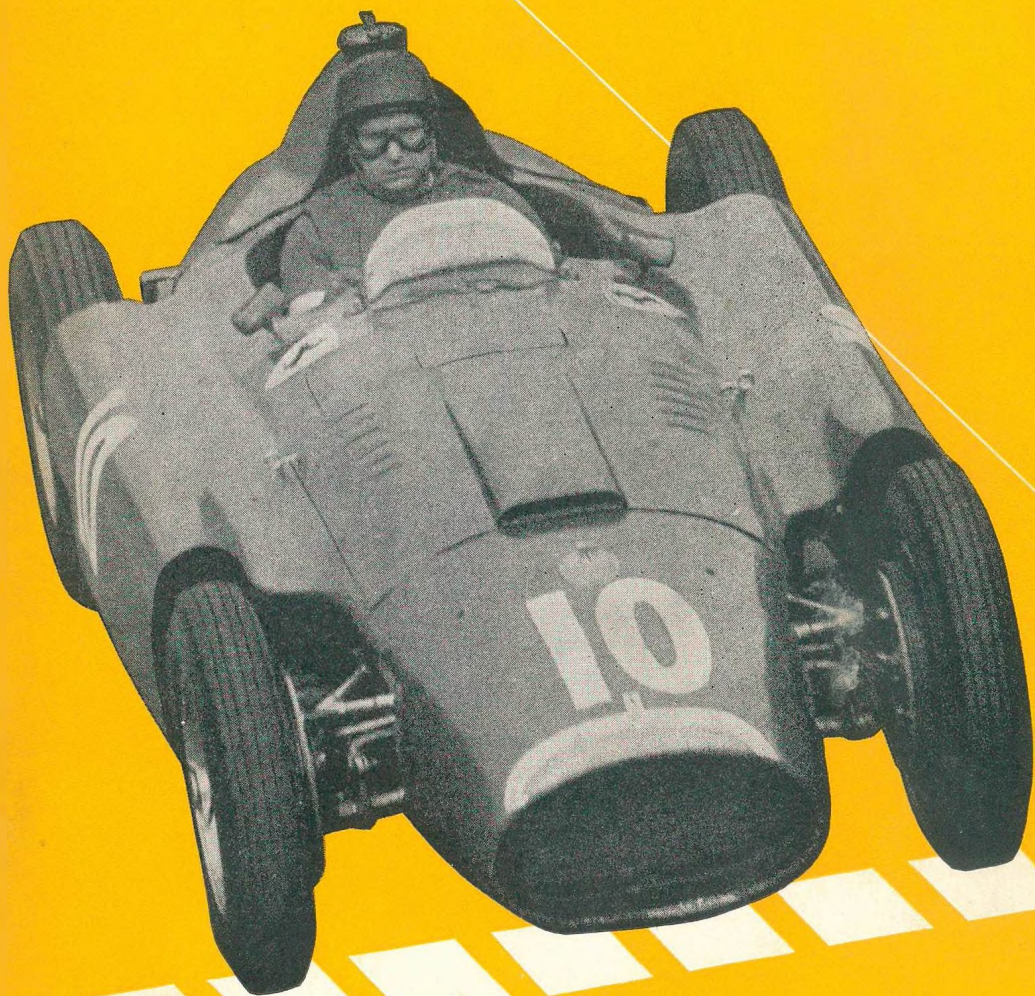


T H E   L I F E   S T O R Y   O F



Juan Manuel

**FANGIO**

**THE LIFE STORY OF JUAN MANUEL FANGIO**



Melb Pungis

THE LIFE STORY OF  
JUAN MANUEL FANGIO

by

RONALD HANSEN

and

FEDERICO B. KIRBUS

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## FOREWORD

*My mind's eye sees a blurred image. The facial characteristics of the driver who rode with Luis Finochietto in the previous year's Gran Premio escapes me. All we know for sure that day, in far-away 1939, is that this ex-mechanic is leading the race. And here I am, on the finish line in San Luis, waiting for him in order to see what he looks like, refresh my memory, and incidentally ask him something about his adventures during the day's stage. Undoubtedly he must have something worth writing about.*

*The drivers arrive one by one, but this "unknown" does not show up. As by this time the late-comers are crossing the finish line in longer and longer intervals, after a time I go along to the hotel, where the drivers are at supper. In the hotel are the more famous drivers, those who interest my readers much more: the Gálvez brothers, for instance. The Chevrolet team men are all at one table, where I see Julio Pérez, Pedro Yarza, Tadeo Taddía, etc., all having their supper and going over the day's adventures.*

*We ate and chatted. I heard many stories of luck or misfortune which I noted down surreptitiously to write about later. Then, when nearly everybody had finished, a young man came in. His eyes were clear in spite of the immense tiredness which showed on his rather chubby face, his hair was brown in colour, and as he walked quietly into the room he said, in a flat tone "Buen provecho."*

*"Sit down," Yarza said to him paternally, "What happened to you?"*

*"I went off the road at a bend" was the laconic answer. No excuses, I noted to myself, about big-ends, pistons, springs, tyres...*

*"How old are you?" Julio Pérez asked, noticing the intense disappointment in the youngster's face.*

*"Twenty-eight."*

*"Look at him." Pérez pointed to Yarza. "He led the Gran Premio for ten stages and lost everything on the last day. You've got time ye," he concluded.*

*That young man was the one I had been waiting for, Juan Manuel Fangio. He began to eat, slowly, but one could hear him muttering to himself.*

*"What will the folks think?... Some called me Fangio, others Finochietto..."*

*I have been tying together broken fragments of a monologue heard seventeen years ago, of which only the high points remain in my memory. There are too*

many blanks to fill in... A bend in the road snatched away his hopes and the hopes of the friends who had promised to wait for him, those friends who had clubbed together to buy him a car so he could race. All gone thanks to a bend on the road.

That is how I met Juan Manuel Fangio. The Fangio who was later to become three times World Champion. My friends, Federico Kirbus and Ronald Hansen, have written a book about them and asked me to write a foreword for them. For this I have gone back to the memory of our first meeting. Now Fangio has climbed the ladder and is no longer a brown-haired stranger to fame, but a world figure and one of the greatest to have ever existed in motoring sport.

"Aces are counted on the fingers of one hand," Giovanni Canestrini told me once, "and Fangio is one of those fingers." In 1939 Fangio had said to me: "I wish I can be the first one to get to Lima!" He was first into Lima and won that race. Ten years later, in 1949, his foot on the stepladder of the aircraft which was to take him to Europe for his first Grand Prix season, he said: "If I could win only one race!" He won four in succession, and opened a gap through which he clove his way to stardom and three Championships...

Exceptionally pleasant memories: but then Fangio is an exceptional man.

Buenos Aires, May 1956.

RICARDO LORENZO.

## INTRODUCTION

*In the fashionable Palermo district of Buenos Aires, there is a sidewalk café, which looks just like any one of a hundred others dotted all over the city, but has a subtle difference nevertheless: it is the rendezvous of sports and racing-car drivers from all over the country. Whenever an up-country driver arrives in Town the first thing he does is head straight for La Veredita ("The Sidewalk") to find out all the latest scandals and who is buying what car in what country. In La Veredita you can buy any sort of car from a Fiat Topolino to a Ferrari, irrespective of whether the car is located in Buenos Aires, California or the South Pole.*

*At around about 11 a.m. the first signs of activity begin to manifest themselves, as some late risers stagger along to the bar for a cup of coffee before starting on pre-lunch cocktails. Later, those of La Veredita so unfortunate as to have to work for a living start in on their Gin Tonics and drift off to lunch. Meanwhile, "cafecitos" come and go, "cafecitos" being the little demi-tasses of strong, black coffee, very sweet, on which most of Buenos Aires' business is done. If you meet a friend on the street the "cafecito" ritual is inevitable, if you are trying to clinch a sale a "cafecito" will usually do the trick, and if you are trying to borrow money a "cafecito" is the inevitable approach.*

*At about 3 p.m. La Veredita, like most of Buenos Aires except the offices, slips into a lethargic siesta unbroken except perhaps by a group of students from the nearby Faculty of Law, a siesta which lasts until well after five o'clock, when the evening tide of habitués begins coming in. At 9.30 the café is again deserted, until eleven or so, and from then on the real night birds hold court until three or four in the morning.*

*The subjects under discussion, while inevitably related to cars, are endless in detail. Is So-and-So getting his new Maserati? Apparently not, because it seems that Ugolini promised it to Such-and-Such (here a famous Continental driver is named). Or maybe Thingummybob made a mess of things, Thingummybob being a young Argentine then touring Europe. La Veredita is strongly pro-sports car, and as its nucleus is predominantly drawn from the more or less upper classes, which look down on the more universally popular stock-car racing, the feud between both types of sport wages continually. "Do you know that the*



*Mecánica Nacional* chaps are getting more prize money than we are?" somebody demands indignantly, and a hubbub of conversation rises at once.

And the cars? European cars are, of course, *de rigueur*, although one does come across the occasional Ford V 8 or Chevrolet, and now and again a Cadillac. But generally small European cars hold sway, various makes predominating in rotation. At one time the English Javelin was king, then came the American Henry-J, after that the German Volkswagen and now the Italian Fiat 1100. No lack of international interest, as can be perceived. Any of these cars can be seen howling up the slight slope which leads from Avenida San Martín and the Automóvil Club to La Veredita, their little engines screaming shrilly at 5,000 r.p.m., sometimes with a grey-jacketed traffic policeman in chase with his motorcycle. The battle between La Veredita and the traffic division of the Buenos Aires Constabulary is implacable and unceasing...

It was in La Veredita one warm, damp evening in February, just after the International Season, that we sat for hours drinking beer and "cafecitos" and asking Juan Manuel Fangio for the story of his life. And here is what he said, and what he did not say but we already knew.

## CHAPTER I

### *A YOUNG MAN CALLED FANGIO*

Nineteen thirty-nine. In far-away Argentina, while in Europe the drums of War throbbed in crescendo, men and machines hurled themselves across the Pampas, over the mountains, through rivers, along macadam roads, through mud... another road-racing Gran Premio. In the tradition of the city-to-city events which marked the dawn of competitive motoring, these marathons are the most popular form of motor race in Argentina to-day. A million wireless sets tuned to one station, ten million evening papers with their headlines screaming forth the name of the winners of the day's lap.

Divided into several laps with rest days in between, the Grandes Premios are traditionally the domain of Ford and Chevrolet Coupés, modified out of all recognition and delivering, to-day well over 250 h.p. in their fastest versions. Distances are immense, road surfaces indifferent, speeds high.

There are so many stories that can be told around these races, because when a hundred men and cars race for two weeks through all sorts of terrain and passing from sweltering heat to bitter cold, things are bound to happen. For instance... well, take 1939.

San Luis is one of the really arid provinces of Argentina. Scrub, no water, no life, nothing. For mile after mile the train speeds through the same scenery, little shrubs barely three feet high and nothing else. At infrequent intervals a city or town breaks the monotony.

In just one of these towns, the hot autumn sun was gradually sinking below the horizon while the radio broadcasts and the timekeepers' sheets revealed a surprising fact: the overall classification for the lap was being led by one, Juan Manuel Fangio. The only thing anyone knew about him was that the year previous he had competed in the Gran Premio as mechanic to Luis Finocchietto with whom he had finished seventh—Fangio driving most of the time. However, a mechanic is nearly always an anonymous hero.

As night fell, car after car flashed into the control, and the minutes ticked inexorably by without producing the Chevrolet of this Fangio. "A driver from Balcarce", someone said, and they let the matter drop. It was not, after all, the first time that a newcomer had led briefly in a Gran Premio, to drop back later on and let the champions have their way. Minutes turned into hours,

and no Fangio. Gradually it became evident that he had lost the lap, while still the few personal friends he had waiting for him strained anxiously to catch a glimpse of a car which failed to arrive.

As time wore on, the late-comers staggered in, and the time intervals between arrivals grew and grew. The light of this shooting star faded out as quickly as it had appeared. The few Pressmen who were still there gathered up their papers and went home to their hotels, while the tired officials waited on until the last car should report home. The Pressmen would not have to wait for Fangio now: it was not worth while. The public only wants to know about its idols, about the men who win.

The hotel where the drivers were staying for a day or two was one of the usual flea-bitten shacks of the region. In the plain, dirty dining-room, several deal tables were placed together to form a long common table, where all the lucky drivers still in the race sat, ate and told of their experiences. The Gálvez brothers were there; they had won the previous Gran Premio, flagged off in Concordia because oceans of water and mud made it impossible to carry on. So was Pedro Yarza, who was leading in the Gran Premio of the South, held a few months before, when in the last lap he lost all he had so painfully accumulated, his car capsizing and finishing with great dents across its steel roof and sides. Julio Pérez—who would later cover the 400-odd miles between Buenos Aires and Córdoba in 5 h. 32 min., a record not to be beaten for many years,—was also among the present.

Among the tinkle of crockery, and occasional half-ironic burst of applause heralded the entry of yet another latecomer. The inevitable question "What happened to you?" answered by the inevitable long tale of misfortune. Every man delayed a Ulysses telling his own Odyssey, but what was interesting at first grew boring, with the monotony of endless sacrifice and back-breaking work, sometimes to change big-ends while lying in apparently bottomless mud. Tomorrow morning the dining-room would lie still and quiet under the midday sun, the legendary sound and fury of motor racing would vanish as quickly as it came. Tomorrow the little hotel would sink back into its dusty lethargy, but tonight was Life, with a capital L.

Suddenly a voice made itself heard above the din. A high, womanish voice, which seemed to contain immeasurable tiredness, disappointment, shattered hopes. A brown-haired young man, who, to judge from his boyish figure and face, had not yet seen thirty years slip by. With the "Buenas noches" sacred to Argentines entering a public dining-room, the newcomer sat down wearily. Yarza reached him a chair and made room for him to sit down. The inevitable question was heard. "What happened?"

"I went off the road on a bend." Nothing more. No trying to justify a poor placing by laying the blame on the car, no making a crankshaft pay the consequences of a misjudged curve. The young man ate on unseeingly, his youthful face lined by a deep bitterness.

"How old are you?" Pérez asked with a smile.

"Twenty-eight."

"Twenty-eight! See that chap over there?" The speaker pointed to Yarza. "He's forty. Led ten laps of a Gran Premio and retired on the last of all."

Fangio said nothing and silently ate on, thinking, What will they think at home? A few days before several friends of his had put up all their available cash to buy him a car. With Finocchietto he had driven a Ford the year before, but Fangio was not the titular driver, and when the local branch of the Ford Motor Company offered Finocchietto a car, they refused one to the unknown Fangio. A friend offered him a ride as his mechanic, but this time Fangio wanted to drive himself. With his friends they had searched all over the little town of Balcarce seeking a Ford coupé, without being able to find one. Finally they had to give it up: nothing but a Chevrolet was available.

He had never driven a Chevrolet in races; he knew nothing about tuning that in-line six, with its overhead valves. "Do you think it'll go?" he wondered aloud, and the little group pondered long. Eventually, however, the passion to drive won over and the car was bought. In later years Juan Manuel Fangio and the Chevrolet marque would seem the natural complement, one for the other, but they were far from knowing that right then. For several days and nights Fangio and his friends worked hard and long on the car, and when the day came for the first road test they were satisfied. It went. The next week or fortnight would tell whether this initial impression would be confirmed by fact.

Fangio started on that memorable night, and shot off pointing his Chevy's sharp nose towards Santa Fé, but only 90 miles from the start, before entering the grain city of Pergamino, the engine began losing oil. No oil pressure at all. So they had to get out and change a connecting-rod. Already! They carried on, none the less, and finished 108th in Santa-Fé. They handed the car over to the *parc ferme* and Fangio and his mechanic, Tieri, went to look for a piece of radiator hose. Next day, when the car was handed back to them, they made a hole in the dashboard and ran the hose through it to the sump, using it as a breather and as a filler to replace oil lost on the way.

Mud, mud again. Tieri kept on pouring oil into the improvised oil filler, blowing with his mouth to ensure that the oil reached the sump. Half-choked by fumes, with tears which welled from burning eyes streaking down dirt-caked faces and cleaning little channels as they went, Fangio and Tieri arrived at Concordia. This time they were seventeenth in the lap, and when they started out in the third lap the endless mud defeated everyone, and this time nothing that human man could do would get the cars home, so the Automóvil Club Argentino had no option but to call the lap off and declare the event finished at the previous check point, Concordia. From Concordia, the cars went by road or rail to Córdoba, where the race would re-start with another name: Gran Premio Extraordinario.

In Córdoba the local Chevrolet agent wanted the young man to retire. The crankshaft had been damaged by the run big-end, and the car seemed unlikely to put up any creditable show in the Extraordinario. Fangio, however, said nothing and kept on working hard at his car, though when the Chevy stars came in for attention to their cars Fangio saw that bit by bit both mechanics and tools were taken from him to place at the service of the great. In the end Fangio was literally unable to carry on working: luckily, he spotted a private customer of the garage, and managed to persuade him to tow the Chevrolet to another, smaller garage located some blocks away. This little place belonged

to a man called Ramaschiotti, and Fangio has never forgotten the name, because it was there that the young driver found for the first time since leaving his native Balcarce, someone who was willing to help him unselfishly and completely. Fangio and Tieri were accepted as members of the family for the few short days he spent there repairing and readying his car. Nor is Fangio likely to forget a little dark-skinned apprentice mechanic, who filched two cans of oil from the big garage, to help a driver he had never seen before and whom nobody knew.

In those few days of peace between the two races, Fangio and his mechanic worked hard and unceasingly and bit by bit the car was readied for the start. The little flame of hope, which had seemed to be dying down, now took on fresh life and began to glow again. They went through the nervous tension of the start all over again, wondering whether their efforts would be rewarded with any measure of success. They were. On that first lap they were fifth, and the highest placed Chevrolet exponents, as that year the Fords were fast and reliable. Then came a startling offer: Fangio was asked if he wished to be included in the works team. His joy was inexpressible. He had run out of cash, despite stringent personal economies, all having been spent on the car, and he had just about arrived at the reluctant decision to ask his faithful Balcarce friends for more money, and he was just in this dilemma when the magic offer came like manna from Heaven. Ironically enough, the same Chevrolet representative who had practically thrown him out a few days ago now came to meet him with hand outstretched and asked him anxiously, "Do you need anything?"

"I need some tyres, mine are worn out."

"Well, why don't you get some?"

"I haven't got any money."

"Money? Look, just sign here and don't worry."

He was beside himself with joy that night. He sent a telegram to his friends telling them that there was no further need for them to send money, that the powerful General Motors Co. of Argentina was behind him now. As if to repay the faith deposited in him, he was second in the next lap, and rose to that position in general classification, too. A dream had come true, although never in their wildest dreams could Fangio and his friends had imagined the young driver in second place, from among the hundred-odd who had started out, weeks before, from Buenos Aires. In this situation Fangio found himself on the horns of another dilemma: to take it easy or to go all out to win the next lap. Logic, cold and remorseless, pointed out that this greenhorn had already achieved more than anyone could expect. To ask more from the gods was to ask for disaster, but he will not gamble will never be a great racing driver, and Fangio hurtled out of the ancient city of Catamarca the next day as if all the devils of Hell were after him, not to hoard the precious minutes so hardily won, but to stake them all on a throw of the dice.

At one stage he led: the evening papers carried his name on the headlines, but the night editions were mute. What Fangio had subconsciously feared, happened with lightning speed. He was tearing along, hands clutching the wheel, the car bucking along the rough road, engine singing its deep-throated song, when he came to a curve. He flicked over the wheel, calm and confident,

but something went wrong, somewhere, and the car started to slide off the road. He corrected wildly, arms and legs flailing, but it was too late and the dark red coupe went off the road, turned over with a sickening crash, and lay still.

\* \* \*

Those who sat around the tables in the little hotel in San Luis knew nothing of this, however. They were the great, the people's idols, the tin gods of millions of fans. When they broke something they told someone to change it and carried on, Fangio thought bitterly. No sleepless nights for them. No being chucked out of garages in Córdoba, no begging for help, none of that. They didn't know about the Ramaschiottis, he felt with a sudden pang, nor about the little apprentice. Nor about Tieri, blowing through his weird oil-filter, choking and nearly passing out with oil asphyxia.

"Are you carrying on?" Pérez asked, and before Fangio could reply Yarza spoke for him. "Of course he's going to carry on." Surprised, Juan lifted his head. Were they talking to him? Wrapped up in his own disappointment, he had hardly even realized what he had been eating. While his body sat tiredly in a chair in the hotel, his mind's eye went back time and again to that terrible curve. "What happened? What did I do wrong?" Instinctively, his hands gripped the cutlery harder, as if the steering wheel was still in them and he could go back in time and erase his mistake. What would his friends say? By dint of extraordinary sacrifices he had managed to get the crippled car to San Luis under its own power, but the accident had left its mark. He felt as if he had let them all down. His school days, his first attempts at driving a car, the long days while his friends went from house to house begging for donations to finance the man who wanted to race in the Gran Premio and the great day when amidst the flags, cheers, crowds and bright lights he had started off from Buenos Aires all went coursing through his weary mind.

Fangio carried on. And he was fifth in the race and first Chevrolet to finish this Gran Premio Extraordinario.

## CHAPTER II

### *A STAR IS BORN*

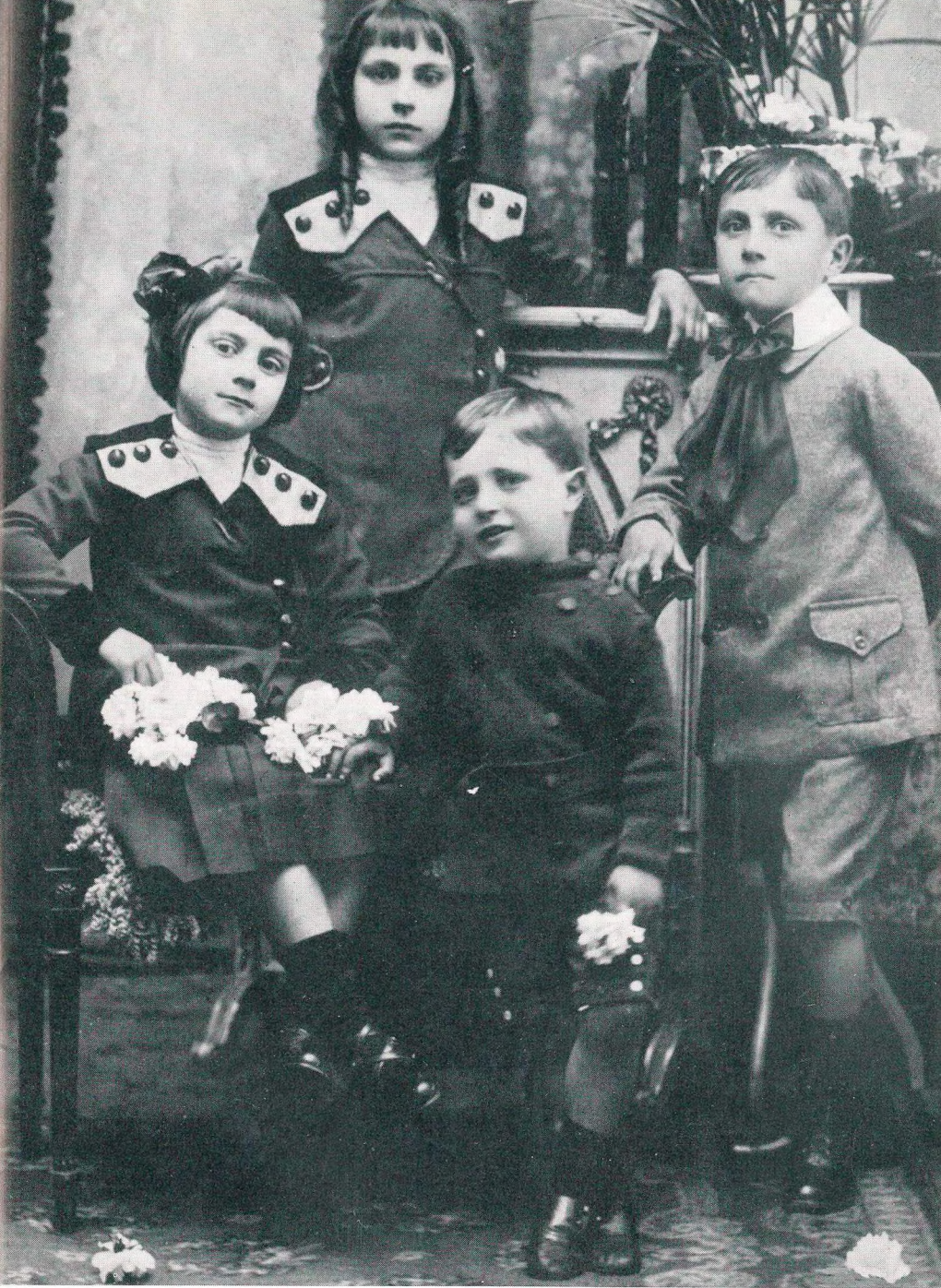
“Many, many years ago life in Italy was very hard, and the young, undeveloped lands in far-off South America glittered like tantalizing emeralds in the eyes of the hard-working Italian labourers and artisans. Well before the turn of the century the Argentine Government invited a large-scale immigration from Italy, and hundreds of thousands crossed the Atlantic crammed in the holds and steerageways of immigrant steamers, suffering considerable hardships in order to be able to set their roots in the, to them, Promised Land.

Among them, there were two, a couple just like so many other couples, Loreto and Herminia Fangio. Loreto was a house painter, and a good one, too, as he will tell you if you should ask him to-day. When he arrived he was told by friends that the best thing to do was to strike out to the interior of the Province of Buenos Aires, then a wilderness dotted with little shanty towns, today—a wilderness dotted with big cities...

He chose Balcarce, which was then growing rapidly as the centre of the potato crop district, because his intuition told him that Balcarce would grow quickly and prosperity, already peeping round the corner, would soon come. At first things were not easy, as the local residents mistrusted the ‘Italianos’, but very quickly the Fangios were assimilated into the community and Don Loreto was very soon busy with his painting. In time they were able to build a little house for themselves, and then came children—quite a few of them...

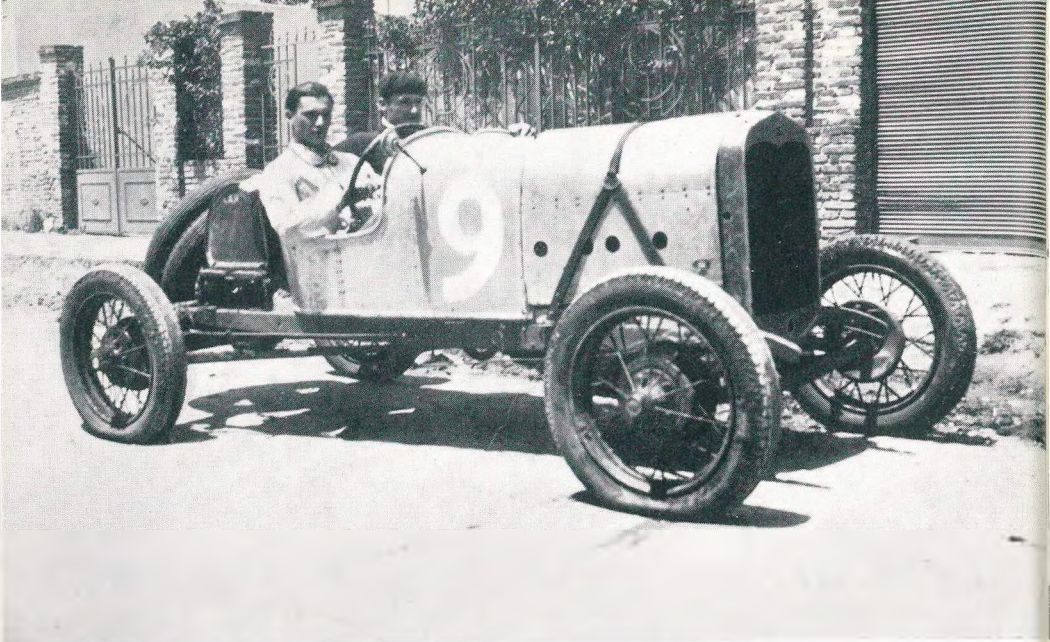
One of these children was born on the 24th of June, 1911, and was named Juan Manuel. It was I, and they called me Juan because that day was the day of St. John.

Naturally I can't remember very much about my very first years. Things were not easy at first, because money was not over-plentiful, but by and by with my elder brothers beginning to work and bring some money into the house, things started getting easier. I started to go to school just like everybody else, and just like everybody else I hated it. I thought at the time that it was much more agreeable to be playing football in the fields than studying arithmetic and grammar. The worst part was that in those days Argentine mothers considered football one of the Deadly Sins, and if any of us were caught playing we were sure to get a good clip on the ear!



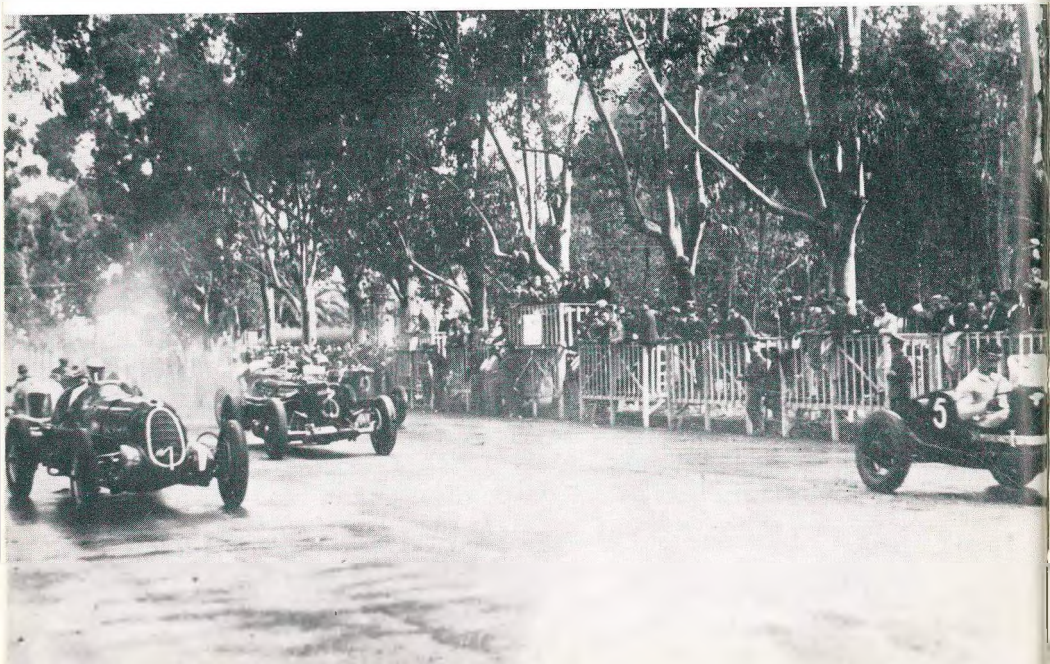
FAMILY PORTRAIT. Juan Manuel at a tender age, with two of his sisters and his elder brother José. The Fangio family was large, in the tradition of the Italian immigrant families which came to Argentina in the 80's.





**STRAIGHT EIGHT.** One of Fangio's first "Mecánica Nacional" cars was a Buick Special which he drove without great success in 1935-1936. Note the lack of a tail and the hefty bonnet straps.

**INSTANT STARTING.** In the Necochea race in 1938, the fastest car on the course, Arzani's 3.8-litre Alfa-Romeo (far left), suffered wheelspin in the wet and Fangio's little Ford shot off first (far right).



However, in time I began to find myself able to mix school and football, although I think I was better in football than in school... Anyway, that's where I got my nick-name 'Chueco' ('Bow-legs') from. I used to have a funny way of kicking left-handed shots which earned me that name. It's a funny thing, but years later I was told that if I had carried on playing I might not have done so badly at it as a professional.

Anyhow, as time wore on I grew up and when I was eleven my father got me a job as a greasemonkey in a garage which belonged to a friend of his. I would finish school in the morning, have lunch, and go off and work in the garage. Naturally, my first tasks were hardly of great responsibility, and more or less entailed sweeping up and cleaning grease off things. This frequently meant that I had to stay late, because very often a farmer would come in with a broken-down truck on tow and demand that it be repaired in time for going into town next morning. I didn't have anything to do with the repairing, of course, but I had to wait until everybody had finished and then clean up the mess.

The worst part of all this was that there was a great big Panhard Levassor in the garage, which had been there for years. Señor Viggiano, my boss, used to say it had been brought into the country by Christopher Columbus. Personally, I think Columbus must have bought it second-hand! Anyway, my big trouble was moving that enormous old contraption, so as to clean up underneath it. Naturally I was too small to be able to push it, so I had a lot of trouble until one day a mechanic taught me to put it in gear and stand on the starting handle to move it along inch by inch. I don't think Panhard et Levassor would have approved, but anyway I got the car out of the way. I still remember that infernal starting handle operated anti-clockwise!

All this time I was beginning to feel the motor craze seeping in. The mechanics would talk of nothing else all day but cars and racing drivers, and their enthusiasm was very infectious. So much so that one day I watched the Panhard being started up and decided that that night I would start it up myself.

Well, that evening when they had all gone I climbed into the driving seat, switched on the ignition, and then vaulted onto the starting handle, as I was used to do. Naturally it was much freer with the car in neutral, and after two or three flips the engine suddenly started up.

I was terrified! What a din! In the daytime the Panhard's exhaust was just another racket among so many others, but in the deep stillness of night it sounded like the Last Trump. This is the end, I thought. They will come running and it will be all over with me. I dashed out and peeped through a window but nobody was around, and if anybody heard I suppose they just thought it was one of the mechanics testing a car...

After a while I gained confidence and climbed back into the driving seat. I gently pressed the accelerator, and the engine's burble changed into a growl and then a roar. I lifted my foot, and—by this time I was used to the noise—I died down again to an even, monotonous beat.

I switched off the engine and, my legs shaking, slumped back in the driving seat. I was only eleven years old, I thought, and yet with a gentle pressure of my foot I can call thirty or forty horsepower into play, I could if I dared drive off and make two tons of metal answer my will... To this day I sometimes feel again that childish impression...

I was growing all the time, and when I was fourteen I finished primary school and my teachers started pressing me to go to Buenos Aires, for higher schooling. I suppose I should have gone, but I didn't want to. I'd had enough school for a long time! They gave me a full-time job in the garage, and by this time I was starting to do simple repair jobs and the motor bug had already bitten me hard. Of course, Viggiano very properly refused to lend me any customer's car, and I couldn't afford one of my own, so I decided to join the Balcarce Football Club to work off my excess enthusiasm. This annoyed my mother, and I was pretty often in hot water. I used to say I was going to the cinema, and go and play instead, until one day my father, coming back from a job, saw me playing, went to the cinema, saw the film, and when I got back asked me what the film I was supposed to have seen was all about!

Just after that I took up boxing, and with some friends we started a little club, and in time we set up a ring and had some good fun. My physique is more or less adapted to boxing, I suppose, and I didn't do too badly at it. However, I soon grew bored with it, and then in 1928 a great event in my life occurred: Ayarza, one of Viggiano's customers, had entered for a nearby Ford T race, and asked Viggiano if he knew of a riding mechanic. I was seventeen then, young and light in weight, apart from being very, very keen, and Viggiano pointed to me. When Ayarza came along to me with the proposition I was speechless! Naturally once I got my tongue unwound I accepted like a shot, although imploring Viggiano not to tell my family anything, or there'd be the Devil to pay.

I can't remember very much about this race, but we didn't win, and I was scared to death at first, then I grew more cheerful, and towards the end I was exhilarated. When it was all over I was rarin' to go again, but had to contain my soul in patience for a long time.

Soon after, my National Conscription stint came up, and I was sent off to Campo de Mayo, the huge military camp near Buenos Aires. It was the first time I had seen the big city, and it fascinated me. I got into quite a few scrapes during my week-end leaves, but of course the authorities make a lot of allowances for the 'conscriptos' and when my year was up I went home with a clean bill of health.

By that time, what with saving up and some money my father lent me, I was able to put up a little garage with a close friend of mine and still my partner today, José Duffard. After a while things began going well, and soon we had to take on an accountant to handle the financial side of affairs, as neither of us were extraordinarily strong at figures!

Actually, I drove my first race in 1934, not long after returning from Buenos Aires. A friend of Viggiano's, Manuel Lliviejo, had a rather fast Ford T and I prevailed on him to lend it to me for a race some miles from home. Unfortunately I ran a big-end, which annoyed Lliviejo considerably! Anyhow, I fixed it for nothing, and by this time the racing bug, which had been rendered rather dormant with time, woke up again and started nibbling. I started saving up and putting together spare parts and pretty soon built myself a Ford T.

Of course, it was not a standard Ford T: it was lightened, had a slightly higher compression ratio and a larger carburettor, and I had scrapped all the non-essentials from the bodywork, although I could not change the body style

which had to remain standard. In those days Ford Ts were the Done Thing in the up-country races, and in fact they are still very much used. Some of them do over 100 m.p.h., too, although with special bodywork and o.h.v. or o.h.c. heads.

I must say, however, that my debut as an owner-driver was certainly not without incident. In practicing the blessed ignition system had given trouble and I spent all night tracing it, and when I finally got things fixed it was late and we had just about time to get to the track. We dashed off, I driving and about seven other lads in the car, and when we got to the circuit the race had just started. I shot through the gates, stopped to let my friends off, and tore on to the track before the stunned race officials could say a word! The best part of the whole incident, however, was that I entered the track about half-way round the first lap, and when I dashed past the start I was thus ahead of the other cars, so the spectators thought I had achieved a wonderful first lap and cheered wildly! Well, I was soon flagged off that time, and to make things worse my parents got to hear about it and there was a terrific ruckus. Of course I was of age by this time but I didn't like to anger my parents unduly, so I laid off for a while. When the hollering died down at home I did a few more races with the old T and then made up a V 8 special with an 85-h.p. Ford V 8 engine in a 1934 Ford frame, using a two-seater body I built myself.

My first race with this car was in March 1938, and a funny thing happened there. I made a good practice time and went into the front row, and had a 3.8 Grand Prix Alfa beside me. When the race was started the Alfa's rear wheels lay in a pool of water, they spun, and my little Ford shot straight into the lead! Of course, I was soon passed, but for years afterward I used to pull the Alfa owner, Arzani's, leg about the incident and ask him if he remembered the time I beat him off the line with the V 8! "

## CHAPTER III

### *ROAD AND TRACK*

November 13th., 1938, was a tragic day for Argentine motor racing. Fangio, with his Ford, entered, like nearly everyone else of note in the track-racing world, for the Tres Arroyos event, and during the practicing he was, as usual, fast, although not up to the speed of the leaders. The Tres Arroyos circuit was untarred, smooth earth, and it so happened that about that time a great drought had settled over the country and rain had not fallen for several weeks. On the day of the race it was terribly hot, and there was not a breeze, not even a slight breath of wind, and it was so amazingly still that on an eight-mile lap the leader, Domingo Ochoteco, came tearing round his first lap and ran into the dust which had been made at the start, nearly seven minutes ago!

The alarmed group of race officials and Pressmen rushed to the organizers' booth. "The race must be stopped!" they cried. And it was true. It was quite impossible to race in those conditions. The organizers were in a flurry of indecision. Several thousand spectators had paid to see the race. It was not the first time that the races had been held under dusty conditions. "But not so dusty!" someone cried. A competitor came in dead slow and through the dust haze the Starter saw a Special travelling at 20 m.p.h. seeking its pit and unable to find it, through the dust. Then a Fiat came round and went right into the other car, crashing it through the pit counter. Then the Fiat spun into the middle of the track and yet another car came along, luckily dead slow, and ramméd it. Then a white Mercedes flashed past between the two cars without touching either of them.

By this time, of course, no-one doubted any longer. The Chief Marshal hastily grabbed the black flag to call the race off, but it was too late. F. Martín came tearing through in the wake of the other Mercedes, and, not seeing another competitor, P. Ruíz, ran right into him. Martín's car was hurled into the air and both drivers thrown out, while the petrol tank on Ruíz's car caught fire. The driver jumped out and ran away from the burning car, but unfortunately was caught in the barbed wire which fenced off the spectators, and one of these tried to help and was also badly burnt. Martín, Ruíz and Martín's mechanic, Miguel Zatuszek, all died in hospital. There have been shocking accidents in motor sport, and Argentina has not been spared in this sense, but

for sheer ghastliness this incident will live forever in the minds of those who were at Tres Arroyos on that fateful day.

Fangio, who had as much trouble seeing as anyone else, drove as fast as he dared and when the event finally was flagged off, finished 8th.

In 1939 Fangio made his debut as a "Gran Premio" driver, in the Gran Premio Argentino, which, as chronicled in Chapter I, was suspended at Concordia and restarted at Córdoba under the title of "Grand Premio Extraordinario". It is perhaps, at this junction, appropriate to remark briefly on the history of the Gran Premio.

As we believe the reader has gathered from Chapter I, these events are for modified stock cars, steel tops being obligatory, and are run over public roads, metalled or unmetalled, from point to point, each lap taking anything from five to fifteen hours, and with rest days interspersed between the laps to give the competitors a chance to rest and to repair their cars. Although several of these races are held every year, only one of them merits the title of Gran Premio Nacional, however, and that one is the longest and toughest of them all. The route varies from year to year, but in all cases a lot of ground is covered.

The series started in 1910, Juan Cassoulet winning with a De Dion at some 15 m.p.h., racing from Buenos Aires to Córdoba over unmetalled roads, a trip which required him 30 hours 42 min. Four years later a Springfield won it, then a Mors, and then came the Trench War and activities subsided for some time. In 1921 Mariano de la Fuente, still an active Automóvil Club Argentino official today, won in a Packard, from Buenos Aires to Rosario and back, some 480 miles, averaging 29.9 m.p.h. This route was followed until 1924, when they went back to Córdoba, de la Fuente winning again in 25 hours 6 min., with a Studebaker this time. The Córdoba route was kept up for time, occasionally changing the intermediate stopping points, and in 1931 a Mercedes-Benz SSKL driven by Carlos Zatuszek won, at nearly 60 m.p.h. running average. In 1933 it rained so hard that only one competitor managed to finish, the comparatively unknown Roberto Lozano, driving a little four-cylinder Ford. The severity of his single-handed Odyssey back may be gauged from the fact that while on the way out he required only 7 hours 38 min. 22 sec., he took 22 hours 44 min. 11 sec. for the return leg, and it was only due to the fact that the organizers extended the time limit for arrival that he was enabled to finish at all! Lozano never stood out as a particularly fast driver, but that single event was a marvellous trial of courage and physical resistance and it most fitting that Fate should have seen fit to reward him with a victory in that race—his only big victory.

In 1935 a great change was to take place. Until then the Grandes Premios had been contested by large racing and sports cars of the two-seater variety, usually Specials with large American engines, but in that year Emilio Karstulovic made some startling suggestions to modify the whole plot. Karstulovic had achieved fame through his single-handed trips across the country, rather in the tradition of the modern Cape-to-Cairo runs, and this experience had convinced him of two things: that it was possible to cross the mighty Andes at racing speeds, and that the best car to race in was a closed one. Opinions were divided about the wisdom of racing in closed cars, but

regarding the Andean crossing nearly everyone was unanimous in calling Karstulovic crazy. That sort of stunt was all right on solo trips, even against the clock, but not at racing speeds. The road from Buenos Aires to Santiago de Chile reaches 14,000 feet in one spot. Besides, the road was, and is, dangerously narrow in places and largely unsurfaced. It was felt that crossing the mountains would be a terrible mistake, but the suggestion was eventually accepted, and in the end Raúl Riganti gave the doubters the lie by doing it in 6 hours 54 min. averaging just over 33 m.p.h. for the 200-odd miles from Mendoza to the Chilean capital.

Since then the Grandes Premios have been substantially unchanged in character. There have been marathon events, like for instance the 6,000-mile race all through South America, from Buenos Aires to Caracas, and the longest race in the world, the 1949 event over nearly seven thousand miles in which Juan Gálvez won in a Ford in an aggregate time of 104 hours 25 min. 58 sec., averaging 65.5 m.p.h. Of late the events have been almost the complete prerogative of the Gálvez brothers, Juan and Oscar, both of whom drive Fords.

Anyhow, to return to 1939, Fangio was fifth in the Extraordinario, and in the next year this startling newcomer won the Gran Premio! The first few laps were a bitter fight between Fangio and Oscar Gálvez, but then the Ford exponent ran into serious trouble and lost a lot of time. Fangio won four out of thirteen laps, and in spite of striking trouble between Chile and Perú on the seventh lap, finished over an hour ahead of his nearest rival, Daniel Musso (Ford). It was a queer twist of fortune when Julio Pérez, who had urged him paternally to carry on, after his crash the year before, was now detailed to race along behind carrying a spare differential in case Fangio's should be damaged!

Fangio won the Thousand Miles race the next year and also the Mar y Sierras Trophy, but then war came and stopped the sport. However, he was far from inactive in those years, as the complete lack of spares gave all garage owners plenty to do improvising and making up replacements to keep cars on the road. Furthermore, he prepared two Chevrolets, a Special for track racing and a road-racing car. The road car was a wonderful job, and Fangio hoped it would be faster than anything else on the road once he got going again. His great rivals, of course, were the two Gálvez brothers, and these two family names, Fangio and Gálvez, split the fans into two bitterly antagonistic factions, as had never happened before. There were Gálvez fans and there were Fangio fans, and the rest didn't count.

However, as things worked out, it was with the track car that Fangio recommenced racing, in 1947. For many years the Argentine racing fraternity had wished to act as hosts to the great European drivers, whom they regarded almost as demigods. Before the war the Automóvil Club had been in contact with the foreign teams, and Mercedes and Auto Union were particularly interested in the A.C.A.'s propositions, but for various reasons the projected trips did not come off. It will be recalled that in 1937 Pintacuda and Stuck fought a great duel for victory in the Rio de Janeiro G. P. in La Gavea, victory going to the Italian who crossed the line coasting along with a dry fuel tank, and that event, enthusiastically commented on by the Argentine newspapers, had left latent a strong desire for more.

Thus, in 1947 the A.C.A. approached several European drivers and at last the long-nourished dream was to come true. A circuit was chosen in Retiro, near the Buenos Aires Port, and right behind one of the city's great railway terminals, and it was all set.

Naturally, what with a hotch-potch of old and new racing cars in the country, and only Maserati and Talbot building cars for sale in Europe, it was pretty pointless to insist on racing to Formula, and thus the events were run under Formula Libre, as they all were until the I Argentine Grand Prix in 1952. Finally, after a lot of work, the following were lined up: Varzi, Villolosi, Pintacuda, Palmieri, Platé, Bignami, Raph, and the Brazilian Landi. The circuit had been used for the first time in 1941, when José Canziani and Oldemar Ramos, both driving 3.8 Alfas, fought it out between them: in 1947 the same machines were to reappear in the hands of Oscar Gálvez and Pablo L. Pessatti, respectively.

Varzi! Villolosi! These two names were chorused by the eager crowd as one, while in the pits Juan Manuel Fangio sat nervously in the cockpit of his Chevrolet Special, waiting for the start of the curtain-raiser event for locally built specials (Mecánica Nacional, as it is called). "Fangio en pista!" ("Fangio on the track!") exclaimed millions of fans when they heard that their hero was now going over to track events—of course, he had started out on the track, but he wasn't their hero then—but in spite of the huge deputation which came waving banners and chorusing verses calculated to explain how superior Fangio was to all the other Mecánica Nacional drivers, he could not do better than third. After his event he sat and watched the Europeans racing, and pondered deeply on their incomparable skill in, for instance, changing gear. Most of the Argentines who had been out for the first time in European-type cars complained bitterly of the difficulty of changing gears with crash-type gear boxes, yet these men did it without thinking about it, and so quickly, too! He realized he still had a lot to learn. Undoubtedly, however, he assimilated a lot of knowledge from his personal observation of the foreign drivers, made with a connoisseur's eye and with the secret intention of one day driving one of these cars himself. His track driving began to improve, and thus when in October 1947 an event for racing and Mecánica Nacional cars was run off in Mar del Plata, the famous ocean resort, Fangio finished fifth and first Mecánica Nacional exponent, his Wayne-equipped Chevrolet being beaten by such modern and powerful machines as 3.8 Alfas, a 3-litre and four-cylinder Maserati. Fangio also won the Mecánica Nacional heat, thus proving the fastest car-driver combination on the track that day. Some weeks later he won in Rosario, too.

However, although success seemed to be coming his way in this new, or rather revisited, speciality, the open road called Juan Manuel Fangio with an irresistible voice, and thus in October 1947 he gave his new road Chevy its baptism of fire, very successful, as the car won the event easily. Nevertheless, he was able to see that his rivals were not far behind him in speed, as the Gálvez brothers had been right up with him until forced to drop back with mechanical troubles of various kinds.

"The Grand Premio was due again, and I started tuning my Chevrolet for this event. The first lap was from Buenos Aires to Mendoza, the wine capital



of Argentina, across the dead flat plains of northern Buenos Aires, southern Córdoba and dry, arid San Luis. While I was working on my car I was offered a camshaft which had a very drastic profile. I looked at the thing for a long time, and the longer I looked the less I liked it. In those days we were still using pretty standard cams, and when a couple of days later Domingo Marimón, father of young Onofre who was so tragically killed in the Nurburgring, came round for a chat, I showed him the camshaft and asked him if he wanted to use it. He shifted his ever-present cigar slightly and grunted "Let's have it". He used it in his car and averaged 85 m.p.h. from Buenos Aires to Mendoza! Actually, this cost him a dinner, as not even he had imagined that it would be possible to average over 80 m.p.h. all the way. Carlos Arzani bet that it would be more than 80, and won... And the camshaft went on to pull Marimón's car right over the Andes, over the mountain road which was then more like a goat-track than anything else, and into Santiago de Chile at over 70 m.p.h. average all the way. That was quite a show, and you can be sure that a few weeks afterward we were all queuing up for these new camshafts..."

Fangio won the second lap, from Santiago to La Serena, and E. Fernandino (Ford) the third, after which came the Copiapó-Tucumán stage, which was considered the hardest, as it wound over the Andes through the feared San Francisco Pass, 15,000 feet up and which until then had been the exclusive domain of mule trains and the Andean condor. Hundreds of years before, the conquistadores had come that way from Peru, cutting a swath of blood and robbery through the lush greenlands of South America. The worst hazard was the White Wind, the "Viento Blanco", howling gales blowing powdery snow which freezes everything it contacts and had killed Lord know how many intrepid mountaineers.

One night, the intense stillness of the mountains was desecrated by the bark of an unsilenced exhaust, and a scarlet coupé came tearing up the mule track, its lights blazing fiercely. It was Juan Manuel Fangio, and he was leading the race. Suddenly some calculation went wrong and the car swerved off the road and its snout plunged into the soft snow. Nobody hurt, the car was not damaged, but it was impossible to get the car out. Fangio cursed briefly and relapsed into silence. Somebody would soon be along.

A few minutes later he saw a pin point of light lashing back and forth as a car tore up the hairpins of the apparently vertical cliff face, and as the little glow-worm below climbed and climbed, he soon made out it was his friend and arch-rival, Oscar Gálvez. He stood in the middle of the road and waved his arms. Oscar screeched to a stop and Fangio and his riding mechanic ran to the Ford coupé.

"Are you all right?" Gálvez asked anxiously.

"Yes, fine, but we're stuck, and I can't get the car out."

Flashing into action, Gálvez and his brother (who raced with him in those days), jumped out of their car with a stout rope and tied it to the Chevrolet's front bumper. The Ford pulled, the engine roared in low, but the Chevrolet shifted a few inches and then refused to budge further. Gálvez began to worry about burning out his clutch. Then while they were desperately trying to think up an answer to the problem, Fernandino came along, and quite

a few more behind him. They all stopped and lent a hand, but after a while those who had arrived first wanted to get going again, as they were afraid someone would go right through.

“ Look ”, Fangio said desperately, “ If you help me to get out I promise not to pass anybody on the road all the way to Tucumán ”.

To his relief everybody agreed, and the pushing and shoving went on with by this time quite a little group of cars by the roadside. Unfortunately, all of a sudden a car came along, the driver slowed briefly, and then shot off again towards Tucumán. This was as everyone had feared would happen, and one or two began remarking that they'd better get a move on. Oscar Gálvez and Fangio straightened up and looked at each other.

“ Get going ”, Fangio said briefly.

Oscar looked round uncertainly.

“ Get going ”, Fangio said again more urgently. “ You can still win the lap. They'll all be going off now. ” So Oscar tore off, won the lap and the race. Fangio bitterly restarted hours later, and though he did not retire then, was hours behind the leaders and with no chance to do anything in the race.

\* \* \*

*It was now nearly seven o'clock and several office-workers among the Veredita habitués were turning up one by one for tea, coffee or beer and large toast sandwiches which are a feature of that café. An XK 120 Jaguar, with a large dent in a front mudguard, came up the slope and screeched to a stop in front of our table. The driver got out, flung his coat on a chair and commented bitterly on the heat.*

*We asked for another “ cafecito ” and somebody passed a pack of cigarettes round. As we stretched and yawned a monotonous voice was heard in the background describing endless troubles with a 2.5-litre Alfa-Romeo. Fangio looked round at the mention of the marque and then grinned when he saw who was talking : the sufferer was a man famous for his incredible mechanical misfortunes with cars. A new arrival, just back from the U.S.A., came over to our table and told Fangio that he'd “ been able to fix up that bit of business ” and Fangio nodded.*

*A young man came in with a bundle of motoring magazines fresh from Britain and everybody pounced on them, ignoring the owner's plaintive bleats not too let them get too scattered, because he had to leave soon. The driver of a Cadillac-Allard waved a broken layshaft cluster in the air and made an impassioned speech on the quality of the locally-made spares. A very elegant young man came in with a streamlined blonde and they sat at a far table while thirty pairs of eyes swivelled round as one.*

*The XK Jaguar left hurriedly, its tyres screeching as it accelerated away in a curve, and its place was taken by a grey and white Fiat. Big grey clouds began to roll over from the Automóvil Club building, presaging a storm and some relief in the heat for the morrow.*

*Fangio called for a fresh “ cafecito ” and leaned back in his chair, mopping his brow. A one-time driver strolled in with an enormous police dog and another*

*habitué* asked in indignant tones whether he thought this was a blessed zoo or something. Two Volkswagens whirred past, locked in combat, carried on round the park, tyres whining, and came to rest abruptly at the kerb in front of the café. Both drivers got out, laughing and each claiming that he had been faster from San Isidro to La Veredita.

“Nine minutes twelve seconds!” one of the two said emphatically.

“They wanted six thousand pesos to paint my car!” a voice bleated at a nearby table, and Fangio grinned and resumed his talking.

## CHAPTER IV

### *ROSARIO*

The 1947 International season had shown Argentina that she could run a successful series of International events, and also that some of her drivers were not so far behind the near-fabulous Europeans as had been thought. When that year rolled to a close, then, the newspapers started clamouring or more, and the Automóvil Club once again began to extend its feelers over Europe seeking suitable drivers to invite. The Argentine season was already known in Europe, Achille Varzi and Luigi Villoresi having spread the news on their return, and furthermore they paying public was immense and promised adequate financial support.

Consequently, after a few weeks of negotiations, Villoresi, Ruggieri, Rosa, Raph and Platé lined up with 1,500 c.c. four-cylinder Maseratis, Farina entered a 3-litre 8 CTF Maserati, Jean-Pierre Wimille a Simca-Gordini, and Varzi an Alfa-Romeo, V 12 4,500 c.c., while the only non-European foreigner entered was the Champion of Brazil, Chico Landi, who brought over his 3-litre Alfa. Furthermore, of these drivers, Georges Raph and Jean-Pierre Wimille represented the famous Ecurie Naphtra-Course, which at the instigation of the Automóvil Club brought over spare racing cars for two Argentine drivers, to be nominated.

Juan Manuel Fangio was chosen to drive one of them, and, years later, when Fangio's name was already famous in all the racing circles of the world, people wondered why he had been chosen in 1948 for one of the Ecurie Maseratis; those who knew always gave the same answer: for one thing, Juan Manuel had achieved fame on the road and on the tracks, but there was another contributory reason. When the A.C.A., made the necessary arrangements for the supply of two cars for Argentine drivers, it called up several of the best-known men on its rostrum and expounded the proposition to them.

When he was told, Fangio asked: "How much will it cost me?"

All the other drivers demanded, "How much shall I be paid?"

For the 1948 series, a new circuit was laid out in Palermo, the park-like residential district of Buenos Aires. In the middle of a wood, the start led to a sharp left-hander, then a right-hander on to a twisty section round an artificial lake, all the way round and back to a straight near the start, to a roundabout,

up a short straight, another roundabout and back to the start. It was a fairly slow circuit, but there was a long straight at the start which promised to give the faster machines a good chance.

Due mainly to the long straight, Wimille and Raph considered the two Simca-Gordinis they had brought would not have much of a chance, so they placed two Maseratis at the disposal of the A.C.A., who nominated Fangio and Oscar Gálvez to drive them. During the trials, however, Gálvez's car—perhaps due to its No. 13!—refused to go properly and the driver decided to use his faithful 3.8 Alfa-Romeo in the race. The event was to be split into two heats and a final, and with the exception of, perhaps, Gálvez and Pascual Puóppolo (3-litre Maserati) none of the Argentinos had many hopes. One of them, the late Andrés Fernández, who drove an antediluvian six-cylinder Maserati (of the type unsuccessfully developed to beat the E.R.A.s in 1936), remarked over the radio that he intended to ask the organizers to let him have the key to the circuit, so when he finished the race he could lock up and put the lights out... and after all he finished third in the final!

For Juan Manuel Fangio the great day had come. He arrived very early at the circuit, to find the Ecurie mechanics already warming up the Maserati engines. Practicing, it should be noted, took place in the early morning in those days, so as not to disturb city traffic too much. Fangio looked at his mount with some nervousness not unmixed with awe. So this was the famous Maserati. The mechanics, speaking in Italian, gave him some instructions. "Watch the oil pressure." "You will probably find she doesn't pull much below 3,500... the brakes are still a little fierce... let us know if you want the shock-absorbers adjusted..." and so on. A few days before he had been chatting with Wimille and Varzi, and they had given him a general idea of how to drive these cars, so new to him.

His apparent calm hiding his nervous excitement, Fangio pulled his driving gloves on and eased himself into the cockpit. He lifted a hand, put the car in gear and declutched, the mechanics pushed, he let in the clutch and was away. Diablos!... how this little car accelerated! It was something very, very different to his Chevy. He took the first few laps very gently, and then gradually began opening up, and soon his inherent ability overcame his initial nervousness. He was just beginning to have fun when he saw a mechanic waving a signboard at him, which meant he had to come in on the next lap. He went round once more, tore along the finishing straight, shut off the ignition and coasted into the pits.

The mechanics gathered round. "Does the engine pull?"

"Very much."

"The brakes?"

"Perfect."

"Oil temperature?"

"I didn't notice."

He climbed of the car, excited but now confident that he could drive these cars. Varzi watched him climb out, with a little smile on his lips, and listened to him telling about his experiences. Then he gave Juan Manuel some advice. Take all corners on the same line, he said. Fast corners should be taken close in and slow corners on the outside. Keep the engine revved up, these cars develop

power only at high revs. The instrument panel is there to be used. And so on.

The Italian maestro could not have found a more attentive pupil. Fangio had now found his *métier* and was anxious to get on in this type of racing. A born driver, he achieved 2 min. 39.4 sec. in training against the great Villorresi's 2 m. 37 sec. However, in the race he was unlucky, as he seared himself badly on the very first lap when he went too fast into a corner, and then three tours later his machine developed plug trouble and he had to retire. He had been going faster and faster after that first-lap incident, but then he had to stop.

Anyway, he couldn't complain. The Ecurie were satisfied with him and they assured him a car for the remaining races of the season. He knew he couldn't expect to win, but at least with some luck he could finish in a leading position. For the next week the A.C.A. organized a race in the coast city of Mar del Plata, on a picturesque Monte-Carlo-like circuit near one of the most luxurious beaches. Fangio drove down in his private car while the Maseratis went by rail, and while he sped across the flat plains of Buenos Aires province he meditated on the deep difference between racing on one's own and with an *équipe*. While he drove down on his own, with nothing to worry about, the mechanics loaded the cars on the train, fretted until they arrived safely at destination, gently unloaded them and then, once on the circuit, retook the endless fight to keep carburation and plugs in order, tyre pressure right, brakes adjusted, fuel-mixture spot-on, all those niggling worries and fears that continually harass the private owner. For him it was just a question of sitting down and driving.

In training Juan Manuel proved the fastest Argentine. Villorresi lapped in 2 min. 12.3 sec. with the works 1500 Maserati, and Fangio achieved 2 min. 15.3 sec. with the Naphtra-Course car, beating his eternal rival Oscar Gálvez by nearly 3 sec. Among a dozen starters, Fangio was fourth in the line-up, preceded in the front row by Villorresi (Maserati 4 CL), Farina (Maserati 8 CTF 3,000 c.c.), and Wimille (Alfa Romeo Type 308, 3-litre). The lap distance was 2.52 miles long, and distinctly slow. At the last moment Fangio's car developed radiator trouble, but it was repaired in time, and he was able to enjoy himself fully, racing along in third place most of the time, to the joy of his supporters from his native Balcarce, located only 90 miles from Mar del Plata. As can well be imagined, half the town turned up to cheer their favourite son on, although they were disappointed when on the eighteenth lap he had to stop due to plug trouble, caused by letting the engine revs drop too much on the hairpin bends. However, in spite of all that he finished fifth and was well satisfied.

That Mar del Plata race is of historical interest in that it is the only time the eight-cylinder 3-litre Maserati—driven by Farina in this case—ever won a European-style race. Only three of these machines were ever built. One was bought by public subscription in Argentina for the driver Raul Riganti in 1940. Riganti took it to Indianapolis but was unsuccessful with the car, which was sold and is at present in Argentina. Another one, driven by the late Wilbur Shaw, won twice at Indianapolis, in 1939 and 1940, slightly modified and running as an "O'Boyle Special", while the third model was the one in which Farina drove to victory in Mar del Plata. These cars were fast but very unreliable and, besides, after a few minutes racing, the cockpit became a boiling inferno in which it was impossible to sit.

The next week the "circus" travelled the 400-odd miles from Mar del Plata to Rosario, second city of Argentina, and with a picturesque park circuit strongly reminiscent of the Parc Bôrely, at Pau. It was a very twisty, slow circuit and the Ecurie resolved to try out the two little 1.43-litre unsupercharged Simca-Gordinis for this event. Tiny, lively, the little French cars seemed made to measure for the Rosario circuit. However, they would require an entirely different handling technique to the Maseratis, so Fangio was enjoined to be early for the practising in order to get his hand well in for the race, particularly as, like nearly all Argentine drivers, he was a believer in the virtues of sheer horsepower outputs and was distrustful of the art of winning by superior cornerability. He did manage to get in a quick visit to his parents in Balcarce, where, as can be expected, he received a king's reception. He found it very hard to hear himself away and had to drive like mad to reach Rosario in good time.

At first the little Simca seemed singularly slow after the 220 b.h.p. four-cylinder Maserati, but he soon got into the swing of things, and startled everybody by lapping in 1 min. 49.2 sec., making the second fastest time to Oscar Gálvez 1 min. 49 sec., and no less than 1.5 sec. faster than Wimille, the acknowledged champion Simca exponent!

There was much that was new within the "circus". Villoresi strode up and down complaining about the engine and the suspension of his Maserati. Farina had struck trouble in Buenos Aires with the 3-litre Maserati and took over Ruggeri's 1.5 job instead. Achille Varzi's 4.6 Alfa, second in Mar del Plata, would not go, so Varzi took over Wimille's 3-litre model. Landi changed pistons in B.A. and drove the Alfa down by road to Rosario.

The day of the race was hot and damp. The park's trees dripped dampness, the drivers walked around mopping their brows, mechanics glowered pessimistically at the engines, white-coated boys roved around selling ice drinks.

The crowd, separated from the official enclosure by a row of wooden palings, gaped and pointed out excitedly every time they saw a figure they recognized. Fangio strolled around nervously, uncertain about his new mount. "It goes very well", he said to one journalist, "But I'm not sure that I am fully in control of it yet. On the bends it seems to want to break away, but you get ready to correct and it doesn't break away at all". He shook his head and wandered off.

Gradually the hour drew near for the start. Fangio got his car and allowed himself to be pushed to the starting line. His engine was started and he blipped the throttle, mechanically studying the instruments while he thought about the race ahead. Then the flag was raised... his right foot instinctively sank a little... the flag dropped... and he was off!

On that start, four men tore off, fighting for the lead: Gálvez, Farina, Wimille and Fangio. Varzi stripped his rear-drive pinion a few yards from the start, and retired with a shrug, and Gálvez went into the lead and stayed there. On the seventh lap Farina dropped out, while Villoresi flashed past his pit shaking his head. The others were fast, though. Gálvez averaged 56.5 m.p.h. over the first five laps, while Wimille raced along in second place and Fangio

was third. Gálvez drove magnificently in these early laps, slinging his ponderous machine about as if it were a lightweight, but the two little blue Simcas were never very far behind. The small cars were very much faster into the curves, but Gálvez' blown 3,800 c.c. pulled the Alfa away very hard once he'd got around, and so things went for fifteen laps, while Fangio, driving as he never had before, got to within 1 sec. of Wimille, in a third place which abruptly became second when the crowd realized with a groan that Gálvez' big car had stopped, having stripped its crown wheel.

Wimille went into the lead and Fangio raced along behind, the crowd frantically urging him on, and the race now developed into a bitter dog-fight between the two Simca-drivers, as Fangio pulled out all the stops and gradually caught and passed the Frenchman. Everyone else dropped behind, and the average, which had fallen slightly when Gálvez retired, crept back to 56.5 and stayed there. The heat and dampness were now forgotten, and the crowd began edging on to the road to see which car appeared first. Policeman hoarsely waved them back, the loudspeakers pleaded with them to be careful, and still the frantic battle went on in crescendo. Wimille was plainly driving in a more polished way, managing to get fourth gear in along some short straights, which Fangio was manifestly unable to do. Even so, he managed to lead twice, between laps 17 and 25.

Then on lap 26, Wimille hurtled past the stands with no shadow trailing him. Tension grew into a sick despair when it was realized that the other little Simca was missing, and then Landi hurtled past in second place, then Villoresi with the sick Maserati, and still no Fangio. Then, a gasp of relief when the loudspeakers blared forth metallically, "Fangio has retired with engine trouble. He is completely unhurt." The gasket had blown and the car would no longer go, the water temperature went sky-high. Fangio barely managed to fill second place on laps completed, but at least he achieved fastest lap in 1 min. 48.3 sec., almost a second faster than in training.

When the European Press heard this news it was profoundly shaken. Even if it was admitted that Fangio had probably over-revved his engine, to be able to keep up and pass the great Wimille was, for a South American driver, little short of miraculous. People began to wonder and promise themselves that next year they, too, would go along and see what happened around those parts.



## CHAPTER V

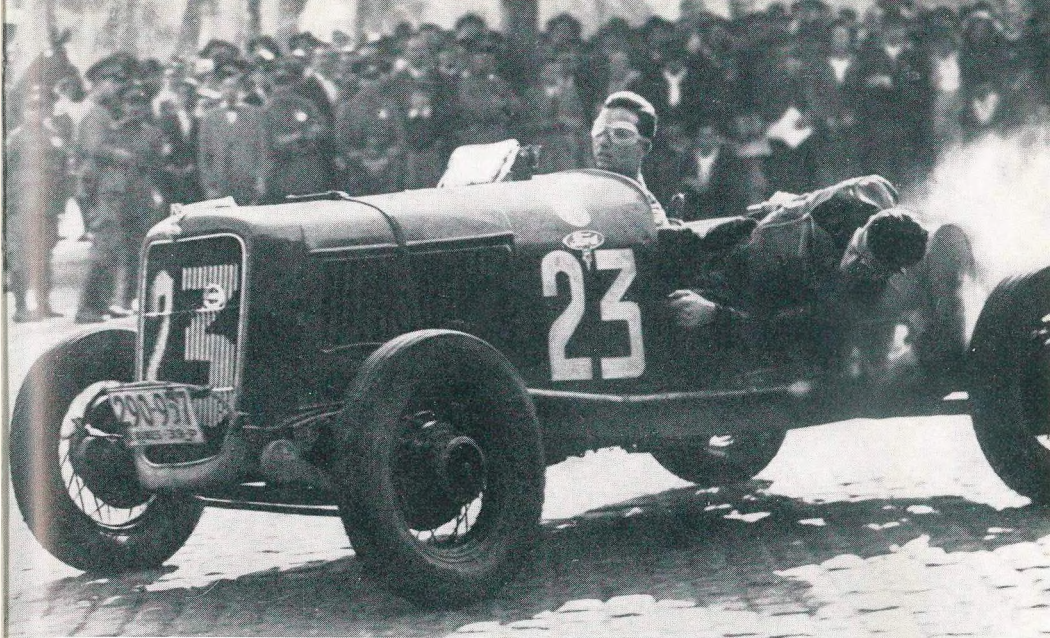
### *LIGHT AND SHADE*

After Rosario there was a great hubbub, and M. Gordini declared publicly he had not known which of the drivers would win until Fangio blew up. The European Press was understandably shaken by this performance, and the muttering took some time to die down.

Then came Palermo again, but here the little Simcas were hopelessly outclassed, and after experimenting with innumerable axle ratios Fangio started but soon gave it up as a bad job. His disappointment increased when Oscar Gálvez, who had been leading easily from Luigi Villoresi with his 3.8 Alfa, lost the race due to a badly organized pitstop.

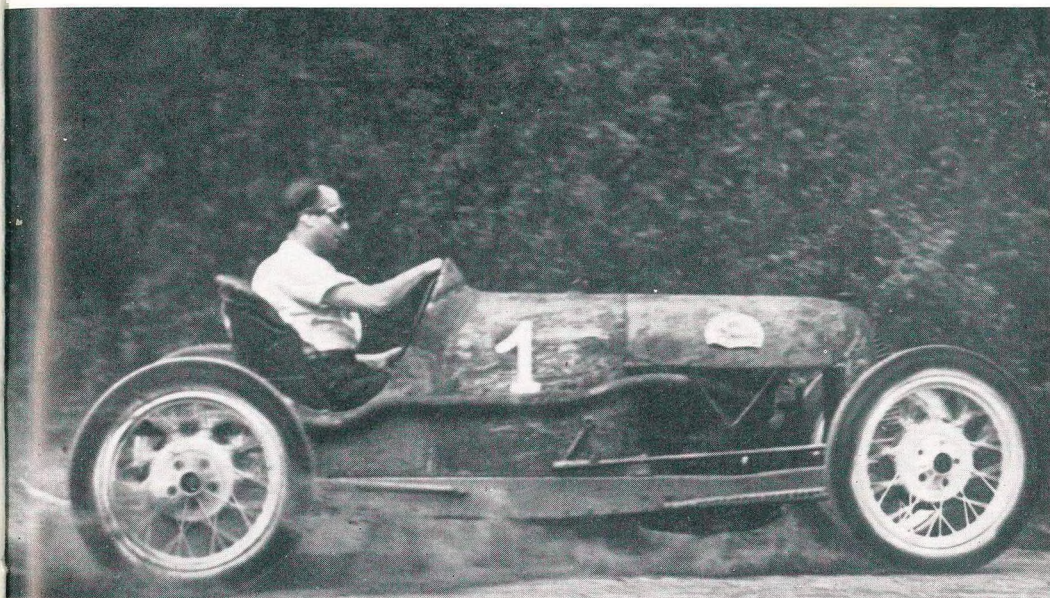
Once the hubbub of International Racing had died down, and people began to take stock, it was seen that the apparently impossible was near to achievement: an Argentine driver able to meet the Europeans on equal terms. The fans, as ever sharply divided into Fangistas and Galvistas, began to clamour for better "opportunities" for their heroes, and thus the Argentine Government decided in 1948 to send a few drivers to Europe for a first-hand look at the racing scene there. For even if the whole set-up had been transplanted to Argentina for the season, the indefinable "atmosphere" was lacking, and furthermore these drivers had never seen a racing-car factory at work. Clémar Bucci and Pascual Puóppolo went first, and later Fangio and Oscar Gálvez. They went first to Indianapolis, and Fangio has never forgotten that first impression. He has made a resolve to race and if possible win in that event, which is so different from all the other World Championship races held in Europe and Argentina. Where on "European-type" circuits one is continually braking, changing gear and accelerating, on the Hoosier Bowl only one gear is used and instead of braking one simply cuts off for the fast, banked bends. The speed, the great danger, the immense prize money, all adds up to the fabulous Indianapolis picture—and Fangio hopes to be part of that picture one day.

After Indianapolis the Argentines went to Europe, and what they saw filled them with wonder. At home they had been used to working amongst greasy and rusty parts, old auto seats, Primus stoves boiling water for the inevitable "mate", and a liberal profusion of nuts and washers strewed all



**ANTI-CENTRIFUGAL.** Fangio driving the V8-engined Special with which he scored his first successes. The attitude taken up by his riding mechanic is distinctly worthy of note as an evidence of the poor cornering powers of the "Mecánica Nacional" cars of those days.

**TIN LIZZIE ON THE TRACK.** Fangio racing with a Ford T-engined Special in one of the races which were frequently held for those cars in Argentina. The Ford T class is still existant, although it is gradually dying out. Some remarkable speeds have been achieved by these Specials.





**RICKENBACKER RAMPANT.** In one of the early post-war Mecánica Nacional races Fangio drove this Special fitted with a Rickenbacker engine. The Rickenbacker was an American car which folded in the late twenties. This engine was later replaced by a Chevrolet.

**THE RAINS CAME.** In 1948 Fangio won the Autumn Grand Prix for Mecánica Nacional cars in the Palermo Circuit, the race acting as a curtain-raiser for the Buenos Aires Grand Prix for International drivers, which was run immediately afterwards.



over the floor, so when they saw the ateliers in the Old Continent they were amazed.

In the Grand Prix de France, which was preceded by the Coupe des Petites Cylindrées for small cars, Fangio was entered in both events by M. Gordini, but evidently the Rosario spirit was not with him that day and he failed to put up an impressive performance. By that time, of course, the Rosario commotion had been entirely forgotten, and nobody noticed Fangio's driving. His car broke down in both races, too, which further increased his gloom. He felt very unhappy that day: his Golden Grail had seemed almost within his grasp, and he had lost his chance! He is given to gloomy brooding, and it took some time before Oscar could make him see things in a more favourable light. Anyway, this was his first race in Europe, although little did he know what was in store for him a few months later...

When he got home there was great commotion. The Automóvil Club had this time decided to stage the motor race to end all motor races, and had organized a Gran Premio between Buenos Aires and Caracas, in Venezuela, 6,000 miles away. Every possible condition would be met by the drivers. They would race at 100 m.p.h. along superhighways and plunge off them to plough through oceans of mud. The deserts of Santiago del Estero, the mountains of Potosí, 10,000 ft. high Lake Titicaca, steaming jungles, sun-baked rock. One day they would be gasping for breath higher than airliners fly, the next they would be perspiring in a dank jungle. Nearly a hundred started: only a handful would finish, but that handful need not feel ashamed of themselves wherever bravery and endurance were mentioned. Years before a famous Italian driver had entered for a Gran Premio with an Alfa saloon, but after practising on some of the trickier parts of the course, had exclaimed "These men are crazy!" and gone back to his native land...

On the incredible first stage, over 1,000 miles long, Oscar Gálvez averaged over 75 m.p.h. from Buenos Aires to Salta, a trip which took him 15 hours and which any normal tourist would be glad to do in three days... Fangio met with a lot of mechanical trouble and finished 79th., and to the next stage wrote one of the great stories of the Grandes Premios by passing more than seventy cars in five hours, by night and on the twisty, dangerous mountain roads, where a single mistake usually meant a terrible crash. From Villazón to Potosí and the silver mines of Bolivia he struck trouble again and could do no better than 46th., while in front the two Gálvez brothers, Oscar and Juan, fought savagely for the lead.

From Potosí to La Paz Fangio had better luck and delighted his fans by winning the stage by seconds from Oscar Gálvez, although he was still a long way behind in the general classification. He was still in the race and things were looking up, when disaster struck.

\* \* \*

"From Lima to Tumbes was a long lap—600-odd miles—which meant that we had to start off in the very early morning in order to arrive at Tumbes before midday and the fierce heat of the early afternoon. I was really keen on

winning this stage, because I had hopes of being able to recuperate lost time—after all, there was a long way to go yet—and so started out thirteenth but soon managed to pass a few cars and before long I was right behind Oscar. It was pitch-dark and very clear and cold, as it always is in the mountains.

I raced along behind Oscar's car for a time, and then decided to make my bid to pass him. I tried once, was unsuccessful, and then I thought I saw a gap I could get through. It was on a bend, a dangerous place to pass, and suddenly, I don't know how, the nose of my car struck the tail of Oscar's, and as if a giant hand had swept it off the road it swung round, skidded off and rolled round and round. I don't remember very much about it, but when I came to I managed to find a torch and discovered to my horror that my co-driver, Daniel Urrutía, was still unconscious and seemed badly hurt. Desperately I tried to administer first aid and then, realizing it was useless, ran to the road and managed to stop one of the cars. It belonged to Eusebio Marcilla, the 'Gentleman of the Road', and Marcilla took Urrutía and I to the hospital, although it was too late to save Daniel, who passed away that night without recovering consciousness.

That, I think, was my bitterest hour."

\* \* \*

That incredible race saw an equally incredible performance by the two Gálvez brothers, who duelled for the lead and won all the laps between them except one or two, and then, on the last lap, Juan went off the road and Oscar damaged his engine trying to pull his brother's car out. This led to a really amazing epilogue, as when the race was practically won, both Gálvez brothers retired almost at the gates of Caracas, and the man who had been third, Domingo Marimón, won the race to his own amazement! It should be mentioned that Marcilla was second, and had he not lost nearly twenty minutes a few days before taking Urrutía to hospital, he would have won on aggregate time. Verily, a whole book could be written about that amazing 1948 Gran Premio from Buenos Aires to Caracas.

The 1949 Argentine Season started off with tragedy. Jean-Pierre Wimille had come back to race his little blue Simca, and was killed one morning practising on the old Palermo circuit.

Palermo was actually a park circuit which used streets normally open to traffic, so they held the practice sessions in the early morning, from 6 to 8 a.m., so as not to upset the normal flow of business. One morning Wimille was one of the first at the track. This was to be just another practice morning, just another opportunity to learn the course. Wimille was not particularly keen on the Palermo race: he was hoping to do well in Rosario, as the year before. In Palermo, with its fairly long straight, the new Maseratis driven by the Italians and by Juan Manuel Fangio and Benedicto Campos simply left the little Simca standing.

The Simca shot off, casting long shadows in the early morning sun, and in about two minutes forty seconds the car should be back. Slowly the hands in Mme Wimille's chronometer swept round and round, as first two minutes,

then 2:30, came round and now the pit men were craning their necks to see the little blue car come down the straight. 2:45 and not even an engine note suggesting an impending arrival! At 3 min. it was clear something was wrong. He had gone off the road, maybe, or stopped to adjust something on the way. A mechanic dashed off and as the blood drained slowly away from Mme Wimille's face, surprise turned to wonder and then fear. The chronometer ticked on and she felt like smashing it on the tarmac. A swell of voices half-lent confirmation to her worse fears. The mechanic came walking back. Her husband had crashed and been taken to hospital. When she arrived she no sooner entered the big white reception-room than she knew the answer. Jean-Pierre Wimille was dead.

Perhaps the soul of Wimille was, after all, glad that its body died in the cockpit of a blue racing car, because Wimille loved France's blue as he loved life itself, and even when he raced a scarlet Alfa Romeo for the Milan team his overalls were always sky-blue. As an engineering student Wimille raced Bugattis, won the French Grand Prix three times and Le Mans twice, the second time on that historic 1939 race when, with a 3.3-litre supercharged Bugatti, Wimille set up a record which stood until 1950. Later he was Champion of Europe with the Alfettas, but although in an Italian team, he was a French driver first and foremost, and it was in a French car that he was killed that morning in Palermo.

The causes of the accident are obscure, but the glare of the rising sun probably struck him and blinded him. The car spun off and struck a tree: Wimille was thrown out, instinctively stood up but almost immediately collapsed. An ambulance appeared quickly, but when the white car screeched through the hospital gates Jean-Pierre Wimille had fled to a Place where it is always blue...

\* \* \*

That was an historic season. Ascari won the first Buenos Aires race: a rookie on the Maserati team, he had come from Italy bursting with ambition to win, and when the flag fell he shot off and was uncatchable. The next week, also in Palermo, Gálvez, who had so nearly won in 1948 with his big old 3.8 Alfa Romeo, managed to pull it off this time, and Fangio, running with failing brakes in the brand-new 4 CLT Maserati which the Automóvil Club had entered him in, was second, although some distance behind. In Rosario it rained and Farina (Ferrari) and Parnell (Maserati) fought it out, with victory going to the Italian after a hard race.

Then came Mar del Plata, and we leave the floor to Fangio himself.

"Oscar had shown us all in Palermo that with determination and a bit of elementary luck we could hope to beat the Europeans, so when the time came round for Mar del Plata I was determined to make a good job of this race. By this time I was on much closer terms with my car, which was of the 'San Remo' 4 CLT type and much more powerful than the 4 CL I had driven for the Ecurie Naphtra-Course the year before.

During practising in Mar del Plata I went pretty well, and I thought that with a bit of luck I might be able to force the issue on the Sunday. As you can imagine, I was pretty nervous while waiting for the start, particularly on

the line when I kept asking myself if the oil pressure would hold, whether I had got over my early failing of letting the revs drop and oiling plugs, whether the brakes were properly bedded in... Suddenly the flag was raised and I had no time to think anymore. I put my right foot on the brake and accelerator and my left gently eased in the clutch... the flag fell and I was away! The first curve was, as far as I can remember, pretty hectic, but anyhow I got through and was, I think, fourth or fifth on the first lap. Then I moved up into third behind Ascari and Villoresi, but Ascari ran into trouble and that left me second with Villoresi leading.

I suppose I was more or less inspired that day, or maybe it was just one of those days when everything goes properly. Anyhow, I passed Villoresi fairly early on, and from then on all I can remember to tell you is that nobody else passed me and I won the race.

When I had finished my lap of honour and shut the engine off while coasting into the pits, I felt entirely transfigured, different somehow. Now I knew that I could do nothing else but race in Grands Prix and that night I was interviewed by radio and said I hoped that the Automóvil Club would send a small team to Europe. I didn't expect to have much chance in Europe, but was hoping that we could win one race at least, which would be wonderful for us.

A few days later in Buenos Aires I was called to the Automóvil Club and they said they were going to send a team of two Maseratis and two Simcas to Europe, and they wanted to know if I was willing to lead the team. Naturally, you can imagine what my answer was."

## CHAPTER VI

### *THE EUROPEAN SAGA*

“When we left Buenos Aires, we had a pretty big reception committee. A big crowd of people turned up to see us off, and I was hoping that we wouldn't disappoint them. I remember I told several people that I was hoping to win at least one race, if luck was with me. Or possibly Benedicto Campos might win it, because Benedicto was a good driver, very fast, although he was rather inclined to let things blow up under him.

Anyhow, we got off all right and arrived in San Remo, where the first race of the European season was to be held. There was quite a good crowd there, although the Ferrari team didn't show up because their cars were not ready yet. In practice I had quite a struggle with Bira, and Bira made fastest lap in practising on the Friday, although I beat that on the Saturday and set up the best time. Then in the race I shot off and led all the way through. Bira made the fastest lap in the race, though.

Well, I'd done it already, and a lot sooner than I'd expected. Really I was overjoyed. Of course I'd won in Mar del Plata, but it was entirely different to pull it off in Europe itself, and I felt as if I'd reached the top of the world that time. You know Bucci drove in San Remo the year before, when the San Remo Maseratis first appeared, and was third to Villoresi and Ascari. I sent a very happy telegramme to my people and I also received a number of cables from well-wishers in Argentina. The Maserati had gone beautifully.

After this we had to go to Pau, but by this time we were seven, with Benedicto, our team manager Bignami, his cousin Franzoni, our head mechanic Bernardo Pérez, and two Italian mechanics, and myself. Franzoni was hurriedly called as book-keeper after we had succeeded in getting our accounts in a mess. You see, even now I haven't learned how to keep figures straight.

In Pau I won as well, against more or less the same crowd. Emmanuel de Graffenried gave me a pretty good race. Campos was third here, as well, and driving much more wisely than I thought he would.

Those were great days. We all worked together on the cars, in our headquarters, Galleate. You know Achille Varzi's father, Menotti Varzi, insisted on our going there. Varzi was very fond of Argentina and had planned on coming here to stay after his retirement from motor racing, and to start a



school for racing drivers. Unfortunately he was killed practising for the 1948 Swiss Grand Prix...

When old Ingiere Varzi heard we were coming over he wrote to the Automóvil Club offering Varzi's workshop and his own house for us, and the A.C.A. were naturally overjoyed at the offer. The hospitality we were given there was tremendous, really. Whenever one of us would appear the urchins would shout 'Gli Argentini!' which would be a signal for all rest to crowd round us, demanding autographs. Of course, we weren't all Argentine, but still...

The children were funny, like anywhere else. They used to hang around the workshop a lot, and sometimes they picked up words which were not really adequate for young ears, but as they were in Spanish, the kids didn't know the difference. And many times one of us would be stopped on the street by beaming parents who would proudly tell us that young Gianni was learning to speak in Spanish. Then the child would innocently let off a string of obscenities and we would have to control our mirth and assure the parents that Gianni's Spanish was very good indeed!

We all learnt a lot about the cars in those days. We didn't know very much about maintenance of Grand Prix cars, of course, and had to learn the hard way. That meant that our Maseratis were soon in need of a good overhaul... Anyhow, we took the two little Simcas to Marseilles, where there was a race for unsupercharged cars only, and here Benedicto won his heat, I was second in mine against Etancelin's Talbot, and I won the Final.

Of course, my lucky streak couldn't go on for ever, and although I won the Grand Prix du Roussillon at Perpignan, when the time rolled round for the Grand Prix of Rome for Formula 2 cars, all I could scrounge was a 2-litre two-seater Maserati, and this car blew up, while Benedicto also retired with one of the Simcas. But by this time I had lost the cork.

Now when I say I had lost the cork I mean that after San Remo we had a victory dinner, and one of the champagne corks which we sent flying through the air landed in my lap. This is considered a very good omen in Argentina, and Benedicto told me to keep it as it would bring me luck. It did so until Marseilles, but in the rush of leaving that city I lost it—and lost the next race! What a curious coincidence!

Well, by this time things were a bit rough. We'd practically run out of money, and furthermore the Maseratis were by this time simply crying for factory attention. Benedicto and I did a few laps in the Belgian Grand Prix to collect starting money, but we knew very well neither of us stood a chance during the race, although we wound up the machines during practising and got away with some decent practice laps.

The Belgian starting money didn't last us long, and I finally came to the decision to wire home to my friends to sell my Chevrolet and wire me the money, but when I had done this the Automóvil Club Argentino heard about it and immediately put more funds at our disposal. Not content with this, they advised me that I had a 2-litre Ferrari waiting for me at the Ferrari works! I cannot thank them enough for what they did in 1949 and for what they have done since then.

Well, we had the Gran Premio dell'Autodromo coming up, so I dashed to Modena to collect the new Ferrari, which I found barely finished and on test at the airfield (the circuit hadn't been built yet). I took it to Monza, but as soon as I started practising something went wrong with the gearbox and I spent all Saturday night under the car replacing the layshaft. Thus Sunday morning came round and I hardly knew either car or track.

Anyhow, we got started and from the beginning I was mixed up in a pretty good scrap, and although I didn't think it would, the car held together, and after Ascari and Villoresi had dropped out I found myself in the lead. By this time the oil temperature gauge was getting near its limit stop, and I couldn't get third gear. I carried on, although the cockpit was boiling by this time, and I can tell you I prayed pretty hard.

I never thought the car would last out, but the laps kept reeling off and although that confounded red needle was by this time well past its limit stop I managed to keep ahead of Bonetto, and when the race was beginning to seem interminable to me I saw Campos come out on to the road with a sign which read 'Last lap'. What a relief that was! I didn't relax until I'd been given the chequered flag, but as soon as I was past I slumped back in my seat and I think the car must have driven itself round the lap of honour.

As you can imagine, I was particularly keen on getting my name down on the roll of victors at Monza, and thus I was overjoyed at winning this race. It took three years before I managed to win again at Monza..."

\* \* \*

The Monza race served to put a stop to some comments that had been originated in Argentina by "sports reporters" who apparently knew more about football than motor racing. As Fangio had invariably won on slow courses, and had retired in the fast Belgian Grand Prix, some of them seized on the idea that he was "no good for fast courses" and at one time this mistaken belief took hold, ignoring the fact that at Spa the Maseratis were on their last legs. Anyway, Monza got rid of all those weird ideas.

The Gran Premio dell'Autodromo came just in time to administer a badly-needed shot to morale, because feelings were very low after Spa and they didn't expect to win at Monza either, as the car had acted up in practice. However, after collecting the Monza prize money they sent the two Maseratis to Modena for an overhaul and when the cars returned entered for the Grand Prix d'Albigeois at Albi. The race was split up into a 5-lap preliminary to decide starting positions for the final, and the final itself, and the 5-lapper was a really tremendous affair, with Fangio and Farina (Maseratis) scrapping fiercely during the five laps, and Fangio shot home to win by a few feet, and thus started in first place for the final. When the flag was dropped again Fangio immediately hurtled into the lead with Farina behind, and between them both master drivers quickly left the rest of the field standing.

Meanwhile Campos retired with sunstroke—the heat was terrific that day—and many competitors were coming in regularly for water for themselves and their cars. Then refuelling time came round: Fangio fuelled quickly and was

off, but when Farina came in he got his fuel in all right, but the car wouldn't start afterwards! The regulations at Albi forbade strictly any starting other than on the handle, and this component proved useless as the engine would not respond to it. Infuriatingly enough, after the race they pushed the car a couple of yards and it fired immediately. This, of course, left Fangio out in the lead, and he cantered home to win by three minutes from Bira.

Albi was followed by the French Grand Prix, the Classic of Classics, immediately preceded by a Formula 2 race for the Coupe des Petites Cylindrées, just where Fangio had made his unauspicious European debut the year before. By this time Fangio was a prominent figure and a top-money attraction at the Grands Prix, which shows just how far he went in one year.

However, his luck wasn't any better than in 1948. He led the Petites Cylindrées Cup until he broke the gearlever of the 2-litre Ferrari, and in the Grand Prix Fangio and Campos made the running right from the beginning, but became involved in a rather unwise personal duel and as a consequence both blew up.

Fangio felt that this was the time to call it a day, so they left the racing cars at the works for a good overhaul and flew back, all except Campos who stayed on to drive in the 1949 Gran Premio d'Italia for Maserati. He put up an excellent show but threw a con-rod while second.

The season had been a great success: 10 starts, 6 wins. Not bad at all!

## CHAPTER VII

### *RECEPTION EXTRAORDINARY*

In the four-engined plane flying back from Paris, Fangio mentally went over the many good things which had occurred to him in the last few months. When he had thought it presumptuous to hope for one victory on the Continent, he had obtained six, and his team were among the most sought-after in the game. The Automóvil Club Argentino had every reason to feel satisfied that their efforts and expense had not been effected in vain. Although he probably did not realize it fully in the 'plane, Fangio was, in his own country, a national hero. In four months—he won at San Remo on the third of April and started for the last time in the French Grand Prix on July 17th—this amazing achievement had been carried out by seven men, working like slaves and driving like masters. Let the future bring what it may, Fangio felt that he had got over the hump, the worst was already behind him, for even if the A.C.A. could not face another heavy financial outlay for the next year, he had received so many tempting propositions in Europe that he knew he would be fixed up one way or the other.

He looked out of the window and saw the lights of Rio de Janeiro beneath him. The giant bird delayed for a few minutes in the Brazilian capital and then pointed its snout towards the River Plate.

\* \* \*

Dusk was falling softly over the Buenos Aires countryside when the engines of an aircraft were heard approaching the Ezeiza airport, and although dozens of planes arrive and leave that field daily, this one carried a special message to the tens of thousands of people gathered in the airport.

"That's him!" someone shouted.

The airport presented a really amazing spectacle. Wherever the eye could see, there were people, of every walk of life. The street Arab rubbed shoulders with the aristocrat from Avenida Santa Fé and the middle-class burgher from Calle Boedo. An ocean of private cars, buses, trucks, and two-wheelers choked the four-lane highway leading to the vast airport. The lucky ones who

had come early had managed to grab places on the huge observation terrace, but the vast majority had to content themselves with swarming around and finding a place as near as possible to the spot where the plane would land.

The police officer in charge of the airport had desperately called up his central office for reinforcements, and even as the little speck in the sky grew larger, a column of large open-sided Ford personnel trucks wove through the crowd, sirens screaming shrilly, lights ablaze. In the administration offices, the few employees on the night watch left their desks and gathered round the windows which offered the best vantage points.

In the 'plane, the occupants knew nothing of all this, could not see down as it was so dark, and so the pilot received his routine clearance, set his huge charge down safely, braked it to a stop, and took off his peaked cap with a gesture of weariness. He looked absently out of his side windows and suddenly sat bolt upright. *Cáspita!* What were all these people doing here? Surely they couldn't all have come to welcome Fangio back. Had he any other famous passengers on board? He ran his mind over the passenger list and concluded not. Meanwhile Juan Manuel Fangio had picked up his raincoat and his briefcase and was shuffling towards the exit. When he stepped out of the plane, he was instantly blinded by a battery of photographers' flash bulbs, and instinctively winced. Then, when his sight returned, he saw a vast throng of people cheering and waving at him.

Astonished, he mechanically eased himself down the steps, and when he reached the concrete floor the crowd broke through the police cordon and instantly were on top of him, kissing him, gripping his hand, pulling him... fortunately the police managed to restore order and form a protective cordon round him, and he managed to make his painful way to a large automobile which awaited him. Through the windows he saw something which moved him deeply: a big crowd of men was going through the mob carrying a standard which said, in large red letters: "The Gálvez fans salute the champion Fangio". Only to one who knew the depth of feeling between "galvistas" and "fangistas" could the full meaning of this homage be understood.

Once clear of the crowd and traffic jams, the limousine, escorted by an enormous caravan of cars and trucks, gradually wended its way to the President's residence, where another enormous crowd awaited him. Astonished, amazed, he got out of the car and when his hands instinctively went to straighten his tie he suddenly discovered it had been torn off him by a souvenir-hunter in Ezeiza! When he finally met the President, he shook hands with Fangio and then embraced him, telling him that the whole country was grateful for his achievements in Europe.

That night Fangio was the guest of honour at a reception lavishly laid on by a large textile firm, which had contributed part of the expenses of the tour. The firm's managing director thanked Fangio deeply for the immense satisfaction he had given every Argentine, and his hand was pumped repeatedly by such old friends as the Gálvez brothers, the Marimóns father and son, Señor Borgonovo of the Automóvil Club Argentino, relatives, and everybody in general.

In the following few days dozens of toy racing cars appeared in the shops, countless products were named after him, and a composer wrote a tango based

on his life. All the magazines carried his portrait on their covers, and his comings and goings were daily reported in the papers for weeks. However, he did not stay long in Buenos Aires, fleeing to Balcarce as soon as he could get away. Somehow during the trip word got around that he was on his way and as his Alfa Romeo coupé snarled along he saw the sides of the road lined by thousands of cheering fans... and, of course, in Balcarce probably the city's entire twenty thousand population turned out to welcome him home. Never, since the days of Carlos Gardel, the most famous of all tango singers, had the country been so shaken by a public figure. However, soon the excitement died down and Fangio could take a few days of well-earned rest.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *FOUR-LEAF CLOVER*

“Towards November I began to feel the yen to go Gran Premio-racing again. By this time I was pretty well assured of a place in a team as a Grand Prix driver, but I wanted to have another fling at the roads, because Gran Premio racing has a certain attraction of its own. There you don't measure time in fractions of seconds but in minutes or hours, and you can be stuck for two hours and still win the race. In 1948 I had lost hours and yet would have had a chance were it not for my crash. So I started working on the Chevrolet again.

When Bignami heard about this he was horrified. In 1949 they decided to make the Gran Premio even longer than in 1948, and although it didn't leave Argentine territory to avoid Customs troubles and to cut down costs, it had gone up to 7,000 miles, which is quite a distance. It started out in Buenos Aires and the first stage cut through the treeless Pampas of Buenos Aires to the big grain centre of Bahia Blanca, then through the Higher Patagonia to cold, windy Comodoro Rivadavia, along the main centre of the oil country. From then ever southwards to Rio Gallegos and Rio Mayo, snowbound all year, and not far from the Antarctic, and then northwards again, through Mendoza to the sun-bleached provinces of Jujuy and la Rioja, the wheatfields of Santa Fé back to Buenos Aires.

Anyway, Bignami lifted up his hands in horror and said that I could not, must not start. He explained that driving a Maserati and a Chevrolet are two entirely different things.

‘You drive a Maserati with the tips of your fingers, easing it along’, he said, ‘you change gear gently, delicately... everything is done with calm and precision. Now driving one of these battleships’, he jabbed a scornful finger at the Chevrolet, ‘you have to hold it on the road, and holding a ton-and-a-half of car on a rough mule track at 100 m.p.h. is an entirely different proposition. If you drive this car you'll lose all the finesse for the Grand Prix cars.’

I suppose Bignami was right, but I had to have one last fling with the Chevrolet, and I went on working on the car. As soon as we started out, however, I realized that my rivals had stolen a march on me while I was away. A lot of new-fangled speed equipment was coming from the United States just then, and furthermore speed shops in this country were working on modifica-

tions of the American designs to suit our conditions more closely, so I found everyone had all sorts of weird camshafts, multi-carburettor manifolds, dry-sump lubrication systems, and what-have-you.

So when we started out I couldn't do any better than gradually work my way up into second place, a long way behind Juan Gálvez, who started that year on his first of three successive Gran Premio wins. I ran into a lot of gearbox trouble on the way but nevertheless I was able to take two stages off Juan, although there was no hope of winning the General Classification unless he broke down.

Well, after this interlude I decided to obey Bignami and sold my car, resolving to do no more road-work, at least for some time."

\* \* \*

After this everyone started getting ready for the 1950 season, of which the first race was actually held in late December, 1949. From the Fangio angle the story is soon told. Like Ascari and Villoresi, he drove a long-chassis 2-litre supercharged Ferrari, and in the first Buenos Aires race Ascari made the running all the way, while Fangio passed Villoresi about half-way through and finished second. In the second Buenos Aires event, Ascari retired just after the start, and Fangio was leading when he struck a kerb and had to come in to change a wheel, which wouldn't budge an inch. In trying to change it they lost four minutes, and those four minutes naturally proved unreplaceable. Fangio finished fourth.

Then they moved off to Mar del Plata, the local fans not unnaturally a bit impatient this time to see Fangio win, and here Ascari won because Fangio and Villoresi collided and both had to retire, although no personal damage was done. This raised a storm amongst the less responsible elements of the Argentine Press, some of whom directly or indirectly accused Luigi Villoresi of having deliberately run into Fangio so as to facilitate the victory of his team-mate Ascari. This was a manifestly absurd statement, but which took a lot of killing, and at one time Villoresi did not want to start in the last race of the season, at Rosario.

Rosario was rather a circus, as the cars were by this time too big and powerful for the tight little park circuit, and some weird and wonderful things were seen that day. Ascari retired, Fangio climbed a lamp post with his Ferrari while trying to pass a slower competitor, and Villoresi won from Campos, who put up a brilliant show but was not as fast as the Italian, especially as he only had the short-chassis Ferrari ex-Formula 2, now converted to Formule Libre by the addition of a supercharger, and this chassis was definitely not suited to the great power of the blown engine. This ended a season which was definitely unsatisfactory from the strictly Argentine point of view, but in motor racing one never looks back, and one day...

\* \* \*

... a black-and-red Alfa Romeo coupé hurtled along the Via Traiano and came to a stop in front of the office of a huge building—the head office of



Alfa Romeo S.p.A., Milan. The engine was heard to bark once or twice as the driver revved it up preparatory to switching off, and as the off-side door opened two men got out of the car, one short, stocky and swarthy of visage, the other stout and balding, complaining about the heat, and the third would have been recognized by any follower of motor sport as Juan Manuel Fangio, the brilliant newcomer from the South. The other two were Juan Carlos Guzzi, of the Automóvil Club Argentino, and José Froilán González, who had made a most successful debut in the Palermo race a few weeks previously, finishing fifth in a 4 CL Maserati, during the process of which he effectively beat all the 4 CLTs!

They straightened out their rumpled clothes, and, as they went in, Fangio takes it from here.

\* \* \*

“When I received the cable from Alfa Romeo I thought I was in a seventh Heaven. They had been away from the circuits in 1949, after discovering that in the post-war period they had nobody to race against, as neither Maserati nor Talbot were fast enough. Furthermore, they had lost all their team when Wimille and Varzi were killed in practising for Grand Prix events and Count Trossi died a sick man in the winter of 1948. After a breathing space in 1949, they felt that 1950 was appropriate to stage a comeback, and when they started to look around for drivers they were kind enough to select me as a possibility, so they cabled me to go and see them when next I was in Europe.

Naturally I went like a shot. When I got to the works with Froilán and Guzzi, we were shown in to the office of Dr. Alessio, the Alfa managing Director, and after a few pleasantries Dr. Alessio leaned back in his chair and, looking over his joined fingertips, spoke very slowly and distinctly.

‘Our firm,’ he said, ‘has decided to return to Grand Prix racing for 1950, with the Type 158 model. We intend to race for the title of World Champion, which, as you know, is to be contested for for the first time this year. You will, of course, readily understand that with a motor racing tradition such as ours we cannot afford to be haphazard about our Grand Prix programme.

We know our machines are good, and to drive them we require the services of the fastest drivers. The pay is good, but the discipline is strict and the races are controlled from the pits. The Type 158 has a magnificent record, we think it is the machine most likely to win the 1950 World Championship, and we consider that you are one of the most appropriate to drive one of these cars.’

What could I say? The Type 158 was every race driver’s dream in those days. Almost unbeaten since their very inception, they were far and away the fastest vehicles on the post-war scene, and on the Alfa team I was almost assured of a good measure of Grand Prix victories, if luck was with me. I accepted without any hesitation whatsoever, and then Dr. Alessio took us over the factory to the racing department, where a row of shrouded figures lay in deathly silence, like as at a morgue. Alessio lifted the shroud from one of the cars and my excited eyes saw for the first time a Type 158 Alfa Romeo.

What a beauty! I got into the driving seat, and although it had not been adjusted for me, it fit me like a glove. I longed to try it, even if to drive it up and down the street outside, but it was not to be, and after a few moments I regretfully climbed out and the shroud was replaced."

\* \* \*

Fangio's first race in the Alfa Romeo took place at San Remo, where he had made his triumphal entry into Grand Prix racing the year before, and he has this to say about it:

"Alfas obviously wanted to give me a rehearsal before their full team programme, and while they normally only competed in the Grandes Epreuves, they decided to send one car only, for me, to San Remo. This was, of course, a very risky business, because with only one car anything can happen and even the best equipe can lose a race. Alfas had not lost a single race except in a freak result in 1946, and before the war, when they were beaten in Tripoli. Since 1946 onwards they had never been beaten once, and in fact they had won all their races with an ample margin, so the responsibility which was thrown on my shoulders was very great.

In practising, although the little Alfa was a good deal more powerful than anything I had driven, I soon learned to handle it—I thought—but although I made fastest practice time, on race day it poured with rain, and I was never good at rain in those days, although I have learned more about rain driving now. When the race was started my driving wheels spun, I was slow off the line, and only third or fourth into the first corner, and all round the first lap I couldn't seem to hold the car at all, and I can tell you I was desperate, for I felt my newly acquired post with Alfas slipping quickly away.

Those two or three opening laps were about the worst in my life, but gradually I got a grip on myself and almost by itself the little Alfa seemed to go faster and faster, and to my intense relief I gradually managed to get through and win the race.

Those were very, very sticky moments I went through."

\* \* \*

Shortly afterwards Fangio raced in the Mille Miglia driving an Alfa saloon with an experimental 2.5-litre engine, and the bodywork had a roofline so low that once, going over a bump, Sanesi struck his head against the roof and was stunned! In spite of not knowing the route well, Fangio drove so hard that he led in some parts, and eventually after some last-minute trouble came in third. The Mille Miglia is another event which Fangio dreams of winning, and he hopes to be able to win this before retiring.

After this came the dramatic Monaco race of 1950.

\* \* \*

"In training Alfredo Pián, who had gone over that year with great hopes and had, in fact, been third in San Remo, was injured, and only his crash

helmet saved his life. The next year the Argentine Sports Commission decreed that crash helmets should be obligatory in all motor racing events, and shortly afterwards the C.S.I. followed suit, as you know.

When the race started I got off first and went through the first lap in the lead, but all unknown to me an accident had occurred behind which might have meant a major tragedy. Anyhow, 'way round the second lap I noticed much agitation at the pits, and when I arrived at the seawall I saw half-a-dozen cars scattered all over the track! I jammed the brakes on hard and just in time saw a 'lane' through the cars which I managed to get through, and set off again, very worried as to the fate of the rest of the drivers. As I went round on lap after lap they were clearing the obstacles away, and soon the road was almost clear.

Later I found out what had happened. Farina had come in too fast, skidded on a large pool of water just left by a wave which splashed over the seawall, and in a flash ten other cars were into him! How nobody was killed is a miracle to me. As it was, the injuries were very light, except to poor Froilán González, who got through all right the first time, but when he came round again flames from his exhaust pipe ignited the huge pool of petrol lying on the ground, and in an instant his car was wrapped in fire. With great presence of mind he steered the car into a safe spot and jumped out, but this small delay ensured that he was quite badly burnt.

They took him to hospital straight away, and I was in the ambulance with him, trying to cheer him up by cracking jokes and minimizing the importance of his injuries. Actually they were nothing really critical. We drove post-haste to Bologna without waiting for the Monaco prize-giving, because I knew a very good medical institution which specialized in the care of the burned. Then I had to rush back to Modena, leaving Froilán in Guzzi's care, because I had to collect a 2-litre Maserati engine with which to have a go in the Gran Premio dell'Autodromo in Monza. When I arrived, however, the engine was not ready, and I waited for a day until Guzzi telegraphed me that González had been shifted to Novara, near Galleate and the location of our old Scuderia Achille Varzi H. Q... The trouble was that Pián was in Bologna, so I had my hands full dashing back and forth visiting them while Maserati worked on my engine! I wasn't the only one, though. Mières arrived from Argentina, went straight to Galleate, and found a note which Pérez had left on a blackboard telling him to go to Novara to keep González company in hospital. To make matters worse, the Maserati engine didn't go properly on its trials and I had to race the old V-12 Ferrari, which didn't last out the day.

At Berne I dropped a valve and retired, but, for the Formula 2 Circuit des Remparts in Angoulême, I had the new Maserati engine, and furthermore a couple of days before the race González turned up all bright and shining, and we gave him the V-12 Ferrari. The Maserati went like a bomb and accelerated much faster than the Ferraris, and so I won this race, which was the first time that a single-seater 2,000 c.c. Maserati raced.

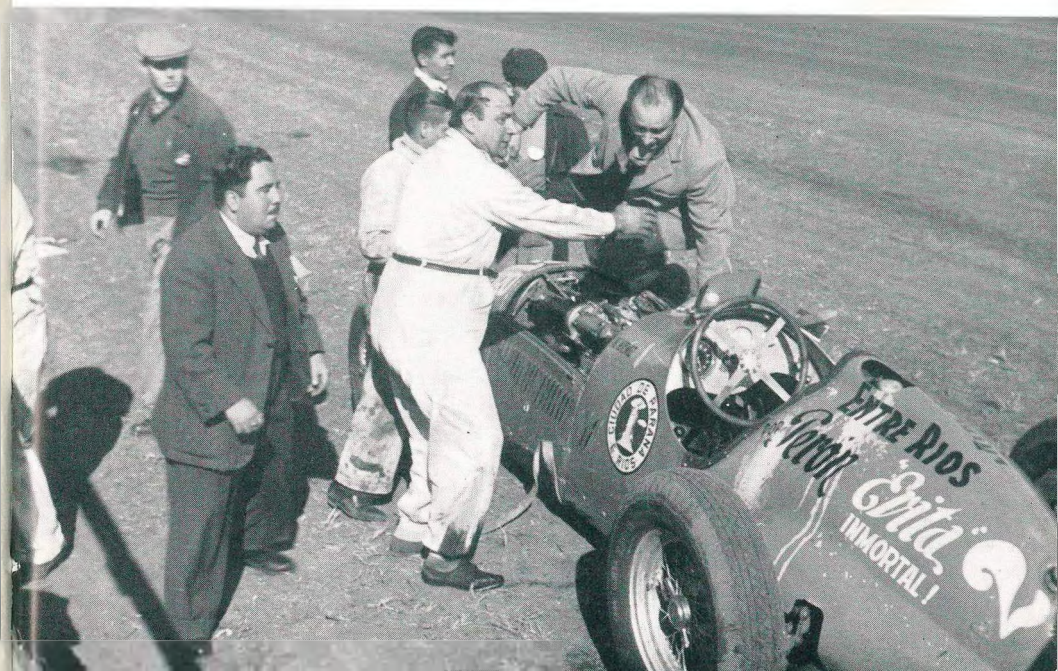
In that same year I started in Le Mans with a 1,000 c.c. Simca of M. Gordini's, but the little car wouldn't go and I had to retire very early. "

At Rheims for the French Grand Prix, Fangio revealed himself as a superb driver, circulating at 116.1 m.p.h. in practice, a speed which was really sensational. No Ferraris showed up, so the race was more or less a joyride for



**JEAN AND JUAN.** Fangio with his great friend and early tutor, Jean-Pierre Wimille, strapped in Palermo. Fangio is pictured in the cockpit of the Ecurie Naphtra-Course Maserati which he drove in that year. A week later Fangio and Wimille were to stage a furious duel for the Rosario Grand Prix, both driving Simcas.

**MIND WHERE YOU'RE GOING.** In practising for the 1951 Rafaela 500 Miles' race, Fangio was talking to his friend Hector Niemitz, when another driver came in and crashed Niemitz' Alfa. In this photo Fangio is shown leaping over the Alfa as the other car comes in, the driver wildly trying to avoid hitting anybody.





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*On the preceding page:*  
RECEPTION COMMITTEE. Fangio's colossal reception in 1949 when he returned from his amazingly successful first European season. This is only a small part of the crowd which assembled at the Ezeiza Airport. The banners and portraits of Fangio can be clearly seen.



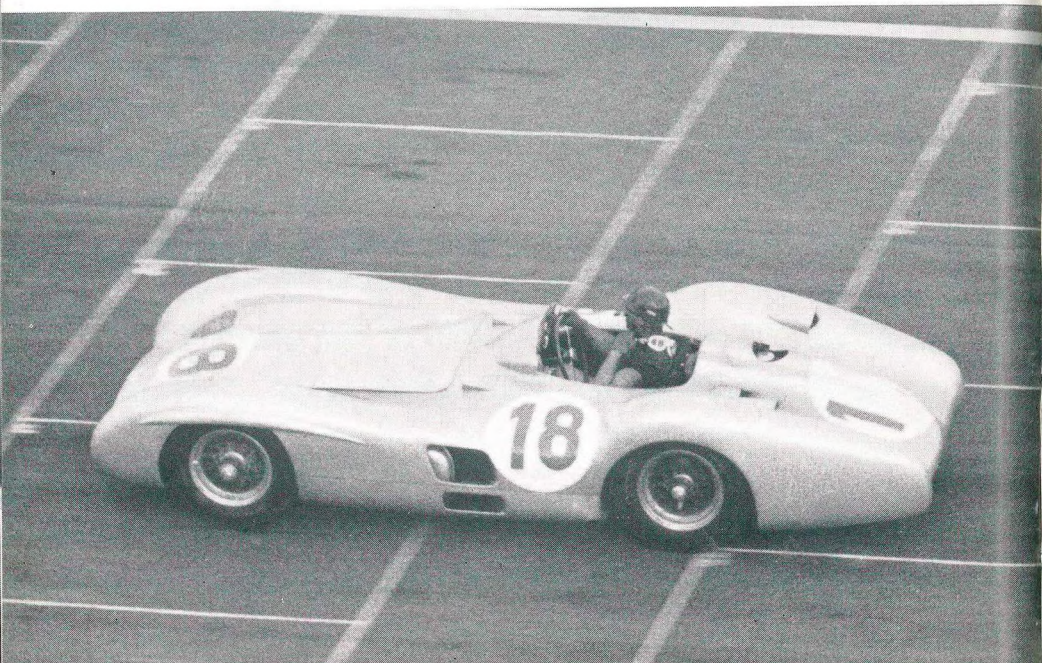
**COCKPIT CONTRAST.** A contrast between two racing cars, his two-litre Maserati in Monza, 1953 (when Fangio won the Italian Grand Prix), and the Mercedes-Benz with which he was third in Barcelona in 1954.





GROSSER PREIS VON EUROPA. Fangio leading at the start of the 1954 German (and European) Grand Prix at the Nürburgring, which he won. Moss is shown in second place with his Maserati, followed by Kling (No. 21), Herrmann (streamlined Mercedes) and Mantovani (Maserati).

STUTTGART SWANSONG. Mercedes' last and triumphant race was won by Juan Manuel Fangio at an average of over 120 m.p.h. on the new Monza circuit for the 1955 Italian Grand Prix. The streamlined cars were used here again after a long absence.

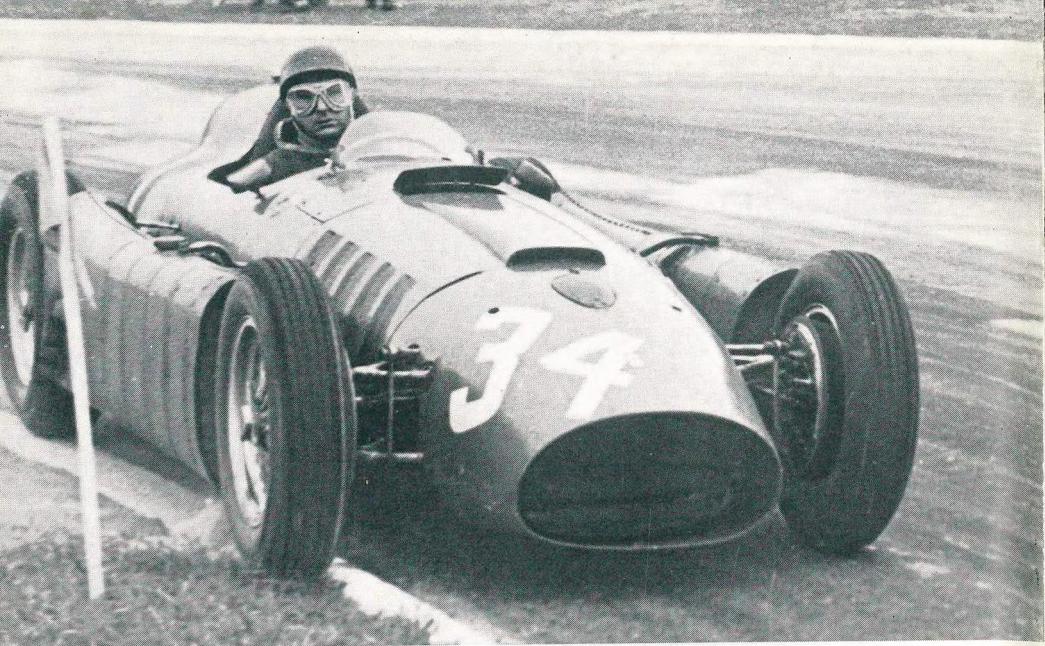




**UNBEATABLE COMBINATION.** Fangio's driving ability and Neubauer's wiliness and general tactical sense proved very rarely beatable during 1954 and 1955, when the Mercedes-Benz racing team made a return to Grand Prix and sports-car racing in the grand style.

**NO LAUGHING MATTER.** The Mille Miglia is one of the few premier road-racing events which Fangio has not been able to win. This race is one of his major aspirations. He took part in the 1956 event, during which he is pictured here in the Ravenna control, but could not finish higher than fourth.





**HOME-TOWN BOY MAKES GOOD.** Fangio winning the 1956 Argentine Grand Prix in an epic drive, after taking over No. 34 Ferrari-Lancia from Luigi Musso when his own failed to go properly at the very start. With this car Juan Manuel won the race and set up a new average for the race distance.

**VISIT SUNNY FLORIDA.** A group of happy drivers during training for the 1956 Florida Grand Prix of Endurance at Sebring. From left to right: Luigi Musso, Harry Schell, Juan Manuel Fangio, Eugenio Castellotti, Alfonso de Portago.



Alfas, although Farina had fuel pump trouble and finished behind Peter Whitehead's private short-chassis Ferrari. Bari was not a Grande Epreuve, but Alfas entered Farina and Fangio nevertheless, and they finished in that order without any opposition at all, although Stirling Moss' brilliant drive into third place with a Formula 2 H.W.M. should be recorded.

Albi was an interesting race. It was split up into two heats, with times added to determine the winner, and in the first heat Fangio led from Sommer (Talbot), González (Maserati) and Rosier (Talbot). Fangio was running away with the race when all of a sudden his engine started to sound rough, and he went slower and slower with Sommer catching him. The finish of the first heat was sensational: Sommer was getting closer and closer and just pipped Fangio on the line, subsequently slamming the Talbot into some straw bales and mussing it up considerably!

After this neither Fangio nor Sommer could start in the second heat, and as Rosier had passed González, Froilán now had to drive like mad to try and recover the time lost. Of course, the wily Frenchman would allow none of this, and although González scored his first win in the heat, Rosier kept close enough behind to assure his first place in overall classification. In Zandvoort the team were unlucky and González, after making the fastest lap, had his trousers burnt off when his car caught fire during a pitstop. Never a dull moment!

With time the Italian Grand Prix at Monza came round. Fangio barely led Farina on points for the World Championship, and Monza would prove the decisive factor. Alfas badly wanted to win this race, first because it was their own National Grande Epreuve and second because it was the last Grand Prix of the year and they wanted to finish 1950 in a blaze of glory. Just to be on the safe side they prepared a faster version of the Type 158 with a higher supercharger pressure, but as they weren't quite sure whether this car would last the 310 miles, they refrained from converting the other team cars to this specification, and Fangio and Farina tossed for the sole modified car, Farina winning.

Alfas had led pretty easily during the year, except at Geneva where the new 4.1 Ferrari, developed by Lampredi from Colombo's original 2-litre design, gave them a bad scare, and Monza was worse still, because the Ferraris had by this time grown to 4.5 litres, and in the race Ascari's model proved faster or just as fast as the Alfas. Fangio was unable to give chase and it was left to Farina to do something about it, which this driver managed after Ascari's original car had blown up and he took over Serafini's similar 4.5, finishing second. Fangio blew up his own and Bonetto's Alfas trying to follow.

The hoped-for World Championship had not come off: it was almost as if Lady Luck had wanted this new driver to wait a little, so as not to rise too quickly! He was disappointed at not winning the Championship, naturally, but hardly had any grounds for complaint at his luck in general, as he'd only started driving in Europe the year before.

Airport officials still talk about the reception he got in the airport when he arrived, and the police still talk—ruefully—about the traffic jam which ensued...

*A fried-egg sun sank below the low walls of the big cemetery across the park from La Veredita, and a restless wind, scattering the litter on the pavements, told of impending rain. "Looks like rain", someone remarked, and two or three people, lifting perspiring faces to the sky, agreed. A young man with a hoodless sports car said he had to get back to Acassuso, fifteen miles away, paid his bill and left hurriedly before the rain came.*

*The news vendor on the corner began looking up apprehensively and wondering whether he'd better start taking in his magazines and papers in case of rain. A couple, locked-arm-in-arm, strolled by, oblivious of weather, heat and everything else, and for five minutes the salient points of the girl were discussed in detail. The Veredita bootblack appeared on the scene and was imperatively called by several people at once, all wanting to know where he'd been all this time. An old sports Ferrari came screaming round the Avenida San Martin bend and a Ford driver nearly mounted the kerb in his anxiety to get out of the way.*

*By this time our table was full of people who sat or stood, listening intently to Fangio's remarks. Mières came in and slapped Fangio on the back, commenting something about prospects for the forthcoming season but Juan Manuel was non-committal. "I haven't decided anything yet", he said. Mières chatted for a while and then, slapping his forehead, said he'd just remembered an important engagement and dashed off again with his grey Fiat.*

*An argument which had been going on for some time at another table ceased as quickly as it had started and the talking died down to an idle chatter. Suddenly came a minor sensation: an habitué turned up with a brand-new British sports car and everybody dashed to the kerb to study it in detail while the owner, importantly swinging the keys in his hand, answered questions about the car with assumed off-handedness.*

*After a few minutes interest died down in the new car and people started drifting back to their table. A man leaned back in his chair and bellowed for cigarettes.*

*A Delahaye arrived at terrific speed, screeched to a stop and a young man, flushed with excitement, stepped out.*

*"I've had a Grey Fox (Traffic policeman) on my tail for half-an-hour", he said, "but I lost him".*

*"Well, you'd better not stay here", someone said, "he's bound to try and find you here". The young man looked rather crestfallen, then dashed into the car and it roared away again.*

## CHAPTER IX

### *GONZALEZ TRIUMPHANT*

In November, 1950, plans for the Buenos Aires Autodrome were already well under way, and, due to this fact and to other causes, the Automóvil Club announced that there would be no International Season in 1951, but that an extra lavish season would be held in 1952. This, however, brought such a howl of protest from the Press and the public that they were forced to reconsider their decision. Fangio had lost the World Championship by a few points that year, and his public insisted on seeing him in action.

In principle preliminary talks centred around Alfa Romeo, and the Ferrari marque was also mentioned. Ferrari versus Alfa Romeo: the closing stages of 1950 had been distinguished by this battle, which more than a fight between marques was a battle between technical extremes: 1,500 c.c. supercharged and 4,500 c.c. unsupercharged. Monza had left a big question mark: V 12 or straight-eight? The Four-leaf Clover or the Prancing Horse? The A.C.A.'s initial effort were naturally directed at trying to obtain the participation of both these teams, in the hope that Buenos Aires might give a conclusive answer to the technical drama which had started to unfold couple of months before.

Correspondence and telephone calls shuttled back and forth, and eventually it became clear that the fabulous Alfettas would not be seen in Buenos Aires. From Italy, Ing. Canestrini advised the Automóvil Club Argentino to act quickly, as time was slipping by. He also advised that a Grande Epreuve should be organized, although we eventually waited two more years for that. Suddenly, Argentine enthusiasts were treated to a really sensational piece of information: the Type W 163 3-litre V 12 Mercedes-Benz cars would be coming. The apotheosis of technical virtuosity, these sleek silver cars had set up records in almost all the racing circuits of Europe, and had, in the last pre-war year, definitely established Mercedes-Benz superiority over all other marques, including their traditional rival, Auto Union. After the war these cars had seemed doomed to destruction, as Mercedes have always broken up their obsolete racing cars, occasionally saving some for their museum. However, these 3-litre cars had travelled back and forth during the war years, and Daimler-Benz had undoubtedly retained them for experimental purposes.

☛ Motoring circles in Buenos Aires went into an upheaval when the news was heard. Some said they were unbeaten, others that they weren't; some that the 1,500 c.c. Alfettas were faster, others that the Mercs could run circles round the Italian cars. Fangio, Kling, Lang, Neubauer, Nürburgring, Seaman, von Brauchitsch, formulas, team efficiency, Mercedes return to racing... In the Automóvil Club and the café where enthusiasts foregather in residential Buenos Aires, argument waxed hot and continuous. All Europe, too, was shaken by the news. It was well-known that the powerful Stuttgart concern never acted without very good reason. But what on earth did this mean, racing obsolete cars in a far-away South American country? Perhaps they wished to train their racing team and possibly collect experiences for the blown 1.5-litre car at one time mooted. However, one day a merchant vessel steamed into Buenos Aires and at last it was true: the famous Mercedes-Benz W 163 would be seen in Buenos Aires.

The opposition, all local, would not be, on paper, very strong. As spearheads for the Argentine attack the two 2-litre supercharged Ferraris were relied on, the long-chassis car first used by Fangio in the 1950 season and the short-chassis job with which—unblown, naturally—Fangio had won the 1949 Gran Premio dell'Autodromo, Monza. As Fangio would be driving one of the silver Stuttgart cars, both these Ferraris were free for other drivers, and the long-chassis car, considered the faster of the two, was handed to Oscar Gálvez, while José Froilán González was charged with handling the shorter model.

Previously, of course, the circuit had been decided on. Once the rivals were known, it was decided to seek a very slow circuit, in order to try and even out as much as possible the chances of the various competing cars. Not, however, that one should mistake the A.C.A.'s intentions: the Mercedes had arrived wrapped in such an aura of invincibility that at no time was it expected that a local driver, except Fangio himself, had any possibility of winning either of the two races scheduled. What was looked for was a circuit where the German cars, hampered by their long wheelbase, would not be enabled to lap the opposition too frequently!

Eventually, after looking around, a special commission, in which Fangio had the deciding opinion, mapped out a little circuit using avenues along the Buenos Aires river-front, near an airport used by domestic transport planes. In shape it was almost exactly like a hatchet, with two lanes of a dual carriageway forming the handle and three involute curves shaping an almost uncanny replica of Benito Mussolini's famed "Fasces". This circuit, a *prima facie*, would fill the requirements.

And so training came due. Low, sleek, the three Mercedes were the cynosure of every eye, and connoisseurs were drawn to the Mercedes pits as by magnets. The track was wet on the first training day: it had rained all through the night and, though Argentine summer rainstorms are usually of short duration, that day it still kept on drizzling. Nevertheless, at least thirty thousand spectators braved the elements to see the cars practising. Fangio would not be driving hard for various reasons: the track was slippery, for one thing, and then he had to get his hand in with these cars, considerably more powerful even than the Alfettas. Besides, they had the gearshift at the right,

while the Maseratis had it in the middle and the Ferraris at the left, so while driving Fangio's hand frequently groped for the lever on the wrong side.

Hermann Lang was another man which everybody wanted to see drive. He had been a marvellous driver pre-war and, it was felt, where there was fire, the ashes should, at least, still be warm. Quite so: on the first training day Lang went round in 2 min. 03.4 sec., averaging 63.42 m.p.h., while Kling did 2 min. 08.5 sec. and Fangio 2 min. 15 sec. Froilán González was fourth in 2 min. 19 sec., but was openly incredulous regarding Lang's time.

"Something must have gone wrong with the timing", he insisted, "tomorrow, on a dry track, they will not achieve those times". And he was right. The next day, with a dry track, a cold morning and all the drivers more used to the cars and the circuit, the fastest Mercedes was Fangio who went round in 2 min. 08 sec.

Oscar Gálvez' Ferrari was off form. The unexpectedly low temperature of the morning caught everyone by surprise, carburation being a muddle, and people went around gloomily forecasting that the only cars which would go properly on the Sunday would be the Mercedes. Marimón threw a con-rod, the offending component punching a neat hole in the crankcase, and scratched.

On race-day González was very optimistic. "I think I can split the Mercedes team", he said, "I am hoping to come in second behind Juan Manuel, if I am lucky. My little car is going beautifully and seems to fit this circuit like a glove". He had been experimenting with tyres, and had decided on 6.50s in place of the usual 7.00s. It was warm that day, quite warm, though not outstandingly so for Buenos Aires, and those who had set their carburation according to cool early-morning temperatures had to start all over again in the midday sun, because the thermometer climbed gleefully into the nineties on that warm, sleepy Buenos Aires afternoon. The little circuit was crowded. Fangio, as can be expected, was the big attraction, followed by Oscar Gálvez. González? Oh, yes, he had lapped very well in practice. Rather a rough driver. Most likely blow up or prang.

Fifteen cars started, the three Mercedes, several Maseratis, Alfas, and two Ferraris in the blue-and-yellow of Argentina, and Mières' red Maserati, entered by an Italian. When the race was started, Lang shot off in the lead, followed by González, Fangio whose car had hesitated ever so slightly at the start, and Kling. On the third lap Fangio passed González into second place and the pattern of the race seemed set.

It was not, however. On the ninth lap the crowd gasped to see Fangio's car stopping at its pit: a tyre tread had come off and it was necessary to change a wheel. And then when inexplicably Kling could not achieve better than fifth place, behind Menditeguy on the ubiquitous 3.8 Alfa, everybody began to realize that things were not going according to plan, particularly when it was seen with amazement that González was gaining on leader Lang!

At fifteen laps, Lang had a lead of 22 sec., but five laps later it had been cut down by ten seconds, and González was obviously going much faster. The crowd began to become first surprised, then hopeful, then they went wild with joy when the apparent miracle occurred. González passed Lang and went into the lead, simply hurling the Ferrari round the circuit. Then he started drawing away, driving flat out, and his lead became bigger and bigger, while people



began to wonder why he didn't slow down, because at one time he drew nearly a minute away; then the answer was revealed: he would have to refuel, and for that purpose he built up a strong lead... he came in and just as he was leaving the pit Lang's Mercedes sang back into the lead, but was repassed a couple of laps later and from then on González simply walked away with the race, to the inexpressible joy of his countrymen. Among all this, Fangio restarted like the wind after his pitstop and, after making the fastest lap in 2 min. 02.1 sec., finished third, ahead of Oscar Gálvez and Alfredo Pián, who drove a 4 CLT Maserati.

So the great V 12 Mercedes had been beaten by a 2-litre Ferrari which, if modern, was definitely "sui generis", the superchargers having been grafted on with the sole purpose of racing in Argentina. Naturally, therefore, the car had not received the intensive development which would be accorded to a regular Grand Prix car. Furthermore, an independent driver had beaten a powerful team of three cars with good drivers, even allowing himself the luxury of a fuel stop!

The conosciuti seethed with arguments.

"Well, Mercedes said their trouble was the heat."

"But they've raced at over 100° in the shade in Tripoli, and won."

"Well, perhaps they didn't expect such heat this time..."

"Don't they know it's hot in Buenos Aires in summer?"

"I guess the trouble was in the abrupt curves. They must have had fuel surge on the tight bends."

"They won at Pau, didn't they?"

"It's thirteen-year old technology. The Ferrari is an ultramodern racing car."

"Nonsense! Technically the Mercedes is even moderner than the Ferrari!"

"Well, anyway, we'll see what happens on Sunday. I don't think the Germans will be caught napping this time."

And so argument waxed on and on. Fangio knew that his car had developed a sudden loss of power about half-way through, but the Germans appeared to have found the trouble during the week and, without giving details, the chef d'équipe declared publicly that the trouble had been remedied. Training appeared to confirm this statement, as Fangio had achieved a lap in 2 min. 01.1 sec. the Saturday before, but now went round in a shattering 1 min. 58.4 sec., shattering because of the extreme difficulty in squeezing two seconds out of two minutes. No-one else got under one hundred and twenty seconds, but Kling achieved 2 min. dead and Lang 2 min. 0.6 sec., while González couldn't do better than 2 min. 03.3 sec., so it was felt that the second race would not be a repetition of the first. But... it was.

What happened exactly, nobody knows. What is known is that even before the start Fangio was unhappy and distrustful of his car, and, sure enough, he only lasted seventeen laps, while González went to look for the lead from the start on this time, obtained it on the fifth lap, and from then on never even looked like losing the race. Kling ran second meanwhile, but then Carlos Menditeguy, driving very well, also passed him with the old 3.8 Alfa Romeo and was a sure second until he was struck by an unkind Fate. With

only a few laps to go, his fuel ran out: he changed over at once to the reserve tank, but there was an airlock in the piping and the fuel would not pass through! Thus this fine driver was robbed of a sure second place.

And the technical result of the race? Very difficult to evaluate, as it was never found out exactly what trouble affected the silver fish from Stuttgart. Innumerable theories were advanced, ranging from fuel to residual tensions in the block casting, including the theory that perhaps the trouble lay with Mercedes having used their own fuel instead of the fuel which everybody else employed, mixed by the State-owned distillery, Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales: it was argued, not perhaps unreasonably, that Argentine technicians were those most indicated to know their native climatic conditions. However, nothing was ever settled, as if Mercedes ever found out the answer they carefully refrained from making it public. Certainly the second defeat was unexpected, as witness Herr Neubauer furiously flinging his hat on the ground and jumping up and down on it!...

Fangio, of course, was very much disappointed. He seemed quite unable to win a race in Buenos Aires, after all the circuits of the world had seen him triumph... besides, as he thought ruefully to himself, "to think I picked that circuit so the Mercedes wouldn't go too far away!"

## CHAPTER X

### *CHAMPION OF THE WORLD*

“ The Alfa pit was a funny sight on the eve of the 1951 Swiss Grand Prix. Alessio, the President of Alfa Romeo S.p.A., was walking up and down smoking nervously and looking at his watch every five minutes. The mechanics working on the cars would look up every now and then at Guidotti or I, shake their heads, and bend over the cars again. Now and again you would see somebody dash out of the Administration offices of the Spa circuit, chatter and wave his hands at Alessio, and dash back into the office.

Alfas and Ferraris were there in force that year. Ferraris were decided to take the World Championship off us, and we were just as determined to keep it for 1951. In the Swiss Grand Prix I managed to win but Taruffi gave us all a bad scare with his 4.5-litre Ferrari, and Farina with the Alfa with the big tanks was third behind him. In Belgium the speeds in practice were terrific, both ours and Ferraris', but we were having trouble, not in getting the speed, but in keeping the revs down. The only gear ratios we had available were too low and when I put my foot down on the straights the revs went wild. On one occasion I went up to 9,500 r.p.m., which was really too high for safety, and even then the speed was nothing remarkable. They were a good deal more powerful than the year before, and we just couldn't keep them in check once they started going on the straights. But we didn't have any suitable gear ratios, so the only thing we could do was cable to Pirelli to make us some bigger wheels and tyres.

Race day came, and I'd managed 4 min. 25 sec. (119.2 m.p.h.), but nearly bursting my engine on the straight, and obviously we couldn't last 500 kilometres at this rate. Villoresi, meanwhile, had managed 4 min. 29 sec. with the new 4.5 Ferrari with dual ignition, and Ascari 4 min. 30 sec., which meant that when one took into account the fact that the Ferraris would not be stopping for fuel, you can understand that we were worried.

A couple of hours before the race Alessio received a telegramme saying the new wheels and tyres were on the way. In 7.00 × 19 size, as specified.

‘ Will they be here in time? ’ I asked.

‘ They should be, if the road is reasonably free of traffic. ’

Slowly the minutes ticked by, and suddenly we all saw a great big Fiat truck come teacing through the gates. Our chef d'equipe went dashing up to the truck, asked the driver if he had the tyres, and when he was told that they were on board the truck he leaped up in the air with joy. He called out ' Guido! Pietro! Carlo!' and all the mechanics came running out. He tore off towards the cars with the truck driver running behind him, trying to get him to sign the receipt for the tyres.

Well, we got the new tyres on and they certainly made a difference. I went out first and felt immensely relieved when I saw the rev counter needle wasn't pushing the stop pin so hard! Then Guidotti took out Farina's Alfa and said he felt more or less the same. However, in the race, as you know, I had bad luck with the new wheels. "

\* \* \*

In the race Fangio, Farina and Ascari were at it hammer and tongs, but on lap 14 Fangio had gone into the lead, when he came in for his routine pit stop, to refuel and change tyres, but when they tried to get the left rear wheel off, came drama: it wouldn't go! Another hefty tug, and still nothing. Then three men got together and heaved, but nothing happened. After this the Alfisti began to get excited, and a whole horde of mechanics swooped on the car and tugged like blazes, but with no better result. Meanwhile, Fangio was seething internally, but externally displayed a stone calm which, we would venture to say, has rarely if ever been approached on a race circuit under such trying circumstances.

It must be remembered in a case like this that a racing driver when " on the job " has his nerves and his impulses strained to maximum speed and efficiency, his mental processes fully accelerated. He is keyed up, to put it another way. Then the time comes for a pit-stop: he comes it, brakes screeching, dashes out of the car, gulps down a drink and frets impatiently while mechanics change wheels and refuel, then is in the car again in a flash and is off. Naturally, when something so ridiculous as a sticking wheel occurs to upset the schedule, it would seem to be asking too much of a driver to slow down his mental processes instantly and accept the situation with external calm, but this is just what Fangio succeeded in doing. He stood around for a while, without indulging in the frantic recriminations of the mechanics which usually accompany anything that goes wrong, then tried a few tugs at the wheel himself and finally strolled off whistling. A really amazing exhibition of self-control.

After a while the mechanics managed to get the whole wheel and brake drum off and rebuild it, so Fangio started out about fifteen minutes in arrears and eventually finished last, his engine ironically running beautifully.

\* \* \*

In Silverstone, 1951, what people had been expecting for a long time, had finally happened: the Alfettas were beaten in a straight fight by brilliant José Froilán González, who in that same year had considerably shaken everyone by

humbling the 3-litre Mercedes with his 2-litre Ferrari, and now appeared doing Alfas the same disservice with his 4.5-litre car. That day, in spite of driving the single-ignition car while Ascari and Villoresi had theoretically faster dual-ignition cars, Froilán had had it all over everyone else, not even Fangio being able to resist his compatriot's violent attack.

Nürburgring told the same story, with Alfas showing signs of shellshock and badly worried before the race started. There was a lot of fiddling round with carburation, tyres and axle ratios just before the start, and they didn't seem to know what they really wanted. Ferrari made the fastest practice laps (Ascari 9 min. 55.7 sec. and González 9 min. 57.5 sec.) and seemed quite confident about the eventual outcome of the race. In actual fact it was so: Fangio led for the first few laps, but then was passed by Ascari and González shot past as well while he was refuelling in his pit. Meanwhile, Pietsch had gone off the road with one Alfa and another—Bonetto's—was ill. González then passed briefly into the lead while Ascari's pit staff changed rear wheels, and then the chubby Argentine came in as well and the two Maranello V-12s went back into formation, but Fangio led again now, setting up the fastest lap in 9 min. 55.8 sec., equal to Ascari's practice circuit, but then had to stop again, while Ascari sang past. Suddenly Fangio's gearbox began acting up, only top gears remaining, so Ascari won comfortably from Fangio and González. Farina, who had never been in the picture, retired with gearbox trouble early on.

Thus things were literally boiling for Monza, the Italian Grand Prix and the "home event" for the two competing Italian teams. Both Alfas and Ferraris started practising early, but while Ferraris seemed pretty confident now, Alfas were clearly shaken by the course of events and would probably have liked to back out of the race if they could. However, Fangio still led for the World Championship, as a result of his victories in Berne, Rheims and his places—second in Silverstone and Nürburgring respectively—so they had to press on and do what would be done.

Thus Juan Manuel was an early arrival at the Monza Autodrome, some two weeks before the race was due to start, while innumerable experiments were made with fuel tank dispositions, superchargers, rear ends, etc., and several drivers tried the cars for the race. By this time all the team Alfas had de Dion rear ends, with long-range fuel tanks extending down one side of the car, while the engines developed outputs variably estimated at 400 and 427 b.h.p. The cars were easier to handle, in spite of the higher power, but the b.h.p. was apt to occur with disconcerting suddenness on Lesmo corner. Tyres would undoubtedly be the real problem.

Gradually the days wore on and trials continued, and then on the day before the race Fangio set off for a final spin, and really put his foot down hard, and when he shot past the pit for the third time he noticed everybody waving excitedly at him and wondered what the trouble was. So next time, just to make sure, he came in to his pit and demanded to know what all the fuss was about.

"Duecento!" someone cried excitedly.

Of course he realized what it meant. Two hundred kilometres an hour, 124 m.p.h., was a mark which the team had been shooting at for some time but

had not been able to attain. Fangio and Ascari had both clocked 1 min. 55.2 sec. for 197,3 km. per hour, the day before, but the magic twin-century seemed just outside his grasp, until that moment, when he had finally achieved it while racing very hard to get his Alfa into the front line up. For a second he let a wave of excitement surge over him, then he looked up and asked the man bending over his car how much he had done.

“ One fifty-three two ”, he was told, “ 200,353 km/h. ”

So that was it. That night they had a little celebration of the record and the first time 200 km. per hour had been exceeded in Monza after the war. However, underlying the celebration was the worry that Ferraris were going to pull this one off again.

When the race started, Fangio tore off in the lead again, followed by Farina, González and Ascari, while de Graffenried, driving one of the Alfa Romeos, came in on lap 1 with a broken valve and dropped out. Fangio tore off to see if he could build up a lead which would give him time to refuel, but was unable to do so, in spite of driving like mad, and on lap 6 Ascari passed him with ease and led the race, drawing away. Fangio then threw caution to the winds and began really putting his foot down, but found a lot of b.h.p. under his right sole and the curves were not always being taken with the precision they should have been.

During lap 6 Farina's fuel-pump failed and the resultant weak mixture somewhat disarranged a valve, so the Italian came bitterly in again, and once more Alfas left it to Fangio, who found himself unable to do much as his car was definitely not so fast as Ascari's. On lap 15, in fact, his cornering proved too much for the left rear tyre, which flung a tread, and Fangio had to come in to have it changed, which let Ascari go miles away. González also shot past into second place, building up points for the World Championship but unlikely to challenge Ascari or Fangio.

Fangio passed González again, but on lap 27 stopped to refuel; Ascari lapped him and González nearly repassed as well, and Bonetto came in and handed his car over to Farina, who tore off and started putting his foot hard down, hoping to do something about the Ferraris lead. Fangio then blew up his car on lap 40 and limped home.

He came into his pit, said briefly “ Non va più! ” and got out. The mechanics glumly lifted the bonnet and agreed. So that was that. Ascari went round like a clock and won again, and González was second, with the first Alfa Romeo—Farina-Bonetto's—third. And both Ascari and Fangio had 22 points now, and by the way the Maranello bolides were performing it seemed extremely likely that the World Championship title would slip away from his hands for another year.

Naturally, for Barcelona the whole team was behind Fangio: they were determined that one of their drivers should win the Championship, come what may, and the only one who had any chance was, of course, Fangio. So they went to Spain grimly resolved to do or die. They evolved a new car, following the Type 158 cars, but which was unofficially known as the Type 159 b or 160, and around which a rumour circulated that the engine had different cylinder dimensions, 62 × 62 mm. instead of 58 × 70 mm. as the Type 158 always had. It was impossible to verify this, but practical results showed that the new car

was substantially faster than the remainder, so it is possible that there is some truth in the rumour.

The piston area of the Alfa Type 158 being a mere 32.7 sq. in., it is not at all unlikely that "squaring" the cylinders should have been resorted to, a process which would have raised the piston area by some seven per cent and the theoretical power output to around 455 b.h.p. The reports that the Barcelona Alfa did, actually, possess something over 440 b.h.p. lends some weight to this theory, as it is difficult to imagine any more b.h.p. being squeezed out of the  $58 \times 70$  engine.

Fangio knew, of course, that this race was decisive and that if he didn't pull this one off, it would mean another World Championship lost, but nevertheless he was determined not to let the situation preoccupy him. He realized very well the importance of being perfectly calm and collected on that day, because in racing driving it simply does not pay to make mistakes. He received a brand-new, very secret Alfa with appreciably more b.h.p. than the previous cars he had driven, and in practising achieved remarkable speeds but Ascari was even faster, going round in 2 min. 10.6 sec., while the official lap tables were only calibrated to 2 min. 15 sec.! And well they might be, because the year before even the fastest laps had not been far below 2 min. 30 sec., and this year the cars racing were nominally the same, although as it had not been a Grande Epreuve in 1950 Alfas had stood down.

When the race started the crowds were enormous, as is usual in Barcelona for the Spanish Grand Prix. At the start Ascari shot off in the lead from González, with Farina third and then Fangio, but González spun round on the first lap and Fangio became third, a position which he improved on the fourth circuit to lead the race.

Ferrari, however, were far from happy. They had started with extra-fuel tanks to complete the full 273 miles without refuelling, a circumstance which rendered the handling extremely tricky in the first few laps, until the level in the tank began falling slightly. But they had another, greater, worry: tyres. For the long straight down the Avenida Generalísimo Francisco Franco, where the B.R.M. cars had hit 180 m.p.h. the year before, Alfas used 18-in. rears, while Ferrari tried 18-in. tyres, decided that they were too heavy for the transmission, and substituted 16-in. wheels, which proved unable to resist the speed. Between laps 6 and 9 all three Ferraris were in for tyre changes, thus nullifying any advantage they might have gained from their large tanks.

Alfas ran first and second now, with Fangio leading Farina, and José Froilán González third until he, too, stopped for tyres at 13 laps, letting Ascari into third spot, quite a way behind the supercharged cars—but then he needed more tyres, and Bonetto became third with yet another Alfa Romeo! Truly the picture had changed from Silverstone, Monza and Nürburgring. Of course, the Ferrari tyre debacle was a deciding feature of this race, but even so it appears that at least Fangio's car was substantially faster than even the speediest Ferraris.

Then Fangio came in and refuelled, but did not change wheels, which was surprising, as everybody had been changing at least once in all other Grands Prix. In fact, there were no Alfa tyre changes whatsoever and they finished the race with their tyres still in sound condition. Froilán González, leading the Ferrari

attack, passed Bonetto again, but both Ascari and Villoresi were now running with unhappy-sounding engines, and Taruffi finished his day when a rear wheel came completely off.

At forty-five laps Fangio had drawn away from Farina, and Villoresi retired his car with ignition failure. Then González lifted the Ferrari morale slightly by rocketing past Farina while the Italian was at the pits refueling, and though he put on speed to try to catch Fangio, the Alfa still had some reserve b.h.p. left, lap times dropped further, and González realized the futility of the whole thing and drove for second place. One by one the laps reeled off, and what had seemed extremely doubtful two weeks before now became true—Juan Manuel Fangio had won the World Championship! A horde of wildly cheering, tearful Argentines were shouting themselves hoarse by the side of the track, as Fangio received the chequered flag and carried on for his lap of honour. González finished second, Farina third in a very good drive, and Ascari, bitterly disappointed but still smiling, fourth, two laps behind.

With an immense sensation of relief Fangio steered his car into the pits after the lap of honour and knew that now, the thing was done. He had achieved what he wanted, the maximum honour to which a racing driver can aspire. His thoughts were full as he allowed himself to be presented to General Franco and to receive from him the winner's garland and the Cup. World Champion!



## CHAPTER XI

### *AND NOW WHAT?*

As Fangio's scarlet Alfa shot over the finishing line on that unforgettable 28th of October, his feelings were hard to describe. When he finally lifted his foot from the accelerator pedal, he felt as if he had been freed abruptly from a nightmare. It was all finished; weeks of work by engineers, mechanics, team directors, had at last yielded the desired fruits. The Milano marque had won the World Championship and the honours went to Alfa Romeo and Juan Manuel Fangio, of Balcarce, Argentine Republic. The doubts, fears, starting-line tension and nervous wishing "if my luck only holds this time!" had by now all fused into a blurry background, and Fangio's life as from two and a half hours ago all seemed to have receded now into the past.

His mind in a whirl, he toured round on his lap of honour, and bits and pieces came tripping into his recollection like flashbacks in a movie. He saw himself driving Lliviejo's Ford T... then going off the road with the Chevrolet... posing, bewildered but happy, with one foot on the stepladder of the aeroplane that was to carry him to Europe in 1949. As he cut off for the corners he occasionally distinguished the crowds shouting, and the familiar Spanish brought swiftly back memories of Mar del Plata, 1949...

Now he was nearing the pits again, and mechanically he switched off the ignition and coasted in to the pits, where he was immediately submerged in a sea of embraces, slaps on the back, handshakes and flashbulbs hurting his eyes. But even in that flurried moment Fangio felt alone, more alone than anyone in the world, because now he was the Champion, and you cannot go any higher than the top. Champion of the World, and now what? That was the question he kept asking himself as he was almost carried bodily to the radio box to be interviewed.

As he reflected later when peace and quiet had returned, he was the Champion now, and now more than ever he would notice that which was bothering him for some time: the moral obligation to win at all costs. His title had come merely as a confirmation of his driving ability, but the name Fangio had become so much of a legend in motor racing that when he strained every nerve and managed to make the fastest practice lap by one or two tenths from such masters as Ascari, people shrugged their shoulders and said, "So what?"

He's Fangio, isn't he?" And if, in contrast, he did not prove the fastest of the fast in practising, people looked at each other and said, "Fangio's beginning to crack up, I think". Half-a-dozen impatient youngsters would be waiting for the first sign of a weakening to begin suggesting to team managers that the Champion was getting slightly past his prime. Motor racing is a hard business, and to no-one harder than to the Champion.

The next day Fangio went into town and bought a case of champagne for the Alfa mechanics. He returned to the garage where the cars were kept staggering under the weight of the heavy case, and was mildly surprised to hear a burst of applause as he went in. Mechanics and driver stared at each other. Then Fangio said:

"Why the applause?"

"For you. And the champagne?"

"For you!"

Later on, more than one of the mechanics could have been observed to be reeling slightly in the warm Spanish sun.

A day later Fangio and his friends drove off to Milan where Fangio asked Guzzi to place a wreath on Varzi's grave; everyone except him had forgotten that it was November 1st., Day of the Dead. Then they had a dinner in Milan: actually it was the outcome of a private bet between Ascari and Fangio as to who would win the Championship, loser to pay the dinner and winner to pick the venue. The guests were Fangio, Ascari, Bonetto, Farina, Villoresi, González, Marimón, Guzzi, Villoresi's old mother, etc. During the toasts, Luigi Villoresi stood up and made a brief but well-phrased speech. After congratulating Fangio on winning the World Championship, he said:

"Juan, I envy you. Once I wanted to be a maestro, but years pass, and I am getting old. I have also received blows, of both kinds, and my profession becomes every day a little harder to follow. You grow up, Berto grows up, and so does Froilán and all the rest of them. Juan, I sincerely envy you, and I hope just as sincerely that you realize just how deeply glad I feel in your hour of triumph." After which he handed Fangio a beautiful silver salver with his signature engraved on it.

Truly, much water had flown under the bridge since a young man with brown hair staggered wearily into a little ramshackle hotel in San Luis, twelve years before...

## CHAPTER XII

### *AUTODROME INTERLUDE*

In 1952 the Municipal Autodrome was inaugurated, but in truth the Inaugural Season was hardly worthy of the importance of the Autodrome as a project. As the track was finished rather late, there was little time left to contact teams and indulge in the inevitable preliminary haggling, but as the Autodrome *had* been finished nobody wanted to wait until 1953 to see races on it. The original plan to stage a full-scale Argentine Grand Prix was abandoned due to lack of time and in fact the only visitors from Europe were the Simca-Gordini team with Simon and Manzon in the cockpits. These drove the little Wade-blown 1,500 c.c. cars, fast but fragile, and the Season was completed with several Argentine entries and a number of Brazilians and Uruguayans driving sundry 4 CLT Maseratis and 1.5 Ferraris, with Brazilian Champion Chico Landi at the wheel of a short-chassis 2-litre super-charged Ferrari. This was similar to the short-chassis Argentine job, driven by González, while Fangio was charged with driving the long-chassis car. These two Ferraris were by now known to all Argentina as “la larga” (the long one) and “la corta” (the short one) in reference to their respective chassis lengths. “La corta” was, of course, the original Formula 2 car in which Fangio had won on its first time out in Monza (1949) and “la larga” was the car brought out for Fangio to drive in the 1950 Season. The races held in 1952 were, as can be imagined, of relatively little interest. Fangio won them all (“all” includes two which were run in Uruguay).

However, despite their lack of significance internationally, these events had a profound significance for Fangio, because they represented a win on home ground for the first time since 1949. Since Mar del Plata that year, Fangio had raced in innumerable events both at home and abroad, but while abroad nearly all the circuits had seen him win at least once, at home he had been signally unsuccessful and seemed pursued by bad luck. Most racing drivers are by the nature of their profession more or less superstitious, and the most dangerous superstition is that of fearing that one cannot win on any given circuit (or country), because the one takes extraordinary risks to beat the unlucky streak, and that is when the thin line starts to get much, much thinner...

Anyway, Alfas having withdrawn (in the nick of time, one might add rather unkindly), Fangio was more or less at a loose end for 1952. After casting around, he decided to more or less free-lance in that year, and the results were rather disastrous, as will be gathered in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER XIII

### *RENDEZ-VOUS WITH DEATH*

“Smoke?” Fangio and González shook their heads. The man who had offered them the cigarette was Raymond Mays, patron of the British Racing Motors venture in 1952. The B.R.M., as the car was known, had been built by subscription among the British motor industry, private enthusiasts, and organizations set up exclusively to raise funds for the car’s development. Probably some half a million pounds were collected in all, but this sum was not enough to make the car a practical proposition for racing.

Undoubtedly the failure of the B.R.M. was due to the fact that its sponsors tried to do too much with too little. £ 500,000 is not a trifling sum, but not enough to fully develop a V 16 with twin o.h.c. per bank of cylinders, two-stage centrifugal supercharging, five-speeds and all the rest of it. The centrifugal supercharger was perhaps the worst single offender in the B.R.M.’s list of shortcomings, as its pressure characteristics are ideal for high-speed constant-r.p.m. engines but not for racing-car powerplants which are expected to operate at between 1,000 and 10,000 revs. The point is that as the supercharger revs drop, the pressure drops out of all proportion. At 5,000 r.p.m. a centrifugal supercharger only produces 1/3 as much urge as at 10,000 revs, and so on, which means that at low speed, when a lot of pressure is needed to get the car to rocket off, this pressure is just not available.

Anyway, after a maiden appearance in the British Grand Prix, and later in Barcelona in 1950, neither of which appearances was successful one, the car kept on going much slower than expected through 1951, and as most of the leading British drivers were understandably fed up with the car by 1952, the team decided to approach Fangio and González with a view to obtaining their co-operation. Thus the two found themselves in London.

Raymond Mays explained the whole affair to them and shortly afterwards they left in a car for Folkingham aerodrome, near Bourne, where the B.R.M. works are located. A B.R.M. was awaiting them there, and González took the car out first. When he got out of it he was visibly shaken by its performance. Then Fangio took over, and González says he never saw anything go so fast. Fangio did a few very rapid laps, and was very enthusiastic about the road-holding, brakes and the b.h.p. available, but complained at the need for incessant gear-changing.

In London they had rather an exciting incident. It was raining one day, when Fangio and González, tired of playing card-games in their hotel room, decided to go to the cinema. Naturally, the task of looking for an acceptable picture to see was somewhat complicated by the fact that the only word of English they knew was "yes", so they wandered around looking for the cinema where most gun shooting was promised by the hoardings! Eventually they discovered a suitable place.

Half-way through the film, however, they heard a tremendous noise and the screen went blank. Confused, they wondered what on earth was happening, and when they saw people beginning to get panicky and rush out Fangio grabbed González' hand and they made a dive for the exit. Then, all of a sudden, they heard a crash, the house lights went on, and they instinctively looked round to find that a huge candelabrum had fallen on the spectators a few rows in front, three people being badly hurt and two or three more slightly injured! That certainly was a narrow escape for them.

However, it often seems that really fast drivers are more in danger out of races than in them. For instance, Villoresi and González were once driving in Gigi's private Lancia sports car, doing some early practising for the German Grand Prix in the Nürburgring, when they saw Farina's Alfa coupé ahead of them. Farina recognized the Lancia and put on speed, and Villoresi tore off in chase. Faster and faster they both went, until the Alfa started to draw away, and Villoresi would have given up the chase but for González who kept on urging him on. The red coupé was going flat out when all of a sudden a stone shattered the windscreen, which became completely opaque... Luckily Villoresi managed to bring the car to a shrieking stop, but it was a very close shave all the same.

On another occasion Fangio was travelling very fast in his Alfa coupé when all of a sudden a big truck shot without warning out of a side road. By some incredible manœuvre, Juan Manuel managed to send the coupé hurtling between two trees, swung the wheel over just in time to avoid a fence, and, still at well over 80 m.p.h., got back on the road again. This done, he turned to his companion and remarked chattily, "I bet the chap in that truck was scared to death!"

The ever-cheerful González was involved in a slight prang once during the bicycle-riding craze in Galleate. They were battling along on their mounts and, on reaching a twisty part of the road, naturally started to race one another. While this was going on González' front wheel accidentally touched Marimón's rear mudguard, and they both went down in a cloud of dust. The others immediately stopped, fearing that they might have been hurt, but Froilán dusted himself, sat up and shouted through his trumpeted hands: "¡Volcó González!" (González has turned over) parodying the Argentine radio commentator Luis Elías Sojit, lately vanished to parts unknown (after the revolution which deposed ex-President Perón).

\* \* \*

The B.R.M. wended its weary way, and trifling trouble after trifling trouble was eliminated only to have another occur in its place. Juan Carlos Guzzi's

perspicacious eye discovered the exhaust pipes were directing their red-hot blasts straight at the rear tyres and considerably shortening the lives of these already overworked components. Then, for the Albi race, Fangio and González, who understandably knew something about racing in hot weather, grabbed a pair of tinsnips and started cutting louvres in the B.R.M.'s bonnet, while the mechanics, distinctly taken aback, watched in considerable horror!

The team went to Dundrod for the Ulster Trophy, where Fangio and Moss were to drive. Fangio tried all he knew in that race but the car packed up, and no sooner had he retired that he set off for Paris in a passenger aircraft, as he had committed himself to race for Maserati in the Gran Premio dell'Autodromo in Monza. The Maserati firm were at that time trying hard to develop a car to overcome the Ferrari supremacy in Formula 2, and were trying out for the first time an entirely new single-seater.

After having experienced all the nervous exhaustion caused by worry about the B.R.M.s, driving in the race, and flying to Paris, where he arrived at midnight, Fangio borrowed a sports Gordini from Louis Rosier and set off at 3 a.m. for Milan, where he arrived two hours before the start of the race. He had to request special permission to do a few practice laps, to familiarize himself with the handling qualities of the car and refresh his memory of the course. The little Maserati, he perceived, was light, very fast but inclined to break away at the tail. It is extremely likely that with his muscles tensed up by driving, first the B.R.M. and then the sports Gordini all night, he found himself twitching the lightweight Maserati all over the road.

However, at last the time for the start came round, and when the flag fell Fangio shot off from his lowly last rank and immediately started passing other cars. However, when he went through the infamous Lesmo curve for the first time, he felt a sensation as if of premonition. The car was obviously so different to the B.R.M. that he felt insecure in it, as he put his foot hard down on the throttle the little monoposto seemed to wag its tail like a puppy. The second lap was passed without incident, and some of his old confidence was returning, when on the third tour his right-hand rear wheel touched the kerb and the car went into a series of wild swerves. Fangio corrected instinctively, knowing that his rear wheel would hit the straw bales, but when he expected them to be soft and yielding, they turned out to be rock-hard, and the car hit against them with a thud. Juan Manuel instinctively grabbed the wheel like a drowning man clutching at a straw, and then blacked out. The Maserati turned over three or four times, throwing out the driver. Luckily he fell standing and pitched to the ground, a fact which broke the violence of his fall and undoubtedly saved his life.

He was immediately packed into an ambulance and taken to the Monza Lazaretto, where they had a special clinic for race-accident cases, and for several days after regaining consciousness in his white hospital bed, Fangio was unable to move. The sixth day after his internment he was X-rayed, and it was then seen that his injuries were not critical, although his convalescence would require some months. In those days he was almost continually unconscious, and in great pain when awake, although in one of his brief lucid moments he remembers Farina and his wife coming to present him with the laurel wreath which Farina had won after finishing first in the Gran Premio dell'Autodromo.

The doctors told him that there was no doubt that the accident was caused by the accumulated effects of tiredness and the abrupt change in handling characteristics between the B.R.M. and the Maserati. The accident had at first a profoundly adverse psychological effect on him, because in many years of race driving it was the first time he had really hurt himself. The home newspapers, too, were full of gloomy predictions that he would never be able to race again, but after a few long months' treatment he was back in the saddle again for the Gran Premio de la República Argentina, the first of the series. González says he never saw anyone so relieved as Fangio when the doctors removed the plaster cast in which his neck was encased, and he saw that he could, painfully at first, swivel his head!

Froilán was left to defend the Maserati colours for the rest of the season, and finished a close second to Villoresi in the Módena race, also failing to pull off a very good chance to win the Gran Premio d'Italia that year. This augured well for 1953 prospects.

\* \* \*

After retiring in the Argentine Grand Prix with transmission failure, Fangio felt that although the race had been a victory for Ferrari, it had proved to him that his own driving ability had not been in any way impaired by his crash. He had been as fast as ever, even though the Maserati accelerated much less than the Ferrari and Alberto Ascari had led the race all the way through.

Then in the Belgian Grand Prix Fangio had another prang. He retired with his own Maserati and then took over Johnny Claes' car, and was catching up leader Ascari in great style when on the last lap Fangio hit an oil patch, the car went out of control and skidded into a ditch. It "sauced" violently in and out of the ditch and landed back on its four wheels again, previously having flung out its driver, luckily with only superficial hurts. Those were black hours for the little Argentine colony in Spa, as it was feared that the accident might have affected his Monza injury, but in fact a few days later Fangio was on the train with Ingiere Lugo of Maseratis, travelling to Milan.

## CHAPTER XIV

### *MONZA, MEXICO AND MARIMÓN*

In Milan Fangio shopped around for new goggles, as his own had been damaged by flints thrown up by the wheels during the Grote Prijs van Nederland held in Zandvoort a few weeks before. Like most professional racing drivers, Fangio holds determined views about goggles. He normally uses Polaroid-type goggles on surfaces likely to release flints and break them, or otherwise the circular-lens type with cloth backing, which he says he finds the coolest, and the type with 90° auxiliary lenses when due to the characteristics of the circuit he wishes to have a wide range of peripheral vision. He always uses two pairs, as a pitstop to change broken or dirty goggles may well cost a place. He dislikes vizors except in exceptionally heavy rain, when the drops tend to be blown off rather than smear up the lenses as on goggles. Vizors do not mist up in rain like goggles do, but they are very hot to wear, as they catch heat which comes straight up from the cockpit, and heat is very important to a racing driver who spends a large part of his active life in what amounts to a mobile pressure cooker!

\* \* \*

In Módena, Maserati was working hard on the new monoposto for 1953. True, the 2-litre Formula was due to lapse last year, but undoubtedly the 2,000 c.c. car would serve as a test-bench for the 2.5-litre prototype already under construction for the 1954 season. The engine of the 2-litre car was derived directly from the A 6 GCS sports car of 1947, but had been steadily developed and they shortened the stroke to 75 mm., the bore going up to that same figure, which resulted in greater piston area and more revs within the permissible figures for piston speed. Later these figures were still further altered to 76.2 × 72 mm., in conjunction with a novel cylinder-head layout incorporating dual-ignition with a top-hat shape combustion chamber. The rear axle was still of the rigid type, however, and thus the road-holding would not be likely to be as good as the Ferrari. The drivers were all called to a conference at which they were explained the power characteristics of the new engine, and tactics and possibilities were amply thrashed out. Thus expectancy hung for the Gran Premio d'Italia.



After the French Grand Prix, where the first four to come in were covered by a five-second difference, nobody could hope for another similar race for two or three years, because the evidence goes to show that however closely matched competing cars are, the eventual winner usually builds up a small but decisive lead towards the end and wins, by five, ten or what-may-be seconds. However, in practising for the Italian Grand Prix it seemed that the French Grand Prix would be seen all over again, with trimmings. Fangio tells the story very well.

“At Maserati they all had been working hard, and on the bench a six-cylinder engine had exceeded the magical 100 b.h.p./per litre figure, which seemed to set an invisible ‘sound barrier’ to designers’ aspirations. Strangely, an invisible hand had seemed to stop the engines at 190, 192, 195 b.h.p., never quite 200, until just before the race. Ferraris had prepared a new car with side-mounted fuel tanks, which they called the ‘Squalo’ (Shark), and it had a new 100 × 79 mm. four-cylinder engine (against 94 × 90 for the earlier version). However, when Maglioli took the car out he scared himself badly, because it was pretty unstable and once or twice I was sure Umberto was coming unstuck. Eventually they didn’t give the car to any of their front-line drivers.

Well, the race was pretty terrific. Every one of the 80 laps was another fight, another duel with Ascari and Farina, who were close up with me, and on almost every lap we changed places for the lead. It was glorious fun, but what impressed me most was Pinocho Marimón, driving his own private Maserati, who kept up with us all the time and was as fast as any of us three team drivers with the fastest cars. Unluckily, a stone damaged the oil radiator of his Maserati and he had to stop at his pit for attention, but a couple of minutes later he was with us again, although two laps behind, and kept up at an equal speed all the rest of the race. It was a really astonishing show, and served to set Pinocho on his tragically short-lived career.

The last lap was pretty dramatic, I suppose. I came in third, with Marimón leading the pack (still two laps behind, of course), and his car must have grazed Ascari’s or something, because Alberto spun round and Farina had to swerve off the road to avoid him, so I shot through and won! I don’t think I would have pulled it off otherwise, although in actual fact the three of us had been breathing down each other’s necks during those 500 kilometres.

I was pretty glad to win that race, though. After my crash in this same track a year before, and what with not having won here except in 1949, I was beginning to fear that bad luck was keeping me from putting up good performances at Monza, and in fact I had begun to worry about whether it might be just as well not to race any more on that track. But, of course, that race ended all those foolish thoughts. They say I was almost hysterical that day, and I’m not surprised, although as a rule I’m usually rather calm.”

\* \* \*

Thus came 1954, and for some time Fangio had been hearing about a new racing car that Mercedes-Benz were concentrating on. In time he was approached to sign on for the team, although he was warned that the car would

definitely not be ready before the Grand Prix de l'A.C.F. in Rheims. He agreed to sign on, confident that Mercedes would make a good job of any Grand Prix car they chose to build, and his first two Grand Prix events that year were with Maserati cars, and he won both, the Argentine Grand Prix in pouring rain and the Belgian Grand Prix in blazing sunshine. Before that, however, he had competed in the fabulous Carrera Panamericana.

"There has always been something exotic about the Panamericana", Fangio says. "Never before has a race attained classic status in so short a time after its inception. It is like, and yet utterly unlike, our Grandes Premios, as it is run from point-to-point but over good, or at least middle-class roads, with some stretches over fine superhighways. It is run from border to border, Ciudad Juárez to Tuxtla Gutiérrez the first year, and in the reverse direction from then on.

An Oldsmobile won in 1950, although the race had poor International support then, and the following year two 2.6 Ferraris won so easily that for 1952 the organizers wisely divided the race into 'stock' and 'sports' classes. I wanted to go over that year, but couldn't arrange a drive, and Mercedes-Benz won with their new 300 SL sports car. However, for 1953 the 300 SL had been withdrawn while they were working on the Grand Prix car, so the issue lay between Ferrari and Lancia. Felice Bonetto had come to see me and suggested that I drive a Lancia for the team, and I hadn't thought very much of the suggestion at first, because after an eventful year I wanted to go home and rest, but after a while I suppose I was tempted and agreed.

About two hundred of us started from Tuxtla Gutiérrez on a hot, dusty afternoon, although before this Bonetto and I had gone over the course twice, marking all the hazards with yellow paint. Among those two hundred there were over 80 Argentines, all tempted by Government offers to let them bring cars in free of duty if they raced! A lot of people I know put up a rather poor show, though, finishing the first lap and retiring to drive straight to Vera Cruz and ship their cars from there to Argentina! However, most of them didn't get their permits, after all.

Our Lancias had arrived in a lorry which was so enormous that it had to be parked in a plaza in the centre of town, where it became one of the showpieces of the local populace. I hear that it took weeks to eradicate the evidence of the truck's wheel-tracks...

The first part of the race was rather dangerous, mountain roads without banking or adequate signposting, and sometimes with a reverse camber. We knew that we weren't as fast as the 4.5 Ferraris, so we had to rely on consistency and speed to see us through. Nevertheless, the first stage was ours, as the immensely powerful monsters from Maranello did not go too well on the twisty mountain roads and we were 1-2-3-4, Taruffi, Bonetto, myself and Castellotti. Taruffi and Bonetto had apparently embarked on one of their frequent private duels, although I warned them that I did not consider it wise.

Three miles before Cuchitan, Stagnoli's 4.5 lost a tyre at 160 m.p.h. and he and his mechanic were both killed (Stagnoli died in hospital). Felice averaged 95 m.p.h. on the first stage and six of us managed to beat Behra's average with the 2.3 Gordini the year before. On the next stage, Oaxaca-Puebla, Villoresi clipped 10 min. off Villoresi's 1952 record, and led, followed by Bonetto and I. I had decided to refrain from indulging in the Bonetto-Taruffi

affair, because not only was the course dangerous but I didn't think our engines would stand the pace.

Well, from Puebla to Mexico the road goes very high, up to nearly 10,000 feet, so we had some trouble with carburation. Piero Taruffi did 103.7 m.p.h. and a prominent newspaper headlined: '¿ Puebla-Mexico 46 min. 25 sec.?' as if doubting the evidence of the stop-watches. Phil Hill crashed, but was unhurt, and Maglioli, Ferrari's only hope after a lot of trouble, was moving up and was now fourth behind me.

Unhappily my premonitions about the Taruffi-Bonetto duel were to come true. Bonetto came tearing into Silao, an ancient Aztec city, and his car struck one of the dips made for the rainwater to run off the road, which do not give any trouble at 80 m.p.h. but are entirely different at 160! They say the car just shot off the highway like a bullet and wrapped itself round a lamppost. Felice was instantly killed. After this I didn't want to go on at first, but then continued and managed to win from Taruffi and Maglioli."

A few days later Fangio flew back home for a rest before the 1954 season. As briefly mentioned, Fangio drove one of the greatest races of his career to win the 1954 Argentine Grand Prix in a fundamentally slower Maserati against the full might of the Ferrari team, a terrific downpour playing a decisive part in the final result. Afterwards there was a protest, in which it was alleged that during a pitstop Fangio's car was attended by more than the regulation three mechanics, but the protest was disallowed.

A few weeks later Fangio also won in the Belgian Grand Prix with a Maserati, after a fine duel with Farina, and then came the French Grand Prix, where the streamlined Mercedes-Benz racing cars effectively wiped out the opposition. In Silverstone, however, they were not so happy, as the streamlined bodywork proved a disadvantage on that circuit which has many curves, and thus for the German Grand Prix Mercedes designed an entirely new body with the wheels exposed in the classic racing-car tradition.

The 1954 German Grand Prix, however, is largely the story of a young man, and his love for the Nürburgring circuit, because what happened to him decisively affected the result of the race.

The young man was called Onofre Marimón. A native of the inland province of Córdoba, famed for its six- and seven-thousand-foot peaks, its tourist trade and its cool, bracing air, he was the son of a first-rank Gran Premio driver, Domingo Marimón, who with Fangio, Marcilla and Taddia had formed the spearhead of the Chevrolet attack against the ever-threatening Fords in the post-war years. Old Domingo, who like most drivers has high-octane gasoline in his veins instead of blood, encouraged his son in his first racing attempts in Mecánica Nacional. The rookie had obtained one or two drives in Fangio's écurie of Chevrolet-engined cars, and later won a Gran Premio-type race in Mar del Plata. In 1953 he got his chance to go to Europe, and, racing for Maseratis, he pulled some extraordinary successes out of the bag, culminating in the Monza race, the scene of the unforgettable Fangio-Ascari-Farina duel, when the young driver was right up with the stars and only dropped back through a stone which smashed his oil-cooler.

In 1954 his first—and only—European victory was obtained in the Rome Grand Prix, and he bid fair to reach first-rank style in that same season. Few

people, however, knew how much he wanted to win in the Nürburgring, because in the way that most drivers have a special predilection for one circuit, Marimón loved the Nürburgring almost with passion. A couple of years before, during a non-racing visit, he had seen the circuit for the first time, and been so captivated by it that wordlessly he set out in his private car, doing so many laps that González told him to stop it, as he would wear the circuit out and they needed it for the Sunday!

Back home he frequently had to drive among the mountains, and every time he screeched his car round a hairpin he remembered, even if only sub-consciously, the German circuit. In 1953 he raced there for Maseratis and practiced so hard that when Fangio, González and he went out for a few laps in a private car Marimón, in the back seat, called out all the bends and dips on the road with his eyes closed... Fangio and González grinned at first at this enthusiasm, but then a shadow swept over Fangio's face, and instinctively González knew what he was thinking. It is not good for a young driver to become obsessed with a certain circuit.

Meanwhile in Europe Onofre's fame grew and people started pointing him out as the immediate successor to Ascari and his two brilliant compatriots. Now in 1954, with Fangio in Mercedes-Benz, González for Ferrari and Ascari in the never-never Lancia, he was the Maserati first string, and thus when the Grosser Preis von Deutschland came round he was overjoyed, as now he had at least a fighting chance at winning. He would have to face the formidable Mercedes team on their home ground, but the Stuttgart cars were not unbeatable, as proved by González in Silverstone. Furthermore, few people knew the Ring like he.

One practice day González, strolling around with his hands in his pockets, saw Marimón's car come in to its pit. The driver climbed out and had a drink, while the car was checked over, and as González strolled along he was surprised to observe Marimón climb back in.

"You're not going out again, are you?" he asked wonderingly.

Marimón grinned a little shamefacedly.

"Just one more lap", he said apologetically, and as González caught the chief mechanic's eye this official raised his brows significantly. Shaking his head, González walked on, and then, struck by an idea, sat down on an upturned petrol can and waited. Sure enough, ten minutes later the red Maserati flashed past, but did not stop, starting on another tour. Froilán grinned again and went back to his hotel.

About half-an-hour later Fangio came into the room.

"Something's happened to Pinocho."

"Bad?"

"I'm afraid so."

Without another word, Froilán got hurriedly dressed and, hoping against hope, they dashed to the circuit, but when they got there it was too late and Onofre Marimón had died on the very roadside of his beloved Nürburgring. The car had gone out of control and smashed, it is not known exactly for what reason, and the driver was killed almost instantly.

The news stunned everybody like scarcely any fatality since anyone could remember. Because racing drivers who were killed were usually either veterans,

in which case people went around shrugging their shoulders and saying "I thought so", or conversely, they were novices whom nobody knew. But not for a long time had a rising star been cut off in his prime, and the news cast a pall over the whole race which was unbelievable to hardened race-goers, inured as they were to sudden tragedy. Fangio went about speaking to nobody, his mouth set in a grim line, and the more emotional González sobbed like a child. In Argentine thousands flocked to the building of the Sports Confederation where the body was waked, and when the catafalque wended its way out of Buenos Aires towards far-away Córdoba a deep silence fell wherever it passed.

In Buenos Aires, this was written of him: "... He left the country with the will to win and he has returned victorious, for Onofre Marimón has triumphed, he has triumphed far beyond the scope of human limitations, and his countrymen who know that mourn as we, who were his friends, mourn as well..."

That is really all there is to say about the German Grand Prix, except that González was so affected by Marimón's death, that he drove like a sick man and eventually handed over his car to Hawthorn, who started to pick up seconds on Fangio, but by this time it was too late. Ferrari could have probably won that race had González been more on form.

\* \* \*

While Fangio stood at attention beside his car, listening to the strains of his National Anthem and his gaze fixed on his blue-and-white flag, he suddenly turned quickly. For an instant he thought he had seen an unshaven young man in baggy pants standing beside him...

## CHAPTER XV

### *SIGNING OFF*

1954 was definitely an "Argentine year". Although the rejoicing at the collective Argentine performance for the year, which was staggering, was inevitably dulled by the death of Onofre Marimón, it was impossible to escape the evidence of fact.

The whole thing had started when Fangio won the Argentine Grand Prix, with González third, then a couple of weeks later Mières finished second to the Ciudad de Buenos Aires Formule Libre event. Froilán González won at Silverstone three times (twice in the B.R.D.C. meet and then in the British Grand Prix), and at Bari Froilán won again and Onofre was fourth. Bitito Mières won the 850 c.c. preliminary to the Albi race, and Fangio the Belgian Grand Prix. In Rome Marimón's swansong resulted in a win, and in the Grand Prix Supercortemaggiore in Monza, González was second with Hawthorn, then winning the Vingt-quatre Heures du Mans with Trintignant, to date the only time an Argentine has won that race. After this Fangio won the Grand Prix de l'A.C.F.

When in 1951 González and Fangio had finished first and second in the British Grand Prix, journalists had commented on the Argentine superiority in the race, but in 1954 González won, Marimón was third, Fangio fourth and Mières sixth! The González won the Portuguese Grand Prix for sports cars, Fangio-González first and second in the Nürburgring, Berne Fangio-González-Mières first, second and fourth. For the first time an Italian had not won a Grand Prix in all the year, and in fact every Grand Prix except the Spanish event (Hawthorn) was won by an Argentine... Remarkable statistics.

In 1955 Fangio won the Argentine Grand Prix again in blazing sunshine, and that year was his most successful, as he won every Grande Epreuve except the British race, in which he tailed Stirling Moss home, both driving for Mercedes-Benz. He won the Championship for the third successive time, in a year strongly marked by the terrible tragedy at Le Mans which cost nearly a hundred lives. 1955 is too recent history to need repetition, but it will surely go down as the most tragic year in motor racing. And for 1956? Whoever wins and in whatever car, the main attraction will undoubtedly be a short, modest man called Juan Manuel Fangio, Driver Extraordinary and three times Champion of the World.

The rain, which had been threatening for two hours, now began to materialize and a few thick drops splashed on the warm pavement, while the news vendor cursed and hurriedly started piling up his stock of magazines, and the waiters began clearing the sidewalk tables while the customers moved in. Two people sprinted off to erect the hoods of open cars, and a man on a motor scooter gave it a kick, started up, and dashed off for home. Another man called up his home and begged his sister to come and look for him with the family car, although judging from his remarks into the 'phone she didn't seem very keen on the assignment. The drops started to multiply and a light shower of rain turned by degrees, slowly, into a storm.

A pretty girl came running past, in short hops due to her tight skirt, a newspaper on her head, and two people called a taxi at the same time and nearly had a fight over it. An habitué came dashing along and plumped down at a table, trying to dry off his lightweight summer suit with his handkerchief and making some pointed remarks about the suddenness of Buenos Aires rains. A waiter came up to the table and the man grunted, "Coffee".

The wind started to drift the rain in and another waiter started to close the big windows, while the abrupt change in temperature caused the dampness inside to condense and we all started sweating twice as much as before. Somebody called to the waiter to "open those damned windows, can't you see we're roasting in here?" and two or three people went to the door for a breath of fresh air. A young man in an open-necked shirt tried to cadge a ride to an address in downtown B.A., but nobody was going that way.

We pondered between beer and coffee and finally settled for a soft drink. A car jammed its brakes on and slid round on the slippery road surface, and an old gentleman in the middle of the road turned round to imprecate the driver. An old Ford, its distributor apparently soaked, refused to start despite the driver's constant wump-wump-wump with the starter. A Veredita Fiat came in with a big dent on a rear mudguard and the owner got out complaining about a clot who had just run in to him on busy Avenida Callao.

One of the waiters, going off duty, dashed across the street to catch a bus pursued by the derisive remarks of his late customers. A motorcycle dashed past in the teeth of the wind, its rider soaked through and obviously hurrying for home. Fangio got up, stretched and said, "I'm going home. Anybody going my way?" Three or four of us dashed across the street into his car and away we went.

## JUAN MANUEL FANGIO'S FIRST FIFTY ROAD-RACING VICTORIES IN GRAND PRIX AND SPORTS CARS

			Km. p. h.
27.	2. 49	G. P. Ciudad de Mar del Plata . . . . .	Maserati 1500 s 111.006
3.	4. 49	G. P. di San Remo . . . . .	Maserati 1500 s 100.662
18.	4. 49	G. P. de Pau . . . . .	Maserati 1500 s 84.923
8.	5. 49	G. P. du Roussillon (Perpignan) . . . . .	Maserati 1500 s 99.386
21.	5. 49	G. P. de Marseille . . . . .	Simca-Gordini 1430 100.827
26.	6. 49	G. P. dell'Autodromo (Monza) . . . . .	Ferrari 2000 160.146
10.	7. 49	G. P. d'Albigeois (Albi) . . . . .	Maserati 1500 s 158.367
10.	4. 50	G. P. de Pau . . . . .	Maserati 1500 s 94.041
16.	4. 50	G. P. di San Remo . . . . .	Alfa Romeo 1500 s 95.992
21.	5. 50	G. P. de Monaco . . . . .	Alfa Romeo 1500 s 98.700
11.	6. 50	G. P. des Remparts (Angoulême) . . . . .	Maserati 2000 69.948
18.	6. 50	G. P. de Belgique (Spa) . . . . .	Alfa Romeo 1500 s 177.096
2.	7. 50	G. P. de l'A. C. F. (Reims) . . . . .	Alfa Romeo 1500 s 168.722
30.	7. 50	G. P. des Nations (Geneva) . . . . .	Alfa Romeo 1500 s 127.583
15.	8. 50	G. P. di Pescara . . . . .	Alfa Romeo 1500 s 135.306
12.	11. 50	G. P. Ciudad de Paraná . . . . .	Ferrari 2000 s 74.872
18.	12. 50	G. P. Ciudad de Santiago de Chile . . . . .	Ferrari 2000 s 95.976
24.	12. 50	500 Millas de Rafaela . . . . .	Talbot 4500 177.097
27.	5. 51	G. P. der Schweiz (Berne) . . . . .	Alfa Romeo 1500 s 143.405
1.	7. 51	G. P. d'Europe (Reims) . . . . .	Alfa Romeo 1500 s 178.593
3.	9. 51	G. P. di Bari . . . . .	Alfa Romeo 1500 s 135.055
28.	10. 51	G. P. Peña Rhin (Barcelona) . . . . .	Alfa Romeo 1500 s 158.938

### Declared Champion of the World for 1951

13.	1. 52	G. P. de São Paulo (Brazil) . . . . .	Ferrari 2000 s 119.139
3.	2. 52	G. P. de Rio de Janeiro (Boa Vista) . . . . .	Ferrari 2000 s 87.987
9.	3. 52	G. P. Presidente Perón (Buenos Aires) . . . . .	Ferrari 2000 s 109.576
16.	3. 52	G. P. Ciudad de Buenos Aires . . . . .	Ferrari 2000 s 112.369
22.	3. 52	G. P. de Piriápolis (Montevideo) . . . . .	Ferrari 2000 s 103.758
30.	3. 52	II G. P. de Piriápolis . . . . .	Ferrari 2000 s 102.050
12.	7. 53	Vue des Alpes Hill-Climb . . . . .	Maserati 2000 125.698
6.	9. 53	G. P. Supercortemaggiore (Monza) . . . . .	Alfa Romeo 3500 (1) 127.161
13.	9. 53	G. P. d'Italia (Monza) . . . . .	Maserati 2000 178.130
30.	9. 53	G. P. di Modena . . . . .	Maserati 2000 123.574
19.	11. 53	Carrera Panamericana . . . . .	Lancia 3100 (L) 169.221
17.	1. 54	G. P. de la República Argentina (Buenos Aires) . . . . .	Maserati 2500 112.875
20.	6. 54	G. P. de Belgique (Spa) . . . . .	Maserati 2500 185.172
4.	7. 54	G. P. de l'A. C. F. (Reims) . . . . .	Mercedes-Benz 2500 185.638
1.	8. 54	G. P. d'Europe (Nürburgring) . . . . .	Mercedes-Benz 2500 133.200
22.	8. 54	G. P. der Schweiz (Berne) . . . . .	Mercedes-Benz 2500 159.650
5.	9. 54	G. P. d'Italia (Monza) . . . . .	Mercedes-Benz 2500 180.218

### Declared Champion of the World, 1954

16.	1. 55	G. P. de la República Argentina (Buenos Aires) . . . . .	Mercedes-Benz 2500 125.917
30.	1. 55	G. P. Ciudad de Buenos Aires . . . . .	Mercedes-Benz 3000 118.235
29.	5. 55	Nürburgring Sports-Car Race . . . . .	Mercedes-Benz 3000 (1) 130.489
5.	6. 55	G. P. de Belgique (Spa) . . . . .	Mercedes-Benz 2500 191.237
19.	6. 55	G. P. van Nederland (Zandvoort) . . . . .	Mercedes-Benz 2500 144.240
7.	8. 55	Svenska G. P. (Sports) (Kristianstaad) . . . . .	Mercedes-Benz 3000 (1) 161.000
11.	9. 55	G. P. d'Italia (Monza) . . . . .	Mercedes-Benz 2500 206.791
6.	11. 55	G. P. de Venezuela (Caracas) . . . . .	Maserati 3000 (1) 131.500

### Declared Champion of the World, 1955

22.	1. 56	G. P. de la República Argentina (Buenos Aires) . . . . .	Lancia-Ferrari 2500 127.759
5.	2. 56	G. P. de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (Mendoza) . . . . .	Lancia-Ferrari 2500 133.721
25.	3. 56	Sebring 12-hour G. P. of Endurance . . . . .	Ferrari 3500 (1) 135.282

(1) Sports car



## GRANDES EPREUVES WON BY FANGIO

- 1950 G. P. de Belgique (Alfa Romeo 1500 s)  
G. P. de l'A. C. F. (Alfa Romeo 1500 s)
- 1951 G. P. d'Europe (Reims) (Alfa Romeo 1500 s)  
G. P. der Schweiz (Alfa Romeo 1500 s)  
G. P. Peña Rhin (Alfa Romeo 1500 s)
- 1953 G. P. d'Italia (Maserati 2000)
- 1954 G. P. de la República Argentina (Maserati 2500)  
G. P. de Belgique (Maserati 2500)  
G. P. de l'A. C. F. (Mercedes-Benz 2500)  
G. P. d'Europe (Nürburgring) (Mercedes-Benz 2500)  
G. P. der Schweiz (Mercedes-Benz 2500)  
G. P. d'Italia (Mercedes-Benz 2500)
- 1955 G. P. de la República Argentina (Mercedes-Benz 2500)  
G. P. de Belgique (Mercedes-Benz 2500)  
G. P. van Nederland (Mercedes-Benz 2500)  
G. P. d'Italia (Mercedes-Benz 2500)
- 1956 G. P. de la República Argentina (Lancia-Ferrari 2500)

## FANGIO'S RACING CAREER IN SOUTH AMERICA (excluding Grand Prix and Sports cars)

13. 12. 36 González Chaves (Ford spl.): Started late, disqualified.
27. 3. 38 Necochea (Ford V8 spl.) 3rd. first heat, 7th. final.
26. 9. 38 Olavarría (Ford V8 spl.) Non-starter.
13. 11. 38 Tres Arroyos (Ford V8) 8th. (Race stopped at 5 laps).
7. 5. 39 La Plata (Ford) 5th. first heat, 8th. final.
19. 10. 39 Gran Premio Argentino (Chevrolet coupé) 22nd. general classification.
29. 10. 39 Gran Premio Extraordinario (Chevrolet coupé) 5th.
19. 12. 39 Mil Millas Argentinas (Chevrolet coupé) 13th.
28. 9. 40 Gran Premio Internacional del Norte (Chevrolet coupé) *winner*.
14. 12. 40 Mil Millas Argentinas (Chevrolet coupé) 9th.
19. 6. 41 G. P. Getulio Vargas (Chevrolet coupé) *winner*.
13. 12. 41 Mil Millas Argentinas (Chevrolet) *winner*.
21. 1. 42 Gran Premio del Sud (Chevrolet coupé) *winner*.
2. 4. 42 Trofeo Mar y Sierras (Chevrolet coupé) *winner*.
15. 2. 47 Gran Premio de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (Chevrolet monoplace) *winner*.
2. 3. 47 Gran Premio Ciudad de Rosario (Chevrolet monoplace) 6th.
6. 4. 47 Gran Premio de Necochea (Chevrolet monoplace) 3rd. second heat, retired final.
20. 4. 47 Gran Premio de la Vendimia (Chevrolet monoplace) second in 1st. heat, 3rd. final.
21. 9. 47 Premio Primavera (Chevrolet monoplace) 1st. local car heat, 5th. final (against G. P. cars).
26. 10. 47 Doble Vuelta Sierra de la Ventana (Chevrolet coupé) *winner*.
22. 11. 47 Gran Premio Internacional (Chevrolet coupé) 6th.
21. 12. 47 Mil Millas Argentinas (Chevrolet coupé) retired.
28. 2. 48 Vuelta de Pringles (Chevrolet coupé) *winner*.
20. 3. 48 Gran Premio Otoño (Chevrolet monoplace) *winner*.
29. 3. 48 100 Millas Playas de Necochea (Chevrolet monoplace) 3rd.
11. 4. 48 Premio Mar y Sierras (Chevrolet monoplace) 11th.
25. 4. 48 Vuelta de Entre Ríos (Chevrolet coupé) *winner*.
20. 10. 48 G. P. de la América del Sud (Chevrolet coupé) retired.
16. 1. 49 Mil Millas Argentinas (Chevrolet) 2nd.
6. 2. 49 Premio Jean-Pierre Wimille (Chevrolet monoplace) *winner*.
20. 3. 49 Premio Semana de Bell Ville (Rickenbacker monoplace) retired.
5. 11. 49 Gran Premio de la República (Chevrolet coupé) 2nd.

Since that date Fangio has only raced G. P. and sports cars.

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