

Introduction

By Ray Brock

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In late 1954, after five years of successful competition with stock cars on the fast-growing NASCAR circuit throughout the southeast US, Smokey was getting fed up with small purses and ever-changing rule books, which hampered creativity. (In racing, figuring out how to run faster than your competitor often involves how you and the officials interpret the rule book. They may think you are cheating when really all you are doing is being creative by taking advantage of what has not been specifically banned...says Smokey.)

A new venue seemed the answer to his frustration and the most obvious answer was the Indianapolis 500, held the last of May each year. A “little skinny rule book” caught Smokey’s attention, hence the title for this section of BDGIT. The book was skinny because about all it defined was minimum car weight, engine displacement, type of fuel, wheelbase and a solo driver.

My personal experience at Indy dates back to 1952 when I spent the second half of May attending practice, qualifying trials and the race won by Tony Ruttman. Smokey’s first three trips to Indy ('55, '56, '57) were

during the same era so I can easily relate to his experience.

The first Indy 500 was in 1911 and garages constructed during that era were designed to be used one month per year, so they were quite basic. On a farm, one could have been used as a chicken coop or a tack room. Nothing like today's racing garages.

During the learning period of the early 50s, Smokey volunteered his assistance to several teams and conceived many ideas he would place into action when he made his debut as chief mechanic. As you read of that 1958 race with Smokey and Goldsmith in an old Kurtis, just think of the differences between then and now. Sort of like black and white silent films versus Technicolor with surround sound.

Creativity was displayed in 1959 when Smokey designed a reverse-rotation engine to plant the inside wheels on the track in the left-hand turns. Close but no cigar! Perhaps the English had it correct all along. They didn't have oval tracks but their road circuits were run clockwise direction, so engine torque helped on righthanders. They even had drivers on the right side to help cornering.

Then the capsule car with engine, driver and fuel load balanced in a mid-chassis spot. It almost worked! The original plan for gas-turbine power and all wheel driver could have really stirred up Gasoline Alley in 1964 Granatelli's STP Turbine finally did so in 1967 and that's when the "little skinny rule book" got a bit thicker.

Another sub-title for Smokey Indy experiences could be "Fast Cars and Faster Women." Those May romances in Gasoline Alley were the norm rather than the exception. Drivers and hero-type crewmen were targets for fence hangers every year.

Smokey tells all, but he is a gentleman to the end; the ladies remain nameless. As for those other "gentlemen" Smokey had run-ins with, this book is payback time!!!