

# Auto Racing

## Glessner always has been driven

By MATT HASSON

Special to the Times

Delaware County native Paul T. Glessner has strong ties to the late Mark Donohue and Penske Racing. He and Donohue exchanged letters for several years, until Donohue died after a race car accident in 1975.

Glessner, 43, was born in Chester, raised in Ridley Park and graduated from St. James High School in 1979. He currently lives in California and works as an engineer specializing in aerodynamics. He has helped develop supersonic aircraft and exotic cars.

Around 1967, Glessner's father, an employee of Donohue/Penske Racing sponsor Sunoco, received a press kit from Penske Racing. Glessner perused the press kit and, at age 6, started writing letters to Donohue, who wrote back. After Donohue won the 1972 Indy 500, young Glessner asked the driver for some kind of memento, like a pair of racing gloves. To Glessner's surprise, Donohue sent him a backup driver's suit from the 1972 Indy 500 win.

"That was a big thing for the time," said Glessner. "Now, you'll see a driver just touch a suit and it's up for sale on eBay. That kind of thing wasn't around back then."

The suit is now enshrined in a glass case at the Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles, said Glessner.

Donohue retired in 1974, but returned to racing the following year to compete in Formula One. In August 1975, he crashed during practice for the Austrian Grand Prix. He was diagnosed with a brain hemorrhage and died a few days later.

### Champ Car Schedule

- April 10 Long Beach
- May 22 Monterrey, Mexico
- June 4 Milwaukee
- June 19 Portland
- June 26 Cleveland
- July 10 Toronto
- July 17 Edmonton
- July 31 Silicon Valley (San Jose, Calif.)
- Aug. 14 Denver
- Aug. 28 Montreal
- Sept. 25 Las Vegas
- Oct. 15 Korea
- Oct. 23 Surfer's Paradise, Australia
- Nov. 6 Mexico City

Glessner and his family were preparing for a vacation in Canada when Donohue crashed. In a hotel room in Canada, the young Glessner heard about Donohue's death on the TV news.

"That was tough on me," Glessner said. "He was a hero to me. I wanted him to teach me racing. He inspired me to become an engineer."

Glessner's father pulled some strings to let his son attend Donohue's viewing and funeral in Lodi, N.J. The young Glessner was overcome with emotion as he watched more than 1,500 mourners, including drivers Jackie Stewart, Mario Andretti and Bobby Allison, file past Donohue's closed casket.

Glessner was touched even more deeply when he found himself alone for a few minutes with Donohue's casket.

"I thought I was a macho 14-year-old," he recalled. "I cried."

Glessner served as an altar boy at Donohue's funeral later the same day.

He later met Donohue's son David, who currently races in the American LeMans sports car



Courtesy Pennzoil

Rick Mears drives the Penske race car that finished third in the 1983 Indianapolis 500. The car featured a wing designed by Chester native Paul Glessner, a successful aerospace engineer.

series. Donohue decided to reissue his father's book "Unfair Advantage" partly because of Glessner's letters, which Donohue considered a moving testimony to fans' intense love for his late father.

"It went full circle, starting with that letter when I was 6," said Glessner, who has collected the entire series of letters to and from Donohue.

After graduating from high school, Glessner majored in aerospace engineering at Penn State. In the early 1980s, he designed "winglets," or endplates, for an Indy car wing and wrote to Penske Racing to suggest the design. To his great surprise, a secretary told Roger Penske about Glessner's proposal. Penske contacted Glessner and used the design, which might have helped drivers Al Unser Sr. and Rick Mears finish second and third in the 1983 Indy 500. Tom Sneva won that year's Indy 500.

"I'm lucky to be an aerospace engineer whose vocation is airplanes and avocation is race cars," said Glessner. "Race car aerodynamics came from aircraft aerodynamics."

Glessner went on to work for Boeing Vertol, Grumman,

Lockheed, McDonald-Douglas, Boeing and JT3, LLC. He also worked at Vector Aeromotive Corporation, which manufactured the W-8 supercar then priced at more than \$400,000.

Glessner has taught Vehicle Aerodynamics at the Art Center in Pasadena, Calif., one of the three top art schools for transportation design. He has a masters degree in aerodynamics from Polytechnic University (formerly Brooklyn Poly), which he earned at night while working at Grumman.

His correspondence with Donohue inspired him to get his two engineering degrees and later teach vehicle aerodynamics. At the Art Center, his department chairman was Ken Okuyama, who designed the Ferrari Enzo.

Glessner is currently giving seminars on aerodynamics around the U.S. He's also working with the designer of the Budweiser Rocket Car, which set a Land Speed Record of 740 mph in 1979. He's the lead aerodynamicist working on "American Challenger," a vehicle that will attempt to hit 800 mph and bring the World Land Speed Record back to the U.S. from Great Britain at a prime location in California in April 2006. The driver hasn't been named.

V i s i t  
<http://hometown.aol.com/aeroseminar> to read more about Glessner and his contributions to aircraft and race car aerodynamics.

### The Olympics

## Armstrong supports Paris bid