

# A Unique Deed: Dan Gurney Won 1967 Belgian Grand Prix With A Car He Designed & Built

By HERB ANASTOR

A total of 233 Americans have competed in a Formula 1 Race (1950-2020) including the men who drove in the Indianapolis 500 from 1950-1960 when "The Greatest Spectacle In Racing" was included in the FIA World Drivers' Championship.

However, only a handful of Americans have ever won a Formula 1 Grand Prix.

The short list includes: Richie Ginther, who in 54 races (1960-1967) had an impressive 14 podium finishes and won the 1965 Mexican Grand Prix driving for Honda; Peter Revson, who in 30 starts (1964-1974) won the 1973 British and Canadian Grands Prix driving for McLaren; Phil Hill, the only American-born Formula 1 Champion who had three victories in 49 starts (1958-1966) and won the 1961 title driving for Ferrari; and Mario Andretti, who won the 1978 Formula 1 title driving for Lotus and claimed 12 wins in 128 starts (1968-1982).

But the most special of all the Formula 1 wins scored by an American driver took place on Sunday June 18, 1967, when Dan Gurney won the Belgian Grand Prix in a car, Eagle Mk1 Chassis No. 104, that he designed and built. He also had a good deal to do with the creation of the Gurney-Weslake V-12 engine in his winning car.

Gurney had a hall-of-fame career as a driver, car-builder and owner and the deserved reputation for being an innovator.

In early 1971 he invented the "Gurney Flap", a simply-made right-angle piece of aluminum that during a pre-season USAC test at the 1-mile Phoenix Raceway he added as an aerodynamic device to the rear wing of Bobby Unser's No. 2 Eagle. This item was also adapted for use by the aerospace industry.

In August 1968 he introduced the full-faced helmet in Formula 1 when he wore a black Bell Star Helmet during the German Grand Prix. He pioneered he same at the 1968 Indy 500.

Gurney was the first to spray champagne in Victory Lane after he and A.J. Foyt won the 1967 24 Hours of Le Mans. That June 10-11 win is the only all-American victory in Le Mans



history; realized by American drivers and team (Ford Motor Company & Shelby American, Inc.) using an American chassis, engine and tires (Goodyear).

The thing Gurney did that had the most impact on American racing was envisioning the modern rear-engined Championship Car and he brought the major parties together that made it a reality.

Through his efforts, and expense, Gurney brought Lotus constructor Colin Chapman from England to attend the 1962 Indy 500. Then, while at the Speedway, he got Chapman and Ford together resulting in a pair of Lotus 29s powered by Ford V-8 engines that he and Clark raced at Indy in 1963.

A Formula 1 driver since 1959 when he was part of the Ferrari team, Gurney spent time from that period onward racing in the various disciplines, NASCAR Stock Cars, USAC Championship Cars, Sports Cars and Formula 1, on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. His résumé in Formula 1 included drives with BRM, Porsche, Lotus and Brabham.

Gurney's goal as a racer was to win events in cars that he designed and built. The genesis for that began in 1964 when he and Carroll Shelby founded All American Racers to build and race cars in USAC National Championship, Sports Car and Formula 1.

The creation of All American Racers was the result of a sponsorship by Goodyear to form a team to win the Indianapolis 500 at a time the race was dominated by Firestone tires. But

Gurney's plan for a Formula 1 operation was not of interest to Goodyear, so financing for that department was another matter.

All of the cars built under the All American Racers banner were "Eagles" and to make it easier for the USAC/Indy 500 and Formula 1 projects to help each other, Gurney and chassis designer Len Terry used a symmetrical suspension system on both types of Eagles so the information gotten from the USAC Eagle, which in normal cases would have had its chassis offset to the left for oval-track racing, could be adapted to the Formula 1 Eagle.

Four Formula 1 monocoque Eagle Mk1 Chassis, Nos. 101, 102, 103 and 104, were built in 1966, with these units being 50 pounds lighter than the Indy 500 versions, reached by using a thinner grade of aluminum.

When the construction of the Formula 1 Eagles was completed in Santa Ana, CA, they were shipped to the team's shop in Rye in England; an operation known as Anglo American Racers with backing from Mobil.

The first Formula 1 Eagle was powered by a 2.7-liter/164.7-cubic-inch Coventry Climax inline 4-cylinder engine and the No. 27 Eagle Mk1 101/Climax engine debuted in the June 1966 Belgian Grand Prix.

The engine was only a "placeholder" as in October 1965, Gurney had commissioned Harry Weslake of Weslake Engineering in Rye to build a V-12 engine that was not ready until the 1966 Italian Grand Prix.

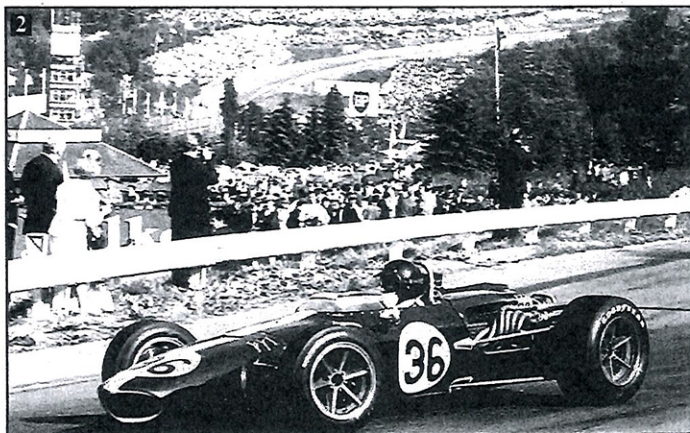
Gurney had previous associations with Weslake and Co. in 1965 when he roughed out an engine with aluminum heads based on the 289-cubic-inch small-block Ford V-8. Working with such an engine can be traced back to Gurney working with Ford and Lotus when they fielded Ford V-8-powered Lotus 29s at the 1963 Indianapolis 500 for him and Jim Clark.

But when Gurney took his idea to Weslake, chief engine designer Aubrey Woods was brought in and through collaborative efforts, a plan for a smooth and powerful DOHC V-12 Formula 1 engine was also developed.

Equipped with four valves per cylinder and a 12-unit Lucas mechanical fuel-injection system, the 2,997-cc/415-horsepower V-12 engine had an aluminum crankcase and cylinder heads; a 60-degree V-layout; a narrow 30-degree valve angle that let a single cover enclose both close-spaced camshafts on each bank; and, a 12.0:1 compression ratio.

It also weighed 365 pounds without its hand-crafted exhaust system and the total budget for four new engines (including the prototype) was roughly \$600,000 (\$4.8 million in today's money).

The new V-12, which had seven main bearings and required some 1,200 man-hours to assemble, proved to be one with promise. And Gurney did quite well with it on the 2.65-mile road course at Brands Hatch, England, when he won the 20-



car 1967 non-points Formula 1 Race of Champions in March.

To make this day complete with his now-Castrol-backed No. 5 the 6-foot-4 Californian won the pole, both 10-lap heats and the 40-lap final. He also won \$675.57 (\$5,228.67) and ran the day's fastest lap (92.6 seconds/103.024 mph).

The race proved to be a har-binger when the racing series held the Belgian Grand Prix three months later, on June 18.

Qualifying for the race at the Spa Circuit saw Clark win the pole, but Gurney was not far behind his dear friend as he claimed the middle spot of the front row and filling out the front row was Clark's teammate Graham Hill.

Gurney's car, though, was a bit different and 80 pounds lighter than the F1 Eagles he had previously driven as this one had a hand-formed magnesium skin and its suspension parts and exhaust headers were crafted from titanium. And in this format the so-called "Ti-Mag Eagle" tipped the scale at 1,192 pounds.

At the start of the race, Clark held the lead for the first 11 laps around the lengthy Spa course and had a 20-second advantage over Jackie Stewart and Gurney.

On Lap 12 things changed quickly as Clark was forced to make a two-minute pit stop as an over-tightened spark plug disintegrated in his Cosworth/Ford V-8 and that gave Stewart the lead. Gurney also had to make a pit stop when he experienced fuel-pressure problems but he got back into action quickly and was only 14 seconds behind Stewart.

With 17 laps completed, Gurney had cut two seconds off of Stewart's lead. Stewart was having trouble and Gurney was able to catch up by four seconds a lap. On Lap 21, Gurney took the lead and drove on to a 63-second victory.

The 36-year-old Gurney's victory, the first European Grand Prix win by an American driver in an American car since Jimmy Murphy's 1921 French triumph at Le Mans, was an important one for Anglo American Racers as the team now felt it was finally on the right track after having some difficulty getting

the car sorted out.

It was also a time of personal satisfaction and fulfillment for driver/team owner Gurney as his performance at Spa set three new track speed marks.

It is also of some consequence that as this is being written Gurney is still the only American to have won a FIA Formula One World Championship Grand Prix in a car he designed and built. The only others to have also built and driven their own cars to F1 wins are three-time (1959-1960 and 1966) Formula 1 World Champion Sir Jack Brabham from Australia and New Zealander Bruce McLaren.

Gurney's 1967 Belgian Grand Prix victory was his fourth and final win in Formula 1. The much-acclaimed triumph at Spa was the only major high point in Anglo American Racers history.

Working with what Gurney admitted was a "shoe-string operation," the low-funded team had little opportunity to do much testing and while there was much promise in the Gurney-Weslake V-12 engine, it suffered from reliability problems, even after Gurney took over the program in 1968.

So, after realizing that he had spread himself too thin, Gurney in 1968 concentrated his efforts on his California-based All American Racers and the record books are full of the accomplishments that he, his drivers and his teams accomplished.

And this situation embraces the fact that between 1965-2012 All American Racers designed and built 158 Eagle Racing Cars for itself and its customers; a number that includes 106 Indy Eagles.

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Gurney was a busy man in 1967 as he crossed the Atlantic Ocean several times. When all was said and done, Gurney had participated in 27 major events driving NASCAR Stock Cars, Sports Cars, USAC Championship Cars, Formula 1 Cars, Can-Am and Trans-Am Cars.

And in addition to his three 1967 victories, he also won the SCCA Trans-Am 300 in Green Valley Raceway in Smithfield, Texas, while driving the Bud Moore No. 98 Mercury Cougar.

It is also a curious thing that in our research we found two re-

ports that three Eagle Mk1 Race Cars originally being entered for the 1967 Belgian Grand Prix: Gurney's winner, No. 104, and Chassis Nos. 102 and 103 for Bob Bondurant and, quite surprisingly, A.J. Foyt.

However, the car assigned to Foyt was eventually assigned to McLaren whose own car was being repaired after an accident at the Dutch Grand Prix. But as the race preparations continued the cars for Bondurant and McLaren were withdrawn.

To add to this thought-provoking scenario, it was even mentioned in the coverage of Gurney's Belgian Grand Prix victory about Foyt and possible Formula 1 plans, but probably not overseas.

Still, while these items made interesting reading, we found little else about a Foyt venture into Formula 1 except for quite a bit of speculation; some of it even suggesting that Goodyear Tire was behind the idea.

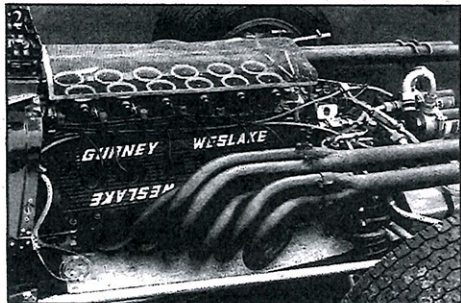
But the thought of Foyt racing in Formula 1 with Gurney did bring to mind a story that "Super Tex" told veteran motorsports journalist Robin Miller just prior to the 2020 Indy 500.

It seems that after Foyt won the first two of his four (1961, 1964, 1967 and 1977) Indy 500s, he met with Enzo Ferrari at Ferrari headquarters in Maranello, Italy, and "il Commendatore" ("The Old Man") offered him a Formula 1 ride.

The only problem, Foyt explained, was that he would be Ferrari's No. 2 driver and that was something that he would not do, especially since there would be "team orders" and such that he would have to follow. In other words, Foyt might be told that the No. 1 driver had to win. So, he declined.

Where was Foyt when Dan Gurney won the Belgian Grand Prix on June 18, 1967?

He was racing in a USAC National Championship 100 at the old 1-mile-asphalt Langhorne (PA) Speedway where he started eighth and finished fifth while driving his Coyote Red Indy 500-winning No. 14. And it was reported that everyone at the traditional American oval-track race was extremely happy and excited about Gurney's historic Formula 1 victory.



GURNEY AT SPA: Dan Gurney 1) is the only American to win a Formula 1 race in an American built car; 2) navigating the rigorous Spa-Francorchamps course en route to 1967 Belgian Grand Prix victory; 3) close up of the huge Gurney Weslake V12 engine which Gurney designed and built with British-based Weslake Engineering. Though it ran well this day, it proved unreliable.

(Photos 1, 2 - 3 AAR)