

# THE L&M PORSCHE

Can-Am Champion









**Porsche 917 Chassis Number 917/10-003**  
**TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS**

**ENGINE**

NUMBER OF CYLINDERS & TYPE ..... V12, DOHC  
DISPLACEMENT..... 5.4L  
POWER ..... 1150 BHP  
FUEL FEED ..... BOSCH FUEL INJECTION  
ASPIRATION ..... TWIN TURBOCHARGED

**DRIVETRAIN/CHASSIS**

CHASSIS..... BODY ON TUBULAR FRAME  
GEARBOX..... 4-SPEED MANUAL  
DIFFERENTIAL TYPE..... LIMITED SLIP  
BRAKES ..... 4-WHEEL VENTILATED DISCS

**PERFORMANCE**

0-100 MPH ..... 2.9 SECONDS  
0-150 MPH ..... 5.7 SECONDS  
0-200 MPH ..... 12 SECONDS

TOP SPEED ..... 220 MPH

*“It is the only car I have ever driven that will spin the tires at 200 MPH.” – Mark Donohue*

# The L&M Porsche Can-Am Champion

By Stephen Cox

Edited by Mike Carr

Current photos by David Newhardt

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# Acknowledgements

Writing a book is like preparing a racecar. You never really get finished... you just run out of time.

This volume is nothing more than the collective memoirs of many good people who provided their time to the author.

“Woody” Woodard generously shared his memories and never failed to call me when a correction was necessary. George Follmer offered his priceless recollections, told first-hand by a legend in the sport.

Collector Rusty West put me in touch with many of the sources used in this book and sent me official records directly from Porsche. His preservation of the L&M Porsche is a service to anyone who ever enjoyed an auto race.

Author Pete Lyons shared photos and memories of his time with the series in 1972. Some of his original material is quoted here. John Ficarra of Canepa Design contributed helpful sources and materials on Porsche history.

Marilyn Motschenbacher Halder sent her personal home movies from 1972 via overnight mail so I could review them two days before my manuscript deadline. They are wonderful snapshots in time and can be obtained at [www.FoxyVentures.com](http://www.FoxyVentures.com).

Mecum’s presentation department tracked down many of the vital sources in this book, not the author. It is their commitment to accuracy and history that made this possible. David Newhardt’s pictures of the L&M Porsche are so good that they really don’t qualify as photographs. They’re better classified as art.

And of course, without the passion and brilliance of Dana Mecum none of this could have ever happened.

The credit for this book goes solely to these people. Any mistakes or omissions are the author’s.

I am out of time. The green flag is about to drop on the 2012 Mecum Monterey auction. I hope this small offering will help you enjoy your experience and appreciate the incredible history you are about to see.

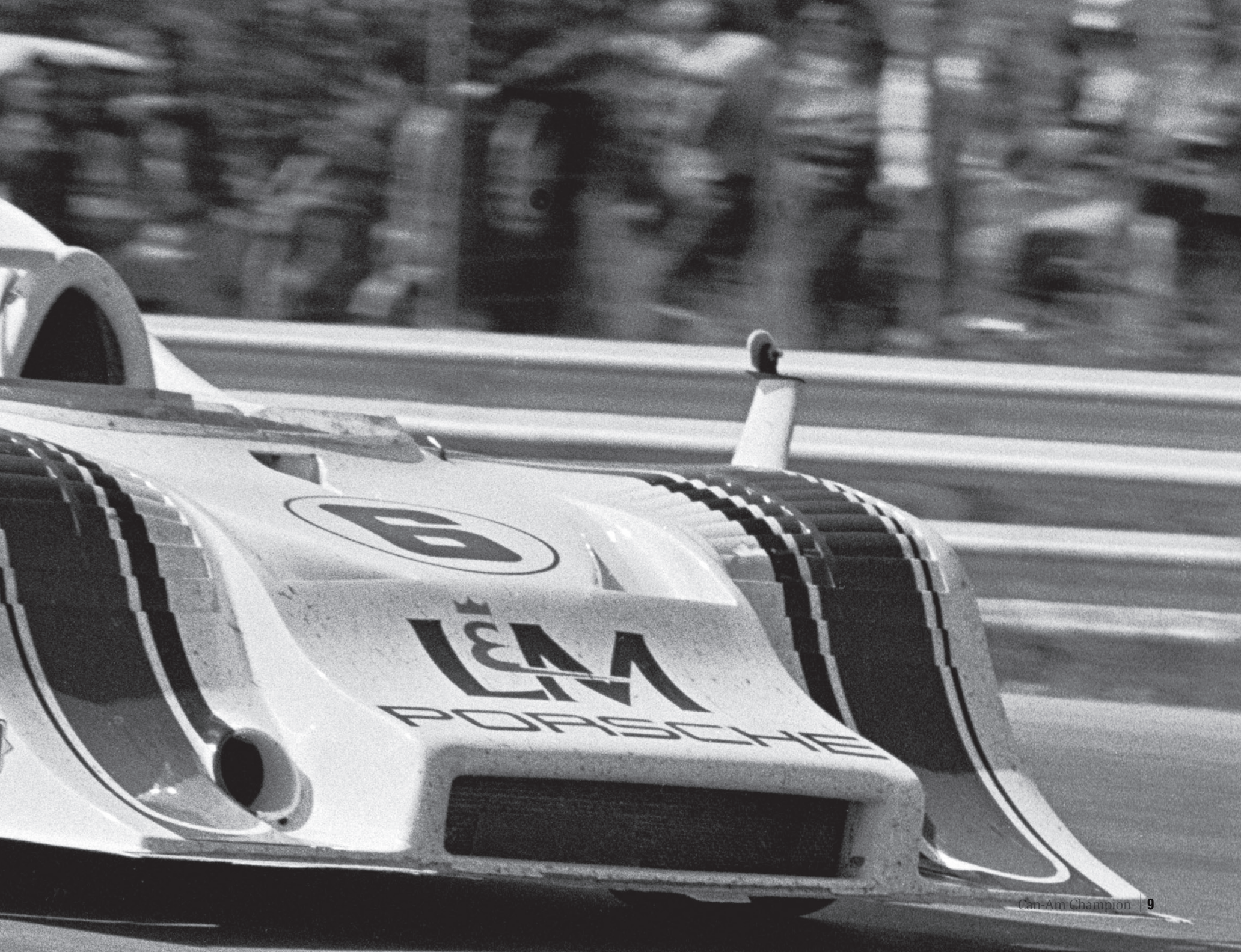
Stephen Cox  
Indianapolis, IN  
June 2012

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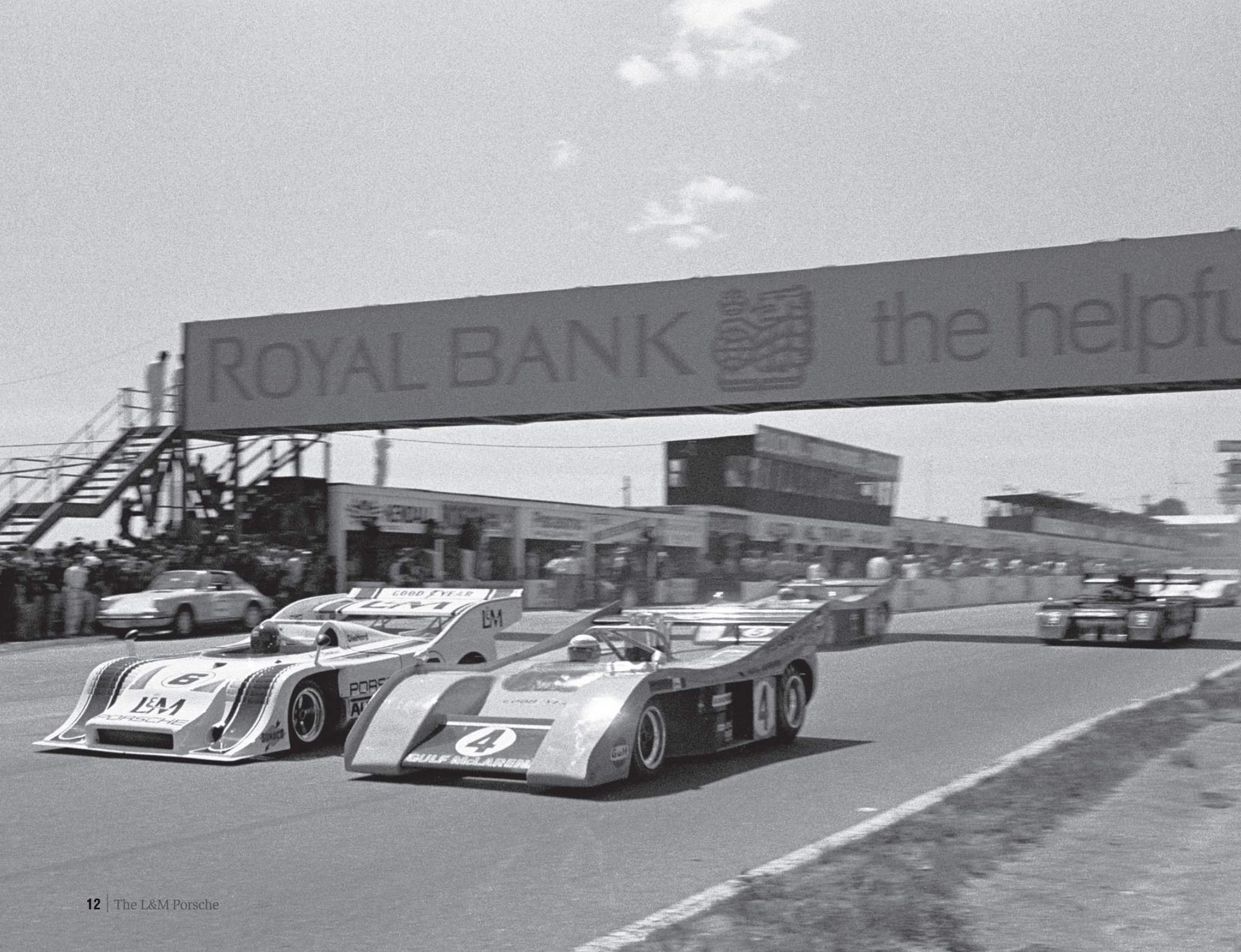




## Chapter 1

# The Beginning

*“I loved those days. I loved those times. I loved the people. It wasn’t like now where everybody goes and hides in their motor homes. Everyone was there for each other.” – Marilyn Motschenbacher Halder*



Mosport International Raceway had an innocent charm that's long been missing from today's clinical, overly sanitized racecourses.

The grass was too high. There were no sand traps. The white line edging the course in Turn 5b (now called "Moss Corner") was worn and covered with gravel. The thin layer of sand covering the front straight raised a fresh dust cloud every time a racecar roared past.

It was Sunday afternoon, June 11, 1972. John "Woody" Woodard took a dirty red shop rag from his hip pocket and wiped the oil off his hands.

Woody was the chief mechanic on Penske Racing's Can Am road racing team and he couldn't afford to have dirty hands. The team's shirts were bright red and would show even the slightest stain. Worse yet, the massive letters on their uniforms identifying them as Penske's "L&M Porsche – Audi" team were pure white. So were their wide leather belts.

Mechanics didn't wear custom designed, heat resistant gloves in 1972, so Woody cleaned his hands as best he could and stuffed the rag back into his hip pocket. His driver, Mark Donohue, would be here any moment to climb into his new racecar.

Already widely considered one of America's finest athletes, Mark Neary Donohue, Jr. was only two weeks removed from winning the world's most prestigious automobile race at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. He had already earned victories in the United States Road Racing Championship, the 12 Hours of Sebring, and held the all-time record for single season wins in the Trans-Am series.

It therefore came as no surprise when the affable 34-year-old from New Jersey won the pole position for Penske at the opening round of the Canadian-American Challenge Cup, more commonly known as the "Can Am series."

Penske's task was simple. His team was to unseat McLaren, who had dominated the series for half a decade and began the 1972 season as the defending champions. Denny Hulme and Pete Revson, both household names and world-class drivers, piloted McLaren's new M20 racecars into the new season.

The opening race at Mosport was only minutes away and both sides of the track were crowded with spectators. Opposite the pit area near the start/finish line, a series of low, temporary grandstands had been erected to hold about ten rows of fans.

Pit lane itself was lined with photographers. One of them bent far over the wall

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AT LEFT: *Setting the stage for the new championship battle, Mark Donohue in 003 starts at the front of the grid at Mosport alongside 1971 Can-Am Champion Peter Revson in the No. 4 McLaren M20-Chevy. – PETE LYONS PHOTO*

and held a film camera just inches above the track surface with his right hand, preparing to capture a magnificent shot as the field flew by on the first lap. You could do that sort of thing in 1972.

Woody leaned against the rear wing of Penske's brand new Porsche 917/10-003 racecar until it began to roll down pit road. He had literally lived with this car since its arrival at the Penske racing shop the previous November. He pushed it, slowly and silently, toward the number one starting slot where it would lead the field to the green flag.

He could not have known that this was the beginning of a historic five-month campaign that would forever establish the L&M Porsche 917/10 as one of the most iconic racecars in the world.

The open cockpit Porsche 917/10 was unlike the previous coupe versions of the 917K that had been competing for the past two seasons in Europe. The earlier models were loosely based on the Porsche 908, which had failed in its mission to dominate Le Mans but still proliferated at racetracks on both sides of the ocean even as development of the 917 began in July 1968.

Penske Racing had two Porsche 917/10's available at the Mosport race. The team would eventually own three such cars during the 1972 season.

Penske's first car was serial number 003. To race fans around the world, this car would go down in history as the famous L&M Porsche. Around the Penske race shop it was simply called the "three car." To the team and the manufacturer, each car was known by its serial number, not the race number painted on its bodywork. In Porsche terminology, the car's full identity was "917/10-003." This was the first 917/10 received by Penske Racing and the car that the team intended to race in the first event at Mosport.

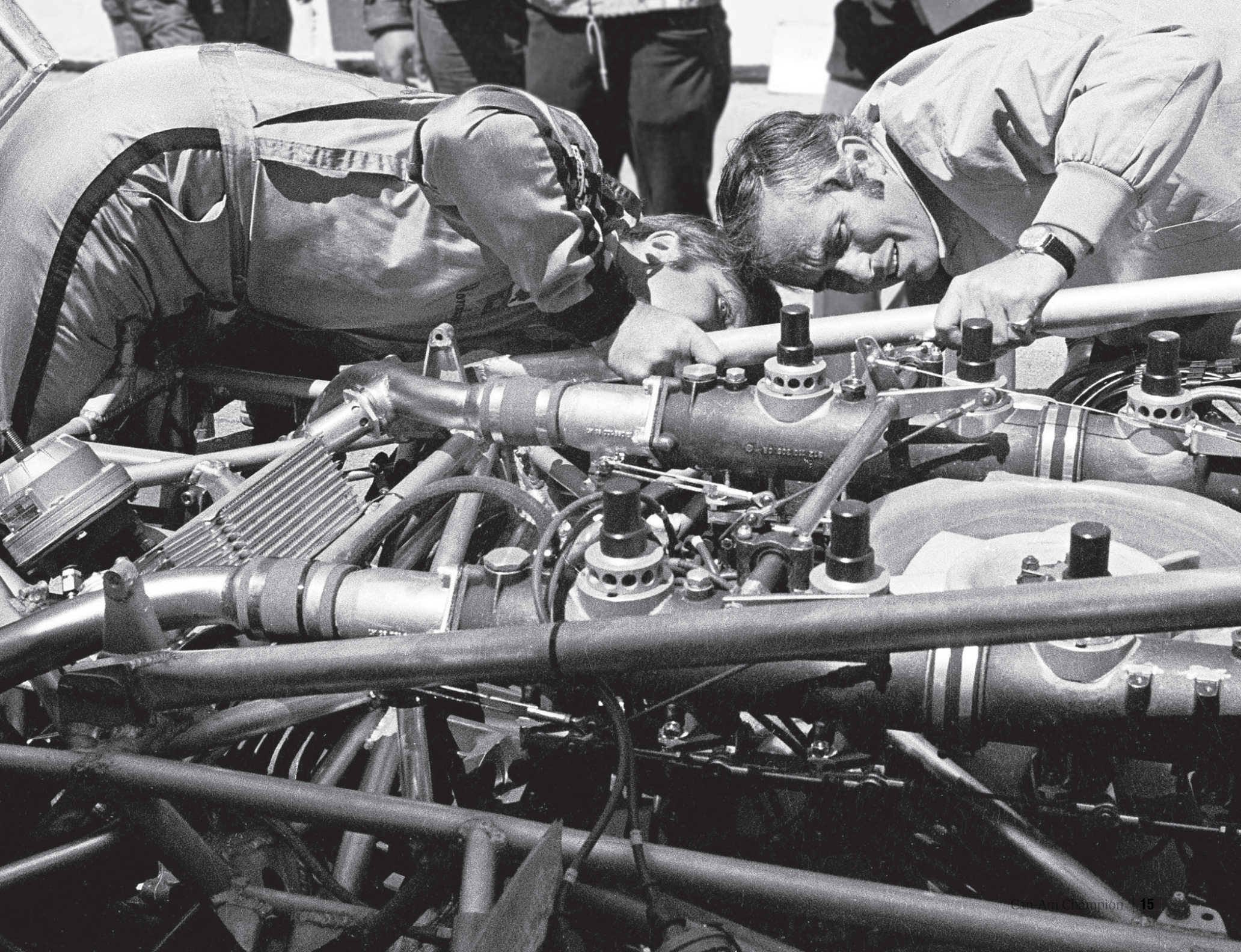
Likewise, Penske's second car (serial number 011) was referred to as "917/10-011" in Porsche records. It was received at Penske Racing just days before the opening race of 1972 and had an experimental, lightweight magnesium chassis. It was transported to Mosport as a backup to the 003 car although it was not yet race-ready.

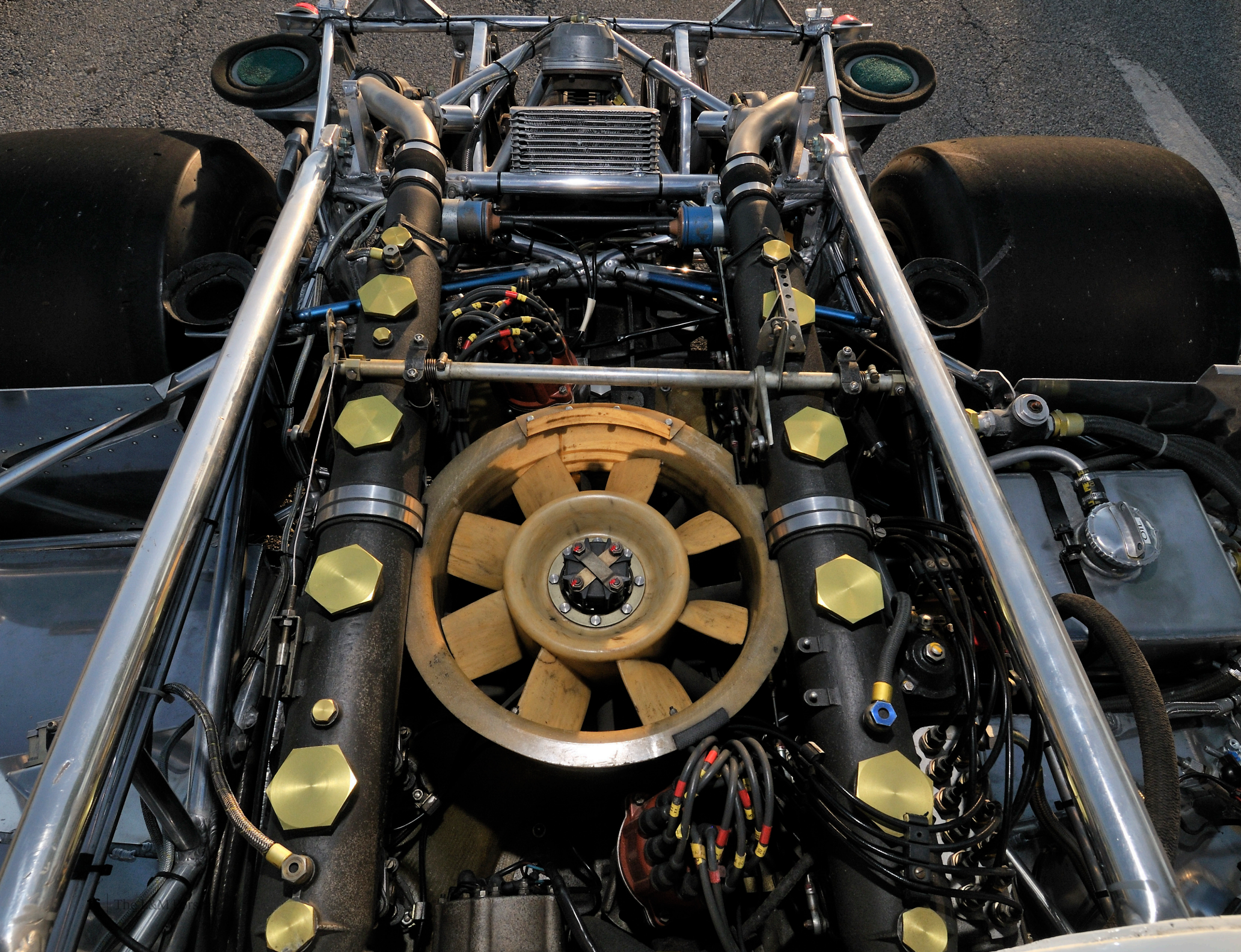
The third car received by Penske later in 1972 was 917/10-005. Mark Donohue would drive this machine late in the season.

Although all three racecars were painted in similar livery, it was the 003 car that would go down in history as "the L&M Porsche."

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AT RIGHT: *Driver and hands-on engineer Mark Donohue examines his machine with team owner Roger Penske prior to the '72 Mosport race.*  
— PETE LYONS PHOTO







It is vital to remember that the numbers painted on the bodywork of the cars were considered irrelevant and fluid at the time. For instance, the 003 car wore #6 for the first half of the season but was repainted as #7 after the fifth event. Within Team Penske and Porsche, the car's "race number" was of little significance. Regardless of what number was painted on the bodywork, it was still chassis number 003.

Distinguishing the new 917/10's from the previous 917K model was easy because, unlike its predecessor, the 917/10 was built in a spyder configuration with an open cockpit. The fuel capacity of the new model was increased to 88 gallons so as to eliminate pit stops during Can Am's lengthy races.

Initially equipped with a naturally aspirated 5.0 liter flat 12 engine, it was determined that the new 917/10 needed more power. Porsche engineers opted instead for a turbocharged, air-cooled, 5.0 liter flat 12-cylinder engine that was a monument to redundancy. It featured dual distributors feeding a twin spark plug system, two valves per cylinder, twin overhead camshafts and a pair of turbochargers.

The engine produced a mind-numbing 1,100 horsepower in race trim. Cranking up the turbo boost for qualifying would later produce an even more obscene 1,200 horsepower.

The 917/10 represented everything for which Porsche stood. It was a technological masterpiece that sacrificed everything for speed.

The floorboard and bodywork were paper-thin and nearly weightless. The cockpit was spartan to the extreme. Overpowered with a short wheelbase, it was a nightmare to drive and demanded the utmost skill from its pilot. It relied heavily on aerodynamic grip, which is finicky and totally dependent on constantly changing atmospheric conditions such as wind and humidity.

Helmut Flegl was a young engineering graduate from Germany who had snagged a job at Porsche in the late 60's. His first assignment was the 917 project and he had exceeded company expectations. He spoke reasonably good English and wanted to see the entire 917/10 project through to completion.

Both Roger Penske and Mark Donohue wanted a representative from Porsche to remain with the team throughout the year to act as a liaison between the automaker and the race team. Flegl was the obvious choice for the position and once again, Porsche didn't hesitate to spend the money necessary to assure the success of their new creation. Flegl came to America for every race of the 1972 season.



“I’ve got a unique relationship in this project,” Donohue told Pete Lyons for Road & Track magazine in the spring of 1972. “A kind of relationship I’ve never had before. Helmut Flegl is, oh, sort of ‘the boss of the 917’ and he’s a man who is capable in every respect. I can talk to him, I can say things to him and he to me and we understand each other perfectly. We speak the same language, and I’ve never really had a relationship like that before. I’ve always been used to doing it all myself. This is fabulous for me. I’ve really learned a lot.”

Flegl’s mindset spoke volumes about Porsche’s commitment level. When 917/10-003 was sent to the paint booth, there was tremendous concern from the manufacturer about the weight of the paint.

The car was given multiple coats of white base coat, then glossy. The roll bar was painted. The overall white was complemented by wide stripes of red paint on each side stretching the length of the car and including the huge rear wing. Black trim was added to every viewing angle of the car, along with numbers and sponsor decals.

Flegl was livid.

Woodard recalled Flegl’s fury when he saw the car, fully painted in its now-famous L&M livery at Mosport, for the first time:

He came over and saw it and said, “My God! I’m going to get fired when I get back. You must have put thirty pounds of paint on it.”

“That’s it. I’m gonna get fired.”

Such was the company’s commitment to the project. The 917/10 was Porsche’s uncompromising gamble to literally steal North America’s most important road racing title from their chief rivals.

But when the green flag fell to start the 1972 Can Am season at Mosport, Porsche’s high-tech armada was quickly humbled by nothing more than a sticky valve.

Early in the race, Donohue pulled 917/10-003 into the pits and shouted to his crew that he had no turbo boost. Valetine Schaffer, Porsche’s top man on the turbo-charged V-12 engine program, looked under the rear bodywork and instantly recognized the problem. Woodard was desperately working alongside Schaffer to fix the issue in the pits, and he recalled the moment:

The German engineers devised a couple of valves to try to keep the turbochargers spooled up. The valve that caused the problem at Mosport (and again two races later at Watkins Glen) was... well... I call it a “dump valve.”

When you let off the throttle it would open this valve so the turbo could still pump air. Even though it wasn't going into the engine, it would just pump the air into the atmosphere. When you open the throttle, this valve would snap shut so that you had instant boost.

It was a slide arrangement and at first the Germans said you needed to use a special lubricant to make sure it doesn't stick. If it sticks, then the valve won't close. That's exactly what happened at Mosport.

The problem was that the lubricant had picked up dirt. The dirt got into the slide mechanism and it seized, and the valve stuck open. The engine lost power and you just couldn't get boost.

There was no design problem. There was no actual part failure. It was just a slide mechanism that got clogged up with dirt and seized.

The end fix was that we just didn't use the lubricant. It was very clean, with enough clearance that it would [open and close properly] under any conditions. After Watkins Glen, we had no more problems for the next two years.

Mark Donohue stormed back through the field but could only salvage a second place finish from what should have been a dominating win in the season's first outing.

Denny Hulme won the race in McLaren's new Chevy-powered M20. Porsche's opportunity to break McLaren's five-year reign over the Can Am series was off to an inauspicious start.

Team Penske knew they had the speed. There was no question about that. They knew they had the driver and that the problem with the dump valve was minor and solvable.

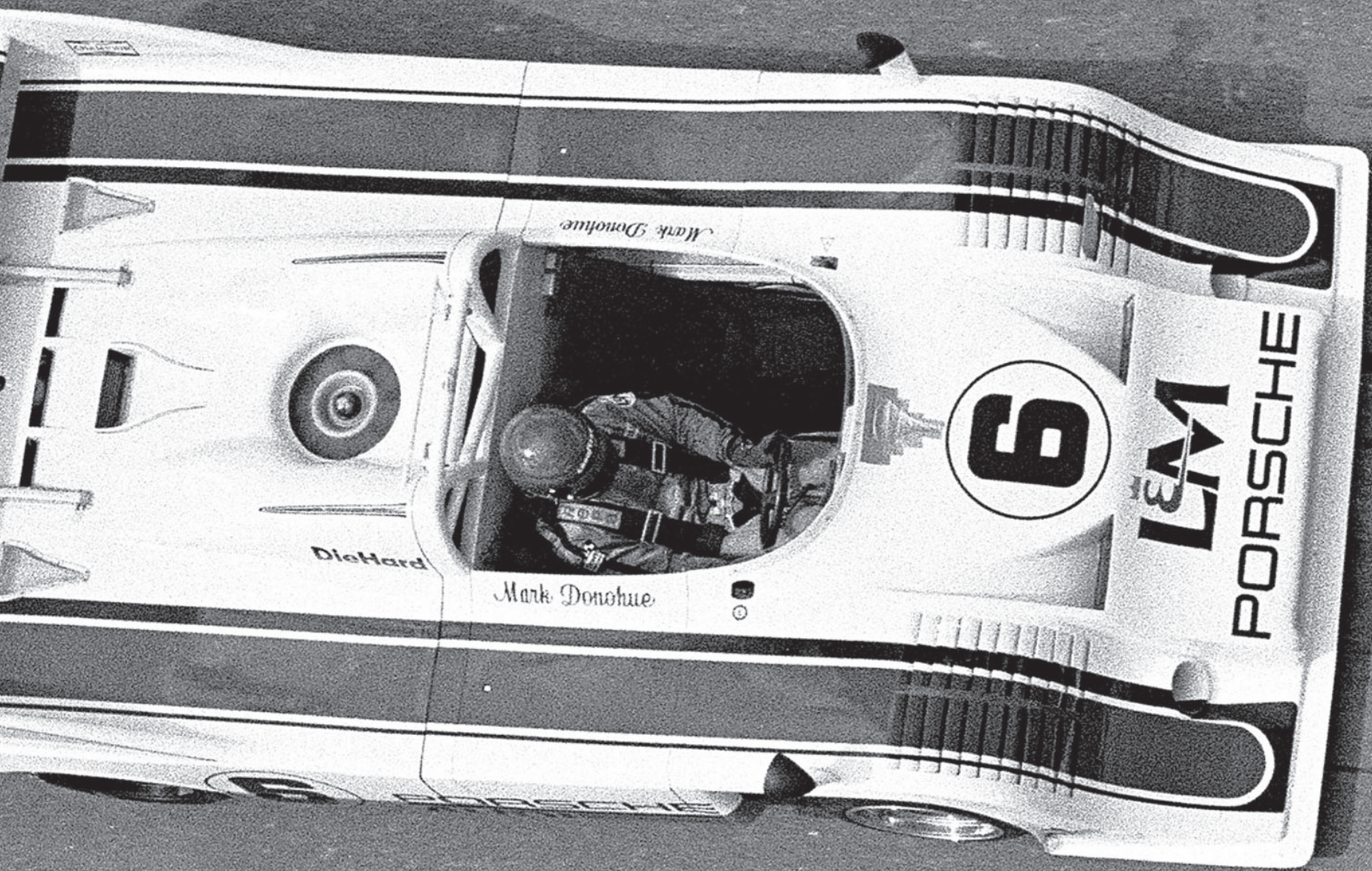
But they needed some luck and so far they hadn't had any.

Three weeks later at a road course in the countryside north of Atlanta, things would get much, much worse.



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AT RIGHT: Mark Donohue piloting 917/10-003 to a second place finish at Mosport 1972.  
— PETE LYONS PHOTO



*Mark Donohue*

6

DieHard

*Mark Donohue*

L&M  
PORSCHE



## Chapter 2

# The Accident

*“A doctor specializing in football injuries told him, no, his sore left knee was really a knot of shredded ligaments. There was surgery and a 6 week plaster cast and a career grounded.”*

*– Pete Lyons, Road & Track*

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AT LEFT: *Mark Neary Donohue Jr., the driver Team Penske picked to unseat McLaren in the 1972 Can-Am season. – PETE LYONS PHOTO*





The story had to be cleaned up for the press.

If the truth came out on national television, nobody at Porsche or Penske Racing was going to be happy about it. So in a televised interview after the incident, race driver Mark Donohue told the story of his horrific practice crash at Road Atlanta with carefully chosen words.

“Going down the back straightaway, the wing, which produced a tremendous amount of downforce at high speeds, came off the back of the car,” Donohue claimed.

That was an understatement. Yes, the rear wing had come off. But so had the quarter panels, engine cover and the entire rear bodywork of Porsche 917/10, serial number 011, at roughly 170 miles per hour.

This was not the 003 car that Donohue had driven at Mosport. It was not the 005 car that was yet to be built and delivered to Penske later in the summer.

Rather, it was a brand new machine that was intended to become the team’s primary car. This new Porsche had an experimental magnesium chassis and weighed 106 pounds less than the 003 car.

Ever the engineer, Donohue insisted that 917/10-011, better known simply as “the magnesium car” within Team Penske, be ready for the race at Road Atlanta. He had already made up his mind to drive it in the upcoming event.

It was Donohue who had been entrusted with the combined Porsche/Penske effort to unseat the mighty McLaren team that had dominated Can Am racing for nearly five years, and it was magnesium car 011 that would carry him to victory.

But now, speaking to television reporters from a hospital bed in Atlanta while his beloved magnesium Porsche was being hauled to a dumpster (literally), Donohue’s dream was shattered. He dared not tell them the full story, which was far more interesting than the sanitized public version.

Just days prior to the event, four men traveled together to Road Atlanta for the second round of the Can Am series campaign.

Chief mechanic John “Woody” Woodard planned to spend the week in Braselton for preparation and testing.

Greg Syfert was Woody’s hard-working assistant and number two mechanic.

Heinz Hofer was a Swiss national who found work in the early 70’s as a ski instructor in Vail, Colorado. One of his students was Roger Penske, who offered Hofer a job as a truck driver on his Can Am race team.

These three men, along with Mark Donohue, made their way to Road Atlanta in early July 1972.

They brought two Porsche 917/10 racecars with them: serial number 003, which was in race-ready condition after its second place finish at Mosport, and the magnesium car, serial number 011, which was not. It had been delivered to Penske just days after their return from Mosport three weeks earlier.

The magnesium car's bodywork had been sent to a paint shop but had been returned late. As a result, the rear cowling had not been properly fitted and all the retaining pins that secured it to the frame were not yet in place.

Donohue's goal was to drive the magnesium car as soon as possible and spend the week preparing it for Sunday's Can Am race. It was lighter and – theoretically – faster. Donohue was determined to race it immediately.

The Penske team arrived at Road Atlanta and unloaded both racecars. Woodard, Hofer and Syfert began toiling on the magnesium car's ill-fitting bodywork while Donohue took the 003 car onto the track for testing.

After only a handful of laps it was clear that Donohue had chosen the wrong gear combination for the 003 car. He passed under the bridge that still spans the track's final turn today, pulled onto pit lane, and dismounted.

Woodard was asked to change the gear in the 003 car. While that work was taking place, Donohue would spend his idle time taking a few laps in the unfinished magnesium car. Woodard was quick to protest, and recalled the event in an interview with the author:

I said, "Mark, you know you can warm it up but you can't put your foot in it cause the bodywork is not finished. There are two primary pins at the back which are not holding it onto the chassis."

He said, "I know. No problem, I understand."

So we're changing the gears. There was only myself, Heinz Hofer and Greg Syfert, my two assistants. And we had hired – luckily – an ambulance driver.

Mark came around about two times running pretty slow and then way off in the distance I could hear him starting on the back straightaway and he got into it.

I could hear him accelerating.

And then there was just dead silence.

Donohue had accelerated hard at the exit of Road Atlanta's Turn 7. Turns 8 and 9 are barely distinguishable bends in the course that can be taken at full throttle. And



in the early days of Road Atlanta, the chicane at the end of the back straight (today called Turns “10a” and “10b”) didn’t exist.

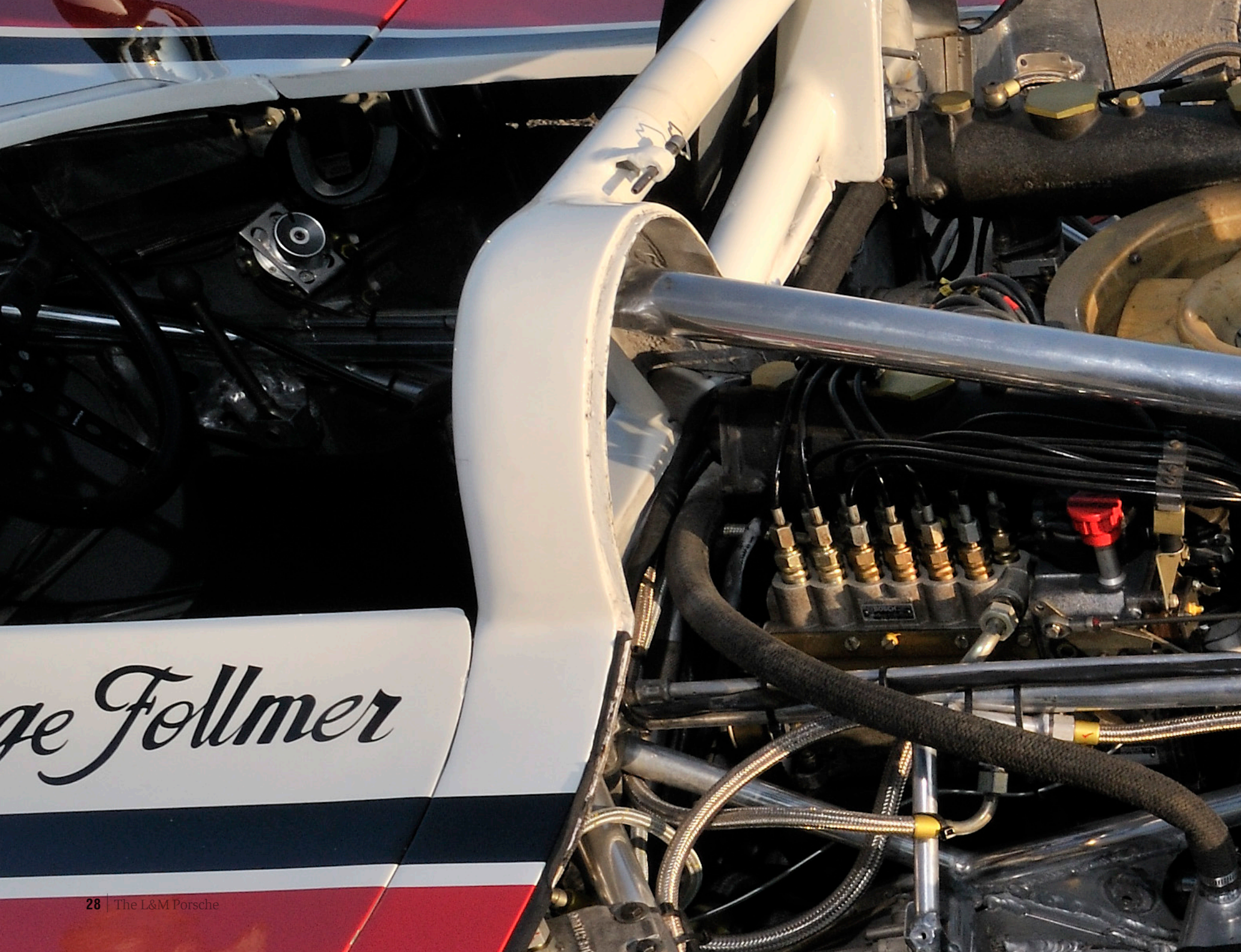
Instead, this entire section of track constituted one massive straightaway that facilitated speeds approaching 200 miles per hour. It was on this straightaway that Donohue’s crash occurred, just past the crest of the rise in the center of what is today called “Turn 9.”

The bodywork on the back half of the racecar had come loose under the aerodynamic stress of speed. It acted as a parachute, lifting the rear of the car into the air before detaching completely and disintegrating.

The nose of the magnesium car dug into the dirt, tearing away the front end of the machine before vaulting into a series of end-over-end cartwheels.

Half a mile away and out of sight, Woodard, Hofer and Syfert were still working on the 003 car’s gears on pit road when the sudden silence caught their attention. They should have heard the sound of a screaming engine in the distance. Instead, they heard nothing.

Woodard said, “I knew something was bad wrong and we jumped in the ambulance and went up there and found him crawling across the pavement away from the car... or what



*Follmer*



was left of the car.”

Donohue crawled away from the smoldering wreckage because he could not walk. His legs had been badly injured.

Journalist Pete Lyons visited him in the hospital shortly after the accident and, as a personal friend of the driver, heard all the things that Donohue didn't mention to television reporters. Lyons recalled:

Mark was sitting up in bed, perfectly lucid and cheerful. I don't know whether he was in pain or if he was doped up, but both of his legs were severely injured.

The front of the chassis had ripped off so that Mark's legs were sticking out during the accident. When the car tumbled, his legs were smashed into the pavement.

He told us that he was going down the straight and all of a sudden he felt the car snap. The car was deprived of all its downforce and just started to go to pieces.

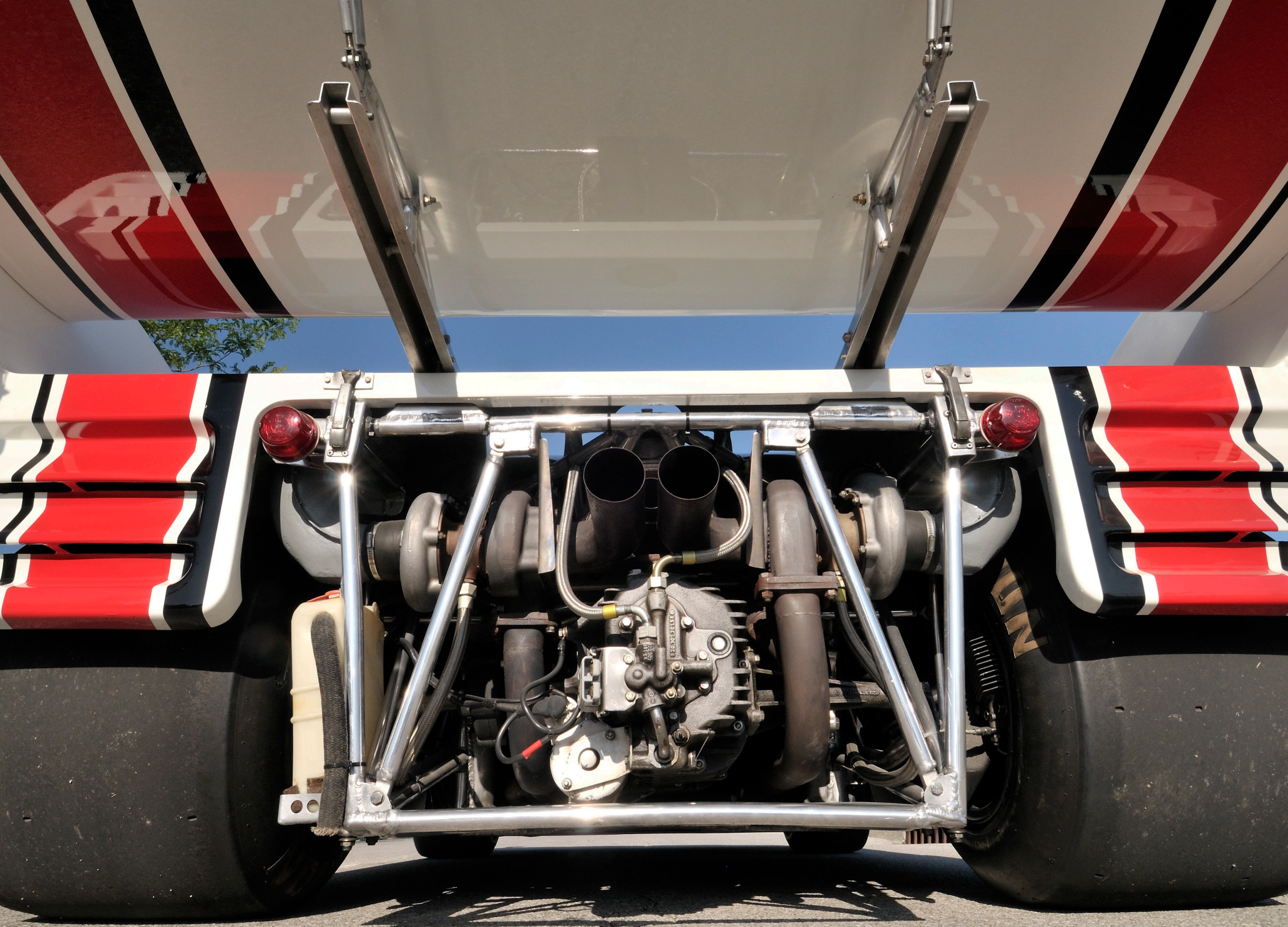
The image that sticks in my mind was Mark describing how he was in the air, upside-down, looking down at the guardrail while the car is cart wheeling.

It would be weeks before Donohue could walk unassisted and months before he would race. He was lucky to be alive.

Team Penske's road racing program had been unlucky at Mosport, but now it was in serious trouble. The brand new magnesium car was totally destroyed and would never run a single race, and Porsche's master plan to dethrone McLaren's Can Am dominance hung by a thread.

Porsche's hopes now rested on one car, Porsche 917/10-003, and a new driver who had never before sat in it.

Over the next eight Can Am races, this unlikely combination would re-write motorsports history.







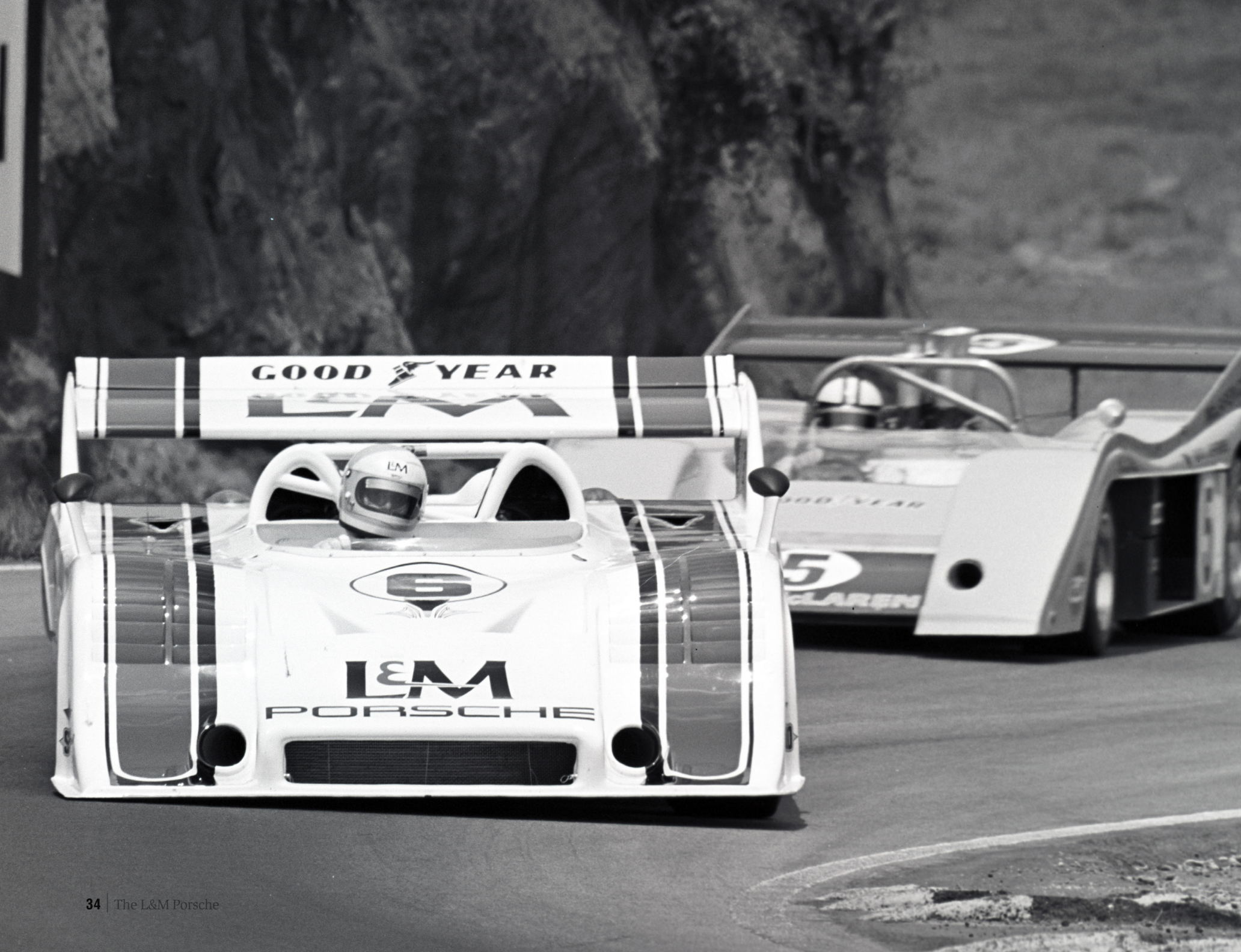
## Chapter 3

# The Replacement

*“We drove by the seat of our pants. We had to muscle the car around the track. We did not have cool suits.” – George Follmer*

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AT LEFT: *“The Captain” Roger Penske (far left) leans over to confer with replacement driver George Follmer in 003 at Road Atlanta while Mark Donohue (with crutches) looks on from behind at the car that still displays his name.*  
– PHOTO BY BILL WARNER



George Follmer arrived in Atlanta early Friday morning in a rented Ford Crown Victoria.

“I didn’t know him from Adam,” said chief mechanic Woody Woodard. “But I’d certainly heard his name. He was a good guy.”

Marilyn Motschenbacher Halder, then married to McLaren driver Lothar Motschenbacher, recalled Follmer’s arrival at the track. “Everybody loved George. He would always wander around the track when he wasn’t working with the guys on the car. He always looked good; he was so nice and always had a smile. He was a jokester. He was fun, but a dedicated driver.”

A lot of people had already heard George Follmer’s name. He had driven from the back of the grid to 15th place at the 1971 Indianapolis 500-mile race and would’ve placed higher had all his pistons functioned properly for the final 50 laps. He had already posted an Indycar victory at Phoenix and had just wrapped up a Trans-Am title days before. His talents would eventually take him to the pinnacle of American road racing and then to Europe in Formula 1.

But on July 7, 1972 George Follmer stood along pit lane at Road Atlanta, clueless and hopelessly lost.

After Donohue’s crash early in the week, Roger Penske wasted no time finding someone on whom he knew he could rely. Follmer got a mid-week call from the man who is still known today as “The Captain.”

I had driven for Penske before in 1967. The Captain called me and asked me if I’d come down and replace Mark at Road Atlanta, and I said, “Well... sure!”

When The Captain calls, you go.

That was about all Follmer knew when he hung up the telephone. He had never before seen a Porsche 917/10 racecar, let alone driven one at the highest level of competition. He had never before driven Road Atlanta. He hadn’t even seen the track. The facility was so new that the paint was barely dry.

“I got there,” Follmer recalled, “and Mark was there on crutches and told me a little bit about it. He couldn’t tell me very much. He said, ‘You know, it’s got some [turbo] lag,’ which I expected because I’d run Indycars. ‘It’s got pretty good brakes, so go out and have fun. If you’re a pro, you’d better figure it out.’”

Donohue’s pain went deeper than his badly injured legs. Although he tried to remain professional and upbeat, he was being forced to watch from a hospital bed

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AT LEFT: *George Follmer leads Denny Hulme into the turn at Road Atlanta 1972. (Note Donohue’s name has now been removed from car)*

— PHOTO BY BILL WARNER

while his season, his ride, his championship and part of his legacy slipped away.

Follmer was gracious and knew what Donohue was going through. “You’ve got to remember that it was Mark’s car. He developed it, he tested it and he helped engineer it. It was his car,” Follmer said.

Woodard saw the same signs in Donohue’s eyes. “Mark did his due diligence and told George everything he could. If there was anybody who was unhappy it was Mark. It was his car. He’d gotten hurt and couldn’t race it, and now here’s one of his competitors coming in to drive his car... and winning. I think Mark struggled with that all year.”

A group of fans at Road Atlanta that weekend posted a huge wooden sign in front of their green Chevy van in the infield area that said, “Get well Mark.” But Donohue never saw it. He returned to the hospital while the usual social festivities continued at the racetrack.

Although Can Am was one of the highest forms of road racing in North America, it still had a club-like atmosphere to the participants. Every track had its own personality. The drivers had favorite restaurants in each town. They all stayed at the same motel at every race.

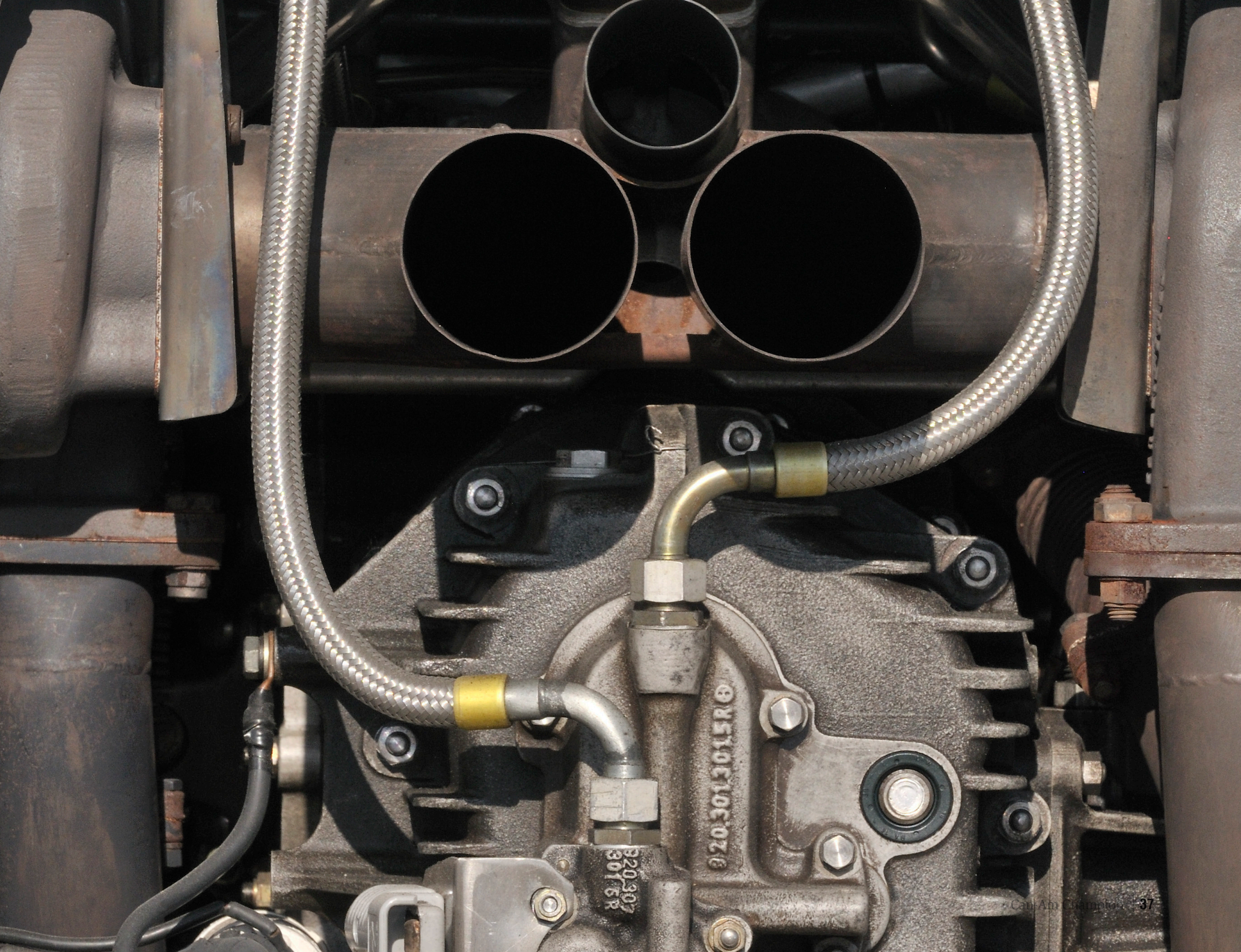
Their social circle was small and intimate. Marilyn Motschenbacher Halder spent much of her time at a the universally recognized social center of Can Am’s inner circle known as “Spanky’s trailer.”

“I don’t even remember Spanky’s last name. I don’t think anybody ever knew it,” Marilyn said. “It was one of those old Winnebagos. There would be Denny [Hulme], George [Follmer], Revvie [Pete Revson], and the photographers, and Lothar and me, and the wives. Jackie Oliver would be there. We’d always gather at Spanky’s trailer and everybody would sit there and laugh and shop talk. They’d say, ‘You should have seen me in this turn!’ and just bench race.”

Away from the social scene, one of the more immediate business concerns on pit road was getting Follmer fitted into the seat of the L&M Porsche.

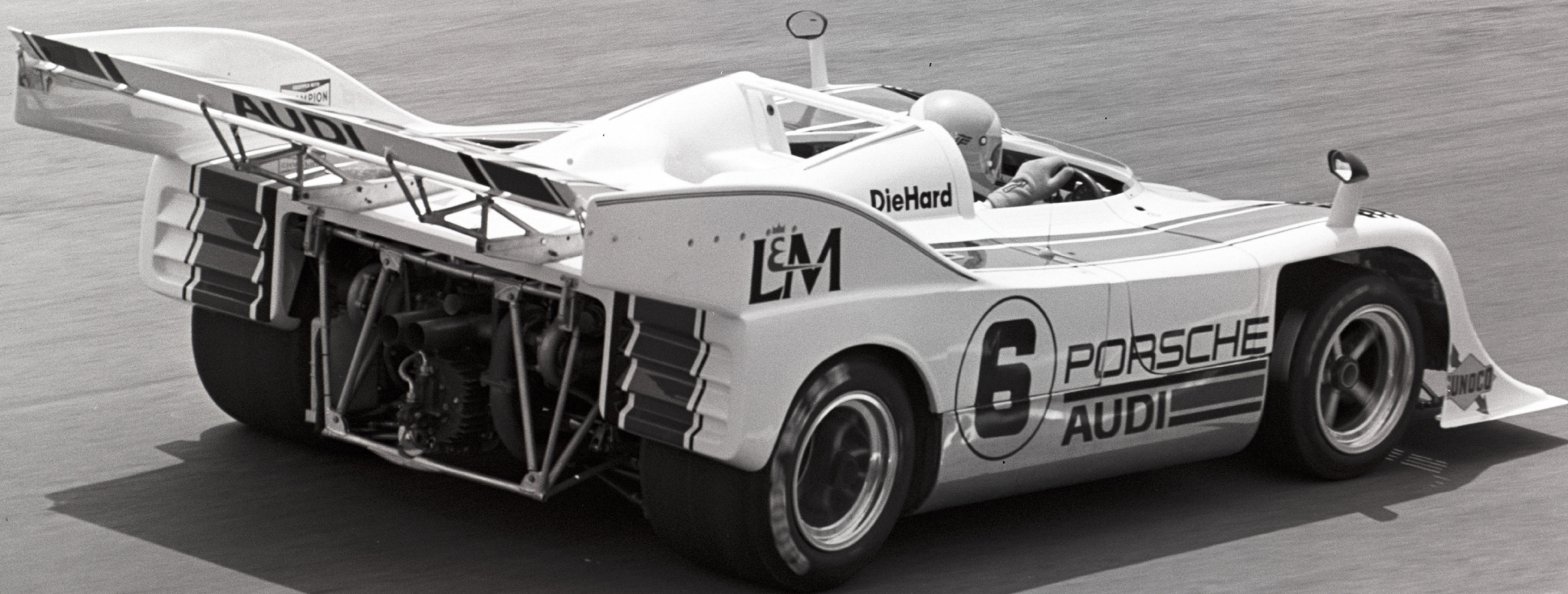
But climbing into the cockpit of the 917/10 was an acrobatic endeavor that required Olympic-level gymnastic skills. The bodywork was so thin that no weight could be placed on it. Instead the aspiring driver was to make one giant step across the fuel tanks and into the cockpit while avoiding the instruments, gear shifter, tachometer, and everything else.

Success eluded Follmer on his first try. “When you got in, you had to step on the



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bar,” Follmer recalled. “It was a tube frame. The floorboard – or what we called a floorboard – was just a piece of fiberglass and it was put up there with tie-wraps. So all you had to do was cut the tie-wraps and pull the fiberglass down to work on the car.”

There was a piece of tape that marked the only available spot where a driver could safely place his foot on entry. George missed it by a mile.

He stepped into the cockpit and placed his feet on the floorboard where they promptly poked through the fiberglass and went straight through to the ground. It was an inauspicious debut that inspired little confidence.

While a new floorboard was being installed on Saturday morning, Follmer got his first chance to see the racetrack. Road Atlanta had a full schedule of activity and qualifications that day so special arrangements were made to open the track at 6 am and allow Follmer a few familiarization laps... in his rental car.

“I took my rental car – it was a Crown Vic – and drove around the racetrack,” Follmer said. He was accompanied by a team engineer who pointed out how the car might theoretically react at different points along the course.

“That’s how I learned the track,” Follmer understated.

“It was a pretty steep learning curve.”

He then switched from a Crown Vic to the L&M Porsche and began practicing. By the end of the final session he had posted a lap time of 1:14.163, less than one-tenth of a second slower than Denny Hulme’s Gulf McLaren.

Hulme would win the pole position with Follmer’s L&M Porsche on the outside of the front row. It was an impressive performance from a guy who didn’t know how to step into the cockpit 24 hours before. Pete Revson qualified inside Row 2 in McLaren’s second entry, but neither M20 would survive the opening laps of the race.

Follmer took the early lead and built a slight advantage over Hulme, while Revson struggled with ignition problems and dropped back quickly.

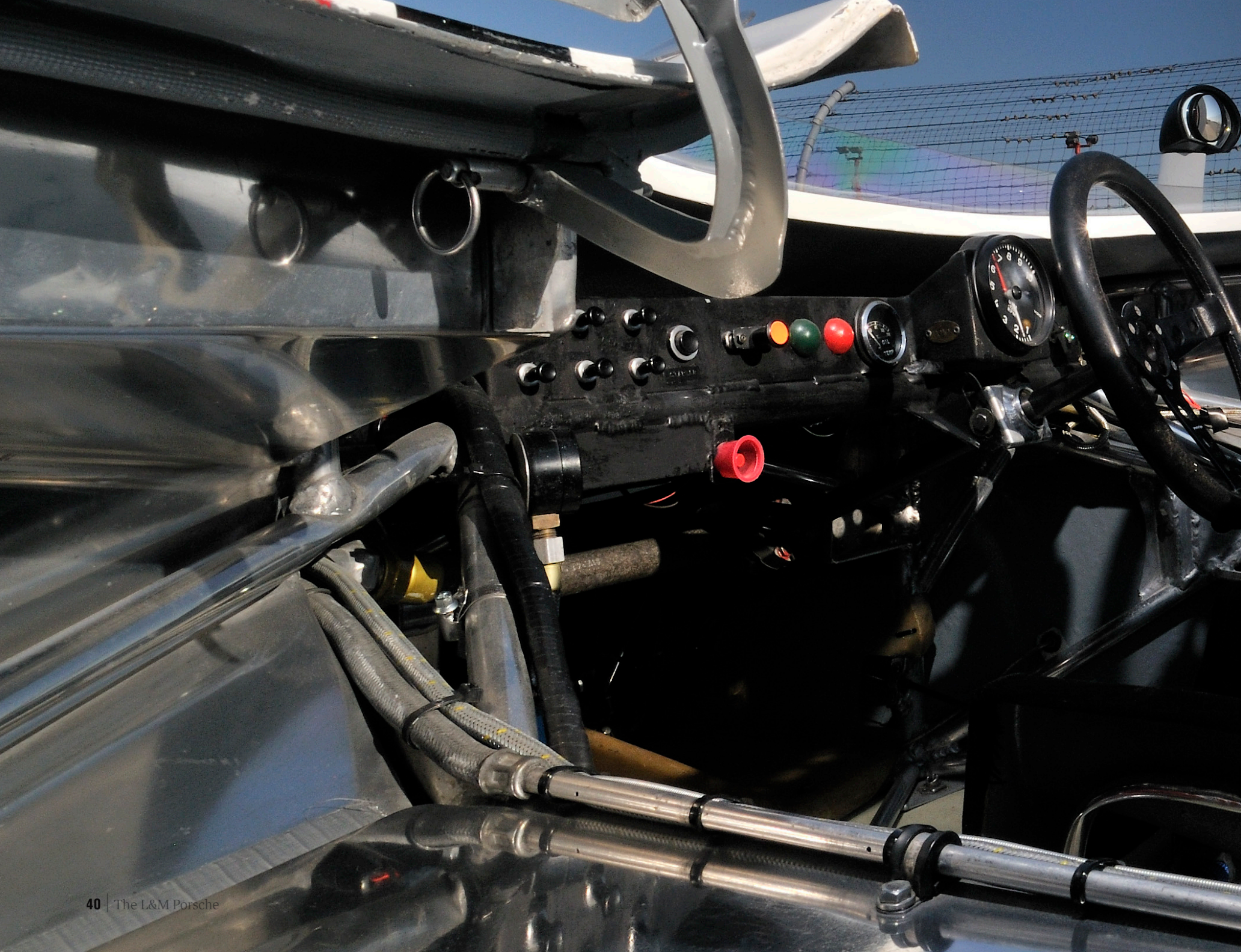
On the fifth lap, Hulme lost control of his M20 at nearly 180 miles per hour along the back straightaway just a few yards from where Donohue’s crash had occurred nearly a week before. A newspaper article described the carnage:

The wedge nose of the McLaren got air under it, lifted up, and, like a hydroplane run amok, flipped straight over backwards... there is a flash of orange, something heavy slamming to earth, a spray of red clay. It’s Denny, upside down.

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AT LEFT: Replacement driver George Follmer motors the L&M Porsche to a Team Penske victory at Road Atlanta 1972.

– PHOTO BY BILL WARNER







2008  
Beck 1



People cluster to the wreckage, heave it over onto its belly, and fire blooms. It's out quickly in a cloud of white powder, and they bend over the driver. He's moving, just coming around. He doesn't seem to know where he is or to recognize his teammate, but in response to direction he can wiggle his toes.

It's all right then, they can pull him out and pack him off to the track hospital.

Hulme escaped with no serious injuries, but his pumpkin-orange and black McLaren M20 was a total loss after cartwheeling for more than a hundred yards. His teammate fared little better. Revson continued to have ignition problems and his race was over in less than 20 laps. McLaren was done.

Follmer was dominant in the L&M Porsche. Now alone at the front of the field, he was getting faster as he learned the track. Greg Young, holding down second place in an outdated McLaren M8F, had no chance. Follmer lapped the entire field and cruised to victory.

Porsche was ecstatic. This was the win they'd hoped for at Mosport. Now, with their confidence soaring, they were ready to spring their new American road racing venture in the German press.

Penske Racing was overjoyed, as were the sponsors and fans. The only person who really didn't know what to think was George Follmer.

"I didn't have any expectations one way or the other because I didn't know," Follmer remembered. "I hadn't driven the car, hadn't raced the car, didn't know the track and I was coming into a series that had some pretty qualified drivers in it. So I didn't have a lot of expectations."

"I was there to do the best I could."

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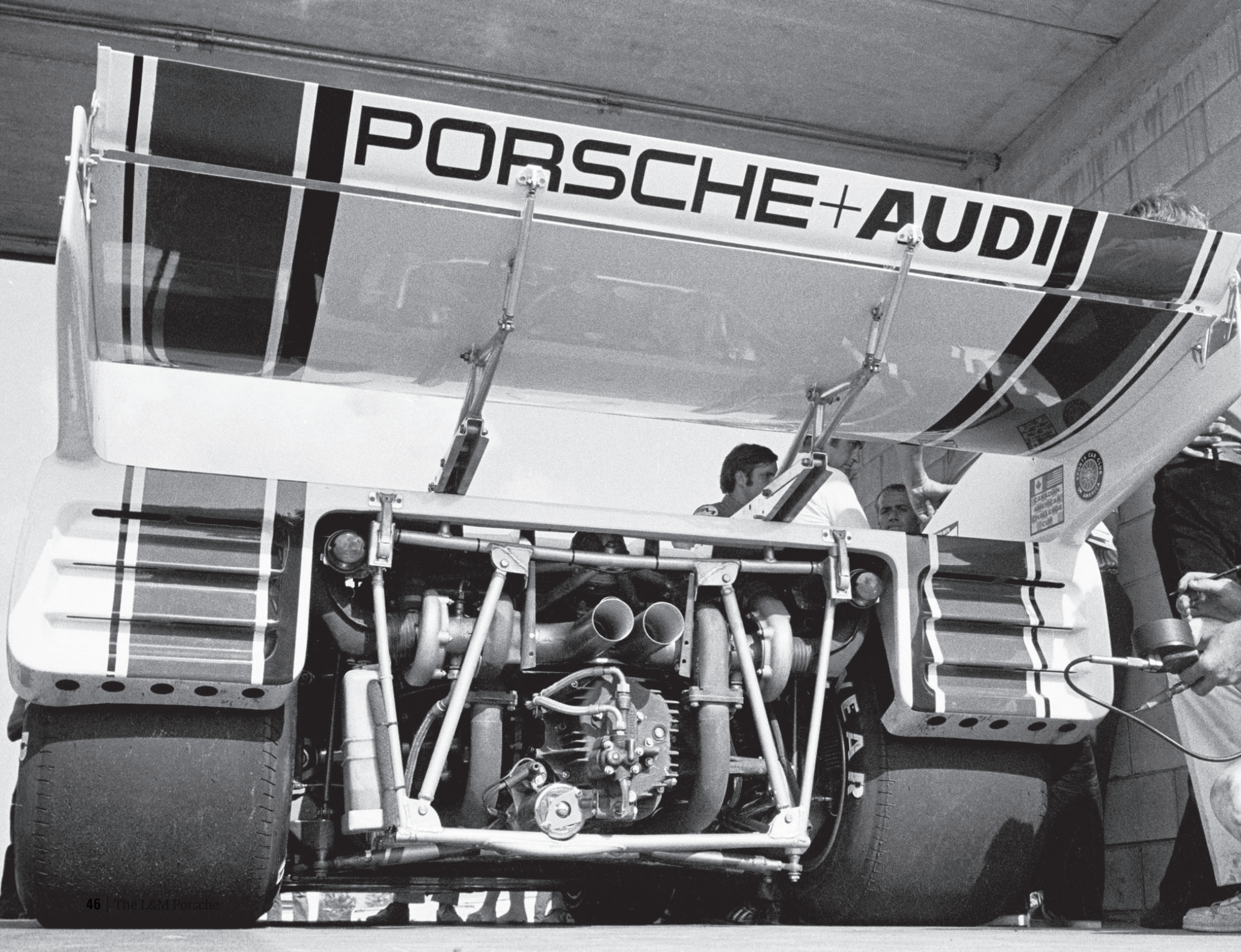
AT LEFT: *George Follmer with Miss Road Atlanta in the winner's circle after his 1st place finish in his first race with 003. – PHOTO BY BILL WARNER*



## Chapter 4

# The Embarrassment

*“I had a five-liter, normally aspirated nothing.” – George Follmer*



**PORSCHE+AUDI**

With what appeared to be a fully developed, dominant racecar, Porsche was ready for their public unveiling. They chose the third race of the season at Watkins Glen as their moment of truth.

After all, everything seemed perfect. The teething problems with the L&M Porsche's turbocharger dump valve at Mosport surely wouldn't happen again.

The loss of the magnesium car didn't seem to be as bad a setback as expected. The standard 917/10-003 was clearly superior to McLaren's new M20.

Donohue's loss was certainly disappointing, but Follmer had shown that he was fast and capable. He'd won Road Atlanta against all odds with zero seat time in the car.

Denny Hulme's car had been totally destroyed at Road Atlanta and McLaren had been forced to build a new car from scratch in less than nine days. The new car was unproven and untested and the previous version of the same design had already suffered problems with both the crankshaft and ignition system.

The stage was set. The Watkins Glen race presented a golden opportunity that Porsche couldn't pass up, so they threw everything they had into it. The race was to be one giant party, and its epicenter would be the Glen Motor Inn.

Owned by the Franzese family, the scenic Glen Motor Inn overlooked Seneca Lake and was located barely five minutes from the racetrack. Nearly all of the teams stayed there. Even today, the same family owns the motel and signed photos of all the legendary Can Am drivers still hang from the walls of the bar.

Penske's crew enjoyed dinner downstairs at the motel's Montage Italian Restaurant, whose specialty was the Bravo Burger with Fontina cheese. Drinks were served at all hours in the bar area. The driver's wives and girlfriends would hold impromptu pool parties in the middle of the night.

Many of Porsche's front office executives made the trip to the Watkins Glen celebration. Engineers and members of the Porsche family were flown in from Germany. The German press was invited to the event and showed up in force. Photographers and journalists worldwide were put on notice that Porsche's new 917/10 was taking center stage at this race.

Woodard recalled, "We knew the big guys were gonna be there. But they stayed out of our way. Roger dealt with those types... but Mark wasn't there for technical support or driver support. Maybe the Porsche hierarchy that was there made George nervous, I don't know."

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AT LEFT: *The view most competitors saw of Team Penske's Porsche 917/10-003 during the 1972 season as it is readied for the track at Watkins Glen. — PETE LYONS PHOTO*

“We were all nervous, “ Follmer agreed. “We wanted to do well and we should have done well. But we didn’t have Mark there. It was his car. He knew that car better than anybody.”

In practice it was clear that the L&M Porsche was unbalanced. It picked up an understeer condition at the entry of the corners, meaning that the front tires failed to hold traction and “pushed” forward much like a street car plowing through snow.

With an engine producing well beyond 1,000 horsepower, the L&M Porsche could easily be induced into oversteer by simply stomping the throttle at any speed. Making matters worse was the car’s short wheelbase, which made the car twitchy and gave the driver precious little time to react to whatever the car was doing.

The result was a disaster. The car understeered into the corners and flicked into a wicked oversteer condition under acceleration.

Follmer struggled to stay in the top five throughout practice. Both McLarens were quicker. They set new overall track records by beating the previous times established by Formula 1 competitors.

Jackie Oliver’s Chevy-powered Shadow Mk3 was right there as well. David Hobbs’ Lola and Francois Cevert’s McLaren M8F were posing a serious threat. Even Greg Young of the Young American Racing Team was within shooting distance of the proud Penske organization. Porsche representatives were stunned.

Their car appeared to be shockingly mortal after all.

Follmer recalled the difficulties of the day, saying:

If anything could go wrong, it went wrong.

First of all, I didn’t know the car as well as I should have. We had a lot of understeer and couldn’t seem to get it out. We really didn’t know what to do.

We didn’t want to start experimenting because here we were with all this brass around. Woody was scratching his head because he wasn’t sure. Mark knew all these things and if he was there he would have recognized it and taken care of it.

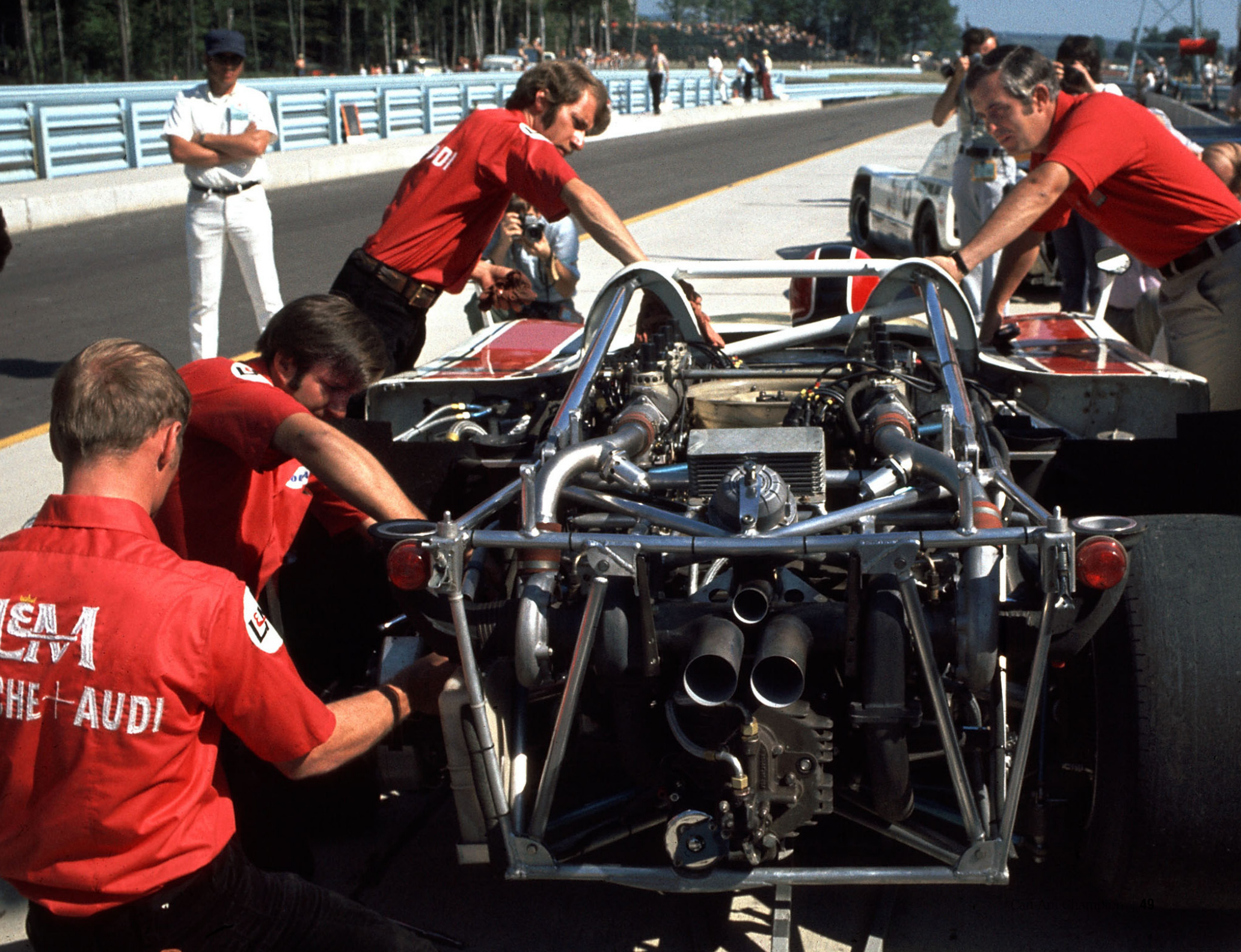
But I didn’t know that much about it and I didn’t want to come in and act like I knew what I was talking about when I didn’t. I could have made it worse.

Time trials didn’t go well. Follmer qualified third in the 23-car field. That may have been an outstanding effort by any other barometer, but it didn’t measure up to the expectations of Porsche executives who had traveled from Europe to showcase their company with a dominating win. To them, anything less than a win from the pole was a train wreck.

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AT RIGHT: *Team Penske crew with 003 in pit lane while “The Captain” (upper right) checks on Follmer. – PETE LYONS PHOTO*





Race day – Sunday, July 23rd – was warm and sunny. Short sleeves and sunglasses were the order of the day. Most of the seats were filled. Dunlop Tires, Chevrolet, Kendall Motor Oil and many other companies had purchased signage along the top of the buildings that lined the pit lane where thousands of eyes would be trained all day.

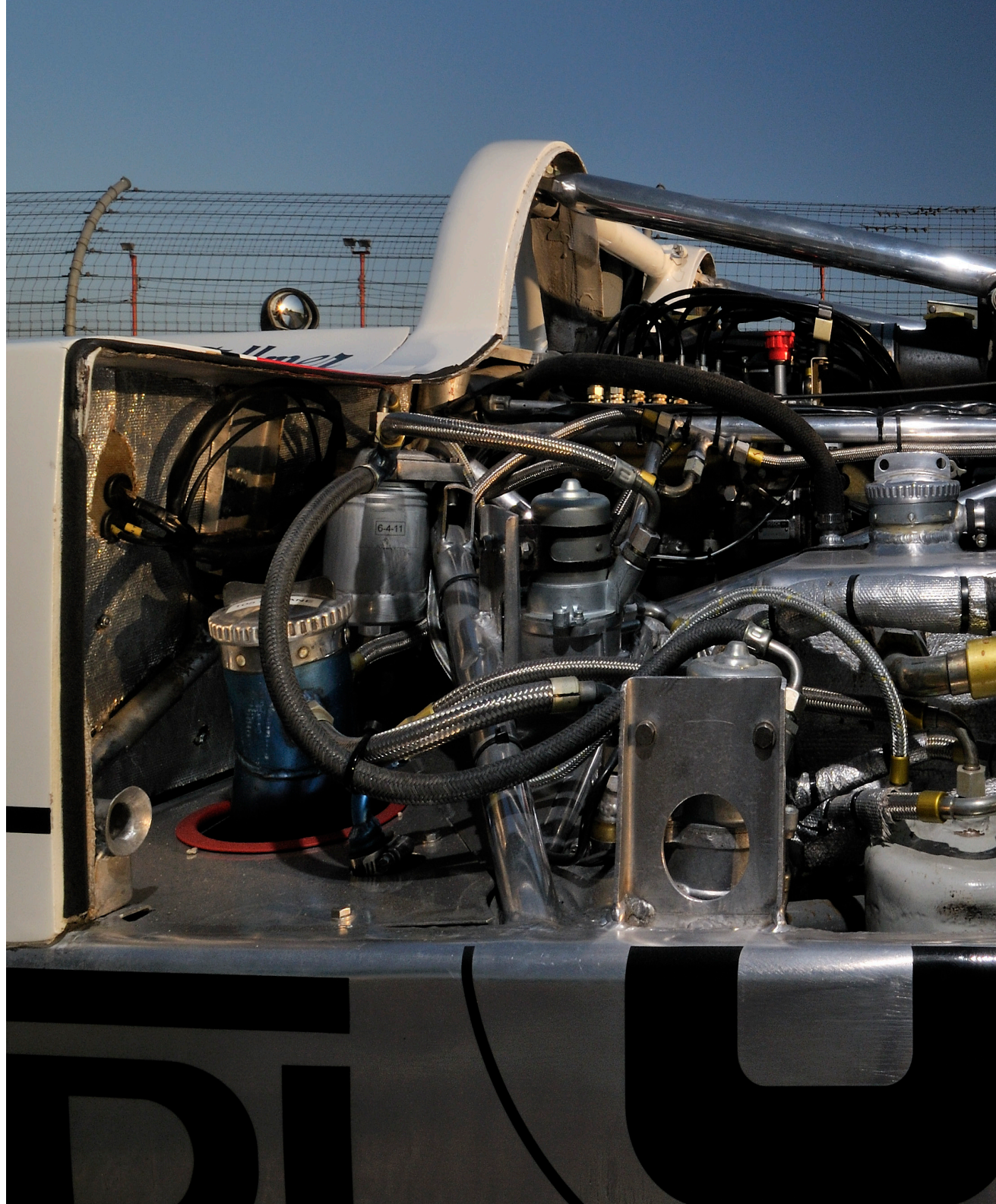
A few of the seats immediately overlooking the pit lane were still available. Only three rows deep, most were reserved for Porsche representatives and other special guests. They were among the most coveted seats at the track.

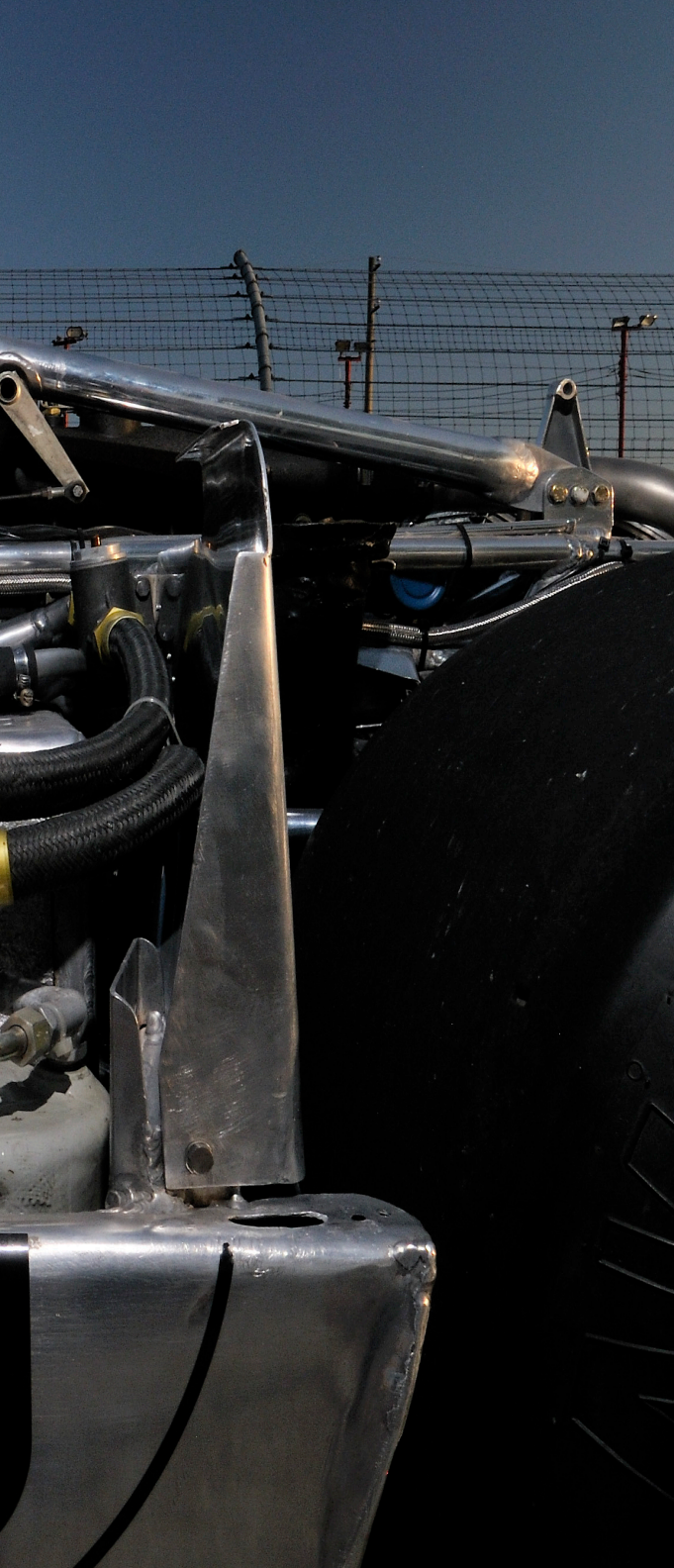
The row of multi-national flags that extended the length of pit road snapped in a brisk breeze. The Penske/Porsche pit area, in particular, was crowded with photographers and cameramen.

The green flag fell and the McLarens simply drove away from Follmer.

Then mechanical problems set in. The L&M Porsche lost considerable power. David Hobbs and Francois Cevert, neither of whom could compete with Penske at Road Atlanta, roared past while Follmer struggled frantically to determine why his engine was producing barely half its real power. The turbos refused to kick in no matter how hard he drove the car.

It soon became obvious that the unthinkable – an unscheduled pit stop – was no longer avoidable. With the most





important people from Porsche watching just yards away, 917/10-003 trundled slowly down pit lane to a stop right in front of the bright yellow “Dunlop Tires” sign.

As the rest of the field continued to put laps on Penske’s humiliated team, the rear cowling was removed and the crew searched for the problem. Once again, the turbocharger “dump valve” had stuck open and the turbo boost was simply evacuating into the atmosphere instead of pumping pressure into the engine.

Follmer said he was driving “a five-liter, normally aspirated nothing.”

He was in a very difficult political position. Donohue had already experienced the same problem at Mosport and would have recognized the problem instantly. Follmer did not, through no fault of his own. The car was still new to him, as were its peculiarities and problems.

Woodard used cleaning fluid to wipe the special lubricant off the dump valve, as well as the dirt it attracted. The valve began to function once again and the turbochargers spooled up perfectly. Follmer was sent back into the fray but by this time the damage was done.

The team finished a distant fifth, two laps off the pace. They were thoroughly whipped by the Gulf McLarens of Hulme and Revson who led every lap and finished first and second.

The team had reached its lowest ebb.

Follmer remembered:

What it was, now that I’ve had a few years to look at it, was I had too much wing in the back. The wing should have been laid back more and it would have loosened up the rear end.

The car would have been more neutral and we would have been fine. It was just that simple but we didn’t get it done.

It was a mess. Anything that could go wrong, went wrong.

Woodard said, “George just couldn’t get comfortable in the car. It was the worst finish for that car at Watkins Glen, in front of all the Porsche brass. That was... a bit embarrassing.”



## Chapter 5

# The Turning Point

*“Mark [Donohue] and the other people behind the Porsche are not lighthearted types. They take the whole thing very seriously.” – Pete Lyons, Road & Track*

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AT LEFT: Follmer in cockpit of 917/10-003 at Mid-Ohio, 1972. – PETE LYONS PHOTO



*George Follmer*

*George Follmer*

**6**

**L&M**

**PORSCHE  
+ AUDI**

Thankfully, Penske Racing had only two weeks to stew in their misery.

The next event was scheduled at the Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course. The teams generally arrived in the middle of the week. If no track time was available on Thursday, the drivers and crew members would hang out, spend the evening at a local restaurant, or have a barbecue at the hotel.

The weather was perfect. Thursday, Friday and Saturday were blessed with bright sunshine and a breeze that made it feel cooler than August.

Although Mark Donohue was still unable to drive, he was able to make his first appearance at a race since his terrible crash at Road Atlanta. He showed up in Lexington, Ohio wearing bright red pants, a lightly striped white shirt and a monstrous cast on his left leg. He hobbled around on crutches all weekend but remained in good spirits, talking with competitors and looking up fellow Can Am driver Lothar Motschenbacher in his hotel room.

“I have a picture of him sitting in our motel room at Mid-Ohio,” Marilyn Motschenbacher Halder remembered. “He had a cast on his leg. He was sitting there with his leg up on the bed, Lothar and he were talking, cracking jokes, bench racing and having some fun. He would just hang out with us. He was a fun, pleasant kid. We saw the kid in him a lot.”

Donohue also spent a considerable amount of energy addressing Follmer’s complaints about the L&M Porsche’s poor handling at Watkins Glen. Follmer went into detail explaining the car’s difficulty in high speed corners, its tendency to understeer on corner entry and into the center of the turn, and the ugly snap into an oversteer condition on exit. Donohue agreed that something had to be done and took the problem to fellow engineer Helmut Flegl.

Together the three men came up with a plan. And they wanted it executed right away.

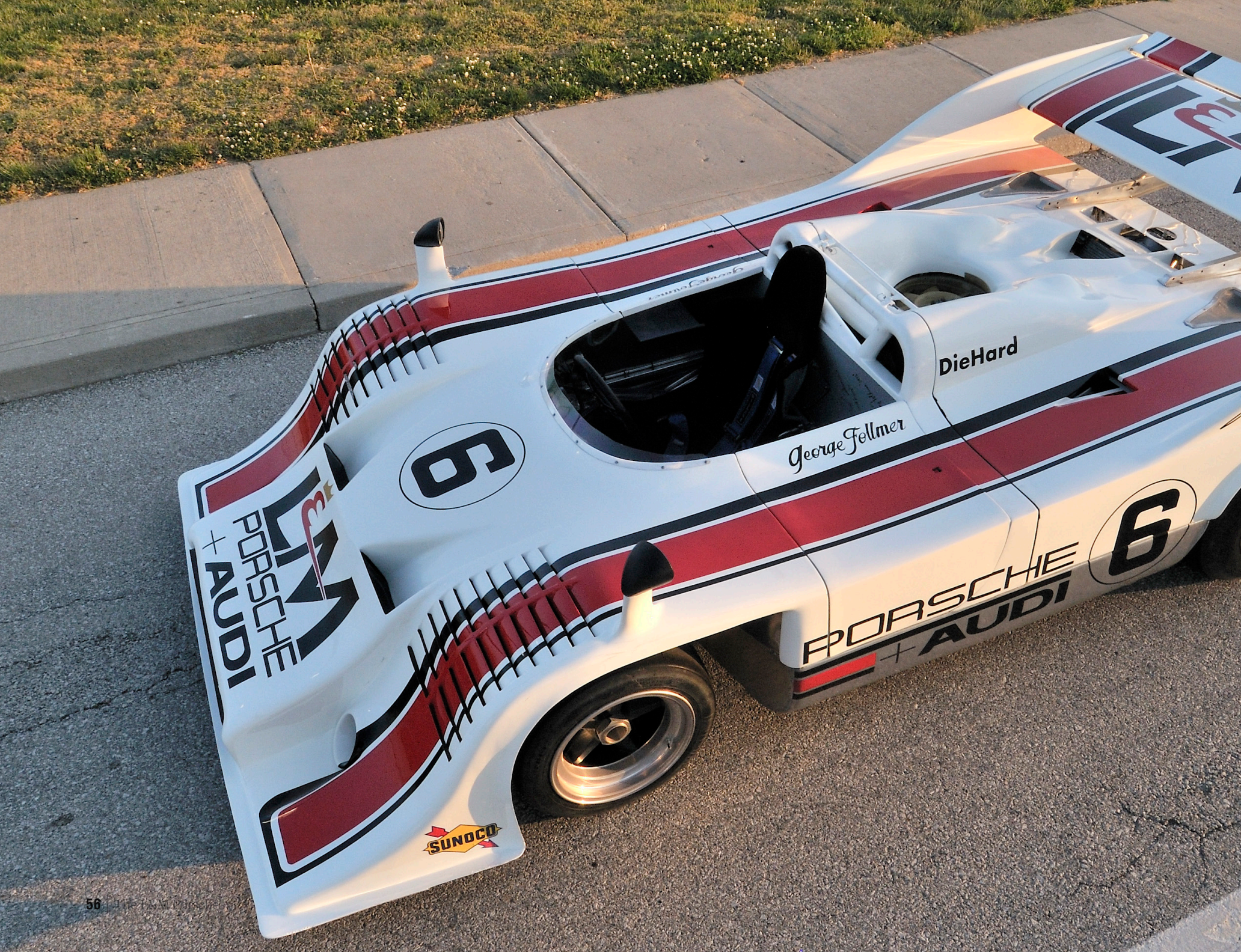
“Woody” Woodard didn’t like working outside the shop. He firmly believed that races were won in the garage and that’s where work was to be performed. But Donohue insisted on a major overhaul of the L&M Porsche before Mid-Ohio, which meant that Woodard, Hofer and Syfert would miss the evening’s social activities.

Instead they drove into Mansfield with the L&M Porsche loaded onto a trailer. They pulled to a stop in front of an old building that housed the famous Rupp mini-bike and snowmobile manufacturer. They chose to work out of that facility because the owner, Mickey Rupp, had a heliarc machine that Woodard needed to weld the

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AT LEFT: *Team Penske mechanics preparing the L&M Porsche before the 5th race of the '72 Can-Am season at Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course.*

– PHOTO BY LARRY NEUZEL







rear suspension and front fire extinguisher mount on the Porsche.

Woodard described his night's work:

[Rupp's] shop was in an old carriage house downtown. It was small and we barely fit in there. But he had a heliarc machine so I just cut and welded away.

After Watkins Glen, George was still kind of unhappy with the feel of the car. Between what Follmer was telling him and Helmut Flegl, who also went to every race and was a fabulous engineer... they came up with some design changes that they wanted me to do in the field.

I don't like to do that much, but we did them. We made some substantial changes.

We put on some bigger rear tires. We went from 15-inch to 17-inch rear tires that Mark had Goodyear make. We changed the actual suspension geometry on the rear upper A-arms.

We were making heavy-duty changes to 003 based on the input from Follmer to Donohue and Flegl.

Woodard, Syfert and Hofer worked all night in the Rupp shop in downtown Mansfield without a wink of sleep. Still hustling as the sun came up the next morning, they loaded the car onto the trailer and returned to the racetrack.

Practice day was quiet, breezy and beautiful. A television crew cornered George Follmer to ask for an interview. They draped a 1950's era microphone around his neck, strung from an awkward wire that no one bothered to tuck inside his fire suit. His L&M Porsche was parked adjacent to the team's bright blue pit truck while George's red, white and black helmet was carefully positioned on the front right fender. The visor was pushed down to reveal the L&M logo for the camera.

The pit truck's tool compartment was left open, but it wasn't for cosmetics. Woodard, exhausted from a sleepless night of work, continued to tinker on the car during the interview. George was told to stand near the front left side view mirror in order to keep Woodard, Hofer and Syfert out of the frame while they toiled near the engine bay.

Most pit activity was still pretty relaxed. While Follmer dodged questions about the team's pitiful performance at the last race, David Hobbs yanked the cowling off of his Lola T310 and discussed the suspension with his crew. They were nearly three seconds off the pace in practice and Hobbs wanted to know why. His complaining done, Hobbs walked along pit road and sat down on the guardrail beside Jackie Oliver to chat.

No one failed to notice Marilyn Motschenbacher Halder as she walked toward her husband's pit box. The Riverside beauty queen wore brown hot pants, knee-high white boots, a sleeveless white top, and had her hair tied into a ponytail with a white ribbon. She paused to talk with Francois Cevert before continuing to Lothar's pit to deliver his helmet, turning heads along pit row as she went.

Practice showed that the L&M Porsche was now a better racecar. Taking some downforce out of the rear wing allowed the front end to gain more bite in the corners, which eliminated – or at least controlled – the understeer condition that plagued Follmer throughout Watkins Glen.

The wider tires and rear geometry adjustments compensated for the lack of rear downforce by increasing mechanical grip the old fashioned way... with more rubber. The car was less “pushy” on corner entry and had more throttle control on exit.

Follmer won the pole in qualifying. It was not as dominant a performance as he would have liked, but anything was an improvement over Watkins Glen. Denny Hulme qualified second, just one-tenth of a second off Follmer's time. Pete Revson and Jackie Oliver made up Row 2.

Despite the beautiful weather throughout the week, a new Sunday forecast called for a chance of showers on race day. It was a bit cooler than usual. Roger Penske pulled a blue sweater over his collared, white dress shirt to fend off the light winds and threat of rain.

The green flag dropped and Follmer drove to an early lead. But in the opening laps of the race a light rain began to fall. It soon turned into a cloudburst that drenched the track and had racecars spinning in all directions.

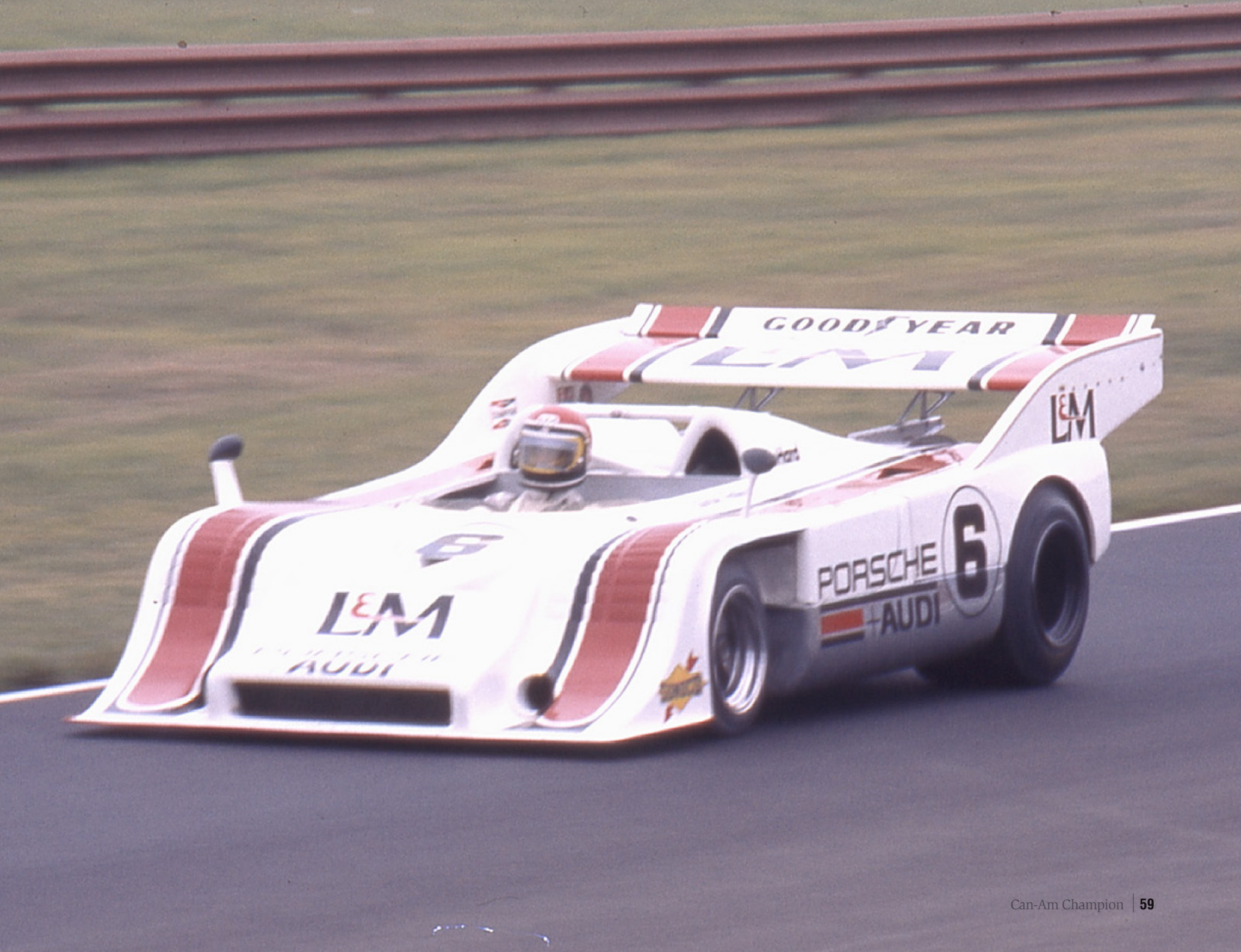
Denny Hulme, already struggling to keep pace with the improved L&M Porsche, slid off the racetrack. McLaren quickly decided that it was time for rain tires. The incredible power of these cars combined with wide racing slicks was a dangerous combination in the wet. They would hydroplane without warning, and keeping the tail end behind you under acceleration was a near impossibility.

Follmer was in a mess and he knew it. “It was a disaster in the rain,” he said. “You go from six or seven hundred horsepower to nine hundred or a thousand almost instantaneously. It just goes ‘boom’ and it's there. You're at four thousand rpm's and all the sudden it hits and you've got seven thousand rpm's.”

The Porsche's twin turbos exploded with power. It was like being shot out of a cannon when the boost kicked in. The un-lubricated dump valves worked perfectly

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AT RIGHT: *Changes made to 003 based on input from driver Follmer to Mark Donohue and Porsche factory engineer Helmut Flegl brought significant performance improvements and a 1st place finish at the Mid-Ohio race. – PHOTO BY LARRY NEUZEL*



and the turbos were as strong as they'd been all year.

But while Follmer fought desperately to control the racecar in the middle of a miniature monsoon, his team was utterly unruffled. Despite massive suspension changes to the car, the horrid result from Watkins Glen and the current downpour at Mid-Ohio, the team's confidence was unshaken.

Woodard dismissed any thought of concern. "Follmer didn't mind the rain. He'd raced in the rain before. He did fine. He just walked away from the field."

Penske, who had by this time pulled the sleeves up on his sweater and tucked a spiral-bound notebook under his right arm, showed why he was The Captain. He calmly stood in the rain watching every move the L&M Porsche made. He glanced at the sky, at the racetrack, and then stared unemotionally at Follmer as he swept past the pit area.

The pits were alive with activity all around him. Denny Hulme stopped for rain tires. So did Pete Revson and most of the field. Finally Follmer sped past Penske once again, still struggling along on slicks. He looked toward the pit box. Penske stood there with arms crossed, staring back.

Follmer said:

We had one of those Ohio thunderstorms that comes up in thirty seconds and leaves in sixty. I expected to be called in for a change to rain tires, as all my competition was.

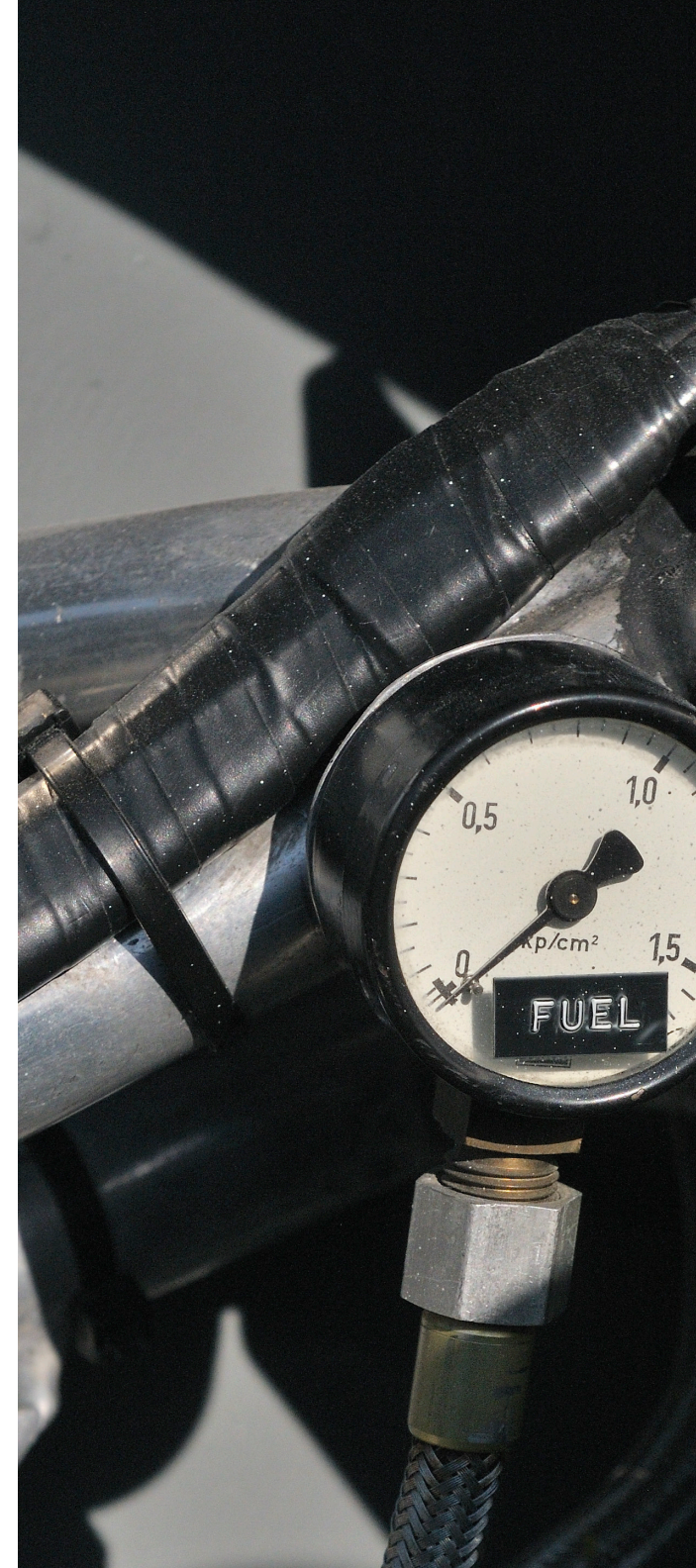
Denny [Hulme] and Revvie [Pete Revson] all went in and got rain tires. I kept waiting on the signal from Roger, who was working the pits, to give me the signal to come in but all he did was take his little finger and keep pointing forward to keep going.

His perception and his vision is sometimes uncanny. And it's usually right.

He'd been to Mid-Ohio many times like myself... but I wasn't looking at the sky. It wasn't quite ten minutes and it was gone.

I just sloshed around it for maybe ten laps. It was slick. I got off in the grass once and didn't hurt anything. I just got it going again. It was an attention-getter.

Follmer's off-track excursion came courtesy of the L&M Porsche's twin turbos. Their amazing power had kicked in on the exit of a turn and spun the car into the grass. This was no longer about winning a race; now it was about surviving. The field was a mess by now, with the leaders going to the back of the pack and everyone reshuffling positions by taking unscheduled pit stops in the rain.





Desperate to keep the car on the track in what was quickly becoming a game of attrition, Follmer tried a new strategy.

I left the damn thing in fourth gear. I just didn't want to get that sudden boost and light the tires up. I could control the throttle better with it in a taller gear, so that's what I did.

I finally figured out that I just can't get down in second or third gear with this thing cause when it lights up, you've got to be ready to move forward. So I put it in fourth so I could control the throttle and boost better.

The next lap, Penske leaned far over the guardrail and glared directly at Follmer, pointing his finger down the track to indicate that no pit stop was to be made. He had decided to roll the dice. Follmer would stay out on slicks in the hopes that the rain would end quickly.

It did.

As the track began to dry lap after lap, it became apparent that the gutsy call by Penske was paying off. Only two of the leading cars had stayed out on slicks – George Follmer's L&M Porsche and Jackie Oliver's Shadow Mk3 – and they were running first and second while the rest of the field shredded their now-useless rain tires on drying pavement.

The rout was on. The L&M Porsche was faster with its new rear suspension configuration. Everyone else had pitted twice while Follmer hadn't pitted at all.

The L&M Porsche simply rolled over the competition, finishing nearly a lap ahead of second-place Jackie Oliver and more than three laps better than everyone else in the race, including both McLarens.

Just as Watkins Glen had been the perfect storm for a disaster, the turning point in the 1972 Can Am season was the perfect combination of decisions and actions at the right time. Everyone contributed what was needed most at the moment of truth.

Mark Donohue had returned, bringing his amazing engineering knowledge and passion for the 917/10 with him. Helmut Flegl brainstormed with Donohue to concoct a new plan for the suspension and handling. Woodard, Syfert and Hofer had stayed up all night thrashing on the car to have all the changes made in time for the race. Roger Penske resisted the monumental urge to come in for rain tires, choosing instead to trust his instinct and gamble. And George Follmer had driven brilliantly under the most dire circumstances.

It was still heavily overcast when Woodard and his crew pushed the L&M Porsche

into victory lane at Mid-Ohio. Follmer was already out of the cockpit, talking with second-place Jackie Oliver, and Milt Minter who had driven to a surprising third place finish.

A huge crowd had gathered around victory lane, which was partitioned with a white plastic rail to hold back fans and photographers. Oliver poured his champagne into the huge silver cup awarded for second place and drank from it on the podium. Follmer wasted no time with formalities; he drank straight from the bottle. Miss Mid-Ohio stood beside him patiently in a blue and white mini-dress while Minter sprayed them both with champagne to celebrate the first of his two podium finishes in 1972.

Many more great moments awaited the L&M Porsche, as well as a few missteps. But Mid-Ohio was the day that changed everything. The rest of the season would be an exercise in futility for every other team in the series.

The L&M Porsche was clearly dominant. Its team was on a mission. They had hit their stride and were determined to bring home the championship.

Even Penske's mechanics were as focused as a laser beam. Woodard said, "There was me and my two guys. We're just the mechanics and the gophers and the truck drivers. But we built these cars and we wanted to win races."

From this point, winning would become routine.







## Chapter 6

# The Title

*“The talk around the pit area was that no one could touch them. They knew that it was the beginning of the end of Can Am. The L&M Porsche was making history.” – Marilyn Motschenbacher Halder*

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AT LEFT: *George Follmer at speed in 003 as he heads to victory at Road America in Elkhart Lake.*  
– PHOTO BY JIM SHAW



No other track on the Cam Am schedule offered sweet corn and bratwurst like the little food stand at Elkhart Lake. Everyone on the Can Am circuit looked forward to it. The stand remains there today, just behind the main bleachers near the Start/Finish line.

Wisconsin sweet corn was roasted on an open grill and sold hot on a stick. The brats weren't wrapped in a traditional bun; instead, they were served with mustard and sauerkraut on a homemade roll. The scent wafted through the stands and into the newly paved pit area that allowed Can Am crews to work in something other than grass and mud for the first time.

The next stop on the series schedule was August 27, 1972 at Road America. The entire Penske team anxiously awaited the race knowing that the 4-mile track's enormous straightaways were perfectly suited to the L&M Porsche's twin turbochargers.

This car was among the most powerful racecars in the history of the sport. Bruce Canepa, whose restoration facility prepared the L&M Porsche for Rennsport IV in 2011, said that Porsche consistently underrated the horsepower of its cars in the 1970's.

Rumors have abounded for decades regarding the L&M Porsche's power rating. Some sources claimed 800 horsepower while others claimed 900 or even more than a thousand. But the truth was constantly fluctuating and may never be known with certainty.

The L&M Porsche was never intended to have a single engine that could be gauged for an objective, simple answer. A number of engines were fitted into 917/10-003. Many times even driver George Follmer didn't know the exact size of the latest engine to be received from Porsche.

"They're always making things better at Porsche. That's their DNA," Follmer said. "A lot of times I don't think the mechanics knew if it was a 5-liter or a 5.4-liter engine that they were putting in. When Porsche sent an engine, it just bolted up like the last one. I'm not sure we would have known if it had been a higher capacity engine because they hooked up just the same."

Chief mechanic John "Woody" Woodard wasn't so sure. "I thought we only had five-liter engines. Could they have snuck in a 5.4 at the end of '72? Possibly, but not to my knowledge."

Official Porsche records claim that the upgraded 5.4-liter engine was not installed in 917/10-003 until July 22, 1973. Then again, Porsche and Team Penske were known to deflect any serious questions and mislead wherever possible. Journalist Pete Lyons said, “They discourage prying eyes with tarpaulins, flatly refuse to answer certain questions, and are positively rude to photographers.”

Either way, Porsche considered the project in a constant state of evolution and changes in both Germany and at the Penske shop stateside were the rule rather than the exception.

Perhaps the most accurate barometer of the car’s legendary horsepower rating comes from Porsche restoration expert Bruce Canepa who said when the turbochargers on the L&M Porsche kick in, “it’s like getting punched in the back of the head.”

Canepa, whose company specializes in Porsche racing engines, estimates the output of the L&M Porsche at 1,100 horsepower in race trim and over 1,200 horsepower in qualifying trim with full turbo boost. Follmer remembered:

It was a different kind of car. It was a short wheelbase with a lot of very sudden power. You went from almost nothing to eight or nine hundred [horsepower] in an instant.

It was twitchy and it didn’t like high-speed corners. It was fine in the tight stuff but it was not a comfortable car in high-speed corners. You kind of had to walk it through corners and it took some learning.

I didn’t know that car until probably the third or fourth race. It had handling characteristics that were... well... different, and as a driver, not always how you’d like it.

But you have to deal with it because that’s what it is. I had to learn how to cope with the sudden power. It was just a learning curve.

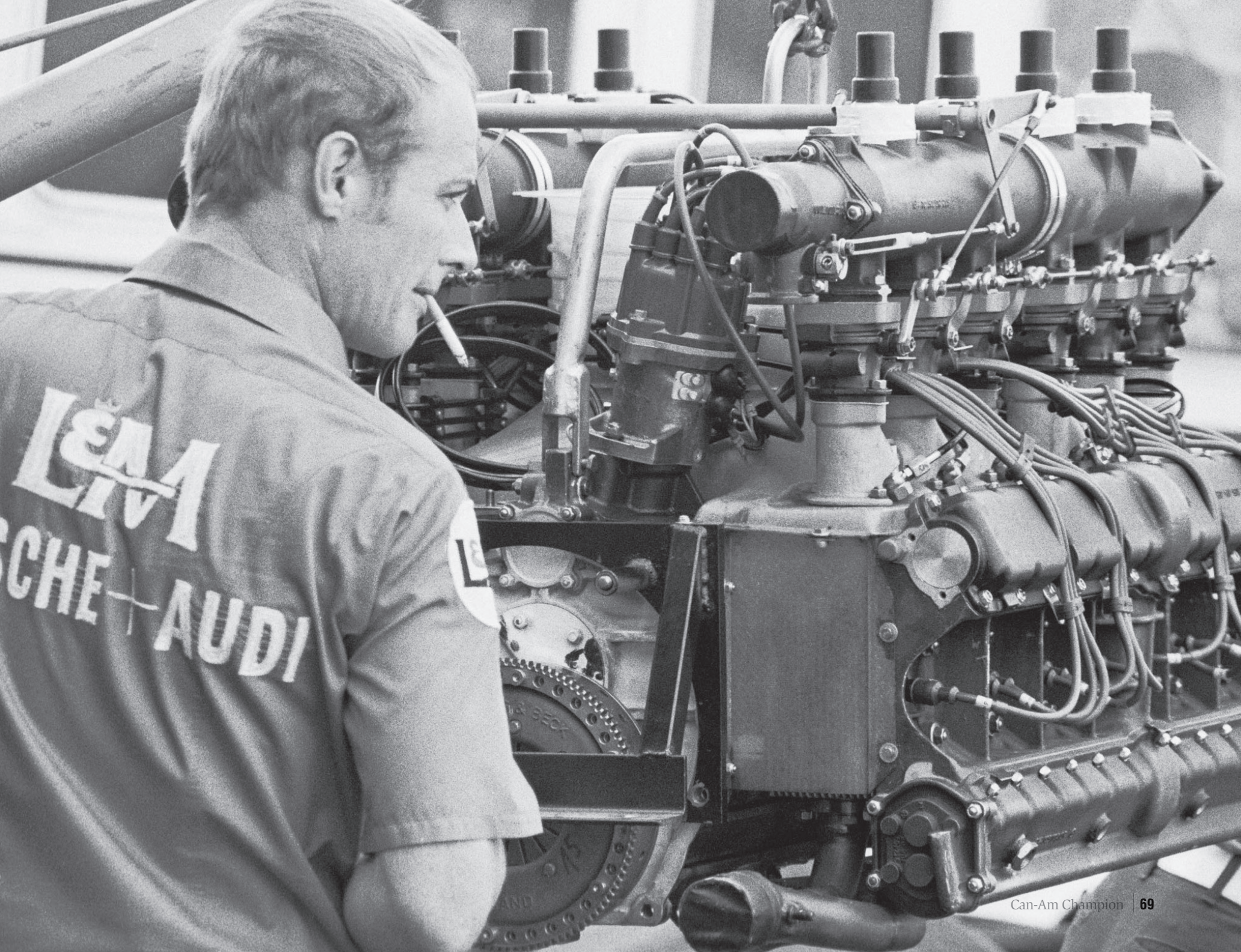
In late August, Follmer was attempting to qualify for the California 500 Indycar race at Ontario Motor Speedway when difficulties with the car forced the team to withdraw. Without sufficient time to repair the Indycar for the California race, Follmer left Ontario and took a private jet to Wisconsin, arriving the next day.

It rained during Follmer’s Can Am qualifying run so rather than push his luck and risk the car, he settled for 13th position on the starting grid. It made little difference.

The L&M Porsche’s incredible twin turbocharged flat 12 engine was perfectly suited to Elkhart Lake, which offered one of the longest front stretches in North American racing.

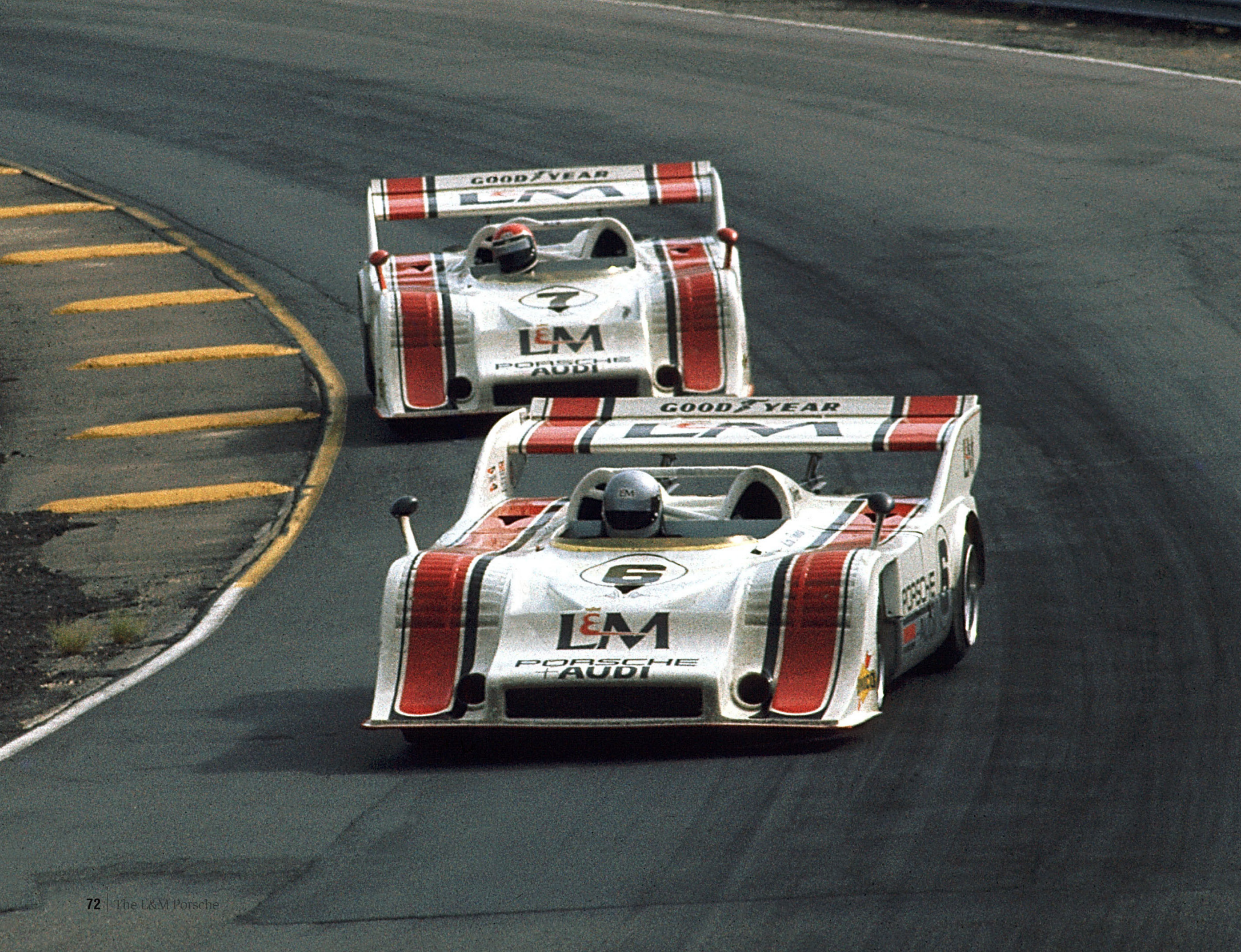
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AT RIGHT: *Team Penske Chief Mechanic John “Woody” Woodard pulls the massive 12 cylinder engine for service. – PETE LYONS PHOTO*











The event droned on for 50 laps, but the race was over quickly. Follmer took the lead on the second lap and never looked back. The L&M Porsche gobbled up Road America's long straightaways with a vengeance. Follmer flew past his competitors, lapping the entire field and taking his third win in the last four races. The L&M Porsche had hit full song and it was a sight to behold.

His memories of the day demonstrate just how dominant the L&M Porsche had become. "When it came time for the race it was dry and I think it took me two laps to take the lead. I had fun for a while. Then it kind of got boring."

On September 17th the series moved to Donnybrooke road course (now Brainerd International Speedway) in Minnesota.

The new 917/10-005 chassis had arrived and been fully prepped for Mark Donohue's return to racing. "6" was Donohue's race number, so the 005 car was duly painted as #6 while Follmer's 003 car was repainted as #7. Photographs taken after mid-September 1972 will show Follmer to be driving a #7 car; however, this is the same chassis he had been racing since Road Atlanta. The race number change was cosmetic and only done to give Donohue his favorite number again. George Follmer didn't change cars; he only changed numbers.

Donohue and Follmer qualified side by side on the front row at Donnybrooke and the event appeared to be a repeat of Porsche's landslide victory at Road America.

The team's plan was for Donohue to win and gain enough points to make a run at second place in the overall season standings while Follmer would run second and continue his march toward what now appeared to be an inevitable Can Am title.

The plan went down the drain when Donohue suffered a flat tire halfway through the event and retired. At that point, Follmer put his foot to the floor and began lapping the field.

The team had installed a small, additional fuel tank to account for the eternally long straightaway at Donnybrooke that ended in a banked, high-speed first turn that Can Am cars took nearly flat out. Donnybrooke was an outrageously fast 3-mile racetrack with a one-mile straightaway. Even the slowest corners would sustain speeds well over 75 miles per hour.

Follmer spent much of every lap with the accelerator flat on the floor and both turbochargers devouring obscene amounts of fuel. To this day he questions the team's decision not to bring him in for a pit stop, dial the turbo boost down, and send him back out in fuel-saving mode. There was certainly sufficient time to make

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PREVIOUS PAGE: *George Follmer in the #7 car (003) and Mark Donohue back at the wheel in the #6 car (005) command the starting grid at Donnybrooke. – PETE LYONS PHOTO*

AT LEFT: *George Follmer in Porsche 917/10-003 (#7) follows teammate Mark Donohue (#6) at the 1972 Donnybrooke Can-Am. – PETE LYONS PHOTO*

any pit stop they wanted.

At the moment he ran out of fuel, the L&M Porsche was two laps ahead of everyone. Follmer recalls waiting helplessly along the side of the racetrack and watching the field pass by for two full laps before he finally lost the lead.

“Our performance at Donnybrooke was superb until we didn’t have enough fuel,” Follmer said. “We weren’t very proud that we screwed up so bad. We knew [our fuel situation was] marginal and we had put in an extra tank, but there wasn’t a lot of room where you could put a tank. But we missed it by a mile and a half.”

Still, Follmer placed fourth overall and continued to solidify his ironclad grip on the Can Am Challenge Cup.

The final three races of the 1972 season were all held in October, with Edmonton being slated for Sunday the 1st. The plan stayed the same. Donohue was to win, with Follmer running second in order to gain a one-two finish in the season points championship for Porsche.

All was going according to plan until Follmer suffered a flat tire that put him over a lap behind the leaders. Donohue went on to win the event with a 46-second advantage over Denny Hulme’s McLaren M20, which put up a stiff fight. McLaren still hadn’t given up on their season.

Follmer called the M20 “a well-engineered car. It really was. It was a good car and it was fast. I’ve driven one, and McLaren really built a quality car.”

Nevertheless, Porsche would have easily taken a one-two finish had Follmer not suffered the same fate as his teammate in the prior event. A right rear tire was punctured early in the event and sportscar teams in 1972 weren’t structured to accommodate quick pit stops. The lengthy spell on pit road ruined what would have been another dominating performance by the L&M Porsche.

Even after the flat tire, Follmer stormed back through the field to take third place.

A win at the October 15th event at Laguna Seca would secure enough points to assure Porsche and Penske the Can Am Challenge Cup.

“At that point it was just a matter of time,” Follmer recalled. “The Captain decided to make sure I won the race in Monterey. We were supposed to run one-two, but I was supposed to win because that clinched the championship.”

The race was a formality. Donohue and Follmer qualified together on the front row and finished first and second according to plan, with Follmer winning and clinching the title.

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AT RIGHT: *George Follmer #7 and teammate Mark Donohue #6 lead the pack on the pace lap at the 1972 Laguna Seca Race.*  
– PETE LYONS PHOTO



**GTX**  
MOTOR  
OIL

**CASTROL**

**GTX**  
MOTOR  
OIL

LAGUNA SECA RACEWAY

**uop**  
LEAD FREE  
**101**

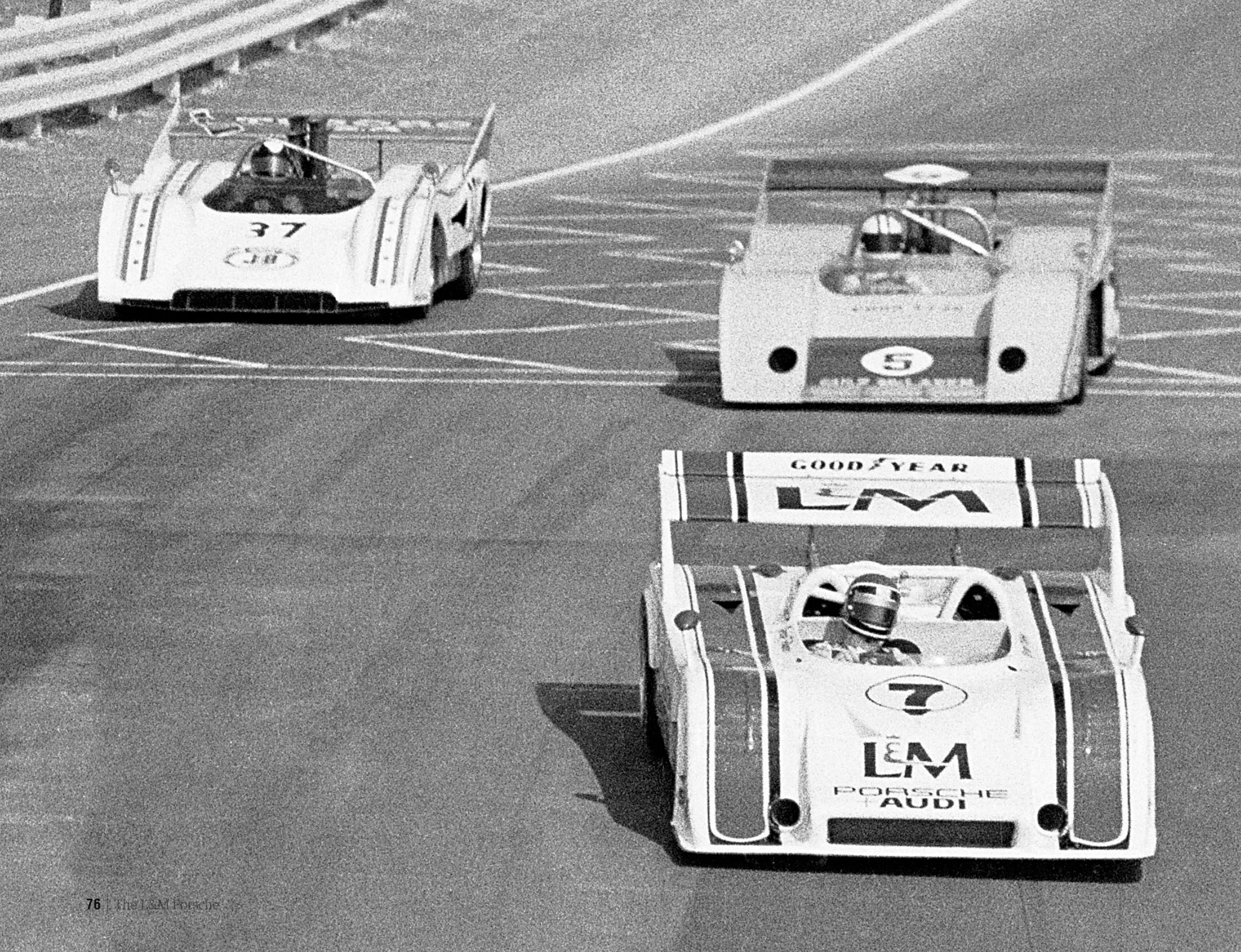
**GOOD YEAR**

**GOOD YEAR**

**GOOD YEAR**

**LM**  
PORSCHE  
AUDI

**LM**  
PORSCHE  
AUDI



Follmer was gracious in victory lane, calling Donohue to the podium and insisting that he celebrate with a drink of champagne. “We got along really well,” Follmer said in response to rumors that he and Donohue were occasionally at odds. “He was a friend. We joked together and got along just fine.”

Two weeks later, on October 29th, the season came to a close with the 15th annual Los Angeles Times Grand Prix at Riverside International Raceway. Follmer was more relaxed. The championship was already won and he could enjoy the experience without any pressure for points.

The Riverside road course was virtually flat and offered excellent visibility to spectators from any seat. The garage area was described by one fan as “carports with tin roofs and garage doors.” The dust and desert heat were intense and drove everyone – fans, teams and drivers alike – toward anything resembling shade.

Marilyn Motschenbacher Halder said, “They had a covered snack bar where everybody would go get ice because it was so hot out there. The snack bar had a very large open area. So a lot of people would gather there to sit and get a breeze, even though it was a dusty breeze sometimes. And you’d get a cold drink of water or glass of ice.”

The Riverside scoring tower was downright comical. It looked like an old fire tower, complete with a square girder system and a narrow, exposed staircase that promoted acrophobia even among the hardiest souls.

A four-sided sign proclaiming “Riverside” crowned the scoring tower, but the second “r” was missing from the side facing the main grandstands. Instead, it welcomed race fans to “Rive side.”

The final race of 1972 was well attended. Photographers lined the front straight and fans crowded into the last remaining grandstand seats. Thirty-four entries showed up making Riverside one of the largest fields of the season.

McLaren made one last, desperate effort to salvage their season with a win at Riverside. Denny Hulme’s M20 was outfitted with an enormous 9-liter Chevy engine producing over 800 horsepower. It was extremely fast. Hulme came within three-tenths of Follmer’s time in practice, enough to qualify in second position and bump Donohue back to third on the starting grid.

For Team Penske, the plan to have a one-two finish once again went awry. Donohue was supposed to win the race with Follmer second so as to gain as many points as possible for Porsche.

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AT LEFT: *L&M Porsche ahead of Denny Hulme (#5) during the final race of the 1972 Can-Am season at Riverside. – PETE LYONS PHOTO*



“It wasn’t really team orders,” Follmer said of Penske’s strategy. “We were trying to accomplish something for Porsche. That’s what they were paying for and that’s what they wanted us to do. We were doing our job and that was the important thing.”

But mechanical issues pushed Donohue out of contention for the win and Follmer was forced to carry the Porsche banner alone.

Denny Hulme once again drove hard but ultimately had nothing for the Penske machine. Eventually his oversized Chevy gave up and he pulled in after 45 laps. The L&M Porsche was simply too much for the McLaren M20, even in the hands of great drivers like Hulme and Revson.

This time, Follmer drove the Porsche into victory lane himself, stopping in the pits to pick up Heinz Hofer, Greg Syfert and John Woodard. All three mechanics sat on the side pods with Woodard carrying the checkered flag during their triumphant cruise to the podium.

Follmer stood in the cockpit sipping champagne with the race queen as the huge, three-foot silver Can Am Challenge Cup was placed behind him. It was the exclamation point on a successful year.

The season was over. The parties had begun. The team was living in the moment and didn’t yet realize that they had made motorsports history.

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AT LEFT: *George Follmer finishes his legendary '72 season in 003 with a win at the final race at Riverside and accepts the Driver's Can-Am Challenge Cup Trophy for Team Penske.*

— PHOTO BY DALE VON TREBRA





## Chapter 7

# The Legacy

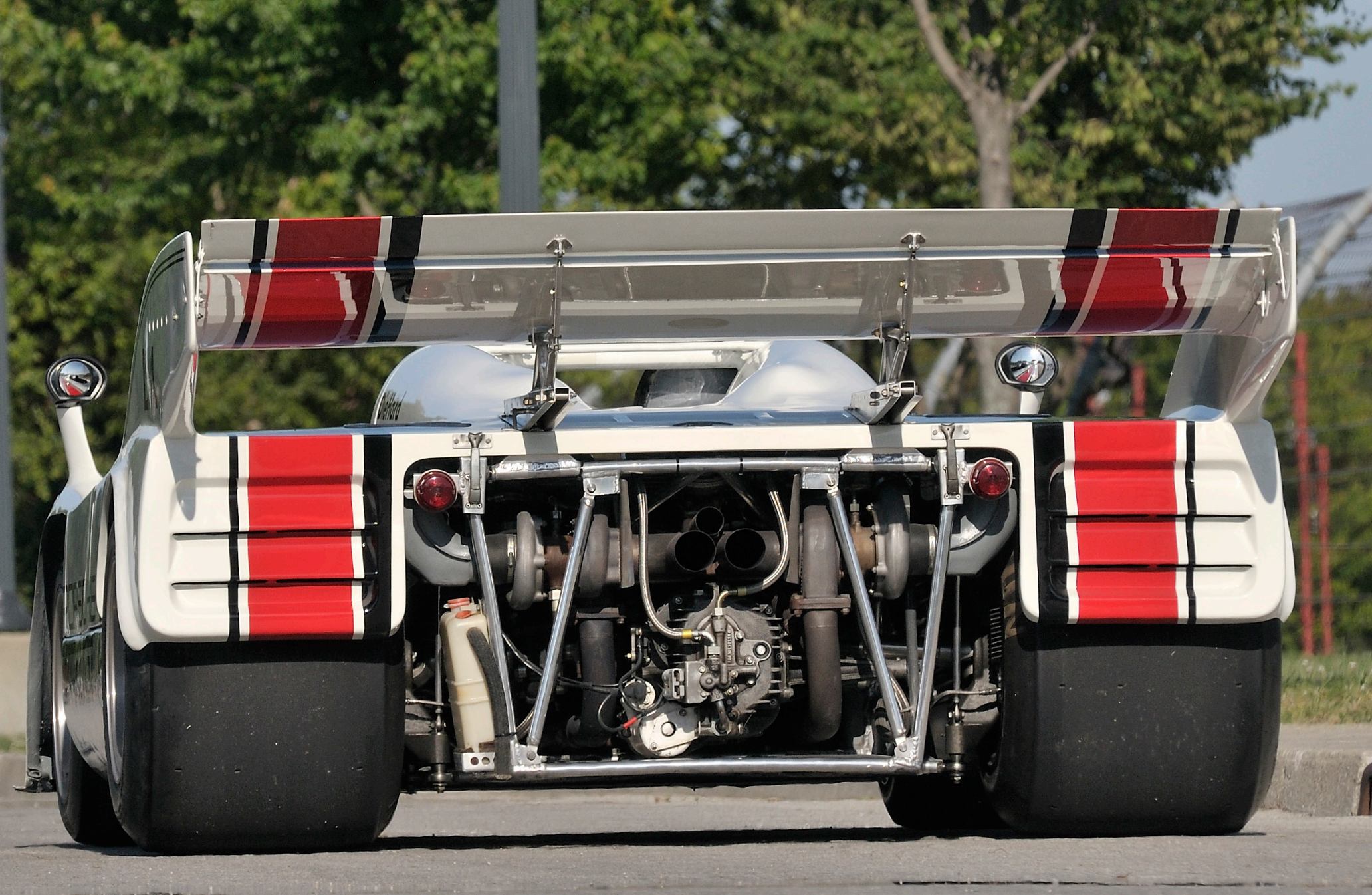
*“In two of the races – Atlanta and Elkhart Lake – the car lapped the entire field. That’s doing something. This was an unbelievable car.” – Chief mechanic John “Woody” Woodard*

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AT LEFT: *George Follmer heads into turn 1 at Road Atlanta during the second race of the 1973 Can-Am season driving 003 for Team Rinzler as the #16 car. – PHOTO BY BILL WARNER*







Porsche enjoyed a dominance in 1972 that McLaren could only dream of. McLaren's five-year stranglehold on the series had been crushed, and Porsche had earned their first Can Am Challenge Cup.

But many years passed before the participants discovered the full impact of their efforts. The L&M Porsche has become one of the most recognizable racecars in history.

Aurora AFX produced an HO scale slot car version of the L&M Porsche at the height of the hobby's popularity. Tens of thousands of kids got to drive the L&M Porsche on miniature road courses worldwide.

Even more than 40 years after the team's finest hour, Ratcliffe models still offer a 1/87th scale resin cast model kit of the L&M Porsche.

Lunch boxes, T-shirts and posters featured the L&M Porsche. It appeared in books and magazines and influenced pop culture as much as any racecar since the Marmon Wasp.

Everyone who saw the car in person remembered its thunderous roar. Photographer Pete Lyons, who covered the Can Am series in 1972, said, "You had the sensation that something momentous had just gone by. You could feel the blast coming out of the exhaust and the ground trembling under your feet."

The power and beauty of the Can Am series faded from the racing scene within a few short years. Many believe it never truly returned in the proliferation of road racing series that have come and gone since, and perhaps never will.

Marilyn Motschenbacher Halder said:

There were times when Mark, George, Bruce, Denny and Lothar... they were all sitting on the wall waiting to see the last [lap] time because if anybody beat their time they wanted to go back out and get it again. It was that way at every track.

It was just different back then. People would get together away from the track and go out to dinner at night in smaller groups. All I can say is that it was a friendlier, more lovable community.

The Can Am cars were the last of their kind. A lot of things have changed now. It's all big business, big money, and motor homes.

But those were the best days ever in racing.

In the late 1970's the world's auto racing landscape was changing rapidly from a wide-open formula to a heavily restricted class structure, and the handwriting was

on the wall for the mighty Porsche 917/10.

Both of Penske's surviving Porsches, serial numbers 003 and 005, were sold to Rinzler Racing for the 1973 season. Sporting their new RC Cola livery, the cars returned to competition in the hands of George Follmer and Charlie Kemp.

917/10-003 was raced in Europe in early 1973. It returned to North America in June to join 917/10-005 and run the full Can Am series.

The 917/10's were never again as dominant as they had been in 1972. Still, the only car that could consistently defeat them was Mark Donohue's new Porsche 917/30.

By the mid-1970's, the two Porsches had gone their separate ways. 917/10-005 was quickly re-acquired by its manufacturer. It still exists today, held at the Porsche Museum in Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen.

After a series of ownership changes, collector Rusty West purchased the original L&M Porsche 917/10-003 shortly after the turn of the 21st century. The car arrived at his garage "covered with an inch of dust." West immediately began a quick clean-up effort so that the car could be preserved.

The original L&M Porsche is in driving condition today and was most recently driven during a vintage racing event at the same Laguna Seca road course where it clinched the Can Am Challenge Cup 40 years before.

The L&M Porsche remains a living testament to the glory years of Can Am racing. It is still the headline attraction anywhere it appears, and even those who weren't there to see it in 1972 instantly recognize it as an icon of motorsports history.

Mark Donohue, the man whose vision brought the 917/10 to Can Am and who should have won the title in it in 1972, continued to have his star burn brightly over the next year as he dominated the series and won the title that eluded him the previous season. He then promptly retired from auto racing.

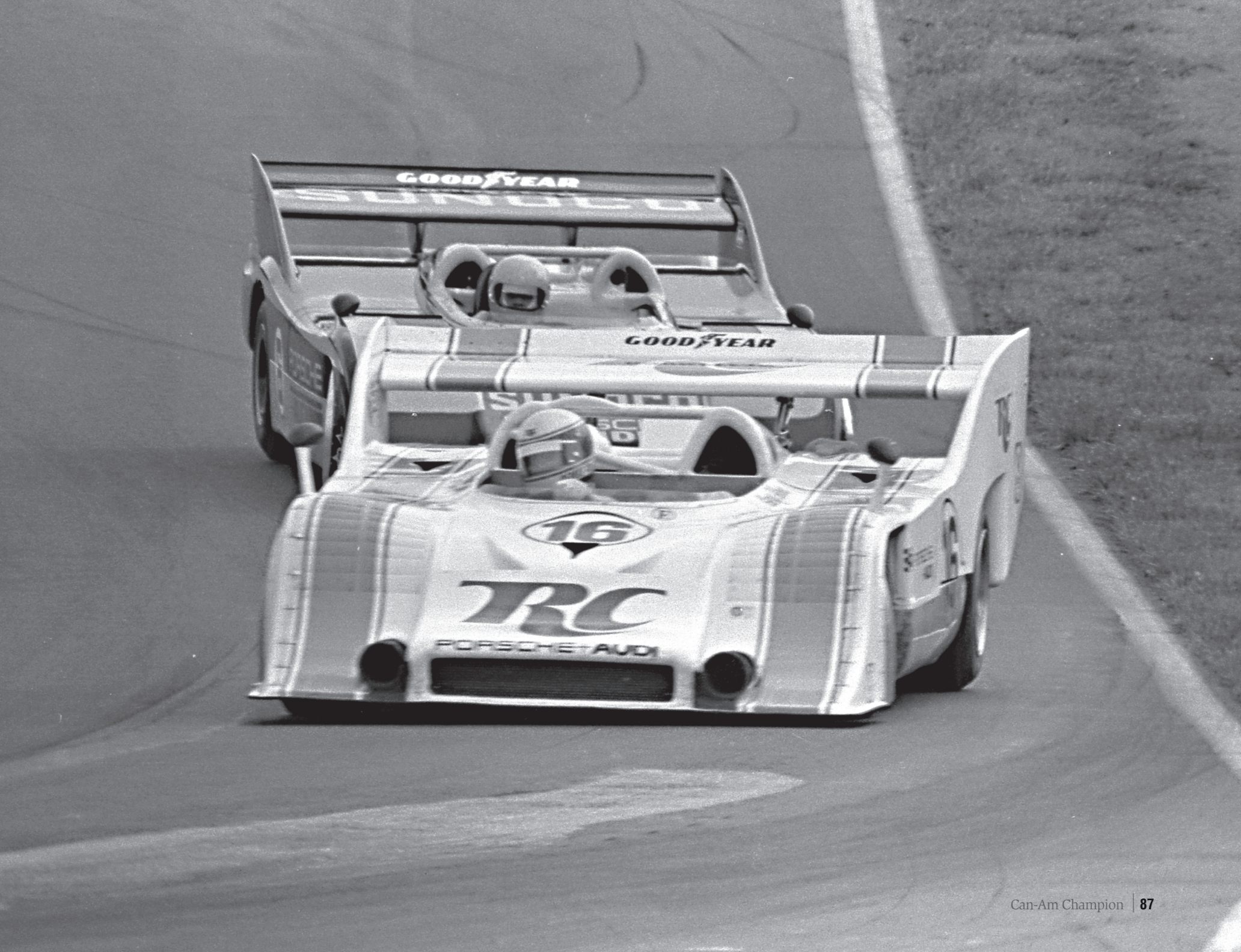
Lured out of retirement by the promise of a new Formula 1 team in 1974, Donohue returned to motorsports to win the first IROC crown and set a new closed course speed record at Talladega.

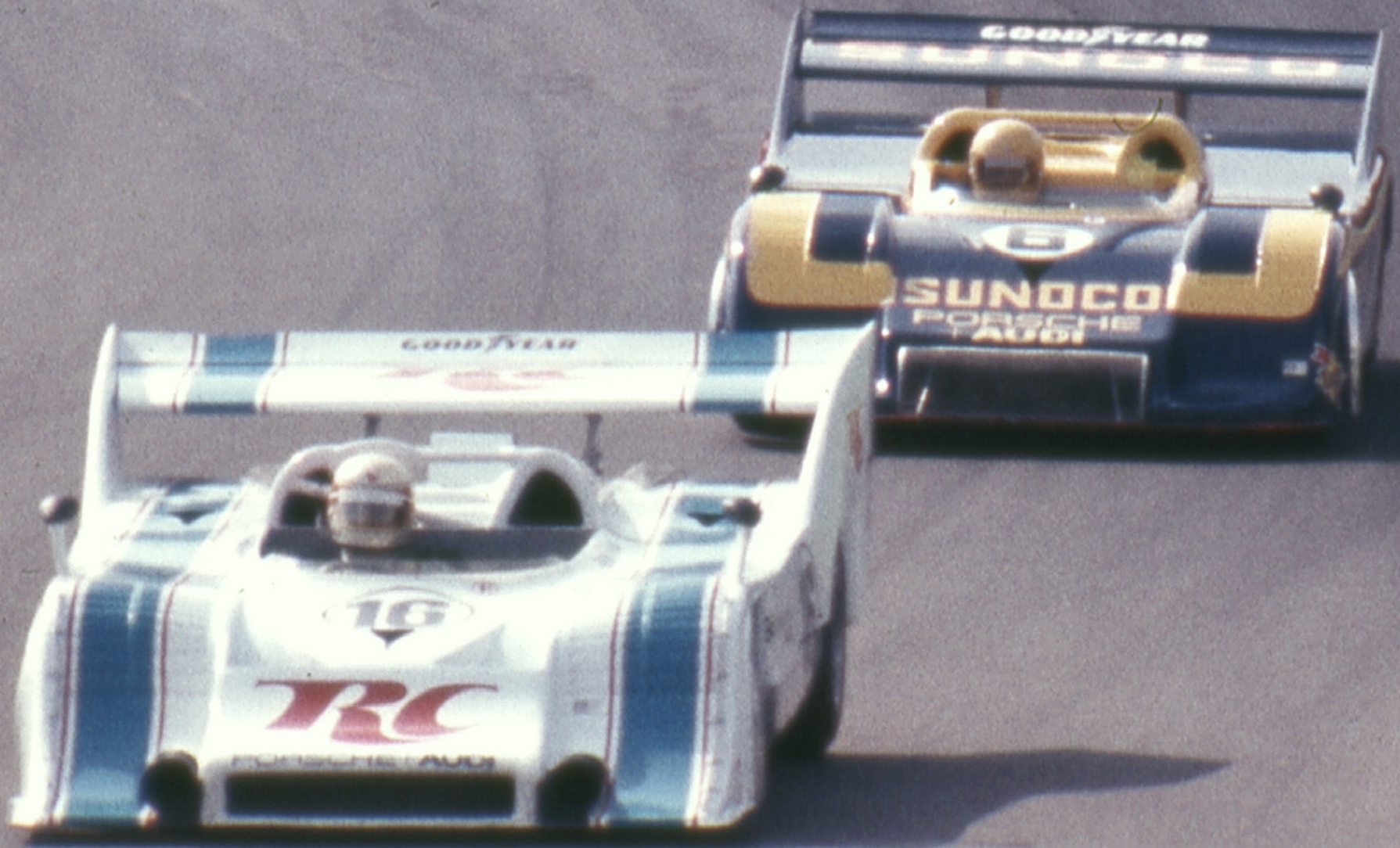
Driving for Roger Penske at the 1975 Austrian Grand Prix, Donohue suffered a heavy practice crash in which his helmet suffered a serious impact. He fell into a coma the following day and died shortly thereafter.

Roger Penske continued to build his racing team and went on to win 15 Indianapolis 500-mile races. Today Penske owns a motorsports empire that still dominates the sport.

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AT RIGHT: *Follmer keeps 003 ahead of former teammate Mark Donohue and his 917/30 in 1973. – PHOTO BY LARRY NEUZEL*







George Follmer became one of the most sought-after racing drivers of the 1970's, competing in Formula 1, Indycars and the NASCAR Winston Cup series. Today he lives in retirement in Idaho. His complete biography will be published in early 2013. Follmer was very generous and helpful in the preparation of this book.

Porsche engineer Helmut Flegl contributed greatly to the German company's success over the following years. After a long and successful engineering career he now lives in retirement in Stuttgart.

Chief mechanic John "Woody" Woodard was very helpful in the writing of this book. He spent eight years full time with Penske Racing and then continued changing right rear tires on Penske's Indycars until 1989. His other business pursuits led him to become president of Detroit Diesel Remanufacturing. He retired in 1999 and now lives with his wife on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia.

Marilyn Motschenbacher Halder toted a camera everywhere and continued in racing for many years. Today she lives in southern California and has created a series of DVD's from the home movies she shot at Can Am races in the late 1960's and early 1970's. They are available at [www.FoxyVentures.com](http://www.FoxyVentures.com).

Truck driver Heinz Hofer, who was Roger Penske's ski instructor in Colorado, stayed with Penske Racing after the 1972 championship season. He became managing director of Penske Racing in England before losing his life in a 1977 traffic accident.

Number 2 mechanic Greg Syfert also stayed with Penske and was eventually absorbed into the team's Formula 1 effort. After Donohue's death in 1975, Syfert left the sport to become a schoolteacher in the Detroit area. He passed away in late 2003.

As a fitting tribute to the machine and its crew, the two men who had more contact with the L&M Porsche than any other human beings were each asked to reflect on the 1972 season some 40 years later.

I believe their comments are best left unedited for the reader to appreciate.

George Follmer, driver:

[The L&M Porsche] will always be special for me. I got very familiar with it. I could do most anything I wanted with it. I could make it go as fast as it could go. I had learned a lot about it.

The '72 season was kind of memorable because I won the Trans-Am series, too. I think they had seven or eight races and I won five of them. So I had two national road racing championships in the same season. It has never been done since and it had never been

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AT LEFT: *Follmer and 917110-003 battling Mark Donohue and the new Porsche 917130 for the lead in 1973.* – PHOTO BY LARRY NEUZEL

done until then. So '72 was really a banner year.

You don't see the same camaraderie today. We were always competitors, but me and Mark and Pete Revson, we came up at the same time through the same channels.

I was glad to be a part of it. I'm honored to be a part of it. I certainly had a good time doing it. We made it into a success story.

It's always nice to have a story with a happy ending.

John "Woody" Woodard, chief mechanic:

That particular car is probably one of the most significant racecars in North America today. There were a lot of 917's built by Porsche and there were a fair number of 917 Turbos, 917/10's and 917/30's, but there were only five that graced Penske Racing shops. Three in '72, and two in '73.

Of the three 917/10's [in 1972], serial number 003 was the first car we got from the factory. I got it in November of '71 and I lived with that car for a full year.

The second car we received was the magnesium car, which was serial number 011. That car was destroyed in Mark's wreck in Atlanta.

The third chassis we got was serial number 005. That was a replacement for the magnesium car. We got that in the summer of 1972 and Mark raced it a couple of times late in the year.

So serial number 003 is the only legitimate Penske 917/10 that exists in North America.

It is the Can Am winner of 1972. Follmer's points were almost twice second place. There were nine races in the championship of which it won five. It finished in the top three in seven of the nine races.

Whoever gets it... I'd like them to know how special it really is.





Appendix

# Racing Records of the L&M Porsche 917/10-003



**Porsche 917 Chassis Number 917/10-003**

DATE	RACE	TEAM	DRIVER	RACE#	START	(Can-Am) RESULT	POINTS
<b>1972 CANADIAN-AMERICAN CHAMPIONSHIP CUP SERIES</b>							
11 June 1972	Mosport	Penske	Donohue	6		2nd	15
9 July 1972	Road Atlanta	Penske	Follmer	6	2nd	1st	20
23 July 1972	Watkins Glen	Penske	Follmer	6	3rd	5th	8
6 August 1972	Mid-Ohio	Penske	Follmer	6	1st	1st	20
27 August 1972	Road America	Penske	Follmer	6	13th	1st	20
17 September 1972	Donnybrooke	Penske	Follmer	7	2nd	4th	10
1 October 1972	Edmonton	Penske	Follmer	7	1st	3rd	12
15 October 1972	Laguna Seca	Penske	Follmer	7	2nd	1st	20
29 October 1972	Riverside	Penske	Follmer	7	1st	1st	20

**1972 CANADIAN-AMERICAN CHAMPIONSHIP CUP • 1ST PLACE WINNER**

1 April 1973	Nurburgring (Interseries)						
	1st Race	Penske	Follmer			8	
	2nd Race	Penske	Follmer			DNF	
1 May 1973	Imola (Interseries)						
	1st Race	Penske	Follmer			DNF	
	2nd Race	Penske	Follmer			DNF	

**1973 CANADIAN-AMERICAN CHAMPIONSHIP CUP SERIES**

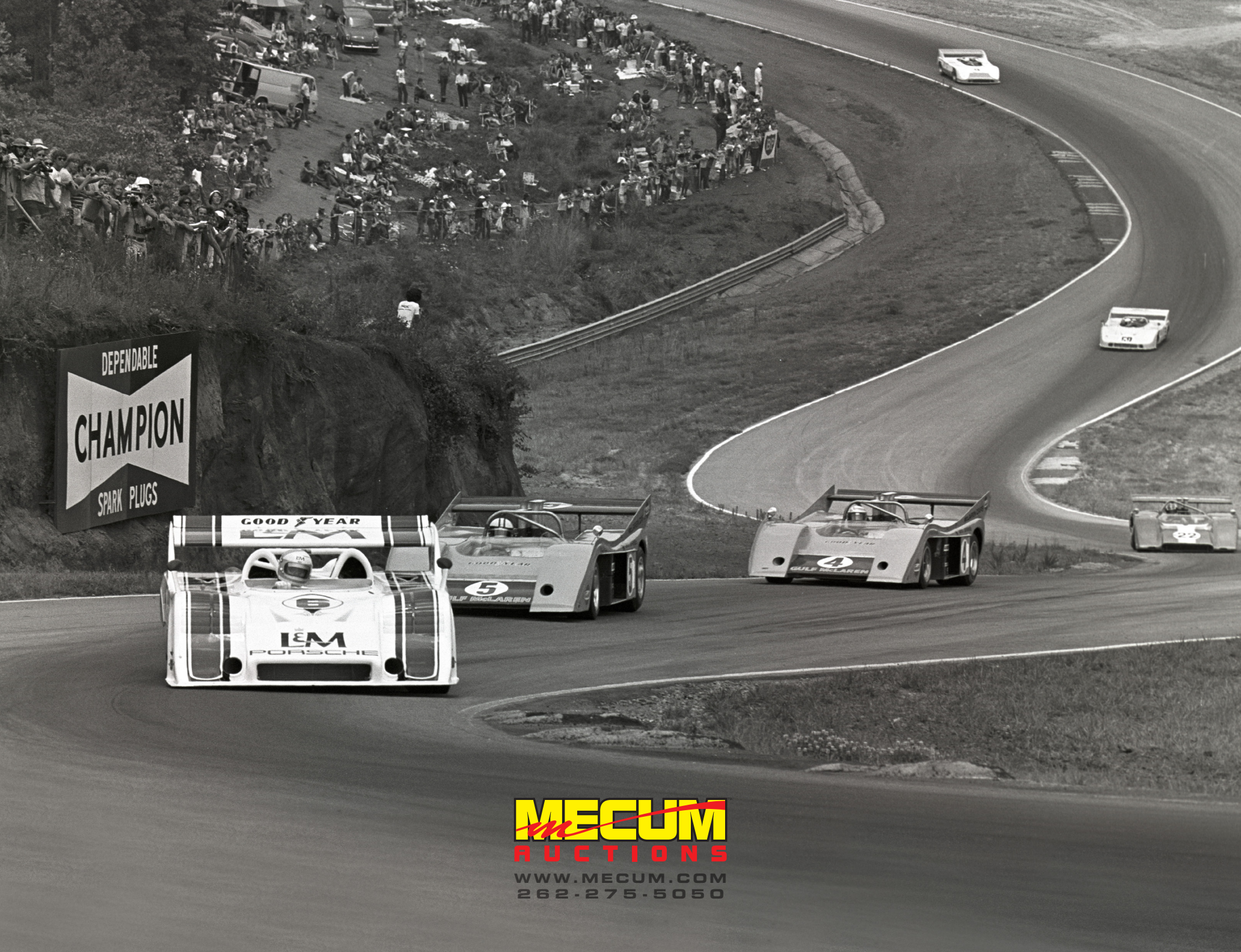
10 June 1973	Mosport	Rinzler	Follmer	16	3rd	Retired	0
8 July 1973	Road Atlanta	Rinzler	Follmer	16	2nd	1st	20
22 July 1973	Watkins Glen	Rinzler	Follmer	16	3rd	Retired	0
12 August 1973	Mid-Ohio	Rinzler	Follmer	16	3rd	2nd	15
26 August 1973	Road America (Sprint)	Rinzler	Follmer	16	3rd	3rd	
26 August 1973	Road America (Cup)	Rinzler	Follmer	16	3rd	3rd	12
15 September 1973	Edmonton (Sprint)	Rinzler	Follmer	16	2nd	13th	
16 September 1973	Edmonton (Cup)	Rinzler	Follmer	16	13th	2nd	15
14 October 1973	Laguna Seca (Sprint)	Rinzler	Follmer	16	3rd		
14 October 1973	Laguna Seca (Cup)	Rinzler	Follmer	16		Retired	
28 October 1973	Riverside (Sprint)	Rinzler	Follmer	16	2nd		
28 October 1973	Riverside (Cup)	Rinzler	Follmer	16		Retired	0

**1973 CANADIAN-AMERICAN CHAMPIONSHIP CUP • 2ND PLACE**









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