



Have You Been To Indy?

If you have attended the Indy 500, please send us a note telling us how many times, when you first went and for what reason, and do tell us about your most memorable year at the Brickyard.

Send your memories to:

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Photo Courtesy Indianapolis Motor Speedway

My Two And A Half Visits To Indy By Paul T. Glessner, M.S.

I graduated St. Madeline's Elementary school in 1975 in a suburb of Philadelphia and with that momentous occasion, my father surprised his 14 year old son with a trip to see the Indy 500 that same year. A dad and his son. I remember staring out the airplane's window to this day as we entered the arrival pattern for Indianapolis (I started flying airplanes two years later.).

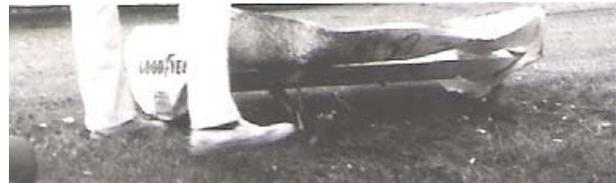
As many of you know, Saturday before the big race is full of so many things to take advantage of such as the parade in downtown Indy, the museum, the sprint cars at the fairgrounds and walking the infield. I remember my father getting us into the SUNOCO suite as he was the corporate architect for Sun Oil Co. overseeing all of the designs of their offices and laboratories. Since Mark Donohue was my hero growing up (www.aeroseminars.com/donohue), getting Roger's, Tom Sneva's and Bobby Allison's autograph on my poster of Mark Donohue winning the '72 Indy made my day for sure as Mark was racing F1 abroad. Tom and Bobby were 'okay' substitutes. I am so fond of that poster, even today, that it was framed in glass a long time ago.



Please keep in mind that three years earlier, I was 'on cloud nine' when Mark gave me his racing suit within a few months after winning the 1972 Indy 500 which I still own today and that I would later be serving his funeral as an altar boy two and a half months later that year.

But the situation that came a close second to those set of signatures I obtained was a chance meeting with AJ Foyt. I was walking by an office outside of Gasoline Alley with about eight photographers in a group waiting impatiently for something. I asked who they were waiting for and they replied, "AJ Foyt is seated in the office." I peered in the old wooden door's window panes and sure enough - "AJ Foyt" seated across from an administration woman at a low desk with his large arms showing out from his white short sleeve shirt. Well, 'that' was an autograph I had to get. I waited, too. I didn't have a plane to catch or call to make to my stockbroker at that time. Some 15 minutes later he exited and I politely both touched him on his arm and asked for him to autograph a postcard I had gotten from the museum. To this day, I think I might be in about eight magazines, newspapers and/or family albums somewhere in the world as the photogs circled the kid getting AJ's autograph from him.

Well, then came race day. It is all a blur today but two things stand out for sure. I remember Tom Sneva's horrendous and fiery crash in Turn 2. Since I was four years shy of being able to enter 'Gasoline Alley,' I had to wait outside its fenced perimeter until dad's mission of photographing Tom's car, as it was being trucked to Penske's garages, was completed. While milling around trying to keep myself occupied, I saw a diamond in the rough that could be looked upon years from then as memorabilia.



There leaning against the fence was a rear wing from Pancho Carter's practice accident with its endplate's rubberized "GOODYEAR" letters there for the taking. The

wing was useless (see pic). So, I worked my fingers through the small matrix of openings and GOT the 'G, O, A and some of the foot' from the GOODYEAR decal with a fleck or two of the car's white paint scheme. It proudly resides on that year's program to this day

Two And A Half Visits To Indy continued



Secondly, I remember how the race was rain shortened. Cars were sliding around at times like they were on ice when pushed but Bobby Unser persevered to win in Gurney's Eagle (fyi - 51 wins for the Eagle chassis). I had obtained Bobby's autograph earlier, as well. At 14 years old I was working over-time to get 'my' story: autographs and memorabilia.

My second and last physical trip to Indy in 1987 highlights Roger Penske's affinity to remember people, their faces and names than anything else. It was during another pre-race Saturday while I was walking with my date, Jodi, that I walked past the stanchions outside Roger's garages (I am rarely in the same zip code as Roger Penske, remember!) and entered the secret world of Penske Racing. I asked Peter Parrot if 'Roger' was around. He pointed to the corner of the garage and there was Roger talking to three guys in 'suits.' I walked over and both patiently and politely waited at least 15 feet away to wait for an opening to give Roger an obligatory "Good luck!" when he stopped his conversation with them, looked at me and said, "Paul, how are you?" I COULD HAVE DIED! The last time he saw me was in paragraph two of this column, 12 years earlier. Of course, I came out of that garage 'and quietly' professed to Jodi that Roger remembered me. Yes, those were the days!



So, how did the 'half' trip come about? It was when I put a bug in Joanne's ear, Roger's secretary, while studying aerospace engineering and aerodynamics at Penn State back in 1981, about a possible wing design for Roger's cars. Days later, my South Philly roommate up at Penn State hollered that someone was on phone for me. I picked up an extension and said, "Hello, this is Paul." "Paul, this is Roger Penske," he calmly said. I immediately stated, "ROGER, sorry for calling you Roger!" I was 20 and had Roger Penske calling me. Wow.

I had to take a technical writing class and chose 'winglets' to research and discuss which led me to immediately think of its advantages 'on the ground.' I explained to Roger the advantages



of the wing design I envisioned in about 10 sentences and two years later with interaction from his designer Geoff Ferris in Poole, England and team manager, Derrick Walker, my wing design was raced at the 1983 Indy on both of the cars Roger fielded. They garnered the next two best spots besides winning - second and third place. Second and third place! So close and yet so far away, uh? I will never say that those results were due to me or the wing alone but to move a mogul like Roger Penske at 20 y.o. was so very thrilling and exciting. Needless to say, having Roger as a reference prior to graduating college and having done my senior thesis on winglets with real world experience was 'WOW^3.'

