

Splash of the Titans

Back in 1973, I was seriously considering Formula Ford as my pathway to racing stardom (if some idiot would have just forked over a large mound of cash for my nickel rocket TR3, that is) and my weapon of choice surely would have been a Titan Mk. 6C. That never panned out, but no question the 6C was *the car to have* at the time. So I was intrigued when the VSCDA announced a Titan reunion for their Gingerman weekend, complete with a “Clash of the Titans” feature race and important marque personalities on hand.

The Titan story starts out with talented young owner/driver Charles “Luke” Lucas and a terrifically gifted hands-on engineer named Roy Thomas. Luke was running the quasi-works Lotus F3 team for himself, Roy Pike, and Piers Courage under the “C. Lucas Engineering” banner with Roy preparing the cars. Roy was always dreaming up new tweaks (like the clever use of a Weber with one throat blocked off to meet the 38mm inlet restriction of F3) and their engines quickly became the standard of the class. Then there was a falling out with Lotus over some Firestone bonus money that never quite made its way out of Colin Chapman’s pocket and on to the team, and Luke and Roy resolved to build their own car. They christened it “Titan” after the Titan moon rockets that were all over the press, and only found out later that the Titans of mythology were an unruly bunch who took on the gods of Olympus and lost rather comprehensively.

Roy Pike debuted the new Titan F3 at Silverstone in July

of 1967, and he promptly put it on pole. But right behind him was team patron Charles Lucas in the unloved Lotus 41 powered by Thomas’ latest engine, the Mk. 17. It was to be a day of mixed fortunes, as Luke spun while battling for the lead and coincidentally managed to put Roy Pike and the new Titan off into the scenery. Whoops. But Luke rejoined at the back and put in what he still recalls as his greatest race, carving up through the field to win handily. That was unheard of in



PHOTO: ANDY ANTIPAS

Americans don’t race in the rain? The Titan Reunion at Gingerman proved otherwise.

the tight, slipstreaming packs of F3, and there were orders for 200 of the new engines waiting when they opened shop Monday morning.

When Formula Ford was created to replace F3 as the new “nursery class,” Titan became involved, and their chassis—particularly the Mk. 6 models—were good looking, well built, aerodynamically tidy and very stable in fast corners thanks to a relatively long wheelbase. Works drivers Derek Lawrence and Ken Bailey were regular front-runners in the competitive British FF series, while Jim Harrell won the 1971 SCCA National

Championship in a 6A. In fact, Titans amassed 11 SCCA divisional titles between 1970 and 1974. A lot of this success was thanks to East and West Coast distributors Fred Opert and Pierre Phillips, who knew their way around the US motorsports scene and, moreover, knew a great race car when they saw one. Plus there was always some new demon tweak to spark interest. Like the infamous “snorkel” airbox on the 6C.

“The high airbox was real-

ly a throw down from F1,” Roy Thomas recalls with a twinkle in his eye. “But we spent a whole day testing and came to the conclusion that it made no difference at all. At the next race I decided to use it. I said, ‘If it makes no difference, why not? It will certainly wind everyone

up.’ Sure enough, the protests came thick and fast. But they were all thrown out, and the end result was that we sold 20 airboxes that day and recovered our development cost.”

Titan engines were also very popular and the “Titan Gold Seal” became standard equipment on the Lola Formula Fords imported by Carl Haas. So business was good. But it had to be, as Luke bowed out of the picture and Roy Thomas formed Titan Cars along with front office organizer, financial marvel and eventual wife Diana. But it all started unraveling with the new Mk. 8 and 9. They had a shorter wheelbase than

the Mk. 6 and, although they performed well in expert hands (Derek Lawrence put one on pole at the “pro” FF race at Bridgehampton), they developed a reputation for being twitchy. Meanwhile, Roy was losing his drive to continue—no real surprise after a decade of back-to-back race weekends, garage all-nighters and never-ending travel—and he ultimately sold his shares and retired.

Andy Antipas of the Titan Registry arranged to have Charles Lucas, Roy Thomas, Derek Lawrence, Fred Opert and Pierre Phillips on hand as honored guests at Gingerman, and the highlight of the whole weekend was eavesdropping on their breakfast conversation on a sodden, drizzly Saturday morning. There were marvelous (and occasionally unprintable!) stories about some of the most famous—and infamous!—names in racing. None to be repeated here.

Unfortunately, the much-ballyhooed “Clash of the Titans” feature coincided with a deluge of truly biblical proportions. Rain pummeled across the track in torrents and visibility and adhesion were uniformly nil. But, following the great, soggy tradition of British motorsport, the lads went out anyway.

“I’ll never again say that Americans won’t race in the rain,” Luke offered admiringly as the field slogged away. In the end (and aided by a set of modern-era rain tires lent by FF-prep guru Bruce Lindstrand), Todd Strong took the win in the generally unloved Mk. 9 he shared with owner and Titan Registry sparkplug Andy Antipas.

You couldn’t have asked for a better ending. ♦