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So you think
you've
got
talent?

Sometimes,
talent isn't
enough

If Bruce McClines could hit a curve ball as well as he drives, he'd be on the all-star team. In racing, he's on the bench.

NEWS



By Bill Lovell

Forget what Mark Twain said about statistics. Here's one that ain't no kind of lie:

Ninety-nine percent of everybody who ever climbed into a Formula Ford figured that they had a damned serious chance of becoming World Champion. Maybe more than once.

That's why the Ford guys always looked a bit down their visors at drivers in other (read: Lesser) classes. Also why the Ford guys always had their own drivers' meeting after the main one broke up, so they could get yelled at in advance for all the nasty things they were going to do on the track. Which none of the Ford guys really minded, because they were the goddamned elite, the ones who were there for a reason. And the reason didn't have a thing to do with any fruitcupping trophies. It had to do with being in the toughest, most competitive class in racing, where winning was the next best thing to having Enzo Ferrari's private phone number. Or better yet, to old Enzo's having yours.

Formula Ford was The Magic Mountain, you see, The Stairway to the Stars that Emerson Fittipaldi climbed to become World Champion, twice. Just jump in a Ford and whip everybody's ass and the



WILL MacNNES BE FORCED TO RETIRE TO STUD?

Along with a toy-store chicken.

The chicken's name was Seymour. The chicken's driver, and mascot, was a semi-crazy dude named Bruce MacInnes.

Nelson Ledges wasn't the first place I'd seen MacInnes. The year before, at the last-ever Cumberland National, MacInnes had spun three times and still managed to finish second, behind former national champion Freddy Stevenson, but I'd crashed and written off the car and didn't pay too much attention to all that.

MacInnes was good, I knew, but at Nelson Ledges I, along with the rest of the field, should have had him for lunch.

It had been raining, hard, for a good hour prior to qualifying, and the chief steward decided that he wasn't going to let MacInnes out on the track on the English Firestone street radials he'd brought along for rain tires. No matter that they were the same street radials the

MacInnes thought so too. He was the one with the talent, the wonderful God-given ability to get around a circuit a half-second or so quicker than the rest of us. We knew it, he knew it, and we all waited for Ferrari, or Colin Chapman or Ken Tyrrell or even Rob Walker to know it too, and MacInnes would be in Formula One and Phil Hill wouldn't be the Only American World Champion anymore.

Well, the last part came true, in time, but not for MacInnes. It came true for fellow American Mario Andretti. Of course, Andretti had (and has) that same kind of talent, the kind Jackie Stewart used to show when he'd flat demoralize the competition by blowing them off in the first few laps and then just cruise home to a win. But for Bruce MacInnes, who had spent what little money he had to show the world that he belonged right up there, the phone never rang.

To race, perchance to dream

If you think you're gonna be World Champion, sit down, pop a cold one and consider the story of Bruce MacInnes



next thing you'll know the phone will be ringing off the hook and first-class plane tickets will arrive, special delivery. Keep that helmet bag packed and parked right next to the door, old son, 'cause you might be testing tomorrow at Brands.

It was the Possible Dream. No, that's too mild. Racers being how they are—how often have you read that all it takes is determination?—it was the Probable Dream. And it wasn't going to take a trust fund or an angel to do it; Fords were cheap, man. All you needed was a one-bay shanty in an alley somewhere, about nine free nights a week and culinary tastes that ran to greasburgers, and you were on your way.

At least, that's what it seemed like in days gone by. They were the late days of the Aquarian Dynasty, just before the Good Ship Lollipop smacked the iceberg at Kent State, when, with an old VW transporter and a credit card some oil company had been dumb enough to send you, there wasn't a Ford race in the country too far away to get to. The factory was promoting the hell out of it, Ford's own Len Pounds was in charge and there was even a magazine and a Miss Formula Ford. And pro races, as in money. Heck, half the population of England was welding up space frames and putting stuff in boxes and sending it to the states for under five grand complete. It was all too good to be true.

To race, perchance to dream. To work your ass off. To give up, and happily,

everything that didn't matter, like rent and family and friends who didn't race, for your shot of standing up there spraying Dom Perignon over some Royal Family while *The Star Spangled Banner* blared and the smell of Castrol R still hung in the air sweet as sex, potent as ambrosia.

Goddamn, it was wonderful. Yesterday's dream.

I do not mind telling you now, these too many years later, that I too shared that dream. The oil company bill was paid off years ago, though not, of course, in as timely a fashion as the company would have liked. The Formula Ford, last I heard of it, was somewhere in Atlanta, mostly in pieces. I have it mostly out of my system these days, and need lock myself in the bathroom only once or twice a year now to keep myself from ignoring the insane prices and doing it again. Because while I could get back in a Ford and race again, and it would be fun, that wouldn't be enough to justify the hassle and expense.

Ford was never about having fun. It was about the dream, and the dream ended, for me, on a rainy day in May of 1972 at Nelson Ledges. On that day I finally discovered I wasn't going to be World Champion, that I didn't have the talent. I discovered this depressing fact because for the first time I found out what real talent was, and it was sitting in someone else's car.



Scott Harvey, Seymour the Chicken and MacInnes at the '76 Runoffs.

blokes ran on every race, wet or dry, in Merry Olde; this here was America, and in America you ran on race rubber or you didn't run. So there was MacInnes, mad as hell and on dry tires while the rest of us went out on rains.

Guess who won the pole? And the race, which started wet even if it ended semi-dry?

Wasn't anybody on rain tires.

For all of us except the guy with that fugitive from Colonel Sanders, it was a long, thoughtful drive home. And somewhere on the Pennsylvania Turnpike I came to the conclusion that I'd be buying my own champagne. It was Bruce MacInnes who was going to be World Champion.

"I was naive. I thought I could do it, I really did," MacInnes says. "Like everybody else, I thought Ford was the way to the top." We're hunched over a couple of industrial strength Margaritas in this bar in Sebring, where MacInnes serves as an instructor at the Skip Barber Racing School, playing the most familiar scene in Florida: Two old strokes reminiscing about days long gone. But there is no anger in MacInnes, no real sadness. There is more than a wisp of what might have been, to be sure, but MacInnes has his life together, loves his job as instructor for the Skip Barber School, has a good wife and a kid that puts a smile in his voice. This is no Kid Gavilan, selling pencils on a street corner

in Miami, but there is a lesson in his story nonetheless. It is the oldest and clearest story in racing, and the fact that each of us had to learn the hard way what we should have known within the first five minutes of drivers' school says more about raw ambition and hope and the addictive power of racing single-seaters than it does about common sense.

The story, of course, is this: Today especially, if you don't have the money, you're dogmeat.

There are exceptions, sure. You can be real lucky and find, like Danny Sullivan, a hometown Garvin Brown, one of the heirs to the Jack Daniels distillery fortune and a Sullivan financial angel. But otherwise you'd best be advised to choose your parents well, or find yourself a business that'll make you an obscene amount of dough while you're still in your early 20s.

Like, for example, the kid who'd arrived at Sebring for the Barber advanced drivers' school in his own jet helicopter.

"Damn, would you look at that thing," Mike Rand says as we sit at the bar at the Sebring airport waiting for MacInnes to finish lecturing the students on the interesting lines they've been taking and join us. Rand's is really the same story. National champion in Formula C, 1970—"let me tell you where that gets you," he says—and like MacInnes a Skip Barber instructor. It gets you, of course, on the outside looking in, watching your dreams fly away like a rich kid in a chopper.

So of course the question must be asked of MacInnes the instructor: What do you tell your students when they ask about racing as a career?

MacInnes is honest with them: "I tell them they can go anywhere they want to go, as long as they can afford it. They've got to have enough money to break in at the top, which is one of the reasons I fell down. I wasn't dropped down the right chimney.

"I'm realistic about the situation, and the situation is that the likelihood of making it if you win every race all year and set a hundred lap records is absolutely, maybe one percent."

MacInnes is realistic about it because that is essentially his story. A hundred lap records is hyperbole—MacInnes set 14—but the rest is pretty accurate. A quick roll of the credits should give you the idea: IMSA pro Ford champion in '72, Northeast Division champion '72, '75, '76, '77, AFFA Pro Ford champion '76, pole position at the national championship-deciding SCCA Runoffs '75, '76, '77. The kind of record that in

practically any other sport you could name would do more than get you to the top; there'd be a spot reserved for your helmet in the Hall of Fame.

"There's something wrong in a sport where you can win every race and perhaps dominate a season and not only not get paid like a champion, but not even get the opportunity to race, period," MacInnes says. Still, and characteristically, MacInnes blames, not the sport, but himself. For losing the fire, the drive to race and win that has to be all-consuming if you're going to make it as a top professional.

"I think a lot of it may have been that I lost my goal. My goal was to race Formula One and win the World Championship, and the reality of the situation after around 1977 was that I wasn't going to make it. It didn't make sense to make the commitment any more, when the reality was I wasn't going to

make it to Formula One."

Commitment is the key word there, and unless you've been there and spent those dollars you didn't have and those hours that meant you didn't do anything else, and done those things for year after year, you simply don't know how much that word means. Finally, you just have enough. The longing to do all those things other people do rushes into the vacuum created when the goal dies.

Don't get me wrong; I've never met anyone in Ford who regretted having made that commitment. MacInnes says it well: "Ford was a motivator in itself. It's the greatest racing class in the world. But after that, and after losing the goal of Formula One, the motivation just wasn't there."

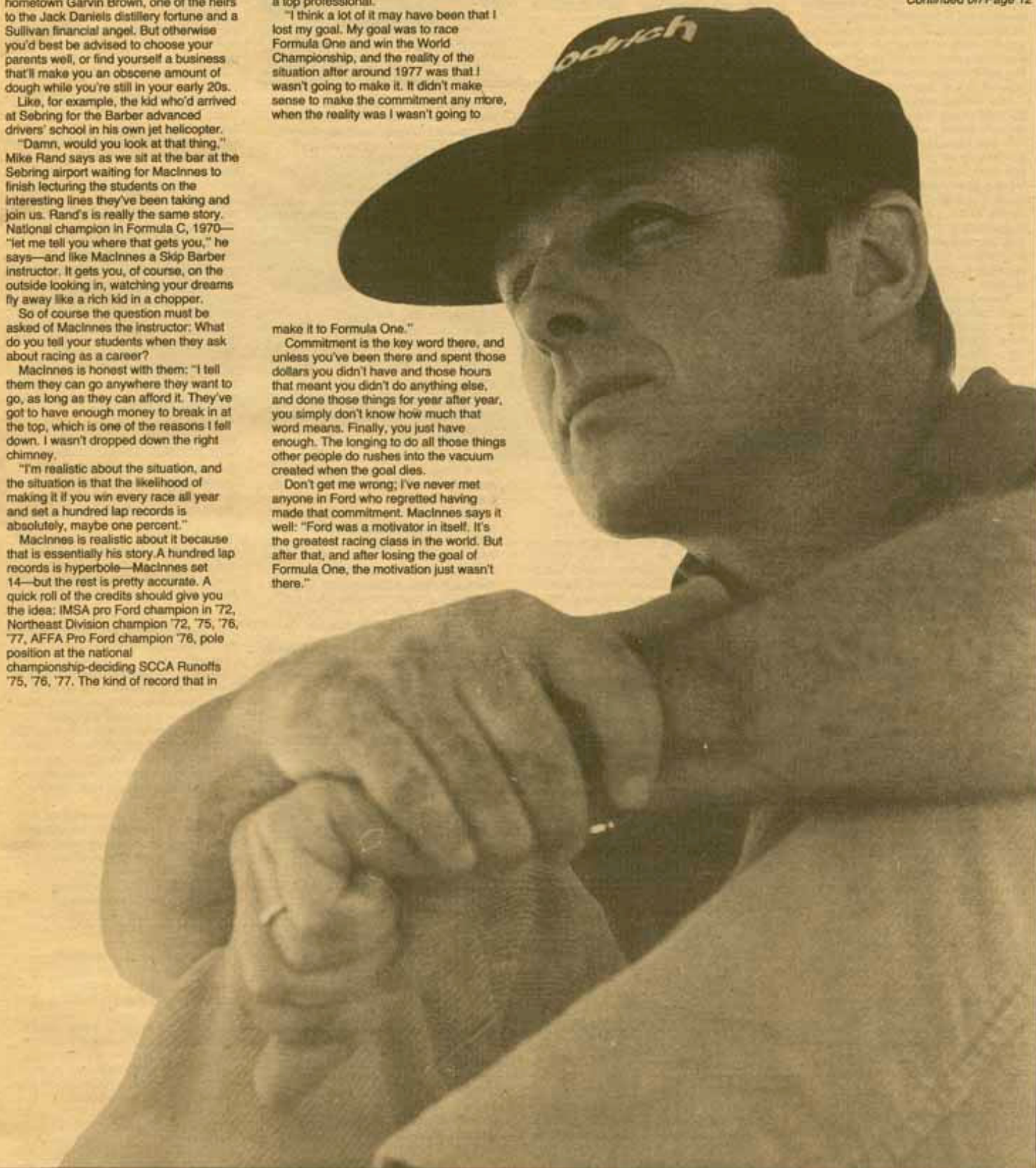
The dream of Formula One, the lure of being the world's best, may be just too strong, like the pull of Klondike gold. At least it was for MacInnes, and even getting the kind of factory drive MacInnes pulled off in '77 couldn't offset the loss of the dream.

That was the year MacInnes spent as team driver for Bob Sharp Racing, a team many times a national champion. Driving both the team's SCCA C Production Datsun 280-Z and its 200-SX in B Sedan, MacInnes won eight of nine starts during the season before suffering mechanical

problems at the Runoffs. There are those who think that MacInnes made a major mistake in leaving the team as he did after just a year, but there was another driver involved. One named Newman. "Two days after the Runoffs, (Paul) Newman's name was on my car," is how MacInnes puts it.

"I think, for one year, that opportunity was great," he says. "Bob Sharp is a good guy. He was fair to me, gave me a good opportunity to race, but I couldn't do it for more than a year. My heart was still in formula cars."

Continued on Page 12



Or Can-Am. Coming off the year with Sharp, MacInnes says, he had two good opportunities to do Can-Am in 1978, "but they both fell through. And I had a guy in West Palm Beach offer me \$50,000 to drive a turbo Porsche. He asked me to figure out what we had to do to update the two-year-old car and do a budget and I did all that and then he got elusive. As it turned out the guy was a pathological liar; he never even had the car."

"Bruce MacInnes," says Bob Sharp, "is a very talented guy who came 99% of the way at least six times to signing the right sponsor and to showing the world what he could do with a competitive car. It's the saddest story in racing, but one we've all seen many times. He left us because he had another opportunity that didn't work out. But he was a great driver."

After those opportunities crashed, MacInnes says, "I looked to the future, to the point where I am now—39 years old—and I said I had to make a living...I looked back at Lothar Motschenbacher and John Cannon, guys who were famous when I grew up, and where are those guys today? Where is Richie Ginther? I'm not real dumb, I had the opportunity in 1977 to get hooked up with Skip (Barber) and Skip is not a flake. He's provided me with a very good living. I love teaching, and I just think it's a great program."

Seven years later, the Barber offer still looks good. Not that MacInnes wouldn't like to race again—"I think I'm a better driver now than I was in '77," he says—but he's not driven to do it at any cost, as once was the case.

"I love to race, no doubt about it, and if I got paid to race I'd do it, but I've got a wife and mortgage right now."

"However, I sure would like to get a GTP ride, or a Trans-Am ride, and I have an opportunity to do that now..."

If a sponsor can be found, it turns out. What else is new?

What is it about racing that makes it so hard for talent to rise to the top? Compare it to other sports and you begin to see the problems.

Team sports have objective criteria—batting averages, strikeout ratios, speed in the 40, etc.—and maybe more importantly, a nationwide network of scouts to measure them and send reports to the front office. If there's a kid in Watercroup, Louisiana who can throw a football 70 yards, the scouts are going to find him, even if he lives in a snake-infested swamp 20 miles from the nearest dirt road.

Individual sports are tougher, but still there's the international-rankings computer in tennis and, while it helps to have an angel to grubstake the pro tour in tennis or golf, there are a lot more guys who fit that description hanging out at the country club than there are Garvin Browns. And even if an aspiring pro can't find an angel, he can still do the qualifying school and try for his tour card and make it the hard way, eating beans and trying to make a few cuts to crawl his way up the money list to exempt status.

Nothing of the sort exists in racing. In addition, of course, the equipment costs are a bit more substantial. Just to practice takes a car, track time, tires, wrenches, equipment, gas. Just to take the car to the track to find it won't run can cost more than a set of golf clubs. The guy you see throwing a grand or so around in the pro shop on the latest golf equipment in all probability just quit racing; it's the next best thing to hitting the lottery for a quantum leap in disposable income.

Still, the fields remain full of Formula Fords. And the cars are still filled with people who think they're on their way to the top. The only difference is that the cars cost over \$20,000 now, and a full national season is going to set you back somewhere between \$70,000 and

Bruce MacInnes

"I looked to the future, to the point where I am now: 39 years old—and I said I had to make a living...I looked back at Lothar Motschenbacher and John Cannon, guys who were famous when I grew up, and where are those guys today? Where is Richie Ginther?"



\$100,000.

What the hell do these guys think they're doing? Don't they know? That the only Ford national champions to make it to Indy, let alone Formula One, were Eddie Miller and poor Gordon Smiley. Both crashed. Smiley died, and that's the whole roster.

Sure they know, just as much as we did way back in the era of front radiators and hard-compound tires. Which is to say not much. Some of them are MacInnes's students today. In addition to telling them what their chances of making F1 are, he teaches a lesson even more important.

"My only goal was to win, and now I look back and think 'who was the World Champion in 1970? Do you know?'" he asks. I stare into the margarita and sure enough, there's the answer: Jochen Rindt.

"You're one of the few people who remember that," he says. "I ask my students that at every school, to try to put in perspective 'how much is it worth to them to jeopardize their life,' and no one knows. They don't even know who was World Champion three years ago. So what's it worth?"

If somehow that doesn't sound like something a real racer would say, remember that the man saying it won, over his career, more races than he lost, over some of the most competitive fields possible. It's just the statement of a man who's decided that there's more to life than racing.

That wasn't always so. There was a

time in the mid-seventies when MacInnes's sponsor had to drop out because of business reversals. Steve Lathrop of Citation Engineering (Zink) offered him a car at cost (\$5,000) because he thought MacInnes could win with it, but he didn't have the money.

"Except that I had a trust fund from a relative I never knew who'd left me this money for my children's education. So I thought about it for about a week and I said to myself, 'well, the kid can consider himself or herself educated: Never trust your old man, because I'm spending the money.'"

"And (spending that money) got me to where I am today in having a good, well-paying job. Best decision I ever made."

It does not happen that the Roger Penskes of this world spend their time scanning the FF national results, or even the Runoff results.

What Ford is good for is finding out if you've got the ability and the desire to win. If the answer is no, you've paid a relatively cheap price for the lesson, with good memories thrown in for free.

If the answer is yes, be prepared to spend more. A lot more. Like the \$250,000 or so it will cost to do pro Super Vee. That series is the real window where you'll get the visibility you need, where talent is noticed. And promoted. Like Arie Luyendyk, who parlayed the '84 Super Vee championship into a CART ride with the Provimi Veal team this season. Or

Chip Robinson, who after two successful Super Vee campaigns hooked up with the Group 44 Jaguar effort in IMSA GTP.

Rand, Robinson and MacInnes agree on one key point: Ford is a great place to start; just don't stay too long.

"I took Jackson Yonge (last year's FF national champion) four or five years to do it," says Rand, "and that's just too long. Bruce (MacInnes) was a helluva Ford driver, but he did it too long too. One year and out, that's the way to go."

MacInnes agrees: "One year, max," he says. "Find out if you've got what it takes, then move on."

Robinson disagrees only slightly. "Two years is OK," he says, "as long as you treat it like a business, as long as you've got a plan."

Robinson's is an interesting story about working hard to "get lucky." After half a season in Ford, "to find out if I had the talent," Robinson says, "I sat down and approached it as a business. I realized you couldn't just go out and win races and drink beer afterwards and have a good time if you wanted to get anywhere."

Not having the requisite big bucks, Robinson went looking for backing. But not just for Chip Robinson, driver. For Chip Robinson, businessman.

"I looked at it the way Bob Tullius did in the '60s," he says, "and I was lucky enough to find people who would finance a racing business, selling and servicing race cars. That way the IRS treated the whole thing as a business, not a hobby."

Of course, a lot of people have found that a racing business is almost as good a way to go broke as racing itself, but attention to detail paid off for Robinson and his backers. They made money. Just as important, Robinson had his goal, and a set timetable to get there:

"Two years of Ford, two years of Super Vee, and the fifth year, Indianapolis." IMSA GTP came along in year five instead of Indy, but as Robinson says, "you've got to be a little flexible." And besides, Robinson says, he has the possibility of doing the CART B series as well.

"I've been lucky twice," he says, "first getting the backing early in my career, and second getting chosen for the Jaguar ride by Tullius. But I like to think I put myself in position to get lucky."

And what of the way Fittipaldi got to the top? What about Formula Ford in England?

"No way," says MacInnes, alluding to the fact that you've got to do 40 or 50 races a year over there and by the time you've spent the money doing that, you could be doing Super Vee over here. But Fittipaldi himself disagrees.

"Formula Ford is still a good way to go," the class's most famous graduate says, but he smiles and says "bring money."


Always money. MacInnes knows the frustration of seeing one of his students come along with more talent than dollars, of seeing, in short, another Bruce MacInnes in the making, but he keeps that frustration under tight control.

"I've seen people who were eaten alive by that concept," he says, "but I'm not one of them. It's a big world, and we're big boys."

Seymour the chicken is retired now. "The chicken is in a glass case," MacInnes says. "He's so filthy my wife won't let him be exposed to the air of our home."

Most people would be a little upset if they had MacInnes' record and if their career, like the chicken, was trapped in a glass case. But after all the years of grasping at the ladder, of putting all those wins in the book, Bruce MacInnes has it handled.

"Right now," he says, "is the best time of my life."

That calls for another margarita.  On me.

Want a ride with Pat Patrick? How about Dan Gurney? Read on

How does a driver attract the attention of a major team owner? Like Pat Patrick? Or Dan Gurney?

One of CART's founders, Patrick's team is one of the heavy hitters. So how do you go about grabbing one of the seats Gordy Johncock or Bruno Giacomelli now occupies?

"We pay our drivers; they don't pay us," Patrick says. "What we look for is a guy who's driving hard and knows what he's doing. Guys like Bobby Rahal in road racing and Sammy Swindell on ovals."

Patrick thinks Super Vee is a good place to attract attention, but thinks it isn't enough. "Super Vee itself just doesn't give you enough experience," he says. "It's not like Europe where in Ford or Formula 3 you drive so many races you get a lot of experience in a hurry."

Chip Robinson, he says, is a good example. "He's done real well in Super Vee, but he needs to run IMSA GTP, like he's doing, to get more experience. He's in the right place now."

If you're out there racing, and winning, right now, Patrick says there's a very good chance he knows about you. "Our guys are all racers, and it's just good business to keep track," he says. But to attract serious attention, you've got to be in a top series, beating other guys he

knows have talent. Super Vee is fine for that, he says, as long as you have other experience too.

And what of Formula Ford?

"Ford," he says, "is a good place to start."

Dan Gurney agrees, but thinks where you start isn't the important thing. "In the beginning, I don't think it matters much," he says. "You can start in formula cars in Europe, or over here, or you can start in karts, or motorcycles, or off-road."

Wherever you start, Gurney thinks the whole key to moving up is this:

"In the beginning, no matter what form of racing you start in, within that group of drivers there's a pecking order. Somebody there is the toughest guy in the block. What you've got to try to do is knock that guy off. Not just for one race, but to the point where the rest of the guys know you're the toughest guy on the block."

And then move on. "Move up as far as you can, and be the toughest guy on the block at each step, and you'll get the recognition," Gurney says. And trying different forms of racing "isn't just good for your reputation," he adds, "but it's going to add to your knowledge, and that's got to pay off."

—B.L.