

HARRELL AND SMILEY—TWO PROFILES

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN DRIVERS JIM HARRELL AND GORDON SMILEY ABOUT WHAT THEY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO FORMULA F AND WHAT THE CLASS HAS DONE FOR THEM

BY DAVID HUTSON

As already evidenced by the racing careers of fast-rising stars Skip Barber, the Sarich Brothers, Bob Lazier, Jas Patterson and World Champion Emerson Fittipaldi—all of whom were launched from Formula F into professional racing—Formula F, in its scant few years of existence has already become known as a class from which to begin, in which to move ahead. Ford means forward.

Gordon Smiley, of Shawnee Mission, Kan., and Jim Harrell, of Tecumseh, Mich., are two U.S. star Formula F drivers who were the antagonists at the 1971 Formula F National Championship run-offs at Road Atlanta. Harrell won that year; Smiley was second by 7.7 seconds. Smiley, now 26 years old, had attended the University of

Nebraska for several years but dropped out. "You can't get racing in college and that's all I want to do." He began SCCA racing in 1967 in a C Production Porsche. After a year out for drag racing he returned to SCCA full time in 1969 when he took a third at the ARRC in a G Production Spitfire. In 1972 he campaigned a Formula B Merlyn all season,

winning the three Nationals he entered and setting lap records at all three tracks. In 1973, he will race in Formula A.

At 29, Jim Harrell, an economics/English major with a strong background in engineering at Texas A & M, has already run what he regards as his last race—the 1972 ARRC in Formula B in which he qualified ninth but retired after six laps. He began racing in 1965 in a production Mustang and switched to Formula F in 1970, the year before he won the Championship in that class. In 1973 Harrell will concentrate on developing his engine-building business and expand the services he offers racers.

Jim Harrell and Gordon Smiley: two drivers from Formula F with different goals and different approaches to achieving them. Smiley is the aggressive competitor; Harrell, the aspiring engineer.

But it was through Formula F that each achieved national prominence, each developed his unique



PHOTO: DAVE HUTSON

reputation, and each stepped closer to his ultimate goal in racing.

Their views on Formula Ford, techniques, strategy, goals and SCCA racing, are set forth as follows:

What were your plans going into the 1971 ARRC FF race?

Harrell: In 1970 I felt that we over-prepared ourselves for the runoffs. Consequently, for the 1971 ARRC we left the racer as it was upon completion of the last National race we ran. Two weeks before the ARRC, I got serious about building an engine, and within a week had what we thought was a competitive motor. We knew the chassis would work, so the only other factor was the driver. I forced myself to look at the event as just another National race, and it paid off. The only thing that bothered me was knowing Gordon was my main competition and not having raced against him till then.

Smiley: Our team took delivery of a new Merlyn chassis just two and a half weeks before the 1971 ARRC, so our time was spent preparing and testing it. Our plans were to prepare the car as thoroughly as possible and install the engines we had built as soon as possible. We had worked hard to get two "Aces" up our sleeve prior to the race. Discussions with our mechanics, Charlie Williams and Joe Kidd, led us to believe the same front Formula B slicks we had been using would make an excellent Formula F rear tire. In testing, our times were more than half a second faster on the slicks. To our knowledge, this was the first FF slick ever used and it certainly turned a few heads. Secondly, we were supplied with a Doug Fraser Racing engine, and in qualifying it proved it was superior to anything in the field. Our "Aces" accounted for a qualifying ad-

vantage of over one second per lap. the race, of course, is history, but Jim certainly earned his title!

What kind of reputation do you think you have built for yourself through FF racing?

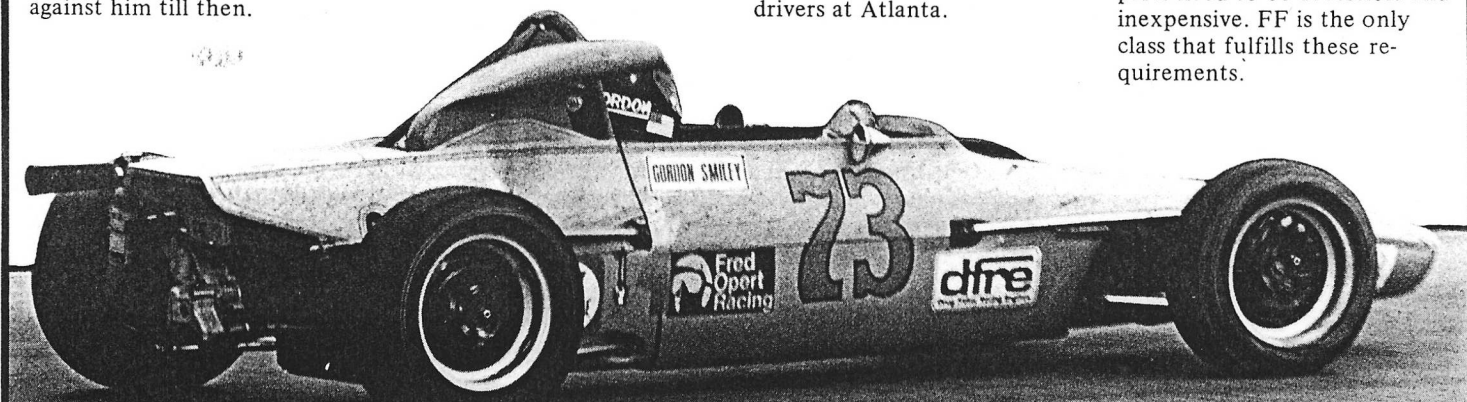
Harrell: I feel we have made major impressions in the FF field, but I think too many people put too much weight on our winning. What most fail to realize is that hard work pays off. Most competitors don't know what hard work means.

Smiley: Since I had never set foot in a formula car of any kind before 1971, and we went on to win eight of nine FF races before July of that year, I think through FF racing I have established myself as a winning small formula car driver. It pleased me when I found out Jim considered me his main competition that year, in view of his experience in FF and the number of competitive drivers at Atlanta.

Do you view FF as a stepping stone to more advanced forms of racing?

Harrell: I have a deep feeling for FF racing. I think it is the best competition from all standpoints. It is close racing that demands the respect of each driver on the course. Without a doubt, it is the ground floor for aspiring young drivers. FF is the way to go racing in a real race car designed for the purpose right from the start.

Smiley: I think FF racing is not only a good stepping stone, but I recommend it as the only way to enter competition on a progressing basis. I believe a beginning driver should start in a "real" racing car, and he should begin in a class fast enough to teach him high-speed techniques. The car has to be reliable enough to take long hours of running and abuse without having to be continually kept up. Finally, the parts need to be accessible and inexpensive. FF is the only class that fulfills these requirements.



GORDON SMILEY IN THE FRED OPERT TITAN MK6A ROUNDING TURN 7 AT MID-AMERICA RACEWAYS IN THE 1972 FORMULA F RUNOFFS. PHOTO: DAVE HUTSON

After racing FF in events with faster formula cars, how does it feel to race around them in considerably faster cars—Formula Bs, for example.

Harrell: This has been a major gripe of mine for a long time. Racing is potentially hazardous, but to mix dissimilar cars is pushing the point too far. Sitting in the driver's seat has made me witness too many competitors who don't realize there are other classes to look out for. The concept of racing isn't designed to cope with the dilemma of dicing at ten-tenths with a competitor through a slick track, marshals' flags, a crash, etc. and having to

keep an eye out for faster cars coming up. I don't like it.

Smiley: I think most good FF drivers will tell you they beat faster class cars more often than they are beaten by them. The reason is the fast Fords are being driven to the limit all the time while faster cars—FA, FB, FC—are not. I have found since moving to FB that the fast FF drivers are most alert and cause you less problems than the backmarkers. In most cases, if you can avoid the obviously slower backmarkers, the quick FF drivers cause you few problems.

How does FF racing compare to FB in terms of sensitivity, driving technique and set-up?

Harrell: After racing FB all of 1972, I certainly feel FB racing has to be treated with more sensitivity. The horsepower and speed potential demand higher levels of acuity. I drive the same way in a FB, though. In setting up any chassis, the goal is to tailor the car for the driver. My FB would be different from others, but it would be similar to my FF. It is important for the car to be working for the driver, not the driver for the car.

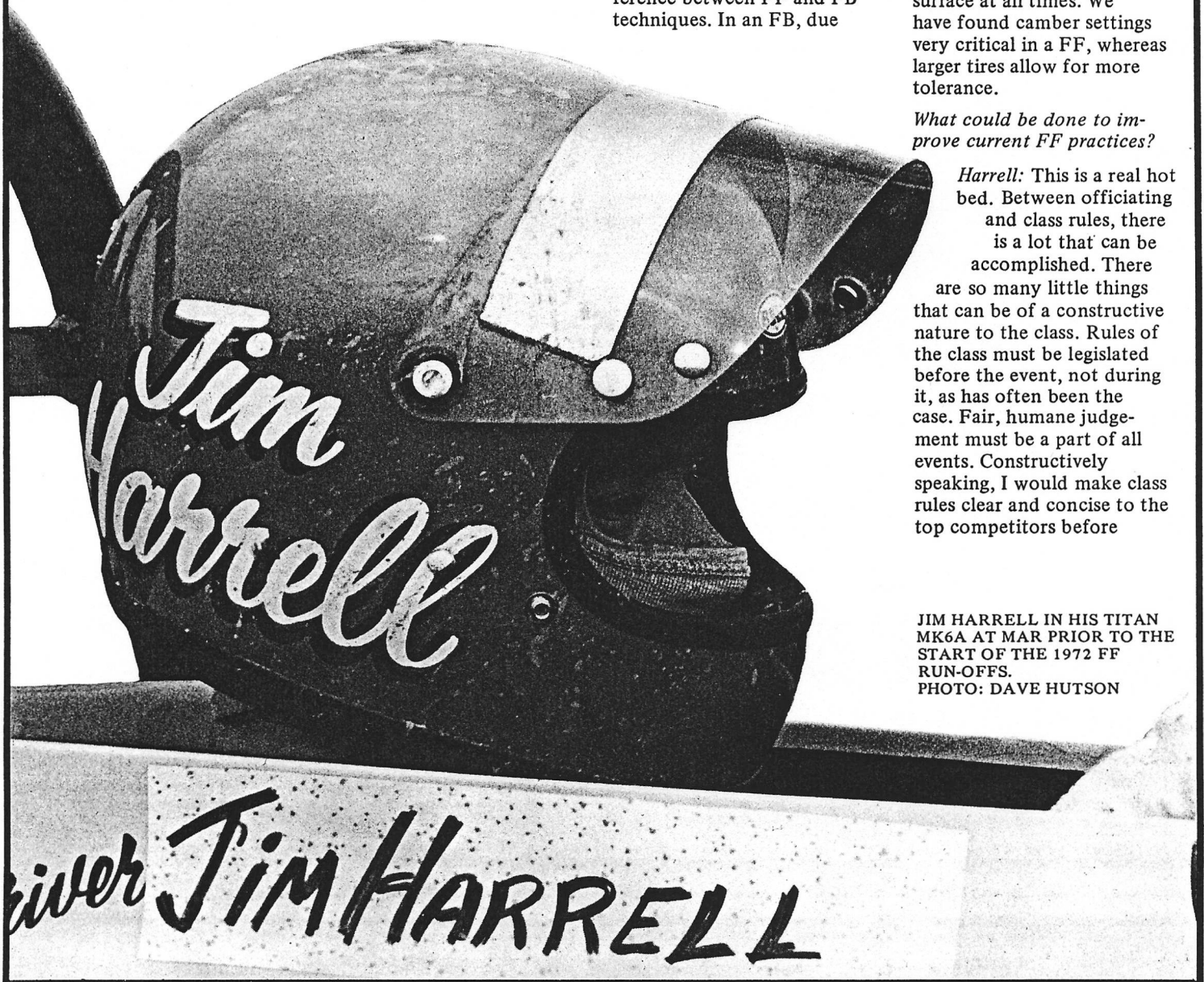
Smiley: There is a vast difference between FF and FB techniques. In an FB, due

mostly to greater speed potential, more caution is a necessary ingredient. In FF, the cars can be driven with much more abandon, although care must be taken to avoid scrubbing off too much speed. Very late, very sideways braking is almost a necessity in a FF to achieve consistently fast lap times, where in an FB, late but well-controlled and planned braking is important. The main difference between our Ford and B preparation is that we are extremely careful to keep maximum amounts of the relatively small tire contact patch on a Ford in close relation to the surface at all times. We have found camber settings very critical in a FF, whereas larger tires allow for more tolerance.

What could be done to improve current FF practices?

Harrell: This is a real hot bed. Between officiating and class rules, there is a lot that can be accomplished. There are so many little things that can be of a constructive nature to the class. Rules of the class must be legislated before the event, not during it, as has often been the case. Fair, humane judgment must be a part of all events. Constructively speaking, I would make class rules clear and concise to the top competitors before

JIM HARRELL IN HIS TITAN MK6A AT MAR PRIOR TO THE START OF THE 1972 FF RUN-OFFS.
PHOTO: DAVE HUTSON



they arrived at an event. These rules would be based on prior experience and knowledge acquired from the major engine builders in the country. Passing judgement after the fact is like stabbing your best friend in the back.

Smiley: I feel a somewhat more liberalized and clarified rules interpretation is necessary. There were a lot of unnecessary protests and teardowns last year that simpler, clearer rules and uniform interpretation could have prevented. I also think the class could support and deserves a professional money series, if for no other reason than as a training ground for our drivers. A beginning series with some form of support must be developed in the U.S. if we are going to compete on an even basis with other countries in producing top caliber drivers. Racing has become far too expensive for most young drivers to participate in competitively without some type of dollar support.

What kind of qualities make one driver better than another?

Harrell: The qualities are

manifold and difficult to pinpoint. Usually preparation, experience, knowledge of a course and driver attitude are the ingredients that comprise possible differences. For example, Gordon demonstrated his knowledge of Mid-America Raceways when we were there for the 1972 U.S. FF Championships, but neither of us fared well. In the FF class, there is an intimate relationship between car and driver and neither Gordon or I had driven a FF for close to a year. Consequently, we lost the intimacy with our cars that the other current FF drivers displayed.

Smiley: Aggressiveness and desire are two very important qualities in competition. I do not advocate seat-of-the-pants driving to make up for lack of ability, but I believe the "gentleman" who hesitates a split second at an opening because it could cause someone else a problem will find himself a long way behind very quickly. By desire, I mean real, true sacrifice and hard work to achieve the desired result. Everyone wants to win, but there are

very few who are dedicated enough to really devote themselves completely to the task at hand. I feel my desire has won several races over opponents equal in every other aspect. I hate to be behind. I have also been extremely fortunate to always have a very dedicated and conscientious mechanic to attend to my equipment. In the many long hours I have tried to be useful and helpful while working alongside these people, their desire for success has never ceased to amaze me. They have been in the past—and I am sure will be in the future—a real key to my success.

What is your ultimate goal in racing?

Harrell: My ultimate goal is to become a recognized engine builder. I definitely feel there is a need for service organizations and this is my prime goal. I am not going to actively compete in the future, but I'd like to be instrumental in helping the sport. Racing is my business, so what I can do to improve it will help me. I enjoy being a car owner and a crew chief as much as I enjoy driving. I feel I reached my driving pinnacle when I won

the 1971 Formula F Championship and over the past three years I have achieved my overall goal of becoming a builder. I must work to keep from stagnating, and continue to learn and progress as a constructor.

Smiley: My personal goal is to represent the U.S. around the world and show that we can produce winning race drivers. I would especially like to compete in Formula I World Championship events. I have found that there are two keys to becoming successful in racing, once you have the ability. One is to know the important people in the sport and be known to them. This is achieved by competing often and at the right places, getting good press coverage, making public appearances and generally being available. Second, more difficult to achieve but more vital to success, is the support of one of the tire companies. The proper word to the right tire representative can send you directly to the top in an amazingly short time. I am working hard on achieving this relationship and feel it will be a boost to my ultimate goal.

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JIM HARRELL IN HIS TITAN MK6A ENTERING TURN ONE AT MAR DURING PRACTICE IN THE WET.
PHOTO: DAVE HUTSON