

VINTAGE Motorsport 20.1 JAN/FEB 2020 1970 McLAREN M14A F1 | DAVID DONOHUE | LOTUS TURBINES | MAZDA RX-7 CHAMPION | TARGA FLORIO | VINTAGEMOTORSPORT.COM



Racing a Porsche in the
Targa Florio 1972

Committed to Success
David Donohue



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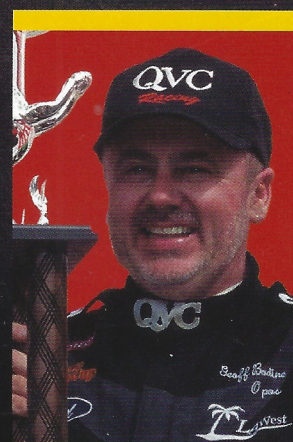
THE JOURNAL OF MOTOR RACING HISTORY

Born Again

1970 McLaren M14A
Formula One



My Favorite Race
Geoff Bodine



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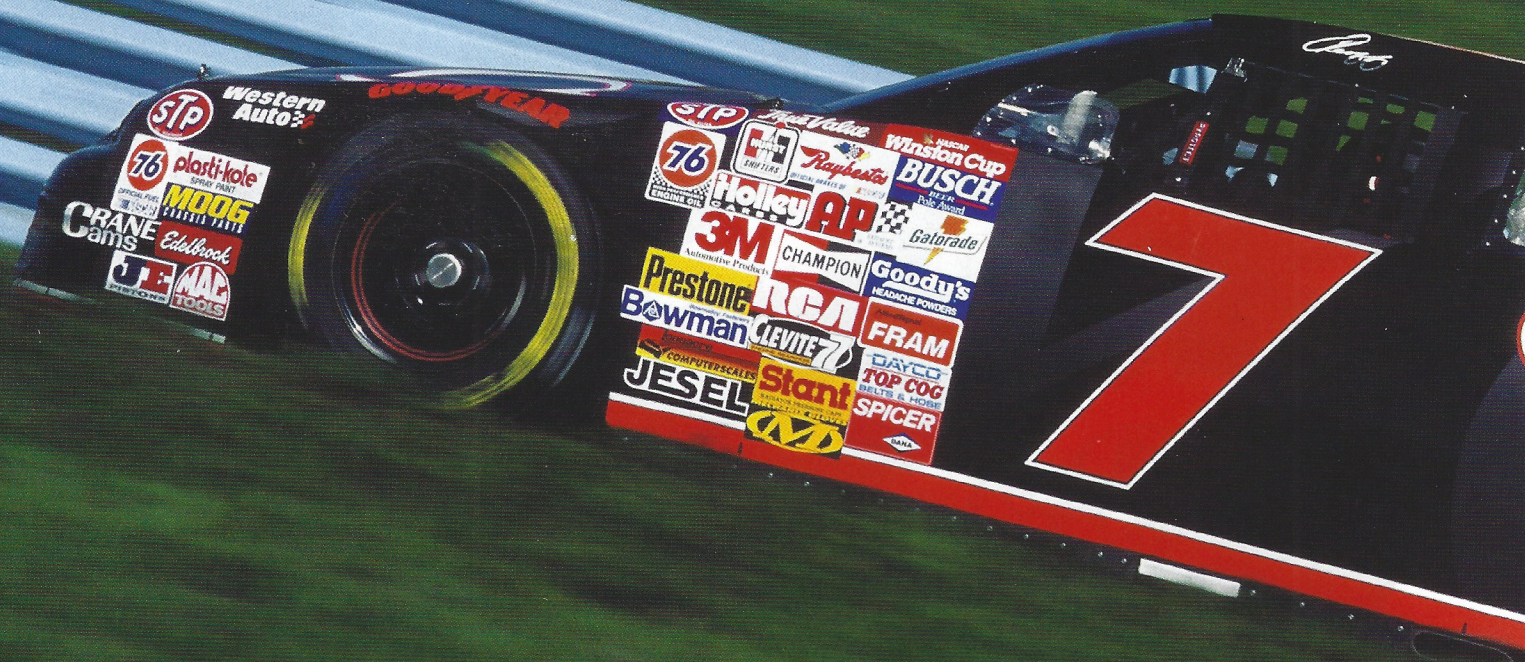
The Revival—
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Night Racing!
HSR Classic 24
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MAZDA's T-REX

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My Favorite Race



GEOFF BODINE

1996 NASCAR Bud at the Glen

BY GARY WITZENBURG | PHOTOGRAPHY BY NIGEL KINRADE

LIKE MOST GREAT RACERS, GEOFF Bodine has a tough time deciding on a single favorite race. Looking past his record 55 Modified victories in 1978 alone, his many NASCAR Nationwide and Busch Grand National wins and his 1987 International Race of Champions (IROC) title to his 18 wins in three decades of NASCAR Winston/Nextel Cup competition, it's close between his first Cup win at Martinsville in 1984 and his last one at Watkins Glen, 1996.

Raised on a farm in Chemung, NY, Bodine's father and granddad built Chemung Speedrome 45 miles from Watkins Glen. He had three racing uncles, and his younger brothers Brett and Todd were also accomplished drivers.

When Geoff was five, his father built him a lawnmower-engined micro midget and a little track for kids, but his parents wouldn't let him race "real" cars until he was 18 and out of high school. But one day

when he was 16, a guy let him try his racer at Chemung and was amazed at how well he did. He once borrowed a wig and ran a women's "powder puff derby." He started last, charged to the lead, then remembered that his father gave the winner a trophy and a hug after the race, which would not have gone over well. So, he shut down and coasted off the track.

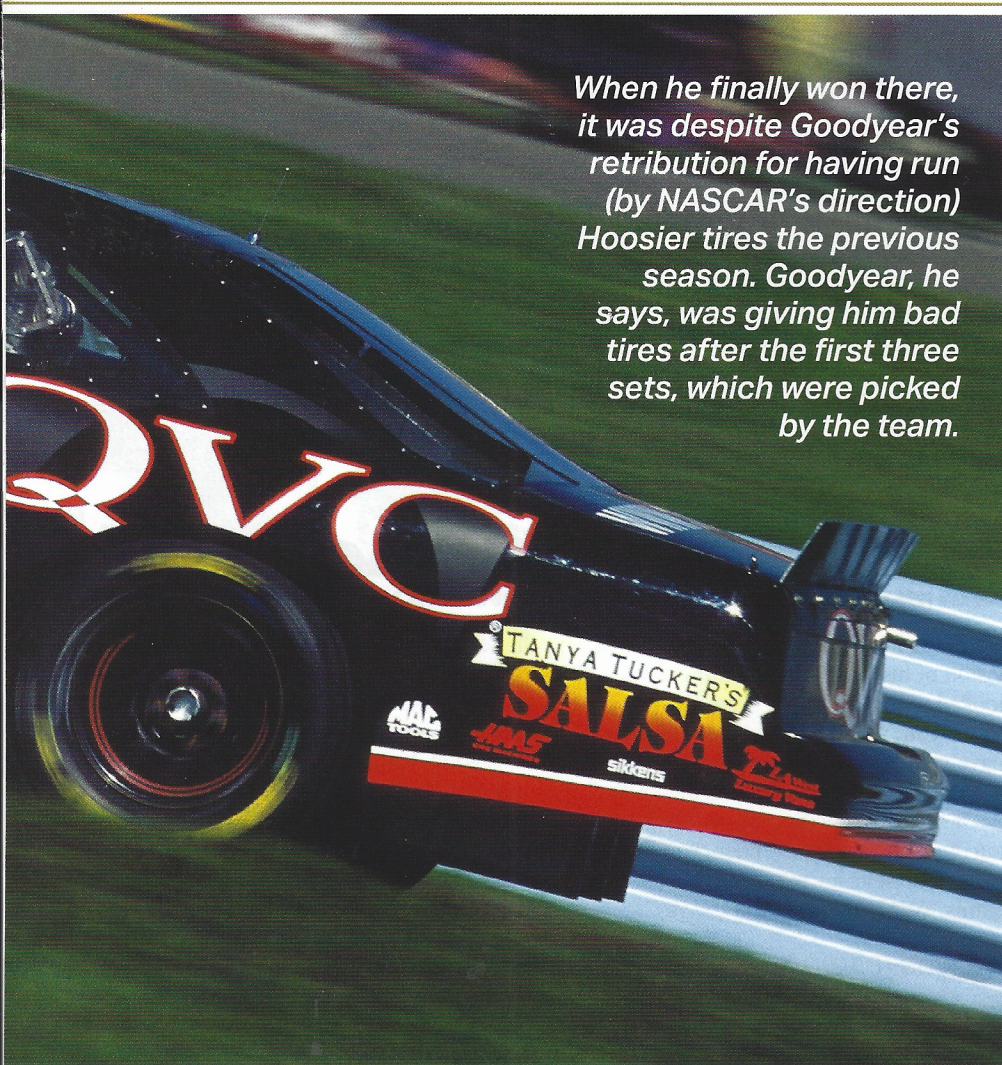
As a high school senior, he built a race car that his uncle Earl drove to a win its first time out, then Geoff drove to a 2nd in his first race after graduation. "Damn," his uncle Maynard said afterward. "I should've given you wide open throttle. I didn't know if you could handle it."

Even while attending Corning Community College (for 2½ years to study mechanical engineering) and serving six years in the National Guard, he found great success in Modifieds. "I love designing race cars and making them go faster," he says, "even better than driving."

Rookie of the Year and First Cup Pole

He earned his first Cup pole and was Rookie of the Year in 1982, his first full season, and Martinsville 1984 was his first win for Rick Hendrick's first-year team, which he had joined because proven winner Harry Hyde would be his crew chief. "We ran pretty well," he relates, "but after our seventh race, Rick had spent a lot more money than he had planned and was going to close the shop." But the car was ready for Martinsville, where Bodine had won a lot of races in Modifieds, and Hyde convinced Hendrick to let them go there.

"We had a good set-up and beat them all," Geoff relates with a grin. "There's a lot of bumping on a half-mile track, so you have to watch your fenders, keep them off the tires, and really manage your brakes. We did all that, and I pulled out toward the end and passed everybody on the outside. You've got to have your car set up to be able to run where they don't." That win



When he finally won there, it was despite Goodyear's retribution for having run (by NASCAR's direction) Hoosier tires the previous season. Goodyear, he says, was giving him bad tires after the first three sets, which were picked by the team.

from behind. The next time, his steering broke and put him into the fence. Another time, he tested his new full-face helmet when his brakes blew up at 170mph, his car hit the guardrail nose first, and his head slammed into the steering wheel. He got out, walked around and looked at the car, then passed out in the ambulance. "I was the test dummy for full-face helmets," he says. "The next week, half the drivers had them."

When he finally won there, it was despite Goodyear's retribution for having run (by NASCAR's direction) Hoosier tires the previous season. Goodyear, he says, was giving him bad tires after the first three sets, which were picked by the team. "I'd run good in practice and qualifying," he says, "then in the race for a while. Then I'd come in and change tires and run just okay, then change tires again and run terrible. We made a machine to test the tires, and sure enough, some were so stiff you wouldn't put them on your tractor. So, we knew Goodyear was messing with us."

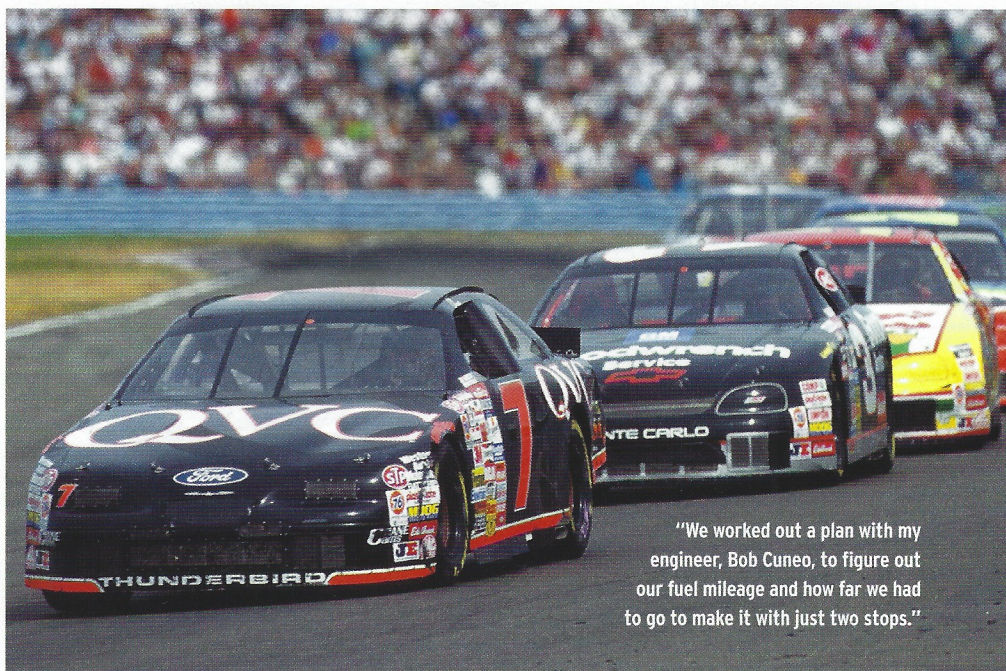
At the Glen in '96, he asserts, "Goodyear was still mad at me, and our first three sets of tires were the only ones that were any good. We had a good setup and ran pretty good in practice, then qualified third or fourth. We worked out a plan with my engineer, Bob Cuneo, to figure out our fuel mileage and how far we had to go to make it with just two stops."

drew sponsorship and kept the door open at Hendrick Motorsports.

Two years later, Bodine won the Daytona 500 with Hendrick, but he sees his 1996 win at Watkins Glen with his own Ford team as even more satisfying. He always ran well on road courses and won a few, but in 10 previous tries at what was essentially his home track—due to an unreal string of bad luck—the best finish he had managed there was 2nd.

"I raced snowmobiles there as a kid," he relates, "and we used to sit in the trees at the end of the back straight to watch races because we didn't have money to get in. I went there once for a Grand Prix with my dad and saw Graham Hill, Mark Donohue and all those famous guys. I never dreamed I would race there in NASCAR, and I really wanted to win there."

Bodine led his first Glen race until his engine failed, then led again the next year until he slowed for a yellow and got hit



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Excellent Pit Strategy

"We started the race and ran good, but saving the tires. The caution came out, way before we wanted to stop, and my crew chief, Paul Andrews, said 'Pit.' I said, 'No, it's too early.' Everyone thought we had screwed up. Then I was leading on the restart and pulled away on used tires. And when we got to the lap when we could pit just one more time, it was on a green. But I pitted, and everybody said, 'What's Bodine doing? He's messing up again.'

"We changed tires, got gas and went back out, and the yellow flag came out. Everybody else pitted, so I was back in front. There were more cautions, but I didn't come in when everyone else did. We took off on the last restart, and I was behind Kenny Schrader, who was leading. I was running hard; he was running hard. Then I started slowing on the front straight, and he started slowing there, too. Then I went into Turn 1 hard, he got a little wide coming off the corner, I scooted underneath and beat him up through the Esses and pulled away."

Regretfully, we have no room here for the story of Geoff's massive wreck in NASCAR's inaugural truck race at Daytona in 2000, which damn near killed him. Broken and unconscious, lying on the track half out of



Bodine's 1996 Watkins Glen win, his first there, was his last of 18 in the Cup Series.

what was left of the truck, he saw a clear vision of his dead father coming to him. "I looked at him and said, 'Dad, I'm coming to see you.' He said, 'No, it's not time. You have more to do.' I think that was God's way of telling me I was not going to die."

Or his 1992 decision to use his design talent and NASCAR experience to build better bobsleds for the U.S. Olympic teams. "With my money in the beginning,"

he relates, "we designed and built them and maintained them cost free. We weren't in it to make money, we didn't sell any bobsleds, we were just trying to get our kids good American-made equipment, which we did. And from 1994 to 2010, the Americans won more Olympic medals and World Championships than they had ever won before. I'm very proud of that project."

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