

The Story of Competition Imports Racing Team (CIRT)

As told to Andy Antipas by Ron Southern on March 9, 2025

The story of Titan Formula Cars in the United States begins with a company called Competition Imports. Ron Southern became an employee of Competition Imports during the summer of 1968 until the doors closed 2 years later. Ron's story begins with his discharged from the Army in May of 1968. Ron was a racing enthusiast and actively auto-crossed his Austin Healey Bug-eye Sprite when he learned of a new business on Santa Clara Street in San Jose that sells racing cars called Competition Imports. The business was in an old Plymouth car dealership building and when Ron arrived it was full of racing cars!

Harvey Snow from Morgan Hill California ran Competition Imports. Harvey's prior business interest was manufacturing the "Hydro Cycle" which was the forerunner of the jet ski. However, the primary funding for Competition Imports was by longtime friend Mitzie Briggs who was the major share hold of Stauffer Chemicals Company through divorce.

Mitzie had five sons. One of them being John David Briggs who was of high school age at the time and was a bit incorrigible. John David had aspirations of becoming a racing driver, and wanting to support her son's interests, Mitzie arranged to have John David live with Harvey Snow, and at the same time funded the creation of Competition Imports.

Harvey, Mitzie, and John David made the trip to England to establish the sole distributorship with Charles Lucas Engineering (CLE) for their Titan racing cars. While still in England, Harvey, Mitzie, and John David purchased additional racing cars including a Lola T-70 coupe, a GT-40 from Paul Hawkins, and from the Checkered Flag Racing Team a BT-21 and BT-23.

In addition to the retail race car sales operation, Competition Imports fielded a racing Team (Competition Imports Racing Team = CIRT) with highly rated driver Ed Leslie driving the T-70 in several Can-Am races (Laguna Seca, Riverside, and Las Vegas). Unfortunately, the T-70 did not finish any of those races due to a variety of mechanical problems.

At the same time, the Formula Continental Series was the support race for the Can-Am events. Ed Leslie also drove a white Titan Mk3 (number 18) that was delivered in FB specification from CLE with a Lotus twin-cam. There was also a second Titan Mk3 painted yellow (number 81) that had its downdraft LUCAS MAE removed and replaced by a Cosworth SCA prepared by CLE. The yellow Mk3 was raced in SCCA Formula C by Harvey Snow, but reliability problems (specifically the SCA overheated constantly) resulted in a bunch of DNFs. Ron's opinion was that the Lucas downdraft MAE would have been competitive in FC and should have been left in place. The team also raced a Titan Mk4 (number 84) piloted by Earl Jones as an FB car in 1968 because the SCCA would not recognize Formula Ford until 1969.

According to Steve Nickless' book, *The History and Development of the Formula Ford Racing Car*, Competition Imports ordered 15 formula fords from CLE, which were likely a combination of Mk4s and Mk5s. Ron remembers going to San Francisco International Airport to pick-up the

cars. He remembers having to “tip” the freight handlers at the airport to extricate the cars from behind mountains of air freight that blocked Ron and his colleague’s ability to load the cars onto trailers. Ron also remembers that Harvey Snow sold comedian Dicky Smothers (Different Drummer Racing Team) a Titan formula ford.

John David Briggs graduated from high school in June of 1969 and had decided not to become a racing driver but decided to marry his sweetheart instead. At the same time Harvey Snow was having some health problems and the decision was made to close Competition Imports during the fall of 1969. The assets of the business were split up between the Briggs family and Harvey Snow. Harvey got the BT-21 and BT-23, and John David kept the T-70 and GT-40.

Competition Imports was in business for approximately 2 years, and when it closed during the fall of 1969, word spread to Fred Opert and Pierre Phillips who quickly became the authorized importers for CLE. The new Titan Mk6 formula ford was ready in December of 1969 for a major international Formula Ford race that was held at Sebring in Florida. Tony Trimmer and Tim Schenken were hired to race a pair of Mk6s at Sebring, which is story unto itself.

With the closure of Competition Imports, Ron bought the BT-21 from Harvey Snow and campaigned it successfully in SCCA FC qualifying for the runoffs. Then in 1972, Ron bought the T-70 from John David Briggs and raced that for a year before selling it and purchasing a BT-40, which he raced successfully as well.

Ron shared an interesting story that involved an important SCCA National race at Laguna Seca. At the time, Ron worked at an auto parts store and asked for the weekend off to go racing. Ron’s boss indicated that if Ron didn’t show up for work that weekend, he would be fired. Ron elected to go racing and won Sunday’s feature. The track announcer at Laguna explained over the PA system that though Ron won the race he was losing his job! Bob Bondurant attended the race, approached Ron and asked if he would be interested in becoming a driving instructor at his new racing school opening at Sears Point. Ron accepted the job and worked for Bob Bondurant for the next 10 years! Ron also raced the Daytona 24 hours and Sebring 12 hours in a race prepared Datsun 260Z. His car interests these days focus around a De Tomaso Pantera, which he has owned since 1973. Ron provided the attached photos from his days at Competition Imports, and I want to thank him for sharing his story, which is an important part of Titan Racing Car history.

Andy Antipas, March 23, 2025

[Pics on page 3]

COMPETITION IMPORTS INC.

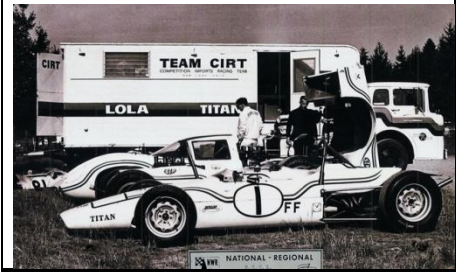


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Ed Leslie driving the CIRT Titan Mk3 FC. Harvey Snow is in the red jacket and John David Briggs is sitting on the tire to Harvey's left. Ron Southern is standing at the far right of the photo.



CIRT Transporter with Team Cars



Laguna Seca CanAm 1968 #460 (0053-0891)

by Dave Friedman @ The Henry Ford Museum
Laguna Seca CanAm 1968



CIRT Mk3 FC at Laguna Seca in 1968



Ed Leslie driving the CIRT Titan Mk3 FB

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Titan Formula Ford Mk.4

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Harvey L. Snow
President
Competition Imports, Inc.

CIRT Brochure Of The Day