

CLASSIC DRIVER

'It gets in your blood' - historic motorsport, Europe versus America

Lead
With Henry Hope-Frost as umpire, overseeing familiar faces Derek Bell, Jochen Mass, Sir Stirling Moss and Alain de Cadenet (plus two very special guests in Dario Franchitti and Jackie Oliver), Credit Suisse's sixth Historic Racing Forum proved as entertaining and humorous as ever...

Chalk and cheese?



So to the topic at hand: historic motorsport, Europe vs. America. "The main difference is that the Americans don't like damage to take place to old cars," said De Cadenet. "In comparison, it's like a demolition derby over here." An animated Moss piped up, "I remember in America at one point, they actually had no-passing zones!" Bell quipped, "But you didn't take any notice of them, did you?" Triple Indy 500 Champion Dario Franchitti concurred: "It's a different atmosphere, and a bit more of a demonstration over there - I've not seen the guys at Monterey, but this is serious here. These guys want to win."

"Anyone can drive a racing car," commented De Cadenet. "There's a big difference between someone who drives a racing car and someone who is a racer. Derek might say to me, 'Oh, I don't really take this too seriously any more, I'm just out there to have fun' - like hell!"



All of them drivers with a wealth of motorsport experience in America, the six agreed that 'across the Pond' was a fun place to go racing, despite its comparative lack of top-quality circuits (though all the panellists agreed that Elkhart Lake in Wisconsin was superb). "They hadn't got the circuits or the cars that we had, but I enjoyed it very much over there, said Moss." He also vividly recalled one of the few American cars he drove, the Maserati 250F 'Eldorado Special', a little too casually, considering... "Oh yes, I was going round the top of the Monza banking at around 175mph or so, and suddenly my arms crossed and I knew something was wrong." Franchitti said his only issue with racing in America was getting dizzy on the ovals, to which Bell cheekily responded, "Think of the money, though."

A worthy cause



As an amateur driver, Alain de Cadenet had good reason to enjoy racing in America. “The big difference was that when you went to the States as an amateur, you got paid to go and do it. At Watkins Glen, for example, you got more money for coming last in the Can-Am, than you did if you came third or fourth in the Six Hour race the day before.”

When asked if historic racing *felt* like the old days, Jackie Oliver said that the speed was like nicotine, and not only was historic racing expensive, but also adrenalin-fuelled. Despite the inherent danger, Derek Bell would never pass up the chance to take part. “It gets in your blood – anyone in this paddock would jump at the chance to drive these glorious old cars.”

In the 50-minute discussion, held in the fabulous, recently restored Race Control building, many more cheeky anecdotes and thought-provoking comments emerged, none of which would have come to light if Credit Suisse weren't so committed to historic racing.

Photos: Rémi Dargegen for Classic Driver © 2015

Gallery

