow wheeled, turbocharged cars.

It was never going to be easy though. The September and October races punctuated a busy end of season schedule for the USAC teams, which would have to adapt its cars for road racing; fitting locking differentials, smaller turbochargers, different pedal assemblies, and increased suspension travel. Goodyear was also



*"It did have its shortcomings," added Brown, "... particularly on the short ovals, and there are those who would say that we were lucky to win Indy as Michael had it stitched up with ten laps. However, winning Indy first time is verging on unique."*

*By the end of the season Galles Kraco was in with a reasonable chance of the championship, but the introduction for the last two races of a tub, built as an investigation into the more stringent 1993 safety rules, just exaggerated the issues with the car's torsionally soft bell housing. Unser would finish well down the order in these final two races, and this limited him to third place overall in the points.*

*"We were looking good for 1993," said Brown. "The numbers in the wind tunnel were excellent. In fact, I didn't see numbers to beat them until we put the 1996 Reynard in the tunnel." However, the money was not available to develop the car any further and in the November the operation was reduced to a skeleton crew. "We had even got as far as ordering the material for the buck for the tub when the order came down for us to stop work"*

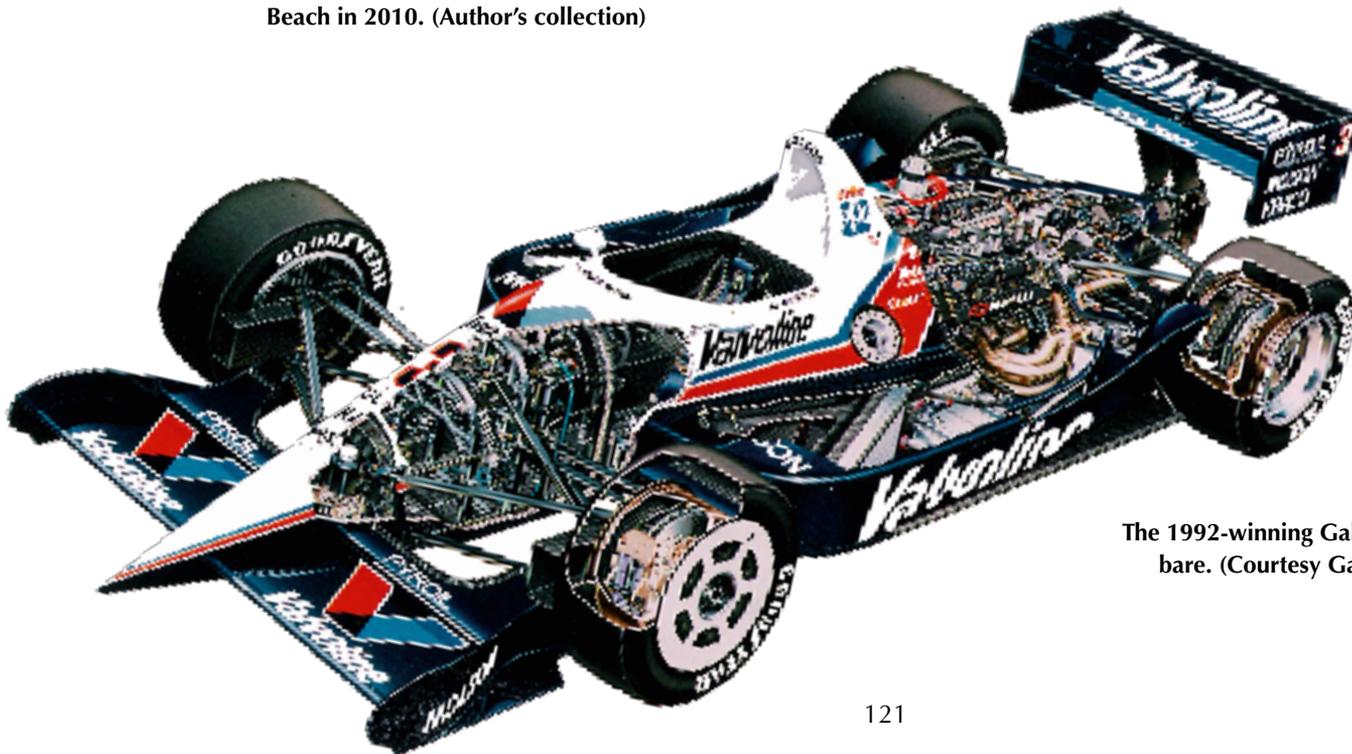
*Bruce McCaw entered Dominic Dobson in the year old Galmer for the 500. "We took a lot of pleasure in the fact that it qualified the fastest of the year old cars," said Brown. Dobson finished twenty-third but that, along with Al Unser Jr's win and Danny Sullivan's fifth the year before, were the only appearances of the Oxfordshire-built Galmers at Indianapolis.*



Former March and Lola designers Alan Mertens (left) and Bruce Ashmore (centre) seen spreading the word about their BAT IndyCar project at Long Beach in 2010. (Author's collection)



A Galmer G92 ready to leave Bicester for the US. (Courtesy Gene Varnier collection)



The 1992-winning Galmer G92 laid bare. (Courtesy Galmer, Inc)

## THE BRITISH AT INDIANAPOLIS



**Rahal returned to Lola for 1995, finishing third behind two Reynards. (Courtesy Lola Cars)**

On the first qualifying day, Unser ran three of the four qualifying laps before Roger Penske, thinking that he was not going fast enough to make the grid, aborted the attempt. In retrospect, Bennett says that was a mistake because Unser's times on the first three laps were quick enough, and he would have qualified. During the second week Penske "... had lost faith in our ability to solve the problem." He duly purchased a Reynard "... and that didn't work too well either, so he borrowed two Lolas, but none of the drivers could qualify in anything. To me, that proved that they had been totally spooked by the whole situation."

Bennett recalled Penske asking him if he minded the team purchasing a Reynard, "... as he didn't think we had the time to get the Penske up to speed. I said I did but he bought one anyway! It was an horrific month." Paul Tracy was not with the team that year for Indianapolis but he came back and tested for the car at the Speedway, just after the end of the season. "We had a normal front bar on. He did 232mph and said, 'I can't see what your problem was.'"

Bennett regards himself as not being particularly creative but more of a developer; analysing what may have gone wrong and drivers' feedback and then working out where he could improve the car – a one step at a time approach. During his time with Penske, his work on a new car would start around April or May with an extensive wind tunnel programme at Southampton University. "This took up about eighteen weeks in the year, which was a contrast to when I was at Lola when we had a very restricted wind tunnel programme. The wind tunnel was the basis of Penske's research at that time. The overall programme was well organised with a set date being decided early on for the car's delivery." It was a goal that, Bennett believes was rightly set – leading to much discussion between design team and management. Generally, the car would be delivered to the airport on time but it meant



**Lola versus Reynard in 1995. Scott Pruett in the latest from Huntingdon leads Stefan Johansson in a year-old car from Bicester. (Courtesy Lola Cars)**

car loose on entry, and still have the exit understeer. It seems amazing now that we didn't get to grips with the problem but days lost to bad weather and reliability problems meant less running and the drivers no longer had any confidence."

that the team had to be very structured with its design and build programme, with weekly production meetings. "It worked pretty well."

Following a final involvement with Indy car racing as a consultant to G-Force, where John Biddlecombe recalled, "He was an absolute

## PART FOUR: GRAND PRIX VICTORY – LEWIS HAMILTON

Justin Wilson's first appearance at Indianapolis was in the 2003 US Grand Prix, running as high as third at one point. The Formula One cars have now left the Brickyard, but the Englishman was back in 2008. (Courtesy Indianapolis Motor Speedway)

Champion Fernando Alonso, was just then starting to complain that McLaren was giving him preferential treatment. Despite that, Hamilton seemed not to be phased. Making his debut at the track, and with the team not having found an optimal setup prior to qualifying, Hamilton still claimed pole position. He recalled the British flags that flew around the track then.

The practice had begun on the Friday morning. The session had been running for some time before Hamilton appeared on the track. At that point Jarno Trulli and Toyota had the best time on the board. Trulli was no slouch, particularly at Indy. In short, he sets a good benchmark. And Hamilton blew it away on his first flying lap.

"Not many people were paying attention in the press room," recalled British journalist Matt Youson, "But of those that were, most nodded in appreciation. In the age

Turning right at the Speedway. Lewis Hamilton on his way to victory in the 2007 Grand Prix. (Courtesy Indianapolis Motor Speedway)

