

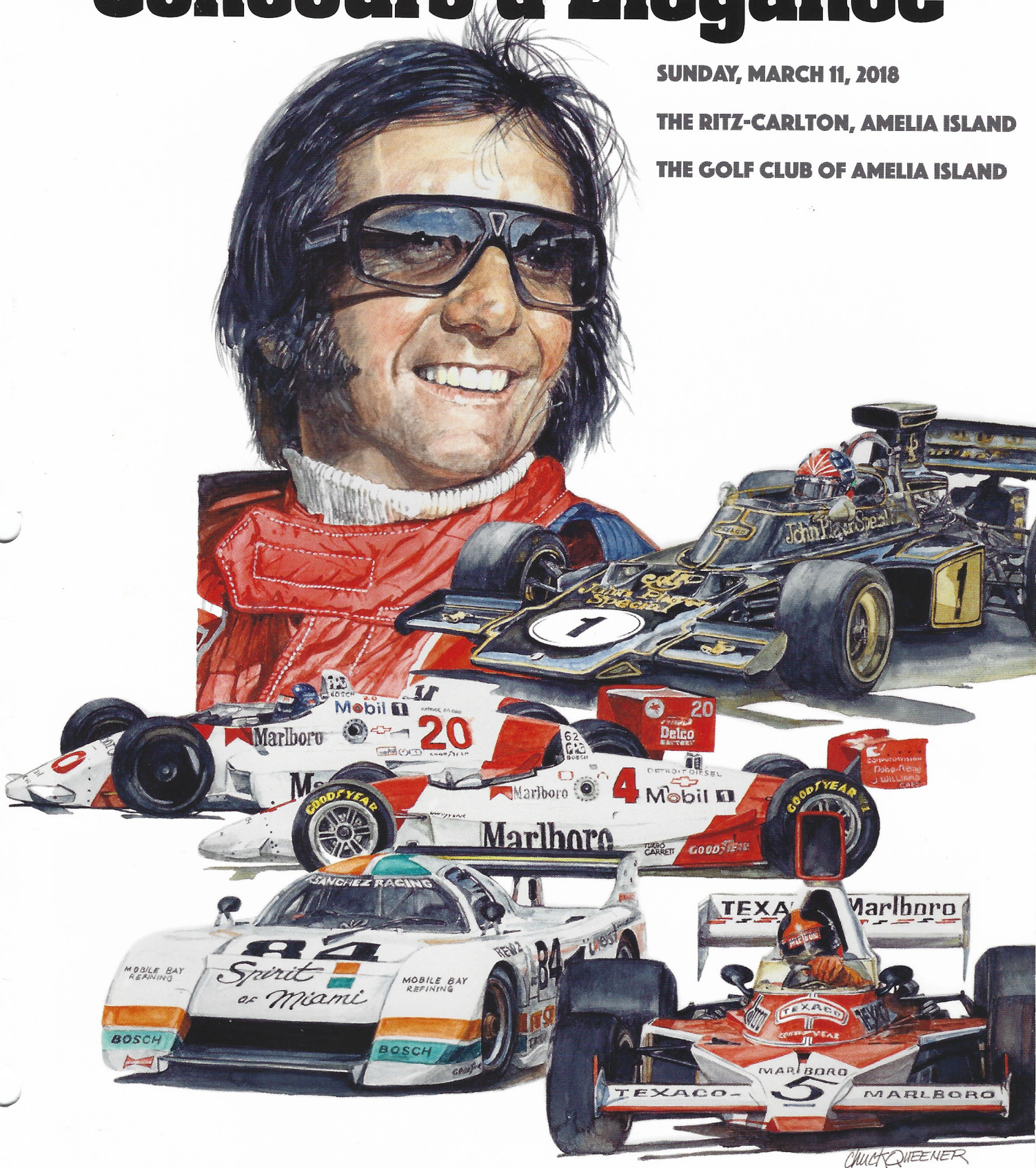
# The 23rd Annual **Amelia Island** **Concours d'Elegance**

SUNDAY, MARCH 11, 2018

THE RITZ-CARLTON, AMELIA ISLAND

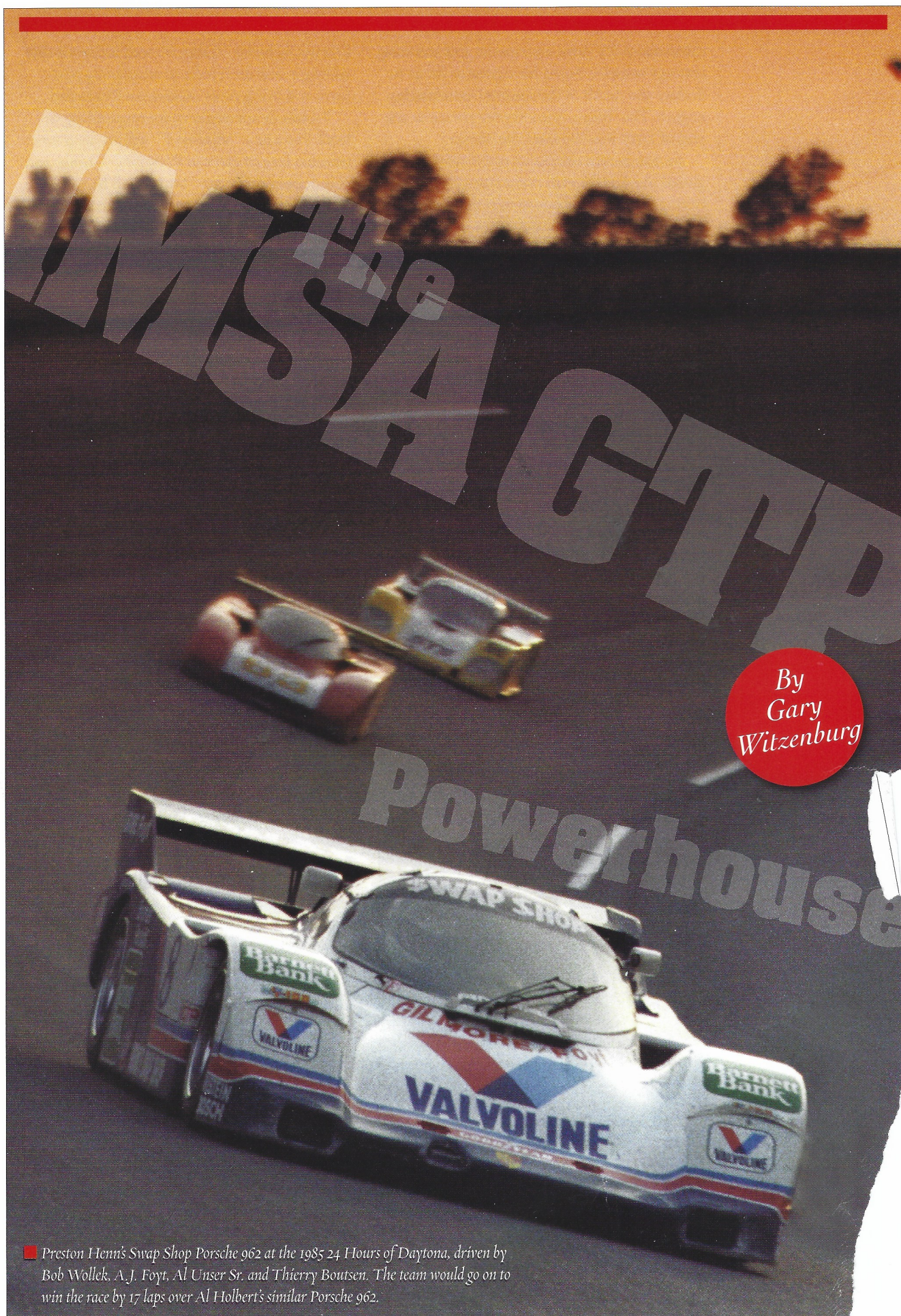
THE GOLF CLUB OF AMELIA ISLAND

THE 23RD ANNUAL AMELIA ISLAND CONCOURS D'ELEGANCE • MARCH 11, 2018



To Benefit The Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance Foundation, a 501 (c)(3) Charitable Organization





By  
Gary  
Witzenburg

■ Preston Henn's Swap Shop Porsche 962 at the 1985 24 Hours of Daytona, driven by Bob Wollek, A.J. Foyt, Al Unser Sr. and Thierry Boutsen. The team would go on to win the race by 17 laps over Al Holbert's similar Porsche 962.



## A baker's dozen years of great American sports car racing

PHOTOS COURTESY BOB HARMMEYER AND BILL WARNER

**“W**

HAT JOHN BISHOP achieved was really amazing,” says former top driver John

Fitzpatrick. “I’d been racing 935s in Europe, and when I got the offer from Dick Barbour to do IMSA, I was over the moon about it. In those days, the IMSA fields were better than the races in Europe. There were more good cars and drivers, and the competition was terrific.”

“IMSA was a powerhouse,” Hurley Haywood says. “The world saw what they were doing and liked it, and everybody jumped on board.”

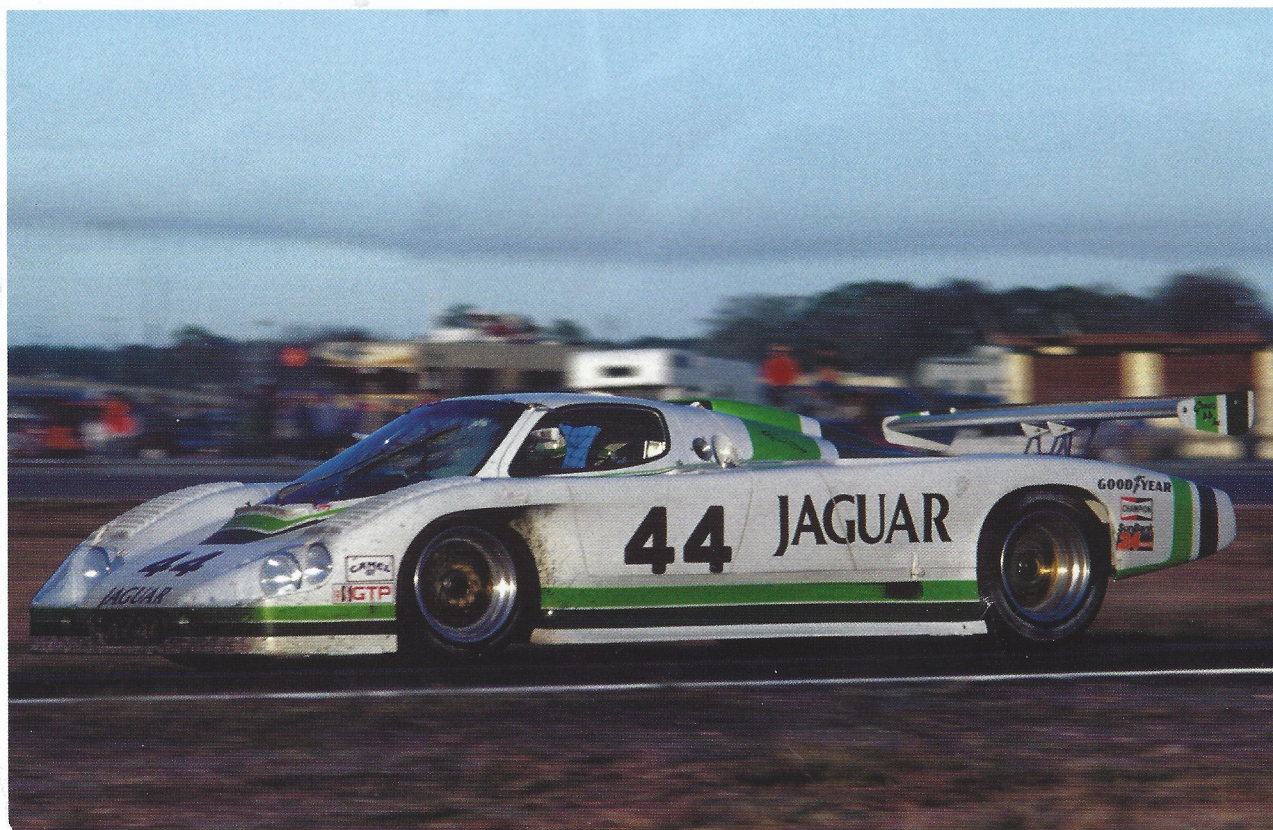
“Those GTP cars were a great concept and unbelievably fast,” David Hobbs recalls. “Some of the lap times they set were under the old Can-Am times.”

■ *Bob Tullius, team owner of Group 44 Racing, ran this Jaguar XJR5 in the 1984 24 Hours of Daytona. His co-drivers were David Hobbs and Doc Bundy. They finished third, 28 laps behind the winning Kreepy Krauly Porsche-March.*

“IMSA racing through the 1980s and into the early ’90s was as good as just about anything we have seen here in America,” adds Tommy (aka T.K.) Kendall. “The drivers who competed, either full-time or in cameos, were literally a who’s who of the world’s premier drivers. It was awesome, one of the true golden ages of sports car racing.”

But does anyone remember that IMSA’s first few events following its April 1969 founding by John and Peggy Bishop — with support and financial backing from NASCAR’s Bill France Sr. — featured Formula Vees, Formula Fords and International Sedans? Good races, but almost no one not directly involved much cared. Or showed up to watch.

Something more appealing was needed, and that something, Bishop decided, was





Euro-style sports car/GT racing — which he knew more than a little about since helping to write the rules for FIA's international World Championship of Makes series in 1967-68 while he was executive director of the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA). "The FIA Group 2 and Group 4 cars only had a couple of races they could run during the year:

**"IMSA was a powerhouse. The world saw what they were doing and liked it, and everybody jumped on board."**

Sebring, Daytona, the Bridgehampton Double 400 and the Watkins Glen Six Hour," he told John B. Heimann for a 2003 *Vintage Motorsport's* IMSA history series. "The rest of the year, those cars — the Porsches, Corvettes and BMWs — were sitting around gathering dust."

So he launched the IMSA (International Motor Sports Association) GT Championship in 1971, with FIA (Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile) Group 4 and Group 2 cars forming GTO (over 2.5 liter) and GTU (under 2.5 liter) classes. The dynamic duo of Peter Gregg and Hurley Haywood won the first-ever IMSA GT race at VIR in April of that year. Then Bishop brought in R.J. Reynolds' Camel cigarettes as series sponsor for 1972.

Those two classes drove five years of growth, with Corvettes (Dave Heinz, Phil Currin) taking the first two GTO crowns and Porsche 911 RSRs (Gregg) the next



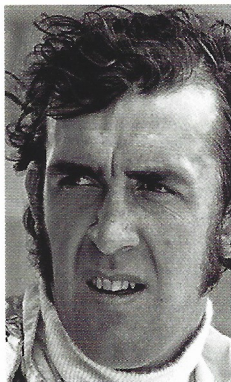


three. For 1975, hoping to counter what had become mostly Porsche-dominant fields and wins, Bishop added a new All American Grand Touring (AAGT) category for U.S. V8-powered tube-frame cars. And he turned down Porsche's request to bring its new turbocharged 934 to Camel GT for 1976.

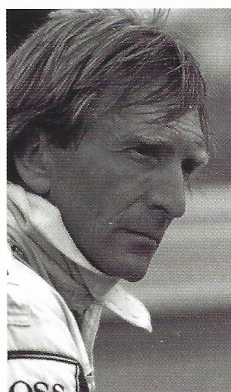
That drove Porsche to run its 934s in the rival SCCA Trans-Am series, until Bishop relented mid-year and allowed the 934 and other turbocharged cars into IMSA. Al Holbert earned the 1976 IMSA title with an AAGT tube-frame Chevrolet Monza; BMW (and others) joined the fray with turbo power in 1977; and Porsche countered with its 700-horsepower whale-tailed 935. Yet Holbert triumphed again that season with his V8 Monza.

### "A Way to Open Up the Rule Book"

BUT SEEING A COMING DOMINANCE BY Porsche's 935, Bishop looked again for a way to make other marques competitive. His



■ David Hobbs



■ Derek Bell

■ *Ford Mustang GTP in front of Wayne Baker's Chevy-March in 1984 braking hard into turn five at Road America. The car was driven by Rahal and Ludwig, but DNF. This car won in the same race a year before in its debut.*

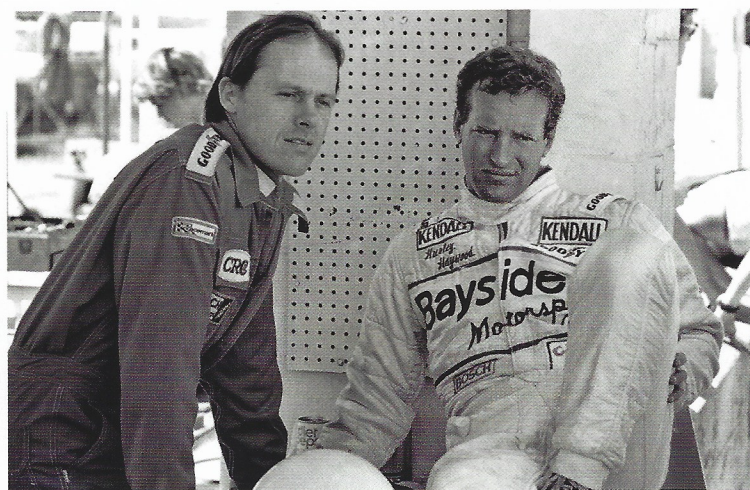
■ *Al Holbert and Hurley Haywood*

answer was Grand Touring Experimental (GTX) — essentially full-race chassis and powertrains under (highly modified) production-look bodies. "It was simply a way to open up the rule book for American GT cars to use wild aerodynamic bodywork, suspension, drivetrains and wider tires, the same as the 935, BMW and others from Europe," says Mitch Bishop (John's son), "to breathe more life into the AAGT concept." This gave birth to John Greenwood's wild tube-frame Corvettes and some others and boosted the remaining Monzas, many of which were quick and competitive, and the racing was good. Still, 935s took the next three championships for Gregg in 1978 and '79 and Fitzpatrick in '80.

"The turbo Porsche 935 was so dominant in the big-car class, it was pure folly to run any other make if you planned to win," Heimann wrote for *Vintage Motorsport*. "During the three seasons between 1978 and 1980, Porsche cars won all but six races. IMSA was a one-marque show."

This led Bishop to create the class that would boost IMSA's growth and popularity among manufacturers, sponsors and spectators for more than a decade. Drawing on his industrial engineering background, he sketched ideas for a pure, purpose-built race car with no pretense of production-car origin. And knowing that one major key would be the engine rules, he consulted Porsche, BMW and potential competitors Bob Tullius (Jaguar) and Jack Roush (Ford), among others, for advice on creating a workable equivalence formula.

Meanwhile, Europe's FISA (Fédération Internationale du Sport Automobile), also struggling with Porsche 935 dominance, was working on a similar concept. So the two collaborated on a new set of international





rules. But there were two major differences between FIA Group C and IMSA Grand Touring Prototype (GTP): The former was based around a fuel-consumption model; the latter required the drivers' feet to be positioned behind the front axle.

And that fomented a bitter battle with Porsche. Developed to FIA Group C rules, Porsche's hot new 956 racer had its driver's feet ahead of its front axle. So Bishop banned it. Porsche threatened to withdraw all support from IMSA, but Bishop bravely held his ground. The 1981 GTP season was topped initially by carryover 935s, then increasingly by prototypes. And despite 10 Porsche 935 wins and two by Klaus Ludwig's surprisingly swift prototype Mustang, Brian Redman took the championship in a Cook Woods Racing Lola T-600.

"When they brought in GTP, I had already ordered a 956 to race in Europe," Fitzpatrick says. "And IMSA suddenly decided that they were not going to accept that car. John Bishop was sick of Porsches winning everything, so he specifically put in a rule that the driver's feet had to be behind the centerline of the front wheels. And in the 956, the feet were slightly ahead, so that is how he kept it



■ Bobby Rahal

out of IMSA. My sponsor was a Porsche man. He did not want to run a March or Lola. So we pressed on with our 935 and won some GTP races in 1982 and '83. But we were pissed off and decided to go race for the world championship in Europe."

John Paul Jr. won the '82 GTP title with a tricked-out 935 called JLP-3, then Holbert



■ 2000 Amelia honoree  
Brian Redman and  
championship-winning  
Cook Woods Racing  
Lola T-600





and Randy Lanier earned '83 and '84 crowns in March (83G and 84G) prototypes. Porsche remained angry but soon decided to return to America's premier road-racing series with an even better new 962 racer (essentially a stretch-wheelbase 956) that would meet IMSA rules.

"I really got along great with John Bishop.

■ *Left: Al Holbert's Lowenbrau Porsche 962 at night at the 24 Hours of Daytona in 1986. Driven also by Derek Bell and Al Unser Jr., the trio finished first overall.*

■ *Below: Ralph Sanchez's No. 84 Spirit of Miami Chevy-March, driven by Emerson Fittipaldi and Tony Garcia at the 1984 Miami Grand Prix. This was Fittipaldi's return to racing after retiring from F1 in 1980.*

■ *Bottom: Dan Gurney's AAR Toyota Eagle MkII at Sebring (note the headlights) in 1992. The car finished 11th, driven by Juan Fangio II, Andy Wallace and Kenny Acheson.*

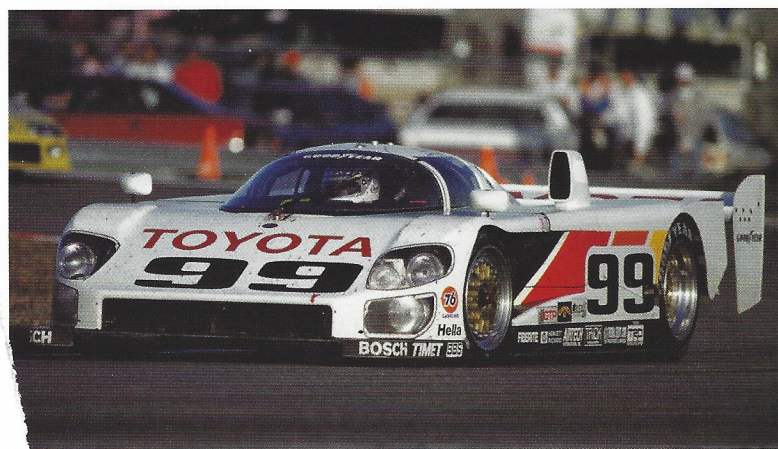
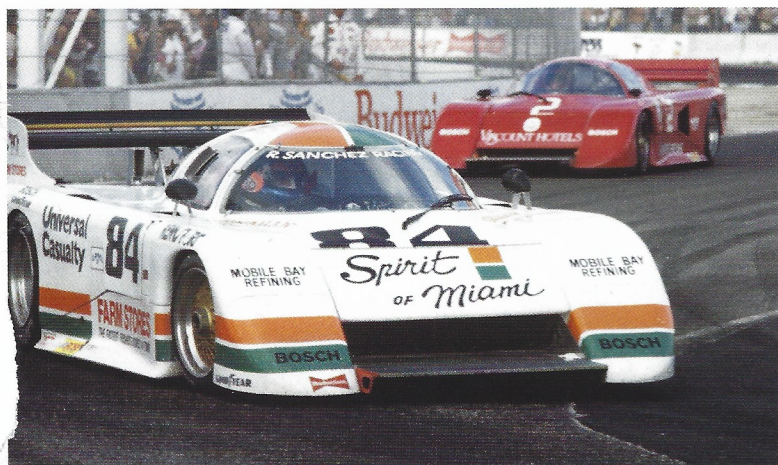
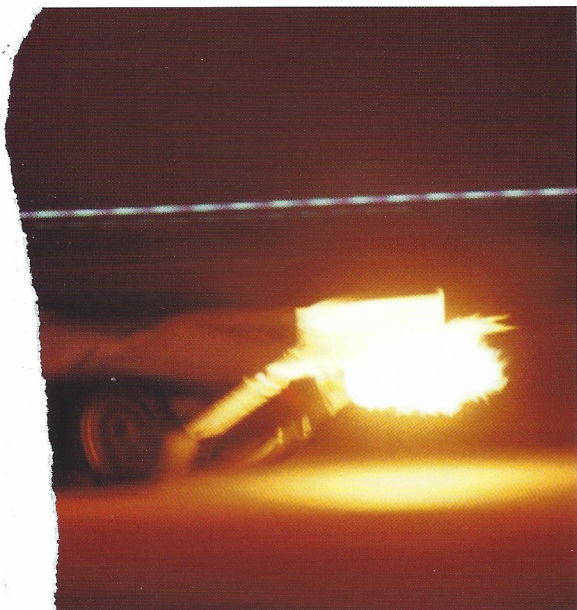
He was very good to me over those years," Fitzpatrick adds. "And I understand why he did it. But eventually Porsche made the 962 with a slightly longer wheelbase and the driver's feet slightly behind the centerline of the wheels, so they couldn't keep it out, and it more-or-less dominated for the next few years."

"IMSA said if you move the driver's feet behind the front axle, we'll accept it," Haywood says, "never imagining that Porsche would do that. But one of the engineering faults of the 956 was that its balance was not perfect, and moving the front axle forward and giving it a longer wheelbase changed the geometry and made it a much better car."

### **"Good Teams Could Hire the Best"**

AND IMSA GTP COMPETITION WAS earning more good press, TV coverage and increasing interest from everyone. "Competition was good," Bishop told *Vintage Motorsport*. "We started seeing an influx of advertising dollars, more makers got involved and the good teams could suddenly afford to hire the best there was." By 1985, in addition to Fitzpatrick, Hobbs, Haywood, Redman and Holbert, the growing list of notable drivers included A.J. Foyt, Danny Sullivan, Al Unser Jr., Bobby Rahal, Pete Halsmer, Geoff Brabham, Lyn St. James, Derek Bell, Bob Akin, Bob Wollek, Bob Tullius, John

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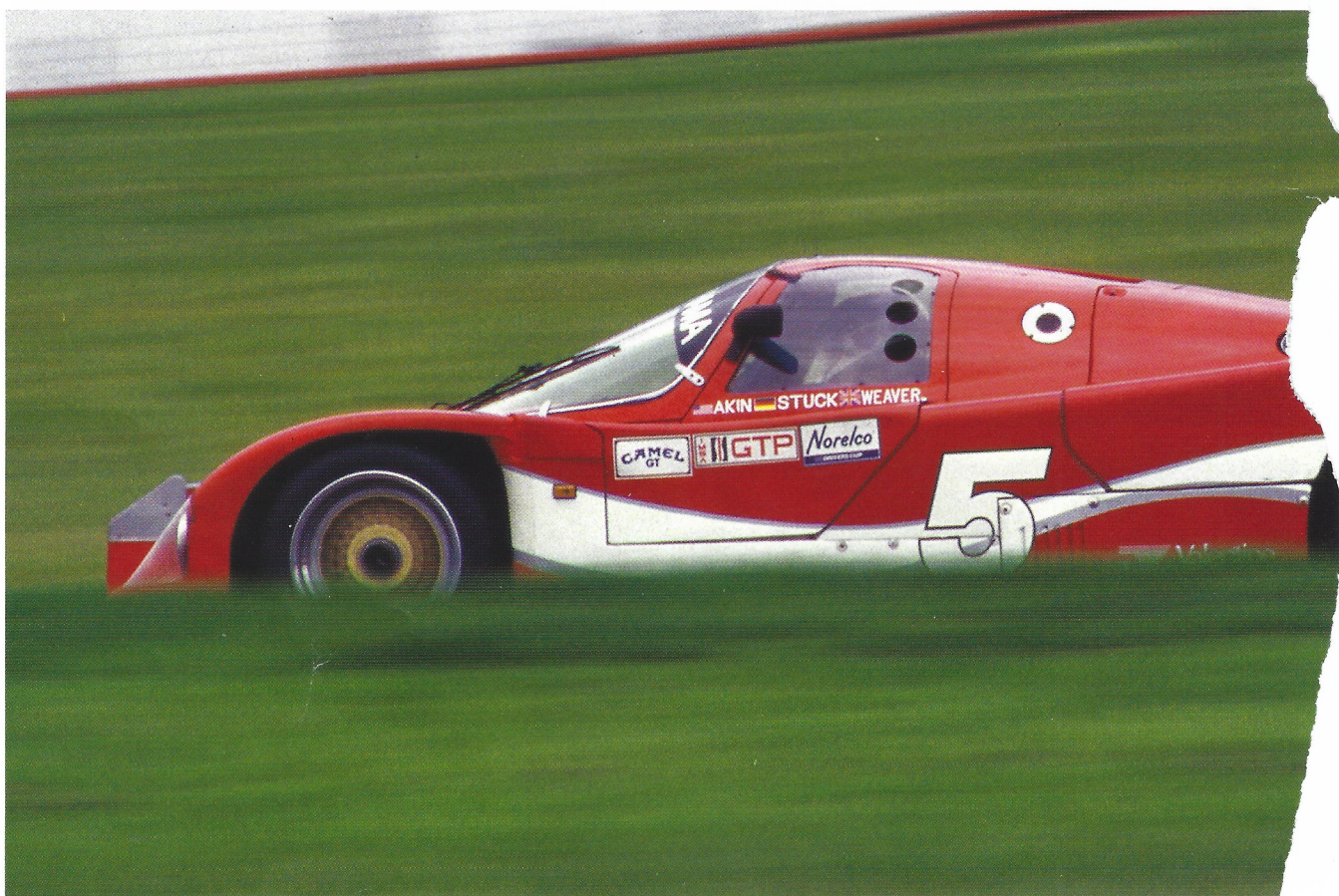
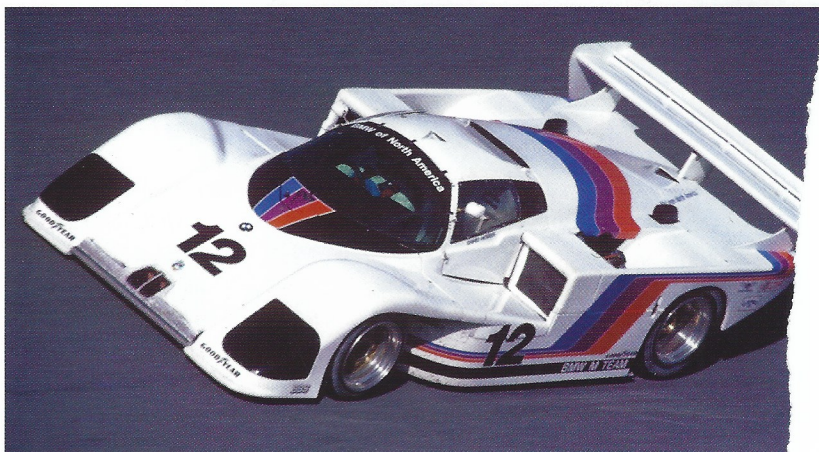
Morton, Chip Robinson, Jim Busby, Doc Bundy, Bruce Levin, Rob Dyson, the Whittington brothers and Danny Ongais, among others.

The next three seasons saw some great racing but three straight GTP titles won by Porsche 962s — Holbert in 1985 and '86, and Robinson (in Holbert's car) in '87. And 1985 saw the birth of a new class of smaller, more affordable "Camel Lights" GTP-type cars. Mazda was first to jump in and was soon followed by Porsche, Cosworth, Buick, Pontiac, Ferrari and others.

"I ran Camel Lights from 1985 to '89," says Jim Downing, who won the first three championships in his Mazda-powered racers. "I came up with the Lights idea, Camel liked it a lot, John Bishop adopted it, I helped write the rules and we got to be pretty good friends. We look at that as a golden age, where somebody with just reasonable means could compete, whether they owned or built a car or just co-drove. Two of the keys to IMSA's success were hooking up with NASCAR and the Camel sponsorship, so we had prize money. With a little help or side work, you could actually make a bit of a living at racing, which I did, because I became a Mazda factory driver."

■ Hobbs testing the brand new BMW GTP car at Daytona prior to the start of the 1986 season. The car would go through many body-work changes during that season.

From 1982-86, Hobbs teamed with Fitzpatrick in a 956 in Europe and won some IMSA races in a 935. Then he piloted the GTP Lola Corvette for Rick Hendrick in 1984 and '85 before jumping to BMW's GTP in 1986. "BMW, having dropped out after 1980, decided to come back with the GTP car and approached me to drive," he says. "I was driving the Corvette GTP for Rick; that car was very fast, and I knew that going back to BMW was probably a mistake. But I signed a three-year deal for 1986, '87 and '88, and once they got that car sorted out, it was quick as hell and could have won the champi-







■ Al Holbert's Miller High Life Porsche 962 in the pits getting serviced during the 24 Hours of Daytona, 1988. The car finished seventh that year in the hands of Holbert, Chip Robinson and Derek Bell.

■ Left: Bob Akin's Porsche 962 with Hans Stuck and James Weaver as co-drivers, Mid-Ohio, 1986



onship in 1987. But at the end of '86, they pulled out again. Then Nissan came in with that fantastic effort with Brabham and Kas Kastner. Rick kept going into '88 with the GTP Corvette before he dropped out."

St. James drove an Aston Martin Nimrod in GTP in 1982 and '83, then a Cosworth-powered Argo in '84. "We did so well in that car," she says, "a smaller prototype with a 3-liter engine, I think it opened John Bishop's eyes to Camel Lights." Then she moved up to the Ford Probe prototype for 1986. "It was a beast, a turbocharged four-cylinder, and you had to be up on the very narrow power band all the time. The most challenging car I drove until I got to IndyCars."

Haywood, best known for driving Porsches with Gregg (and others) also piloted Tullius' Jaguar GTP for three and a half seasons. "The Jaguar was a great car and we beat the Porsches a couple of times," he says. "One of my most memorable races was with Chip Robinson, who was driving Al Holbert's 962, in the streets of Palm Beach. I was leading, got caught in traffic and Chip got around me. I was on the phone saying I got blocked and Chip passed me, and Tullius came back, 'I don't give a damn, repass him.'"



I was right on Chip's bumper, he made a tiny mistake, and there was not enough room for a piece of paper between me and the wall when I went by him. And the entire grandstand stood up yelling and screaming. It was a great race. I won, and after it was over, all the cars and crews were inside a big auditorium, and everybody in the place stood up and applauded when Bob and I walked in. To get that kind of recognition from the guys who worked on the cars was very special."

### "The Politics of Racing"

HAYWOOD CALLS HIS LATE FRIEND GREGG "a controversial figure who helped put IMSA on the map. He always wanted to do the best for us, and many times he didn't agree with the rules and would have major battles, including in court. When you put out a rulebook, it is subject to interpretation, and Peter was very good at interpreting the rules to benefit us as Porsche drivers. Not

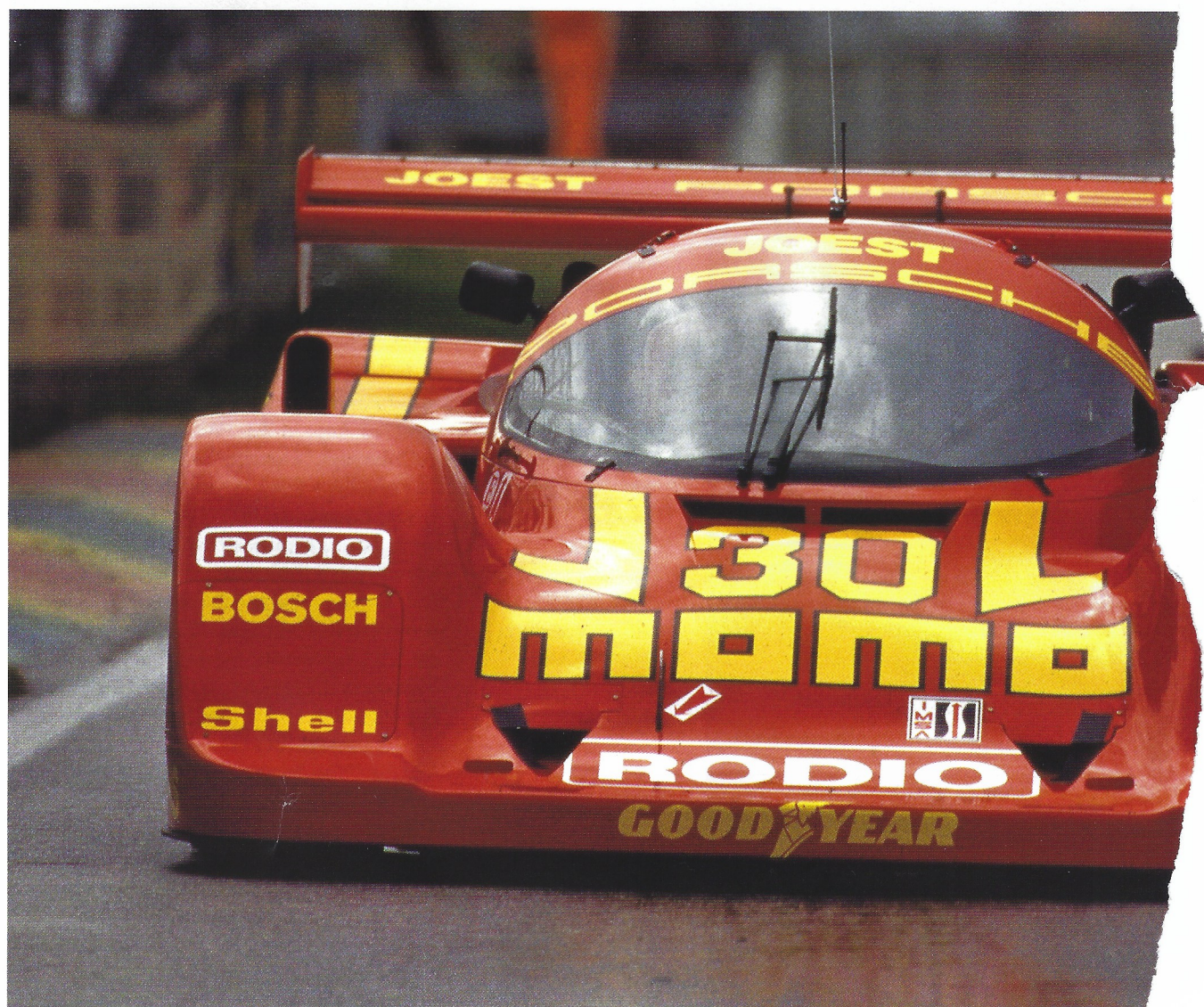
■ *South Africa driver, Sarel Van der Merwe shared this Kreepy Krauly March 83G-Porsche with Graham Duxbury and Tony Martin to win the 1984 Daytona 24-hour race.*

■ *The Joest Racing Porsche 962C of Gianpiero Moretti and Massimo Sigala leads a group of cars in the rain during the Toyota Grand Prix of Miami IMSA GTP/Lights race on the temporary street circuit in Bicentennial Park in Miami on February 23, 1992.*

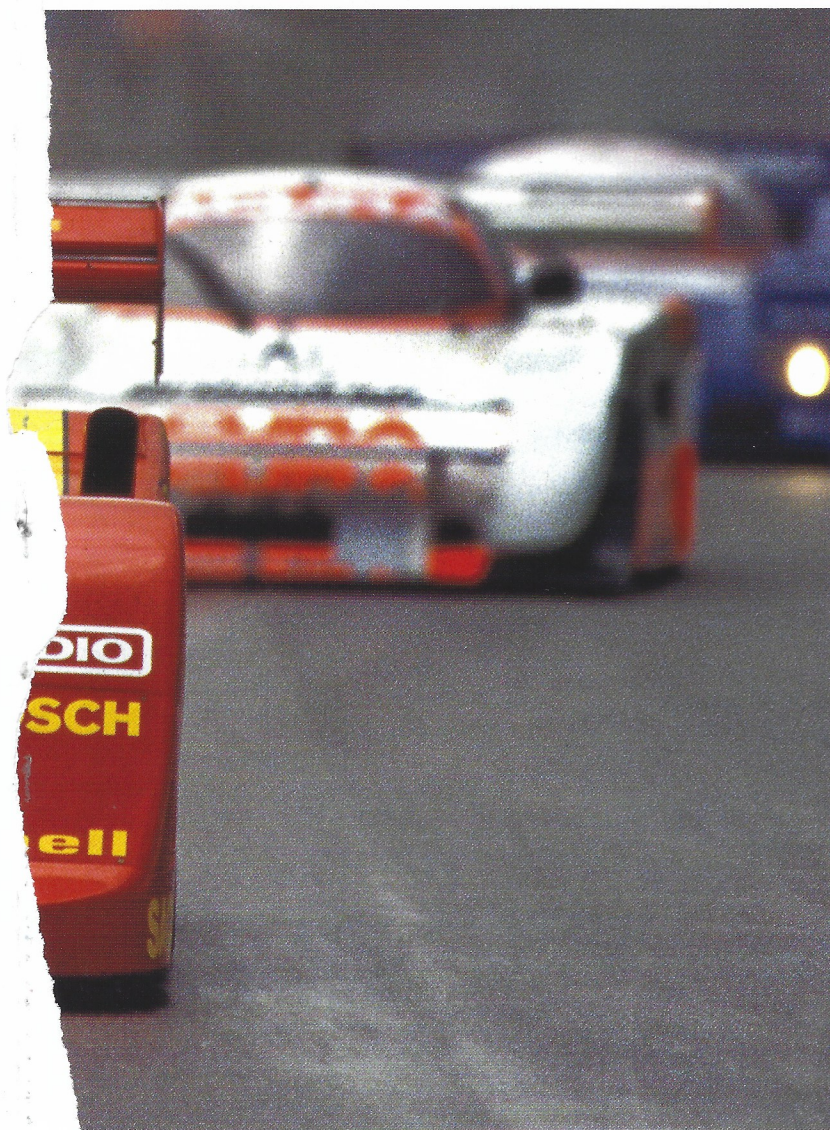
only was he a great driver but he also understood the politics of racing."

Porsche, which had won so many races and championships with (well-supported) customer cars through the years, quit building and developing 962s after 1985 (to concentrate on Indy) and turned that responsibility over to Holbert. New rules for '87 reduced turbo engine displacement from 3.2 to 3.0 liters and banned twin-turbos. And in 1989, Bishop, experiencing health issues, sold IMSA to Tampa Bay-based Mike Cone and Jeff Parker, who promoted long-time staffer Mark Raffauf to president.

But it was the one-marque domination that Bishop always feared that would ultimately lead to GTP's demise. "When Nissan and Jaguar and Toyota and the other big manufacturers entered IMSA, they were in it for themselves," Heimann wrote for *Vintage Motorsport*. "There was never any intention of selling their chassis to private teams. The







amounts of money they could, and did, spend were enormous. Their objective was total domination."

Holbert was killed in a plane crash in 1988, and the next three championships, 1988-90, were won by Brabham in Nissan's fast ZX-Turbo GTPs. He repeated in '91 in a new Nissan NPT-91, but Nissan pulled out in early '92. Which cleared the way for Toyota to rule with its awesome All-American Racers (AAR) Eagle MkII, which Juan Manual Fangio drove to GTP championships in 1992 and '93. Tom Hessert, Scott Schubot and Tomas Lopez won the 1988-90

***It was a great 13-year run, right up there in competitiveness and excitement with the legendary SCCA Trans-Am and Can-Am series of years before.***



Camel Lights titles, then Parker Johnstone the next three.

Kendall drove three 1990 races in Julian Randall's Chevy-powered Spice GTP and returned for '91. "Then the Chevy team that won the Trans-Am title with me moved to GTP and joined forces with Jim Miller," he says. "He had been wanting to build the Bob Riley-designed Intrepid, Chevy came on board, and it was arguably one of the most impactful GTP cars ever because it showed the way forward, which was high downforce. Everybody said it would work only at one or two tracks, but it worked virtually everywhere. It was the Riley car in '91, then the Corvette GTP for '92, both 6.5-liter naturally aspirated."

In his first race in the Intrepid, at Lime Rock, "a track where it's hard to improve by a 10th of a second or two, I lowered the track record by 2.2 seconds," Kendall says, "indicating just how potent high downforce could be. I took off like a shot in the race and 40 min-

utes in had lapped my teammate, Wayne Taylor, who was third. It was looking like I could lap the field a couple times, but then Wayne got into the back of me and spun me out, and I sat for several minutes while the car wouldn't restart. Two races later, I had my big accident caused by a hub failure at Watkins Glen. And when I came back in '92, everyone had gone in the high-downforce direction. Jag had their new weapon, and Toyota especially took it to another level."

But most of the once-competitive private teams were gone, and the departures of Jaguar and Mazda at the end of '93 marked the end of IMSA GTP. It was a great 13-year run, right up there in competitiveness and excitement with the legendary SCCA Trans-Am and Can-Am series of years before. A reincarnated IMSA is once again running good races and attracting manufacturers, sponsors, media coverage and respectable numbers of spectators. But GTP was gone, probably never again to be matched. ♦

■ *Doc Bundy and Sarel Van der Merwe drove the Hendrick Racing Goodwrench Corvette, here at the IMSA finale in Daytona.*

