

More Formula 5000 Memories

The year 1975 began with plenty of drama for those of us destined to compete in the nine-race F5000 series. Lola introduced a new model, the T-400, to follow the dominant T-332. In practice for the first race at Pocono on May 1, we qualified a lowly 11th. When questioned by team manager Jim Hall as to what the problem was, I had no answer. The car felt fine—but it was slow. Bad weather meant the cancellation of the race and it was rescheduled for June 1, just four weeks later, where the qualifying times would stand.

Here, Carl Haas showed uncanny business judgment by not letting the T-400 get a black eye right out of the box. As the U.S. importer for Lola Cars and having sold at least six of the new T-400 model and with a certain obligation to his customers, he bought a crash-damaged T-332 and shipped it to Jim Hall's operation in Midland, Texas. There, the crew of Franz Weis, Troy Rogers, Tony Connor and Davy Evans worked night and day to ready the car for me at Pocono.

By this time, Bobby Unser had joined the Gurney Eagle team (Eagle 755) while his brother Al had joined Mario at Vel's Parnelli (Lola T-332). In Pocono's second heat I came up on oval racer Bobby Unser's Eagle. Slipping down the inside going into a tight hairpin, I went on to win the heat.

Afterwards, Bobby came up to me and said, "Hey Redman, what the hell you doin' passing me like that on the inside?"

I replied, "Well, er, you left a gap"

Unser said, "Is that how you road racers do things?"

I replied, "Well ... yes."

Unser just grinned and said, "Okay, now I know."

Round 2, at Mosport June 15, was a really tremendous race for me with Mario. Just before the start I noticed that Mario had lowered the angle of his rear wing. I mentioned it to Hall and he asked if I would like to do the same. I decided not to.

Well, guess what happened? On the long uphill straight, Mario pulled away

like I was tied to a post. Making every effort, I could close back up by the turn after the pits, but there was no way to pass. In a thrilling race, we lapped the entire field and I finished 0.62sec behind in second place and Mario had averaged 116.489mph for the entire race. Quick!

Off to Watkins Glen for Round 3 on July 13, both Mario and I lapped under the F1 and Can-Am lap records. In the race, Mario's motor was slow to start and he finished fourth. Al Unser was second, some 33sec behind my Lola T-332.

On July 27 at Road America, Mario won and I was eighth after stopping to replace a punctured tire. His VPJ Lola ran away from the field and Jackie Oliver came second in the Shadow DN6.

At the following race at Mid-Ohio

before the race, but took a look anyway. Sure enough, the limited-slip had broken, so a new unit was fitted for the race.

The very strong field included Andretti, Al Unser, Graham Hill protégé Tony Brise, Vern Schuppan in a Gurney Eagle, F1 driver Chris Amon in a Talon, Tyrrell F1 driver Jody Scheckter in a Carl Hogan Lola with teammate David Hobbs, F1 driver and Can-Am Champion Jackie Oliver in a Shadow, former F5000 Champ Graham McRae, Canadian star Eppie Wietzes, Australian standout Warwick Brown and others.

For the first two laps, Al led, and then on lap 3, Andretti and Brise went past. I sat in fourth place watching the action. But on the 10th lap, disaster!

Once again, the Lola snapped sideways on landing after the Turn 1 "jump." Another broken limited-slip! The only thing to do was to take it easy on the throttle going over the very rough uphill surface before the final turn onto the pit-straight, and do the same in Turn 1.

I began dropping back from the flying trio up front. But then to my utter surprise, I saw Unser stuck in the wall, then Mario sidelined with transmission failure and Brise out with a

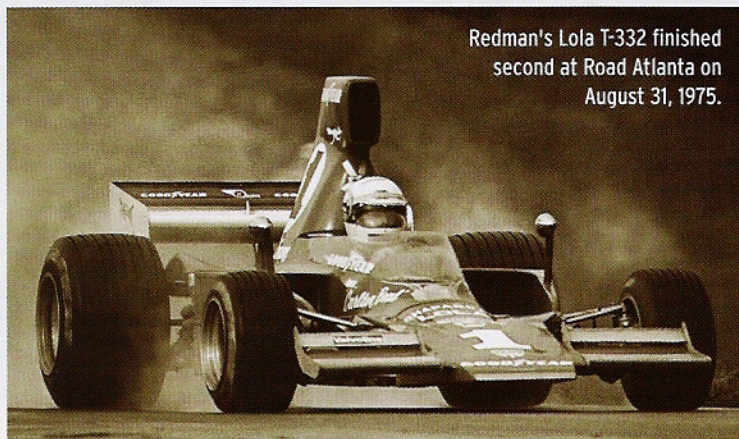
broken halfshaft! All of a sudden I'm leading but with Scheckter gradually closing—until he, too, suffered a broken halfshaft on the 29th of the 50-lap race.

So, we won! Not a great win in terms of driver effort, but certainly memorable. And of course, the 1975 Formula 5000 Driver's Championship was ours.

After the race, they couldn't find the race queen for the awards ceremony ... she was later found drunk on the floor of a local bar. Standing in for her was Patti Queen, wife of Jack Queen, president of Boraxo. Due to the success of the Long Beach race, Boraxo signed on as the primary sponsor for the 1976 season.

At Laguna Seca in October, I crashed during practice but the Lola was repairable and we wound up third behind Mario and Al Unser.

The final race of the year, Riverside, on



Redman's Lola T-332 finished second at Road Atlanta on August 31, 1975.

PHOTO: HAL CROCKER

August 10, tragedy struck in the second heat when B.J. Swanson's throttle stuck on his Lola and he crashed heavily into a guard rail. He later died from his injuries. So our victory over Al Unser and David Hobbs was bittersweet.

Our rain-delayed event at Road Atlanta August 31 saw my tires go away as Al Unser took this one, with Mario just behind me in third, also fighting tire problems.

Then, on September 28 it was on to Long Beach for F5000's first street race. The weekend was another example of my generally good fortune. On Saturday afternoon during the final qualifying session, my Lola snapped sideways after landing following the Turn 1 "jump." I told Hall that I thought there was something wrong with the Weisman limited-slip differential. However, he hated to pull the transmission apart just

October 26, was perhaps one of my worst experiences in racing—apart from temporary incarceration in various body repair depots that is! In addition to it being the final round of the '75 F5000 series, it was also the venue for the second and third IROC races—all the drivers in Camaros.

However, during the first practice session Friday morning with the Lola, everything was fine, at least until exiting the very fast Turn 9. Just as I was down on the apex of the exit, my left front tire burst. Completely out of control, the Lola shot straight across the track and hit the outside wall at more than 100mph. My head went so hard from side to side that the windscreen was broken on each side of the cockpit.

The spare car, a T-400, had never been raced and I'd never driven it. However, it had been properly set up by Franz Weis at Rattlesnake Raceway in Midland, Texas.

In the first IROC race, as usual, we were all in a bunch, then suddenly I got a friendly (?) tap from Richard Petty that sent me into a spin coming out of Turn 7. Richard had kindly made sure it was in a safe place and I spun harmlessly through the dirt and gravel before rejoining the race.

On the next lap flying into Turn 9 going at least 150mph, the throttle stuck wide open. I went straight into the outside retaining wall once again, with further damage to my neck muscles.

Sunday arrived, and the second IROC race was immediately before the F5000 final. Dragging myself out of the Camaro, my blue driver uniform was black with sweat and I was exhausted by the effort of trying to keep my head up, but duty called and I went straight into the T-400.

In the race, it was all I could do to just drive around. We finished third and on the last lap, taking the usual look at the engine gauges, there was no oil pressure. Switching off, I was towed in. What a way to end the season!

Lola introduced yet another all-new model, the T-430, for 1976. This car was very good, smaller than the T-332C, and almost as fast. I used it in practice at Watkins Glen, where it set a new lap record. However, at the end of the day the 332C was still marginally better. I have little doubt that with development, the T-430 would have been a great race car.

Of course with all the great drivers in the series, 1976 was another tough year! The final points standings were: Redman 132, Unser 112, Jackie Oliver 108, Alan

Jones 96, Danny Ongais 78, Vern Schuppan 45.

Great credit for success in the F5000 series must go to Jim Hall and the superb Chaparral crew, particularly Franz Weis who built the engines and test drove the car. What tremendous reliability—just one engine failure and one suspension failure in four years—with three Championships and a runner-up.

During the past few years, F5000 with its tremendous "bang for the buck"—550hp and 1450lb—has become popular

in England and extremely popular in Australia and New Zealand. However, in the U.S., despite efforts over the years, there has been little interest. This is about to change.

Enthusiast Seb Coppola is arranging to feature F-5000 in the Kohler International Challenge at Road America, July 17-20, and September 4-7 in SVRA's Zippo at Watkins Glen. Participation from England, Australia and New Zealand is expected. Learn more at F5000register.com.

Long live F5000! 🍀



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