

RavensYard Excerpt
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Detroit: Seeking the Grand Prix (1982)

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13. DETROIT & THE GRAND PRIX

April 1, 1982, Chicago, Ill.: (Journal, copy to Dad)—Last Saturday, Sun Oak, the kids and I went to Ted Sullivan Pontiac, Inc., on Dundee Road in Arlington Heights, Illinois, and made a \$2,000 cash down payment on the 1982 Pontiac Bonneville Model G that we ordered six weeks ago; dark blue exterior, dark blue interior, four door, 3.8 liter engine, AC, power all around, standard wheel and hubs, no plastic roof, hard only, plastic seat covers no velour, and just about the nicest piece of machinery I've ever had a part ownership in. Partly because GMAC financed the wheels, and for 48 months starting May 11 I shall be paying more than I ever care to admit for this replacement vehicle, which now occupies the driveway space where my green '71 Skylark had stood for all those years.

We sold the Buick on Sunday for \$740 to the sister of a co-worker of Sun Oak's at the bank where she worked. The Skylark had been a gift from Sun Oak's mother when we married (some gift) and we've had it ever since. When it drove away down Newberry Lane after dark Sunday, I felt sad. Strange emotions us Americans have for cars, eh? The new Bonneville is Detroit at its best. It rides like a Caddy, is quiet, gets good mileage (25-35 mpg), an extremely smooth ride. It had four miles on the meter Saturday. Today it has 118 miles. The fact it has four doors is tremendous; no more having the kids climb all over the place. I have lock power at my fingertips to prevent them from opening the doors. The car is great.

I thought what a great thing I was doing spending money on a car to keep Detroit afloat in my own little way. I was helping the wheels of commerce revolve. And, what the hell, I'm just like every other car-loving American. Getting in a new car after signing your life away is exciting.



All this comes as I prepare for June 4-6, when Detroit (the city) will host one of the 16 Grand Prix races scheduled for 1982. Among the entries will be two cars called Saudia-Williams #1 and Saudia-Williams #2. These are Formula One race cars with Ford Cosworth engines, designed and built by Frank Williams of Williams Grand Prix Engineering Ltd., of England, driven by an Argentine named Reihhaussen and an Aussie named Smith, and paid for by a Saudi affiliated with Saudia Airlines, APSCO (the lube canning company that Mobil has a piece of in Saudi Arabia), and TAPS, the Trans-Arabian Pipeline that Mobil has a piece of, designed and constructed and now operates between the Persian Gulf producing fields and the Red Sea port of Yanbu, which Mobil is also helping build. The TAPS is a strategic

asset for the Free World, offering a safety value for the world's oil consumers in case something messes up in the Persian Gulf. Mobil built it.

Mobil Saudia Arabia, Inc., the Middle East Department (MED) subsidiary based in London, is working with Williams, and the Middle East Department in NYC has ponied up \$300,000 to subsidize the Williams operation. Williams signed a contract with some Mobil affiliate (who knows which one) to use Mobil synthetic lubricants in the Cosworth engines and metal-to-metal fittings around the machines. Last year, with Mobil lubes in the Williams machines, they won all over the place. They came in second and third in the overall finals, and placed first on a couple of occasions. Williams is quite the operator, a grand automaker, and very respected among the cognoscenti.

In recent weeks, LaPorte in NY has been giving me hints that somehow USM&R might get involved in this Grand Prix event somewhere. The three U.S. races are in Long Beach, Detroit, and Las Vegas. Long Beach and Las Vegas I don't care about. That's a West Coast problem.

Detroit is another matter; it's my turf. Late last week, I got a package in the mail indicating that USM&R brass aren't giving this MED effort any financial support, but will let local managers decide whether they want to take advantage of the race in their areas and use Mobil's participation in the Saudia-Williams program as a sales opportunity.

I canvass the refinery, the Resale people. Nix. I then talk with Jim Bauguss, the Commercial manager, a cigar chewing Cajun and savvy swamp fox, and he says maybe. He's going to Detroit this week, and I suggest that perhaps it would be appropriate for me to get to Detroit Tuesday and talk with race officials and then Wednesday give what will be available to the key Commercial people in Mobil's office in Southfield, Michigan, a suburb 15 miles northwest of downtown Detroit.

Good idea, he says. So at the crack of dawn Tuesday I take the '78 Buick, leaving the '82 Bonny for Sun Oak, and drive to O'Hare where I park and board a DC-10 wide body (seating 10 across) and fly to Metro Detroit Airport.

I get to the Avis place and rent an '81 Olds Omega, the I car, front wheel drive. It's yellow. Ugly. Drives terrible. And I get on I-94 aiming toward Motown, and what a place! Now the weather was just warming up, the snow had just melted and the trees and grass had yet to turn green. I blame nature's seasons for the ugly scenery.

But after a while, it became clear it wasn't all nature's fault. The road was in terrible repair, potholes all over. The highway had heavy truck traffic; all barreling over 60 and breezing cars like me around like ping-pong balls inside a hair dryer at the beauty parlor.

The road signs were telling: Goodyear had a high sign that had digital

numbers calling out 1982 car production—1,055,441...442...443—every five seconds. Uniroyal had a fake tire about 10 stories high, a huge round thing which looked just like a tire. A veritable monument. The grime was thick. Wind blew discarded newspapers and brown paper around dangerously. The wind held a paper bag to my grill for five miles.

I passed huge Ford, GM and Chrysler plants from various divisions, “Ford Assembly Division Alton Plant” and such like. They were low-slung, dirty, and had the air of decay about them. Behind chain link fences, the parking lots were only half full, where laid off employees don’t park anymore.

I swung onto Route 10 leading toward downtown Detroit and for a while I thought I was on the BQE going through Brooklyn. The city on either side of this decaying highway was desolate. The wood frame homes were burned out and in terrible repair. Windows were broken. Soiled draperies, tattered and torn, blew out of the windows and flapped in the wind. The streets were strewn with litter. All this made Detroit look like New York City during a sanitation strike.

Black teenagers, thin as reeds, walked about in sneakers and parkas. Others wore hand-me-downs from the Salvation Amy, work jeans, black canvas sneakers, and stocking caps pulled about their heads. The stocking caps were dirty, full of yarn that was pulled out and napping up from too much wear.

High above one plant was a large white sign with a Ford logo and beneath it, in blue letters, “World Headquarters.” The highways out the front door were full of potholes and needing repair. I swung under an underpass and above a railroad switching yard, and there in the distance I saw a huge 35-to-40-story brown stone monster of a building, designed and built probably during the Depression, as large as a university administration and classroom building at Ohio State, the centerpiece of the skyline, and above it were the letters spelling out “General Motors.”

I wondered to myself what the hallways must look like inside that building. I knew what Mobil’s NY HQ was like. And that building was only 25 years old. This one had to be more than twice that. The design and the building itself were from another era. As I drove into Detroit I saw signs leading to Canada (which is right across the Detroit River, Windsor, Ontario, to be exact) and through another underpass I came out on Jefferson Street, which runs parallel to the Detroit River. Here, high above me, was a complex so stunning and new it looked like Emerald City in *The Wizard of Oz*—four monster buildings on each corner of the complex, and in the center, a circular tower that was much higher than the corner buildings. It swept toward the sky, brought your eyes above the ground. Truly something from the 21st century!

It was the Renaissance Center. I parked and went inside. The complex

was like a space station you heard about when you were a kid, when some futurist designer discussed the cities of tomorrow. Shops everywhere. But many were still boarded up with signs very discreetly telling a renter where to inquire about rents and lease arrangements. The various levels were confusing, but the design and execution of this place were truly magnificent. There were little sitting areas, and places to lounge about and have a coffee or a drink with your patootie and smooch if you wanted. A kid was playing a guitar in one of those greenery cafes. Despite this pleasant scene there were other signs: some of the black sneaker crowd were walking about, too. A few ducked down a side stairway that led to a lower level of the Westin Hotel that occupied the center tower.

I browsed in a few shops, stopped for a while in a joint that sold Gaelic and British imports. A record playing pipes was the background music in that place. I enjoyed myself. At 1 p.m. I had an appointment with the PR lady for the Grand Prix. She was a barracuda, but I learned that Detroit Renaissance Inc. is a 10-year-old nonprofit outfit founded by Henry Ford II (aka Hank the Deuce), that put the financial package together to build the RC. They are losing money hand over fist, can't find tenants, are fighting bad press around the world, and despite the beauty and majesty of the edifice they are right now losing their ass.

In November 1980, DR Inc. had an idea that they should get a Grand Prix race to America's Motor City to highlight the spot, get some publicity, money, exposure, etc. Same thing with the Super Bowl in Pontiac. And last summer's Republican Convention at CoHo Hall, the civic center a half-mile from the RC complex. The Grand Prix race fits into that "revitalize Detroit" program put together by Hank the Deuce. He got the governor, legislature, city council behind the Grand Prix and is spending up to \$1 million to prepare 2.5 miles of streets with 20 turns for a course around the RC complex for the racing event Sunday, June 6. International TV, jet setters, the whole megillah.

My program was to find out how Mobil could participate—if at all. I found out that Hank the Deuce's had set it up that they would cooperate with you in direct proportion to the amount of money you planned to spend. One box (10 seats for three days, five parking places, access in and out) cost \$2,900. The PR lady said they were going fast. Where do I get help in hospitality suites? Me, she sez. How much? That depends. Mementos? Me, she sez. How much? That depends. Did I get the picture? Yes. She talked about something called the Paddock Club, which for \$5,000 ensured the purchaser and one guest access to a VIP reception at Hank the Deuce's estate, a prime viewing area in a grassy private spot overlooking the track, river, RC, etc. and other bona fides that were available. Okay. I got the idea.

By 2 p.m., I had my information and lots of time—my next appointment was at 9 a.m. Wednesday in Southfield, 15 miles away. Should I stay at

the Westin? Nah. Get out to Southfield, stay at the Sheraton and fall out of bed and take five minutes to get to the meeting the next day. So I get on the road to Southfield, pass the scenery again, and figure that Southfield would be much like other Mobil field offices: suburban, clean, discreet, near a few good convention hotel places, shopping centers, etc. I was on Route 10 for a half an hour and got off at 9 Mile Road in Southfield, and lo and behold it was still Detroit.

The configuration of the roadways in Detroit is so confusing that only natives can know whether they are going down the right way on a street, are in the right lane to make a turn, or how to get around. I got lost, turned around, and drove about trying to figure out how to get to the hotel I could see from the highway across this huge shopping complex.

But there were troubling signs: debris everywhere, parking lots in horrible repair, no painted lines anymore, rubble from broken asphalt piled up, grit, loose paper, poor drainage. The commercial shops were tacky, discount stuff. The cars in the lots were parked too close together, in no formal order. They too were old, beaten and in need of a wash, a buff, and rust proofing. The vinyl roofs were torn.

The office buildings, which were numerous, had for lease, for rent and for sale signs about. I got to the Sheraton/Southfield, which had three stars in the Mobil Travel Guide. I couldn't find a parking place and drove to the rear, slowly as the parking lot had so many potholes I thought I was in a back road in Maine, bouncing here and there, hitting my heat on the roof of the car.

I got to the hotel, stamped the card, and got a hotel room key and found the room wasn't made up. I went back downstairs and got another room, "I'm so sorry sir, here, take this room, it's on our VIP floor..."

I went to the 18th floor, and the red shag rug was dirty, the black and red shiny-foil wall covering was torn and needing repair. The room was clean enough, but VIP? I looked out the window. The cloud cover was low and gray; it was windy and starting to rain.

I saw the entire Southfield complex. The apartment complexes look like Cabrini-Green in Chicago, the Bed-Sty of these parts. The shopping plaza is drab. Not like Woodfield at all. This suburb wasn't an enclave for white flight. This was an out of town shopping center used by the people stuck in ghetto housing but who have no commercial shops nearby. Buses from downtown let out shoppers from the inner city who for 50 cents can get out of town to the suburbs and do their thing. Lots of kids with huge radios, sneakers, and stocking caps are walking around. Mobil's office is here? What gives?

I have time to kill so I decide to drive around and get a bottle of hooch. I look around for a liquor store. The shopping center terrain stretched for acres, all equally tired. There are a few places that are okay, clean, new. But they are the exception. The decay was deep. You can see the rot. Finally I found a small

shopping center with about 15 stores and one of them says Liquor. The parking lot was like the other ones, confusing, dirty, dangerous to rear axles. In front of the liquor store stood some white guys I'd seen before in my time covering organized crime in Midtown Manhattan: gold chains, bellies over the white belts, long aging Caddies with rust spots parked nearby. Two doors down from the liquor store was a porno shop: peeps, live on stage Vanessa Del Rio, bring your camera, come April 18-25, the Johnny Wadd film festival. Some youngsters hung out in front of that joint, whose sign is up in lights like a movie-theater marquee. The stores next in line are vacant.

The Farmer John grocery chain is filled with discount posters and folks from downtown walking in and out. Wait a minute. Where is the suburban ambiance? This was like Corona, Brownsville, Jamaica; but 15 miles from downtown? Unusual, I thought. I got my hooch, carry the bottle in such a way that I could use it as a club if need be. I am in my three-piece blue corporate uniform, and not part of the scenery, or an obvious habitué of these haunts. I use the same animal defense posture I hadn't used since leaving NYC.

At night on TV I watched the local anchors with hair spray report of mayhem in Motown. There is an organization of pre-teen dope runners called Young Brothers Incorporated, which they had a hidden camera showing selling heroin in nine places around town. Two of these kids killed two cops earlier and the Police Department was putting out publicity on this gang. Cops told the TV reporter these are the kids who control the streets.

Other news: Auto production is down. GM is dropping its rebate program, replacing it with a cut in interest with GMAC. American Motors Corp.'s UAW unit is still bitching about whether to agree to a contract. The meeting of the UAW brass, by the way, was being held in the hotel where I was staying. I had seen the TV people, their microwave vans, and the reporters on stake out earlier and knew something was up. Apple Computer also was holding a sales seminar and training session at the hotel. A GM Engineering group was having a meeting. The place crawled with industry people.

The most noticeable were the UAW brass, big fat, wearing K-Mart double-knits, white belts, smoking El Productos. Stereotype. Dinosaurs fighting about contracts. Outside the world was falling apart, and they were bitching about the contract. I overheard in the elevator a couple of these old geezers laughing that if that guy thinks they are going to accept the AMC offer in total, then he wasn't in the same caucus as he was.

I had a nice meal and a few drinks, read, watched TV, and went to sleep. The next day I had my sit-down with the Commercial marketers who think they might want to get one box to make some points with their contacts at Ford, GM, and AMC.

I learn that the race should be quite a deal. But some mistakes were made. There are three days of events. Time trials on Day 1, the race on Day

3. What about Day 2? The Grand Prix organizers in Detroit wanted to put together some other race, and approached Ford and GM's corporate groups with the idea. Nix. What? AMC is now Renault, and they have other fish to fry. Finally it looks like Porsche will sponsor the race on Day 2. What, I ask? A German automaker sponsoring one-third of the event in Motor City USA! How's that? It seems nobody asked the automakers' divisions—Chevy, Pontiac, Olds, Lincoln-Merc, Ford. Instead the Grand Prix asked the corporate bean counters on the 16th floor downtown.

They didn't ask the people who make and sell the cars and who ache for promotions like Grand Prix. The divisions were pissed. How about that? Sounds familiar. Corporations have similar dynamics, it seems. I got marching orders to start the wheels in motion inside Mobil to grease the way for the \$2,700 box seats—easy stuff that I accomplished this morning.

I finish up with the Commercial people at 10:30 a.m. My flight home was at 7 p.m., so I had a whole day to kill in Motown. I was at the Mobil office, so I strode down to the Resale section and dropped in on one of people I'd met the week before when the District Resale Marketing people came to Woodfield to get put on the Central Region program.

We had a nice visit, lunch and made nicely nicely. His secretary, a Mrs. Murphy, was a delight. A real character. Above her desk was a sign: "Murphy's Law—Don't Mess with Mrs. Murphy." The DM told me the packing boxes all over the office were a result of the office move in a week—another 15 miles out to Birmingham. It seems the Mobil people in the Southfield office have been trying to move for two years. The decay was so deep and happened so quickly they couldn't get approval in time.

I told him my reaction to Detroit. He said, "What you have described in just five minutes, your reaction is precisely accurate. We've been saying that to the Region people in Valley Forge for two years and we couldn't get them to understand it...I finally had to take (the Eastern Region GM) to the parking lot and just told him 'Howard, just look around.' A busload of people from the inner city came out, the radios and all, and he says, 'holy shit.' Now he's a Mormon, you know...then I took him into the mall and he saw the products being sold there...red shoes with high heels, radios and game parlors, clothing you wouldn't expect in a suburban store ...what these merchants are doing is responding to their market... if they didn't stock this stuff they'd be out of business...about half the stores here are boarded up...still I couldn't get Howard to give a positive on our plan to move until...well, you saw that sign above Mrs. Murphy's desk, right? ...about two months ago she drove over to the mall at noon to do a couple of errands. When she came out to get back in her car, broad daylight mind you, some guy chased her. Whether he wanted to steal her purse, molest her, or rape her, who knows? Mrs. Murphy is a feisty thing, and she got into her car in

time and locked the doors as this guy was pounding on the windshield, and she drove off. Turns out we find out later that 40 minutes after he tried to attack Mrs. Murphy, this same guy killed another woman. I told that to Region, and we got our approval the next day!”

Conclusion: rot, deep rot. The car I bought is beautiful, produced by a city that is dying. Hank the Deuce shows dimension, sinking so much money into Detroit with the RC and organizing the events to show the city’s good side: Super Bowl, Reagan’s nominating convention, Grand Prix. But the rot is deep. The signs everywhere. A pal of mine who worked at the *Detroit Free Press* in the mid-’60s said the riot in ’64 killed the town. Seems to me that it dealt a telling blow, but what really did it came a decade later with OPEC, the oil embargo, rising prices, inflation, and recession, stupid corporate decisions in the dinosaur buildings like GM, whose corporate bean counters still don’t know enough to refer a query phone call or letter to the division office in Pontiac, Stone, Lansing, or Dearborn. Politicians’ answers to all this is to increase taxes on producers and give the money away. And UAW guys in a suburban hotel debate a contract rather than create jobs with a dying American automaker which has already sold out to the French! The Young Brothers Incorporate punks. The potholes. The asphalt wasteland. Dope. Porno rackets in the suburbs. I was so impressed with that town, I couldn’t believe it. I simply was not prepared. Is Detroit the future? Was my beautiful new Pontiac Bonneville a dinosaur?



June 7, 1982, Chicago, Ill.: (Journal, copy to Dad)—Grand Prix: the most spectacular traveling circus in the world, the most glamorous, intense, exhausting, and ultimately exhilarating of events. Sounds too superlative, maybe. At this point, Monday noon following the weekend, I remain punchy, perhaps still hearing the deafening roar of the Ford Cosworths and the super-charged turbos of Renault and BMW, and the wonder of the festival of humanity and technology I was immersed in for three days. I spent all of it in Detroit (save the time at the metro airport) in the Renaissance Center.

Mobil once upon a time was very much involved in motor car racing—Barney Oldfield, etc. We dominated Indy 500 events for years as sponsors. There was the Mobil Economy Run, but in 1967 there was this command decision that henceforth Mobil would no longer act as a sponsor or participant in race events. End of Mobil in racing. We disappeared. And Texaco, Union stayed with it. So did the French outfit Elf, and Italian Agip.

The System: There is the system of Grand Prix involving teams. There are factory teams: Renault, Ferrari, Alfa Romeo. Then there are the independent teams: Macarena, Marsh, and a Britain-based team run by a would-be race driver, Frank Williams, turned team-owner car-builder extraordi-

naire who since 1969 has been putting together an organization of some 80 employees, a car factory and Grand Prix Formula One race cars producing.

Like all the team owner/builders, Williams solicits his operating money (estimated at \$10 million a year, though the have-not teams operate on as little as \$5 million, and the factory teams up to \$20 million) from sponsors. The largest sponsors of Grand Prix teams by far are cigarette manufacturers, who as you can imagine look for ad media wherever they can find them. Other big sponsors are tire manufacturers such as Goodyear and Michelin, and European companies that sell perfume, toothpaste, and building tiles (TAG, Parmalat, and Ragno).

Here's where Mobil enters the picture in the person of Middle East Department chief Bill MacDonald. Mobil Saudi Arabia, Inc., based in London, employs a fellow named Jan Stravinsky, who watches over MacDonald's interest in things Saudi Arabian. It seems Saudi Arabia has several types of people. The ones with money have a lot, and many of them are jet set types of the Continent, who have become fond of the glamorous life, caviar, champagne, cocaine, and the rest that is best represented by fast cars, fast life, and fast people, which is one facet of the Grand Prix circuit: life in the fast lane. One or two of these Continental Saudis run Saudia Airlines, and wishing several things, respectability at the international level, and the thrills attached to Grand Prix, decided they wanted to become a sponsor.

Frank Williams, the feisty team owner from Britain, was tired of running a have-not team, single-mindedly devoted to victory and competition. Leland Motors of England and TAG of France were Williams sponsors, but he needed the extra leg up, so Saudia Airlines became the major Williams sponsor. Voila, the result is the TAG Williams Team, a subsidiary of Williams Grand Prix Engineering, Ltd., of Didcot, Oxfordshire, England, starts producing Saudia Williams FW 07s, and this year Saudia Williams FW-08s. In 1980, the TAG Williams Team placed first among the 13 or so Grand Prix teams (each with one, two, or three cars competing). The team was the best in the world. It was operated by Brits, who are bankrolled, for the most part, by Saudis.

Here is where Stravinsky, of Mobil Saudi Arabia in London, gets together with the Williams people. He puts together a package and MacDonald sees the wisdom of investing a bit of money to get closer to a few important Saudis, and in 1981 the Mobil Middle East Department puts nearly \$700,000 into the Williams operation, a commitment to develop synthetic lubes for the engines and some other operating parts of the highly technologically advanced and sophisticated Formula One racing cars that are in use nowadays.

People confuse the drivers with the operation of the Grand Prix. The main working piece of Grand Prix is not a driver. They are the front men, the glory people, figures in the racing circles of near superhuman proportions. They are young, starting at 20 and no longer competitive in their late

30s, who are contract players who hired onto teams and jump from team to team for a number of reasons. It is unusual for a Jackie Stewart (the Scot on TV nowadays) to stay with one team, Tyrell, for his career, though he did win three world championship-driving awards, a feat that makes him the most successful driver in history.

The team is the key here, not the driver. The Williams Team is drawn from the 80 employees of the factory in Oxfordshire. They are young mechanics, specialists in engine technology. There are about 20 of them who travel the world to the 18 Grand Prix cities from January to October. They mostly have the equivalent of a high school education, are not worldly, come from the Midlands (the equivalent of West Virginia), and are the grunt workers. They are referred to as Pit Rats, and occupy the essential bulk of the race, if not the spotlight. They do the work.

They are supervised by various team managers, with a hierarchy and a command structure. The lowly carry tires around, pick up trash and pour fuel, the higher-ranking talk with Williams about a new gear they've got in mind, or a recommendation of what kind of rubber to use or which brake pad would work better on this particular track. Part of the team are the sophisticated, socially adept "development people," with names like Charlie Crichton-Stuart, or Sheridan Thynne, whose job is essentially to act as a liaison between the Williams Team and people like Mobil (i.e., me) and make the sponsor's rep and his guests or whatever feel like they are important are part of Grand Prix, and whatever you want is all right with them.

Held away from the sponsor's rep is Frank Williams himself, the early 40ish team owner/designer/manager, who is so immersed in the race that he is available only for a smile and a handshake at the beginning of events. He is busy being a four-star general in the team area and not interested in being pleasant. He is interested in winning. Period.

Each of the 13 Grand Prix teams operates like this. The best team in Grand Prix in 1980 and 1981 was the Williams Team. The Mobil logo sticker is on the chassis right behind the driver's head on the Saudia Williams FW-07s, and on this year's new model FW-08s. On the sleeves of the very trim and clean Williams Team uniforms is a Mobil patch. On the driver's breast is sewn the Mobil patch. This is the work of Thynne, who is interested in Mobil's development money and sponsorship and sells the space.

To give a bit of background, a few months ago LaPorte told me that Mobil was involved in a Grand Prix car and maybe I would be hearing about putting together some kind of program with the clients in Grand Prix cities, which in my case meant Detroit. I was told to wait until I heard more. I waited. Then I heard more. I went to the management in Central Region to see if they wanted to use Grand Prix for sales purpose. Resale said no—not interested in spending more money and they were aware of the Corporate ban on

race participation. The refiners in Joliet could not justify a program. But the Commercial Department was another story. They sell fuels and lubes in bulk to industrial customers, some of whom would respond very well to being shown a good time at a Grand Prix. The Great Lakes Commercial honcho and I went to Detroit to chat with his people; sure enough there was intense interest on the part of the fellow in the Mobil cosmos who is the synthetic lubrication point man with the nation's automakers.

His name is Clark Keebler, about 35, a racing enthusiast, family man, athlete, and perhaps one of the most genuine folks I've met in the Mobil galaxy. He is part of the Technical Services Department, an expert in lubrication engineering who works closely with engine builders and research people at GM, Ford, AMC, and Chrysler. His contacts in these companies are the fellows who develop motor oil and lubrication specs for every car made in the USA.

After a bunch of false starts, bureaucratic in fighting and shirking of responsibility, I was finally able to get a box—10 seats, five parking spaces—for the three-day event. Keebler identified about 15 or so people in the auto industry he wanted to invite and did.

I coordinated with Bruce, who was handling Middle East PR duties, with LaPorte, and the Williams people on how to get them where and when at the Grand Prix itself. It meant an anxiety producing series of events, bob and weave, but it worked out that we had Keebler and his customers near the Williams cars in the pits, talking with the lube technology people from Williams, close to the center of Grand Prix, and later in the garage area where they tear the machines apart and rebuild them each day, and inspect things like metal wear.

At one point, in the garage, after practice Friday afternoon, Keebler was with engine builders from Buick and Ford, watching the Formula One Cosworth engine being pulled apart and the drive train being disassembled. Keebler got down on his hands and knees and put his nose within one inch of a four-inch gear, inspecting the wear to see how the lubricant worked against the metal. The Buick and Ford people watched with interest. Of all the people in Mobil who could take advantage of Mobil's involvement with Grand Prix, it was Keebler, standing there next to his customers and equipment builders from the largest automakers in Christendom. From that standpoint, the entire event was a huge success. The justification for the whole Detroit program was to get Keebler closer to his contacts in the auto industry. Success. Keebler would later sign up an Oldsmobile plant for Mobil products. In the meantime, I had to bob and weave, liaison it up, coordinate and create the conditions in Detroit where it would happen and it did. It worked.

While this work was going on, I was smack in the middle of a world class event of the most glamorous proportions, living on an expense account

in the Emerald City, eating the finest food at exclusive VIP restaurants, drinking wine that cost \$200 a bottle, and being squired about by a member of the World Champion Formula One Grand Prix Team. I had a pit pass that gave me access to anything I wanted to do. Because the pass was visible hanging around my neck, and was obviously the pass of the event, the looks I got from the crowd said: “Hey, I wonder who he is? Too big to be a driver, maybe he owns a team...”

The Renaissance Center (aka. RenCen) was the center of the disco dancing—cruising to get laid—hey let’s do some coke—crowd Friday and Saturday night. The mix of people was complete, from street punks, to the most elegant of international jet-setters who looked and dressed as though they were walking in the pages of the fashion section of *Paris Match*, or other such tone publication. The men were in designer clothing, casual with money. The women, many of them, of the most sensual and sexual kind, were positively stunning. It seems that Grand Prix brings out the sexuality in some people, men and women, and those who are attracted to it and the people in Grand Prix, display themselves openly and excitingly, are excited and available to those who are like them.

Friday I was in the pit all day, watching the team and drivers practice; Saturday same thing. Sunday was the race event. Saturday was the qualifying practice as they call it in Grand Prix, or at Indy the time trials. The various autos are ranked on the start grid according to their lap time in the qualifying. Where one is in the grid is a important thing. The Williams cars ranked third and 12th.

The world champion driver, a fellow from Brazil named Piquet, was in a BMW and he had trouble and didn’t qualify. Only 23 cars are allowed. Some 4 or 5 cars couldn’t cut it. So they didn’t race Sunday. Among the crowd watching were Christy Brinkley, the current model hit; Jackie Stewart; the Duke of Kent; Henry Ford II; various important looking international types. I shook hands with a Japanese fellow who behaved as though he was chairman of Mazda or Datsun. He may have been.

A word about drivers. In Grand Prix Racing the public sees first and for the most part only these fellows. When the race stories are written, they write about how Keke Roseburg of Finland was leading for 20 laps and was passed by John Watson of Great Britain who eventually won. They talk about the driver’s points in the 13-18 event Grand Prix circuit. A driver gets 9 points for a 1st, 6 for a 2nd, 5 for 3rd, and so forth. The driver with the most points at the end of the Grand Prix circuit (this year the last race will be in Las Vegas) becomes world champion.

What the public does not necessarily see or think about is that Roseburg of Finland is driving one of two TAG Williams Team’s Saudia Williams FW-08 cars. They also don’t focus on the fact that along with the driver’s com-

petition for points is the team's competition with other teams. The team with the most points at the end of the year gets the Grand Prix Contactors Trophy, which is what the Grand Prix is really all about. It is the team, not the driver, that handles the sponsorships and award money and gives out the contracts to the drivers. The better the team, the better drivers they hire. If a team never has one actual win but finishes consistently in the points over the course of the season they can walk away with the championship. This is what Williams did in 1980 and 1981. Sunday the Saudia Williams cars placed 4th and 5th.

The team competition is intense. Yet it is the drivers, perhaps naturally, who are the public focus. The drivers remind me of the ancient warriors, knights, or samurai. They risk their lives. They are well paid, most average \$400,000 a season, the best making well over a million spendolas. They live literally on the fast track. They are young. They are small in stature. They wear their own personal uniforms and helmets. They sell space on their uniforms on their own. Marlboro was across the back of Roseburg and on the center of the front of his helmet.

Those postings earned Roseburg a quarter million to the driver.

Profile—Driver #1: Niki Lauda, 33, a driver of a Maclearn Team Formula One, sponsored by Marlboro. The car looked like a Marlboro box. His teammate, Watson, won the race. Lauda is Austrian, about 5 feet 6, wiry, with the face of a chipmunk (which in fact is his nickname). He was world champion driver in 1976. Also, in 1976 he was involved in a serious accident. He was horribly burned. He was given last rites. He survived, retired and recently returned to driving Formula One.

The 48 floor of the Westin Hotel, the tallest of the RenCen buildings, is where I had my hotel room. So did Lauda. I was waiting for an elevator Friday evening, say, around 7 p.m., when the bell rang indicating the elevator was arriving. It happened to ring for up, but a person walking to the elevator bank who couldn't see the red light instead of the white light couldn't tell. When the bell rounded, I heard this pounding of shoes and rustle of clothing, clinking of change, and bounding around the corner into the elevator area hopped Lauda. I recognized him by his red hat, having seen him in the pit earlier in the day.

Bruce had told me he had a scar on his cheek from the fire of some years ago. I smiled at the guy, didn't make all kinds of conversation or attempt to. I'm not a groupie. But I looked at the fellow as he leaned against the wall waiting for the down elevator with me there. He looked like a preppie. He wore loose corduroy pants, loafers without socks, an alligator type shirt with a baggy sweater over it, and that red cap. Then he took off his cap and scratched his scalp. His face became quite clear. There was no hair on the right side of his head. His skin was pasty, and disfigured. The top half of his

right ear was gone. The burn went across his cheek and down his neck. His eye was misshaped. His disfigurement was considerable. I was later told this was the result of many bouts of plastic surgery, and the best it would get. Lauda casually put his hat back on, as though it was the most natural thing in the world, and then I could see more clearly the disfigurement, and also why he wears the hat, which is now his trademark. The elevator arrived and we got in, greeting others who recognized him and smiled pretty much like I did, which was to recognize the guy and basically leave the guy alone. I later read bio-material on the guy. He's a cult hero. His comeback from the wreck to the Grand Prix has made him a figure of tremendous awe among the cognoscenti.

On race day, Sunday, Lauda was way down in the grid, about 13th or 14th. His teammate was 17th. During the race, Lauda drove like a man possessed. He had passed some 10 cars, an unheard-of thing, at 180 mph on straight away speeds, 5 mph at the corners. He was following the 3rd, 4th, and 5th place cars within inches at these speeds. The desire to pass and win was complete. He was an instant away from death or another maiming for two hours. The fans cheered him. He looked in his Marlboro McLaren like any other race driver, menacing, like some kind of space man controlling a land-based rocket that went by so quickly you could barely see it. Lauda had a mishap late in the race, brushing another car he was trying to pass to get into 2nd place, and he hit a cement retaining wall and came to a halt, his car unable to go anywhere. He unhooked his seat and shoulder harnesses and walked back to the pit, his race over, unhurt. He will race again in a week in Montreal.

Profile—Driver #2: One of the two Williams drivers is Keke Rosberg, a Finn. He drives FW-08 #6, the Team's number one car. He signed on with Williams at the beginning of the season, replacing Alan Jones, the Aussie onetime World Champion who retired at the end of 1981. Rosberg is 33, about 5 feet 6. He is well thought of by team members, and is now ranked 4th as a driver in the numbers, though he would be 1st if not for being disqualified in one of the races and being denied points he would have received for placing 2nd in a race. I don't know what the protest and subsequent disqualify was for, but it was a technicality that did not and doesn't diminish his stature as one of the best racing car drivers in the world, a reasonably popular fellow with his new Team mates, and a person of some respect. He wears a blue Nomex driver's suit, with Marlboro patches, Saudia and TAG patches, Champion and Mobil patches, and other logos I didn't recognize. Some are required by his team membership others; like Marlboro, he gets on his own. He will probably earn \$1 million this year.

Before they climb into the cars, the drivers are among the missing. They usually hang around the team's private mobile home a few yards from the

pit area, or in their hotel rooms. Many of them have special diets. They don't drink or carouse. The glamour and jet-setting that goes along with Grand Prix by the fans and sponsors is far removed from the day-to-day, hour-to-hour life of a racing car driver like Rosberg. He is enigmatic, removed, and aloof. He comes and does his job and disappears. He will participate in the technical sessions and in the debriefing after a race, make his recommendations about problems with the car or ways to improve it, about track conditions, providing intelligence for the mechanical specialists, but he is apart from the team in a very significant way. His life is at stake, everyone knows it and treats him as though he is special, for the simple reason that he is. No one else in the organization is doing what he is doing, risking his life for two hours or more every fortnight, or a maiming like Lauda has that he will live with forever.

Before this weekend I'd never heard of the guy. I couldn't figure out what a guy with a Jewish name was doing in Grand Prix. It was my ignorance, as bergs are common in Scandinavian names. I hung around the pit area all three days. I was yards from this guy for long periods of time. He was in another world. He has a mustache, and eyebrows that shape themselves over his eyes in a V. All I could see when I looked in his face was a Viking. After the Friday practice, I was talking with one of the team's development folks, this guy Crichton-Stuart and I wondered aloud what he and the team thought about the track itself after the first go through at 180 mph. He said he wasn't sure but within a few minutes, he brought Rosberg over and introduced me and asked him the question.

Rosberg was totally open, discussing the track as though he were at a suburban country club talking about the 4th hole at the new golf course. The conversation turned to other things, and reporters started coming around. One young lady looked anxious and reminded me of myself at an event waiting for a chance for an interview. I leaned over and asked her what paper. She said *Car & Driver*. I rejoined the conversation with Rosberg and when there was a lull, I motioned that behind him a writer from *Car & Driver* was there and did he want to talk to her.

Big mistake. His expression turned hard, and he shook his head no. Dismissing the suggestion and my impertinent remark. I had treaded on ground that clearly was not my business. It was a bit embarrassing. He realized it too, and moments later remarked that she'd been chasing him for months for more than an interview. His remark was gracious, and made to help me save face, and made the people gathered around laugh. The incident passed and was forgotten. He was a real pro.

The conversation goes to other things, mostly technical stuff, and then he stands for an interview for a lady from *ABC Sports*. She asks him what he thinks of the track. He told her pretty much what he told me, that it is fast

in spots, slow in spots, very bumpy in a tunnel and that is very dangerous.

After the interview he gets back into the pack, and he turns to Crichton-Stuart and asked, “Well, did they like it?” He asked about the fans around the track, perhaps up to 100,000, who had waited all day for a sign of the Formula Ones. Rosberg wanted to know if they liked it. He was told yes. “Was it loud enough? Vaaroom! Vaaroom!” he said, making his own sound effects as if we didn’t know what he was talking about. He was told yes. “Good.” Later my companion from NY HQ told me that was the first time he had ever observed a world-class athlete paid in the million-dollar category express an interest in whether the crowd liked the show. In fact, I thought the same thing. Rosberg was 3rd on the grid, was 1st in the race for about half the time, but finished 5th because his 3rd gear went out and he lost the ability to stay competitive. Rosberg expressed genuine concern about whether his glamorous circus plays in Peoria. It did.

After the race Sunday, Rosberg went directly over to Frank Williams in the pit and talked about the race, the car and conditions for half an hour, while the various tires, equipment boxes and other equipment was being put onto a pickup, oblivious to everything except discussing the machine with its owner and the character of the race and how to make it all better next time.

Profile—Driver #3: Derek Daly is 29, an Irish national, married to a beauty named Yvonne who could be a model, was hired two races ago to replace the team’s senior driver, Reutermann of Argentina, who retired (an act completely unrelated to the Falklands).

Daly has been on the fringes of Grand Prix driving for years, once drove for Marsh, didn’t do well because of equipment problems and now he has his career opportunity for greatness after Williams hired him two races ago. Daly is slender, extraordinarily handsome like Rosberg is, had grayish, sandy blond hair, blue eyes and looks like a spud. His Nomex driver’s suit is cream colored. He has fewer patches than Rosberg, and one of the patches is black and green, Ireland Development Agency — Profits and Growth.

His helmet is black with orange lettering, with his name surrounded by fish. The helmets completely surround the driver’s head, under the chin and back of the neck. They are equipped with electronic earphones and microphones, and have a gizmo that is attached to an air pack in the car that assures the driver of at least one minute of fresh air in the event of a fire. Prominently displayed on the dash in the cockpit is a red button that says “FIRE” with an arrow pointing in the direction that the button should be switched. This switch activates several fire extinguishers in the car, the air pack, and other things in the fuel tank that minimize risks. Such devices permitted Lauda to live, even though he was maimed.

Daly was pleasant. At one point during a practice delay, he was waiting

along with everyone else. He simply went to the edge of the track, lay down on the cement abutment, and fell asleep in the sun for an hour. His wife was with him in the pit and she was a very beautiful and pleasant person, open and talking to everyone. At one point someone remarked that it was hard to wait for the race, she said, “Yes, but it’s hardest on them,” meaning the drivers like her husband. Nice lady.

Daly kept to himself much like Rosberg did, appearing when necessary, among the missing when not. He was 12th on the grid, finishing 4th ahead of Rosberg, because his car #5 didn’t develop any problems, and because he is an excellent driver, and because other drivers he was passing didn’t make any stupid mistakes.

When I left the pit area at the end of the race Sunday, he remained behind, standing by himself in a secluded area, near regular fans, untouched and unhassled, pouring a cup of water down his back. He was alone.

The two drivers I watched closest were Daly and Rosberg. Daly, married, reserved, professional. Rosberg was accompanied by a stunning brunette in tight blue jeans, high heeled shoes, and a loose fitting blue sweater over nothing. She had fashionable sunglasses and moved among the fast crowd with ease in Grand Prix. She’s a Finn who lived with Rosberg in West Germany.

On Sunday she was asked what she and Rosberg did Saturday night. “Did you go to any of the parties?”

“Oh, no,” she said calmly. “We just had a light dinner and were in our rooms by eight...” She said “rooms” clearly, but without any stress or emphasis, simply that Rosberg is a straight shooter who is a racing car driver not a coke snorting fool who sleeps in the wee hours after a night of Grand Prix glitter.

Cars: These are not cars as I had understood them. They are frames of the lightest but strongest metal possible, with mandatory components like brakes, but holding three main things: engine, fuel, and driver. When the outer fiberglass skin is removed, which is all the time as they take it on and off like a glove, it looks so stripped down you don’t recognize it as a car at all. It is a land-based rocket. The skin is specifically and aerodynamically designed to produce the so-called ground effect. In reality is like an upside down airplane wing that instead of providing lift, produces the exact opposite—namely 5,000 tons of downward push that keeps the car firmly on the track at super speeds.

The most significant thing about these cars—aside from the sight of the aerodynamically pleasing vehicle and its rubbers—is the sound. There is simply no way to satisfactorily describe the noise. You don’t hear it. You feel it. Your inner organs literally vibrate with the sound. If you didn’t wear earplugs or some ear protection, you would go deaf. One engine is loud

enough. When the cars start at the beginning of the race, the noise is so tremendous for a minute you forget everything else on Earth except the noise. You cannot hear a conversation next to you, you read lips and then lean to with an inch of your neighbors ear and shout to make yourself faintly heard. Imagine the television at home. There is a volume knob and when you turn it to 10, all the way high, and the noise is simply too much. There was a TV set near the pit with the sound to 10, but during the race, you couldn't hear a thing because it couldn't pierce the sound of the Formula One engines.

The speed of these machines is simply too much. They literally fly, though pressed by the ground effect to the ground. They are so fast you wonder how they can be controlled. But they are. They have five gears, a reverse, and a driver with a steering wheel who for two hours will make a total of 2,000 gear shifts, and take perhaps 8 or 12 corners and turns each of the 65 to 70 laps around the 2.5 mile course.

Race People: Jackie Stewart was walking around, talking, his Scot accent as recognizable as an Indy 500 checkered flag. The VIPs and hustlers from the various automotive parts manufacturers were everywhere. *Penthouse*, the skin rag, sponsors a couple of cars. The Pet of the Year was in evidence the entire time, wearing some black paint for clothing, and available to discuss whatever you liked. Hank the Deuce was around; so was the cousin of the Queen of England, the Duke of Kent. He likes racing. He is a royal. You may not ask to be included in a conversation with him, he has to invite you. And you cannot leave his presence until he tells you to. When he showed up in the Williams pit, there was this awe that I couldn't understand, until I later saw Henry Ford II and got a little bit excited myself.

Detroit: The city went out of its way. The town tried hard and won friends. The sizzle was sweet, if not the steak. For a time you could forget you were in the most seriously depressed industrial city in America, on the northern edges of the USA, in sight of Canada, and believe that the RenCen and Grand Prix were Detroit. After all Jim McKay, that guy Econimacki, and Jimmy Stewart were there and beaming this race to 60 countries, where an estimated 500 million would see Detroit as a Renaissance City. It was a world-class festival, without question the only event of its kind I had ever experienced.

I came back to Earth before I left town. I drove about 7 p.m. to Metro Airport to return the rented car and was inside in the Avis building. There were two people in front of me. I was tired, anxious. There was some photographer with Grand Prix credentials being genuinely obnoxious to the counter girl, asking for receipts that he didn't need and wouldn't get, and was making comments that were in keeping with a person possessing a psychotic need to be socially obnoxious. All I wanted was to get going.

When I came my turn, I stepped up to the counter and said hello, and from just over my right shoulder came this voice, much too close. I turned only slightly to see a black kid, mean twisted expression, pimpled, unshaven, dirty hair, a sheen to his complexion, his eyes squinted nearly closed and he was looking out of the corner of his eye.

“Excuse me, my man, but didn’t you cut in front of me,” he said—you know, being the street dude, wise guy stuff.

“No, I don’t think I did.” My answer was firm enough to stake territory, rattle the sword just enough to say I won’t be intimidated, but weak enough to not try to make a case out of it, and the best thing would be for him to take me at my word and wait his turn.

This rush of fear swept over me, as I watched the clerk process the papers at an incredibly slow pace. I wondered: why now? Some psycho guy, looking for a fight! Will there be steel in my back soon? What is going to happen? Hurry up! Then I move around a bit, stand up as tall as I can, keep loose in case I have to move. I say to myself: stand in control, display no weakness, remain cool and move if you sense anything out of the ordinary.

I guess it worked. The kid went a minute or two later to the next counter girl and started his request. “You mind if I go now, my man,” he sneered at me as he walked over to the counter.

He tried to rent a car without proper ID, and he started talking with a pal I hadn’t noticed about how Reagan hates black folks and he hates white folks., etc. etc. The counter girl showed remarkable control and poise. My clerk handed me my receipt. I walked out as fast as I could and got into the bus to the airport to fly home.