

TAMBAY THE PHOENIX

Motor Racing has had its share of tragedy, but rarely has it had direct successes in lieu of such adversity. Frenchman Patrick Tambay is fortunate to have had more than one instance of rising from the ashes of wearying situations to triumph. So, to that end, he may be motor racing's "Phoenix." Tambay looks back at several such coups while Indy 500 and F1 World Champion Jacques Villeneuve also weighs in on their bond and how racing history was changed forever as the result of their close relationship. **BY TOM STAHLER**

A significant factor in the nonstop appeal of all major league sports is the drama away from the field of play in the periods, innings, laps and seasons between the actual competitions—the "hot stove" period of firings, signings, defections and trades often fueled by injuries to one of the affected parties. Motor racing history has often taken this sense of drama to the extreme as it pushes man and machine to the limit with a risk/reward ratio beyond that of other sports. Here, death or severe injury has been an unfortunate, but real part of the game.

A North American Championship From the Ashes

It's early summer 1977, at Canada's Le Circuit Mont Tremblant. Brian Redman was at the top of his game, the three-time defending Formula 5000 champion driving for car owners Carl Haas, Lola Cars North American importer and Chaparral car-building legend Jim Hall. It was the first race of the year for an untried and, in some quarters, controversial new series called the "New Can-Am." Over the winter SCCA had changed the template of the existing Formula 5000 series in an effort to build spectator appeal. Full fenders and additional bodywork gave the cars a sports-racing profile, but under the skin they were pure F5000. Thus, Redman was looking forward to another successful campaign in North America as he eased his Citicorp Lola T-333 CS onto the famed circuit that had hosted both the 1968 and 1970 Canadian Grands Prix.

The Laurentian mountains made for a picturesque backdrop on that June day as Redman brought his Lola up to speed, the car looked and reacted like an F5000 car with fenders—because it was. The recognizable and iconic T-332 air box rose above Redman's head, concealing a rollbar and forcing air into the Franz Weiss-built 305cid Chevrolet powerplant. Aero tweaking of the stock Lola "glider kit" by

Jim Hall gave the Haas/Hall team an acknowledged advantage over the competition.

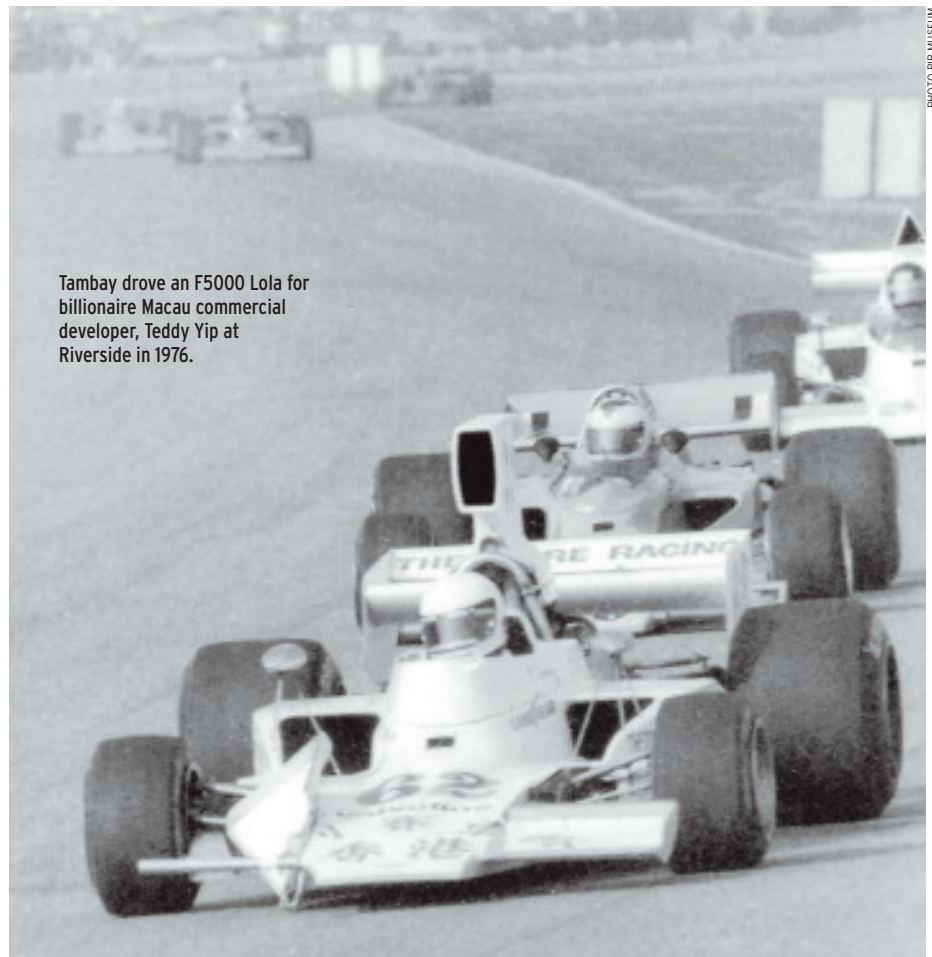
Redman returned to the pit after a few laps and spoke with Hall. "I came in after about 20 minutes in the car and (told Jim Hall) 'it feels good'. Jim asks me, 'what do you want?' So I tell him to take about a quarter inch off the front wings as it was over-steering a bit too much and I wanted to reduce the force on the front of the car."

The adjustments were made and Redman returned to the track. The car felt much better. Redman came through double apex Turn 8 and let it rip onto the long back

straight heading for the uphill to downhill change in grade called "the Hump." Redman was doing about 170mph by the time he crested the hill. Then, out of seemingly nowhere, it happened. In an instant, everything went wrong as Redman became the abrupt and involuntary rider in what could easily be described as a missile.

"It took off right straight in the air—about 40 feet," Redman recalls. It launched like an aircraft carrier plane as the air invaded the underside of the bodywork at the crest of the hump. Redman's Lola reached the apex of its ascent, flipped and landed upside down and backwards. The affable Brit, now an unconscious passenger, skidded on the roll bar and his helmet for 300 yards before stopping.

Fortunately, aid was immediate and highly trained, save the ambulance, which suffered a flat tire on the long ride to the hospital. Luckily, while he had broken his neck, smashed his shoulder, split his breastbone and had a severe concussion, he recovered and returned to driving full-time a year later with Cooke-Woods Racing in the popular IMSA Camel GT series, a decision which was less than popular on the home front by wife Marion, who can at least joke about it now. But in June of 1977, there was



Tambay drove an F5000 Lola for billionaire Macau commercial developer, Teddy Yip at Riverside in 1976.

PHOTO: RIR MUSEUM

a great deal of apprehension in the Haas/Hall camp. Laguna Seca would be missed as they sought out a surrogate driver with anywhere near Brian's skill—a late date in the season to go looking.

In the meantime, the inaugural race of the new Can-Am at Mont-Tremblant was won handily by Tom Klausler in the Bob McKee-designed, hot-pink-liveried Schkee DB1—the inspired design that convinced the SCCA to undertake the new Formula—over John Gunn and Horst Kroll and 11 finishers from a starting grid of 17 cars.

The current centerpiece of McKee's office in Lake Zurich, Illinois, features a painting of that victory.

Two weeks later, Laguna Seca started only 16 cars as a practice crash took out championship leader Klausler with Carlos Garza and Randy Lewis. Don Breidenbach, Elliott Forbes-Robinson and John David Briggs diced a full three laps ahead of the rest of the pack as the new Lola T-333CS Chevys proved to be the class of the field.

The third round at Watkins Glen approached and Carl Haas entered as interim driver Rolf Stommelen, the German F1 and endurance sports car star. But Stommelen, either due to scheduling conflicts or signed in name only to establish an entry into the race, never raced nor tested the car. Now, here's where the drama really takes off—enter stage right a cheery, suave, and movie-star handsome 28-year old Frenchman named Patrick Tambay.

Tambay remembers the circumstances as if they were yesterday. "I got a call from Bernard Cahier on Monday, who asked if I would be interested in driving for Lola Cars in the States," he notes. "The next morning I spoke with Carl Haas who told me there was a prepaid ticket for me and could I be on the next plane to New York?" Tambay chuckled, "I maybe thought about it for two seconds and said 'sure, I'm on the plane'."

Cahier, considered by many to be the very first photojournalist in all of racing, had a unique vocation as a fixture on the Formula 1 circuit with ties on both sides of the Atlantic. He had sold cars alongside Phil Hill and mechanic Richie Ginther at Roger Barlow's International Motors in Los Angeles. He was well known for his skill as a photographer, writer and expert in all

things speed. But most of all, Cahier had a canny eye for racing talent. Tambay was one of his newest protégées.

Tambay had actually met Carl and Bernadette (Bernie) Haas in 1976 at Riverside International Raceway. At that

CAHIER HAD A CANNY EYE FOR RACING TALENT. TAMBAY WAS ONE OF HIS NEWEST PROTÉGÉES

time, he was driving an F5000 Lola for billionaire Macau commercial developer, Teddy Yip. Yip had offered Tambay a one-time ride in his Theodore Racing Lola T-332 entry while discussing Patrick's F1 aspirations at the USGP at Watkins Glen. The 5000 car was originally intended for Chris Amon, who abruptly retired from competitive racing after two major F1 shunts left him feeling "lucky to be alive."

Tambay recalls, "Having just finished the 1976 Formula 2 season, I was open to any opportunity to further my career. I flew right

to Los Angeles with virtually no baggage. I bought a suit at Simpson Safety Equipment (in Torrance) along with a pair of gloves, boots, helmet, balaclava, underwear and jumped right into the car."

Tambay made a stellar first impression.

He qualified sixth and finished the heats ninth overall. His Theodore Racing teammate that weekend was future World Champion Alan Jones, with whom he would team on Haas' Beatrice Foods-sponsored F1 endeavors nearly 10 years later.

Although new to the North American scene, Tambay had a ton of racing pedigree on his resume. In the beginning of the 1970s, there was a strong interest in promoting French racing drivers into F1. Francois Guiter of Elf Petroleum Company began what would become one of the first national driver search programs: Volant-Elf. This ladder system, producing such F1 winners as Alain Prost, Didier Peroni, Erik Comas, Paul Belmondo and Oliver Panis—would be later emulated by Red Bull and



Tambay on the podium at Hockenheim in 1982.

Danny Sullivan in a quest to discover and develop an American F1 Champion. Tambay was Volant-Elf's first Champion in 1973 and had climbed up through Formula 2.

Beyond the early on-track successes, Patrick was the total package: an approachable, articulate and good-looking Continental with American familiarity. Educated at the University of Colorado, Boulder, where he was a ski-racer and English Major (no comment in what order!), Tambay was a sponsor's dream come true. In short, the Haas/Hall ride was a great opportunity for all parties involved.

By the time Tambay climbed into the Citicorp Lola, Redman was thankfully showing signs of stability and recovery. The Watkins Glen Can-Am round proved to be a warm welcome to SCCA Pro Racing. The young Frenchman took pole position, fastest lap and won the race less than a second over F1 and Can-Am veteran Peter Gethin.

Suddenly, the "new guy" was the hunted rather than the hunter in a series that attracted a strong cast of drivers including sports car heroes of the day Elliott Forbes-Robinson, Gilles Villeneuve, John Gunn, Len Janke and Horst Kroll among others.

For the next six races, spanning race courses in Canada and the United States, Tambay would win five—and the Citicorp Cup. "It was a very good situation," he notes. "The Haas/Hall racing team consisted of all Formula 1-caliber mechanics who were also a very tight group of friends. We were having so much fun. I remember I could go crazy for one or two laps in qualifying and have the car set-up figured with those guys. The [Franz Weiss] engines were very strong and reliable. It was easily comparable to the Ferrari/Schumacher situation."

Tambay's legend would blossom within the ranks of the established SCCA sports car

racers and teams in that season. Only Peter Gethin, driving for VDS Racing, a team owned by Belgian nobleman Count Van Der Stratten (that wonderful family that brings you Stella Artois) could come within striking distance (Gethin won his only race of the season at Road America in wet conditions). When the season ended, Tambay had scored wins at Mid-Ohio, Mosport, Trois Rivières, Sears Point, Riverside and Watkins Glen. Tambay held aloft the very first Citicorp Cup, as the Haas/Hall Team and its newly-minted star driver rose from the ashes of a season-opening disaster. In the process, Tambay had also developed great friendships that would lead to more Phoenix-like, but bittersweet triumphs.

On to Formula 1 and Tambay's Close Friend Gilles

Gilles Villeneuve and Patrick Tambay met



For the Long Beach GP in 1978, Tambay looks relaxed.



Tambay races the Citicorp Lola T333CS in the rain at Road America July 24, 1977.

Bernard Cahier (left, with Enzo Ferrari) helped arrange Tambay's Lola Can-Am ride in 1977.



for the first time at the star-studded September 1976 Trois Rivières Grand Prix, a Formula Atlantic street race in Quebec. The entry list that weekend included James Hunt, Alan Jones, Vittorio Brambilla, Hector Rebaque, Bobby Rahal, Tom Klausler, Tom Gloy and Price Cobb among other international class drivers. Gilles won handily over Jones and Hunt with Tambay finishing 6th, holding off Gloy and Cobb.

"The Canadians were trying to evaluate how they would do against the Europeans," reminisced Tambay, "Gilles just blew our socks off." With their common language and racing goals, they became fast friends—and later—very close friends.

While Tambay humbly acknowledges that he and Villeneuve were close friends, he

said, "Gilles was a friend to everyone. He was a very generous guy, a very friendly guy and had a very easy way about him. Everyone liked him. He was a very special character and a very nice human being." Others observe that their friendship transcended racing, "They were very close, best friends," remarked Stefan Johanssen, a veteran Ferrari and McLaren driver of the heralded F1 Turbo era.

Gilles and his brother Jacques (uncle to the future Indy 500, CART, and F1 racing Champion), made the successful transition to open-wheel motor racing from snowmobile racing in their native Canada. The elder Jacques would go on to be the first Canadian to win a race in the CART series at Road America in 1985—paving the

way for fellow countrymen like Paul Tracy, Alex Tagliani and Greg Moore.

Soon, both Tambay and Gilles were crossing the pond regularly, splitting time between F1 and North American commitments. Tambay remembers, "Driving in Can-Am, I had to make it successful as all the income earned in Can-Am was going towards my F1 driving with Teddy Yip and Ensign. He wanted some driver participation in the funding, at that time. It was \$80,000," he laughs. "I don't think you could buy a decent Formula Ford ride with that today."

Villeneuve, with his snowmobile background, translated those reflexes and skills to become a magician of car control and rain dancing. He thrilled F1 fans with his fearless and incorrigible driving style that was truly and always on the ragged edge.

"We both got our first F1 start in the 1977 British Grand Prix," recalls Tambay, "Gilles was driving a McLaren M26 and I was driving a Theodore" (the Canadian was discovered by James Hunt who raced against him, and lost, in the aforementioned '76 Trois Rivières Formula Atlantic race). Hunt recommended Villeneuve immediately to McLaren team boss Teddy Mayer, who gave him a ride in what was then a year-old McLaren M26 and decided he wasn't a good fit.

Tambay simultaneously was offered a Ferrari drive: "I was invited to drive with Ferrari in 1977, but I ended up going to McLaren as I felt it was a better situation. Carlos Reutemann and I suggested Gilles to call Mauro Forghieri. Gilles took the drive."

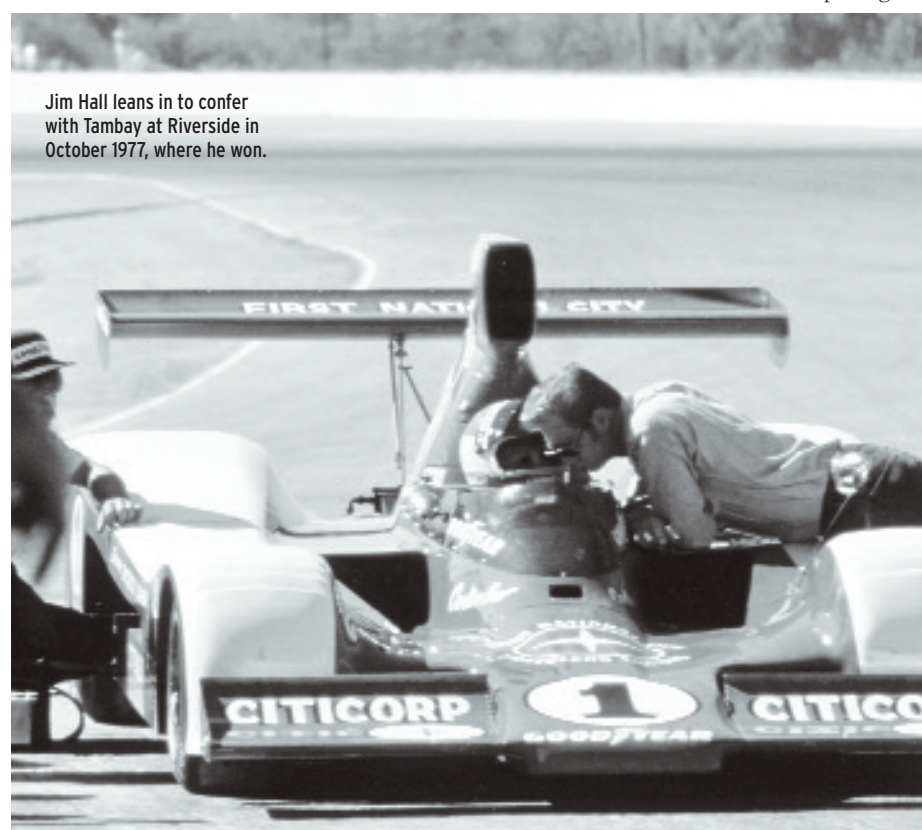
Villeneuve would ultimately become one of Enzo Ferrari's favorite sons and reach international fame during his time riding the Prancing Horses of Maranello.

With a Ferrari contract comes commitment like no other ... a commitment to endless testing hours and travel throughout Europe, Asia and beyond. As he went overseas to get established, Gilles, his wife Joann, six-year-old son Jacques and daughter Melanie, moved into Tambay's house in Cannes. They would later relocate to Monaco as Gilles' career advanced rapidly.

The 1997 Formula 1 World Champion Jacques Villeneuve fondly remembers Patrick and Gilles' friendship. "We lived in Tambay's house for awhile at first. They were good times and I still have fond memories of living there. Patrick gave me a few very important lessons in life back then that were never forgotten."

Au Revoir Gilles; Bonjour Jacques

Fast Forward to 1982, Zolder. The Belgian Grand Prix. At age 32, Gilles Villeneuve takes



Jim Hall leans in to confer with Tambay at Riverside in October 1977, where he won.



Tambay goes inside Alan Jones' Shadow DN6C through Turn 7 at Riverside in October 1977. Jones DNF'd on lap 11.

to the track in his Harvey Postlethwaite-designed Turbo V6-powered Ferrari 126 C2. He is in an angry mood and has not spoken to teammate Didier Peroni in a fortnight, the result of a rift at the San Marino GP owing to Peroni's final corner move on his race-leading teammate to win Ferrari's home race despite alleged team orders.

The Belgian GP qualifying session was coming to a close. According to Ferrari Team manager Mauro Forghieri, "Villeneuve was on an in-lap after narrowly missing the 6th grid position by .01 second from (teammate-turned-arch rival) Peroni, but still pressing hard."

In a story that has been painfully told time and time again, Villeneuve came upon Jochen Mass, also on an in-lap and going very slowly just before the Terlamenbocht corner. The German moved to the right to let the Canadian through, but in a fatal judgment, Villeneuve too decided to move right. The Ferrari's right front met the March-Cosworth's rear left with dire results.

In the wake of that fateful moment, Joseph Gilles Henri Villeneuve left behind a widow, a son, a daughter, a mother, a brother and countless friends and admirers. An entire country mourned the loss of a Canadian phenomenon.

"Our families were very close. Sentimentally we were quite different than just Formula 1 rivals on the track." Patrick pauses sadly, "I really wish we could be old guys and reminisce about the good old days we had together. I really miss that."

Ferrari withdrew from the Belgian race and only entered Peroni for the next three races at Monaco, Detroit and, tragically, found themselves involved in another ill



The Haas/Hall Team and its new star driver won five races and the Citicorp Cup in 1977.

fated incident in Canada. At the start of what would have been Villeneuve's home race at Île Notre-Dame (that now bears his name, Circuit Gilles Villeneuve), Peroni waved his arms furiously—stalled—in an onslaught of angry F1 machinery ... but in vain. Italian rookie Ricardo Paletti slammed square into Peroni's motionless Ferrari, and erupted in a fireball. Rescue workers, aided fleetingly by Peroni, who was clearly in shock, managed to douse the flames, but Paletti succumbed to massive chest injuries from the initial impact.

During this stretch, Patrick Tambay had stepped up for his endeared friends, the Villeneuves.

According to Tambay, "When Gilles passed away, Joann [Villeneuve] was a little bit lost, obviously, and the kids (Jacques,

now 10 and his younger sister, Melanie) were very young and we helped them by suggesting they come over to Villars-sur-Ollon (Switzerland) at College Beausoleil where I was living at the time. I proposed to look after them to make sure everything was okay."

"My mom needed some time off. Patrick was living in the mountains at the time and there was a great boarding school in the village", recalls Jacques. "It was perfect as at the time I was ski racing, education was good and boarding was a good preparation for life. Patrick was there to keep an eye on us when needed. I think it was his idea for us to go there and when it was mentioned, I jumped at it."

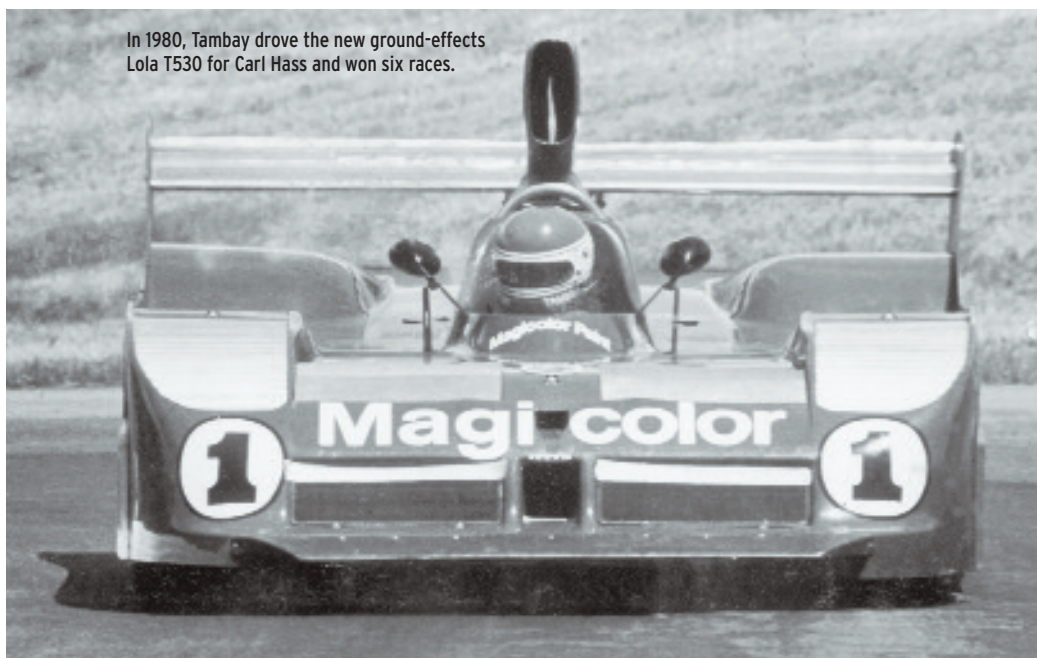
Jacques and College Beausoleil's ski coach-turned-athletic director developed a very close friendship through their mutual passion for skiing—a friendship that would become one of the most prevalent and publicly complicated partnerships in modern motorsport: Scotsman Craig Pollock.

Despite the tragedy that befell the Villeneuves, it wouldn't be long before young Jacques would begin talking with his uncle Jacques (who later would enroll him in racing school), and Tambay about his racing aspirations.

"Jacques came to me after he decided he wanted to race," remembers Tambay, and I told him I was not keen on him going racing after being through the dramas of losing his dad. However he was strong in his decision to go racing."

"I always knew I would race, since I was five," commented Villeneuve. "No one influenced me apart possibly from growing up in a racing family. At that time I was talking a lot with Patrick, obviously mostly about racing. I had a lot of respect for him,

In 1980, Tambay drove the new ground-effects Lola T530 for Carl Haas and won six races.



as he had also been a ski racer before racing cars. I was still in boarding school when I started racing, at an age where you don't listen to grown ups!"

Tambay recalls, "So Jacques went for three years in Formula 3 in Italy. He came to me again and asked what he should do. I told him he should go as far away as possible in order to get your personality and your name established by yourself and be away from the European and Italian way (read paparazzi) of doing things. So he went to Japan for a year."

It was at that point, in Japan, that a chance reunion, at a race, between the younger Villeneuve and Craig Pollock would become a business relationship that netted Jacques the CART Championship, an Indy 500 victory, two successful years at Williams in Formula 1—where he clinched the World Drivers Championship in his sophomore season and the ill-fated, Pollock-led purchase of Tyrrell by the British American Tobacco Company—to become British American Racing (BAR).

"Craig Pollock came to me and asked me if he could be Jacques' manager," Tambay recalls. "I replied, 'sure you can be his manager, but be careful, I will be watching you...' That was the only way I could participate in being a good father by being able to give a little input."

Despite his patronly influence on the younger Villeneuve, Tambay vehemently denies that he was a surrogate father, but instead was an endeared influencer who

wanted the best for his late friend's son.

"When he won the Indianapolis 500, I was doing the commentating for French TV. For the last six laps, I didn't say a word into the microphone, as I was speechless. I laughed, I cried. It was a very emotional victory as it felt like a victory by my own kid."

Jacques and Patrick maintain a good relationship to this day. "I always enjoy catching up with Patrick when we cross paths," says Villeneuve. "I am supportive of (Patrick's son and GP2 driver) Adrien

KNOWN TO MANY AS "FORMULA 1'S NICE GUY", THE AMICABLE TAMBAY ADMITS HE HAD A DARK SIDE

(Tambay) too. He is a very good skier so I mainly spent time with him on the slopes."

Tambay laughs, "I like to give him crap for when he does some silly things."

The next generation of Villeneuve had proven unstoppable on the trail blazed by his dad. With some influence from Patrick Tambay, this meteoric rise from the ashes adds to the examples of Phoenix-like circumstances.

F1 Phoenix Dressed in Scarlet

Ferrari was reeling from a series of misfortune in 1982. After Villeneuve's death at Zolder, Peroni's stalled start and subsequent collision in Canada that claimed the life of Ricardo Paletti, the F1 circus then traveled and pitched its tents at Zandvoort

amongst the Dutch sand dunes on the North Sea—and Ferrari brought in a new second driver for Peroni ... enter again Patrick Tambay, now an F1 veteran starting his 50th Grand Prix. "The second time around in 1982 was a far different condition and situation," recalls Tambay, "due to the death of my friend, unfortunately, I received the opportunity to drive a Ferrari. It was a tough time to drive for them."

Peroni would emerge from the Zandvoort weekend, vindicated with a victory. Tambay, still feeling out the Turbo Ferrari, took 8th. Two weeks later the Ferraris of Peroni and Tambay finished the British Grand Prix at Brands Hatch 2nd and 3rd to the recently unretired and to-the-day-quick Niki Lauda in the McLaren MP4/1B-Ford Cosworth.

The French Grand Prix at the famed Circuit Paul Ricard would follow, and in an era where there were more French Grand Prix drivers than at any other time in the sport, the top-four finishers were Rene' Arnoux and Alain Prost in the turbocharged V6 Renault RE30B's followed by the Ferraris of Peroni and Tambay. The other two Frenchmen in the field were Jean-Pierre Jarier in an Osella and Jacques Laffite in a Ligier. For French racing fans, it must have been a greater celebration than the very first Bastille Day!

Known to many as "Formula 1's Nice Guy," the amicable Tambay admits he had a dark side. "That is what they used to think, and say. But nowadays I don't think I would

Driving a Ferrari 126C2 V6 at Hockenheim in 1982, Tambay won the German Grand Prix, his maiden F1 victory.



have been able to do these things—I think I was a bastard on the track—and nobody knew it and nobody saw it because I was a nice guy off the track.” Tambay explains, “in this business you have to have a huge ego and the motivation that you are the best in the world if you want to succeed.” Tambay chuckles, “Qualities easily found in Alain Prost.”

Tambay reflects, “The Ferrari era was very important to my racing career and my life.” The significance of that statement was about to come to him in phoenix-like fashion.

The 1982 German Grand Prix

As Didier Peroni arrived at the rainy rural German countryside between Stuttgart and Frankfurt, riding an eight-point WDC lead, those around him saw emerging arrogance and increasing isolation. As he looked to be the first Frenchman to ever win the F1 driver's title, he was suffering through a failed marriage—regularly trumpeted by the European tabloids—and continued public blame for Villeneuve's death. With that hubristic attitude in tow, he rocketed from the pits on Saturday morning and unnecessarily, as many would observe, began turning extremely fast laps on a very wet Hockenheim circuit. He took pole position for the race, but kept on driving at the edge—or more.

Peroni lunged his Ferrari 126C into the long and fast forest section of the circuit, blew by the Williams of Derek Daly and in the poor visibility was unable to react as he



A very proud Tambay shares the podium at Hockenheim in '82 with Rene Arnoux (left) and Keke Rosberg.

glanced the back of Alain Prost's Renault. The aftermath was catastrophic—a sick —almost identical crash to Gilles' just mere weeks before, as witnesses described it.

Formula 1 medical director Dr. Sid Watkins arrived on the carnage-strewn scene and immediately considered amputating Peroni's legs to remove him from the car, but was able to eventually extract the hopelessly broken driver without further damage. Peroni's championship

hopes—and F1 career—came to an abrupt end in the same haunted woods that had wastefully killed fellow countryman Patrick Depailler and F1 World Champion and legend, Jimmy Clark.

“It was like the sky had fallen on Ferrari's head,” recalls Tambay. First there was the Zolder accident with Gilles, and then the Hockenheim accident with Didier and it seemed nothing was going in the right direction.”

Now it would be Tambay in the lone Ferrari starting 5th on the grid behind the empty pole position vacated by Peroni, then Prost, Arnoux and Piquet.

Tambay was filled to the rim on fuel as the cars left their markers and erupted into the woods for the first of 45 passes and Nelson Piquet shot into a race-long lead piloting the Bernie Ecclestone-entered Brabham-BMW BT-50 while Tambay moved up to the penultimate position ... until lap 19.

“We had a no-stop strategy and Piquet had a one-stop strategy and he was about to come into the pits ... he had about a 20-second lead on me and he needed more than that to get back out [in the lead]. My car was beginning to feel light. He would have gotten a fresh set of tires and a heavier fuel load than me. At that point he was pushing hard and got tangled up in a chicane with Eliseo Salazar. Arnoux was 15 seconds back and from there it was a cruise home.”

Salazar, who put his car on the wrong line as Piquet came up to lap him suddenly found himself a punching bag as Piquet physically assaulted the young Chilean as the two exited their cars.



For the San Marino GP emotional roller coaster at Imola on May 1, 1983, Tambay's Ferrari 126C2B V6 gets attention. Compare the Grand Prix pits of 1983 to today's facilities.

Tambay's Ferrari was clear of Arnoux in the Turbo Renault by 16 seconds at the finish—his maiden F1 victory—and not a moment too soon for the reeling Ferrari crew. Tragedy to elation! A brand new name on the top step of the podium: TAMBAY!

"Suddenly the next day we are blessed with a victory ..." Tambay reveals. "This is what life is about: ups and downs—downs and ups—and when you are up you must be very careful because you can rapidly go down and when you are down you've got to work hard and be faithful that something good is going to happen—and it always does. After a storm, there is a clear blue sky."

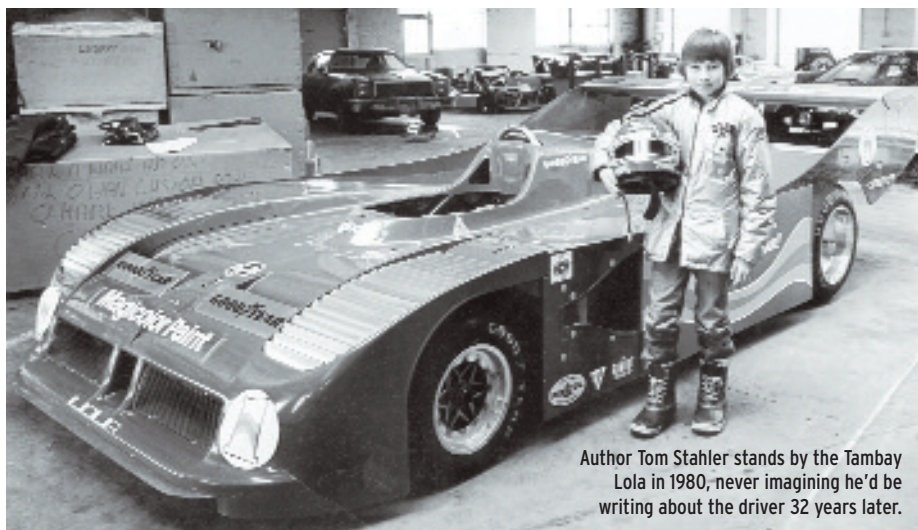
The dark cloud that had settled over the Ferrari camp had dissipated. "The mood of the team was elevated straight away ..." But Tambay the Phoenix was not done yet ...

Ghost in the Machine

There are times in the human experience where focus on a situation becomes so defined that it can only be described as "in the zone." In-car film footage of Ayrton Senna at Monaco, producing record lap after record lap, exemplifies this "out of body experience" that so many drivers try to explain, arduously, after the fact—but can rarely put into words.

At San Marino, 1983, Tambay sat in car No. 27 in the same grid position, third, that Gilles had sat in just a year before. Tambay drifts back and explains, "the Tifosi had painted a Canadian Flag on the grid marker with a message that read (in Tambay's native French): 'Patrick, win for Gilles' and banners all around the track with a huge, huge crowd."

Pole was scored by Tambay's new Ferrari teammate, Rene Arnoux—the two Ferraris split handily by Nelson Piquet's Brabham in the number-two slot. Alain Prost would line



Author Tom Stahler stands by the Tambay Lola in 1980, never imagining he'd be writing about the driver 32 years later.

up next to Tambay, in fourth position.

After his reconnaissance lap, "I got to the grid and sat in the car for 20 minutes and cried and cried. The mechanics they came and talked to me, but then left me alone as I was sobbing like a kid."

Overwhelmed by what he had seen on his first tour of the circuit just prior to the San Marino Grand Prix, Tambay was limp in the car. Consider any mild enthusiast offered the opportunity to drive a scarlet red Formula 1 car at Autodromo Dino Ferrari, just down the road from Maranello in front of throngs of Tifosi, creating a sea of red bodies all around the course, the church bells ringing, an annual Papal blessing, the legend ... unbelievable. Add to that the pressure cooker of the F1 circus and the team under the watchful and fierce eyes of Enzo Ferrari himself. But Tambay's mind was on the events of the past year that brought him here, to this moment in history.

"With a surge of sadness and emotion and thought to myself, 'Shit, I won't be able to recover and do this race.' I felt weak and

it was not going to be nice [feeling] the pressure and tension of the race coming up, I regained composure and took the start."

Tambay had launched off the start second as Piquet stalled and was later push-started to rejoin after the fury of turbocharged F1 machinery screamed away.

"I immediately began having a fuel pickup problem through Curva Grande (aka Tamborello, where Senna was killed in 1994) and the engine stalls—then stops—and picks up again. Now I am losing my head. I'm going to lose this race, I think. Stupid mechanics! I have lost more races due to mechanical failure, it was just another stupid story that was going to happen again!"

He is just about to be swallowed by Prost, Patrese and the ensuing ... then the motor comes back to life ... and an old friend possibly gives a boost from eternity.

"Then suddenly I feel a big 'Whap!!!' on the helmet—I don't know what's happening—like I hit a bird or someone was giving me a slap on the face. It really grabbed



With fans screaming "Win for Gilles!" Tambay delivered a very emotional win at Imola in '83 with the No. 27 Ferrari.

my attention. On the next lap I was looking for something on the track that might have hit the helmet—there was nothing.”

As the laps counted down, Arnoux lost time on track as his pit-in laps proved to be much slower than Ricardo Patrese, who started 5th, and Tambay who raced hard but struggled with the shifting fuel, and subsequent starvation each time he passed through Tamborello.

Tambay lamented, “I now am concentrating harder and harder on the racing, but still having the fuel issue every time through Curva Grande.”

At times as he felt aided by other hands “I was not alone doing this race. It was the spirit and the strength from the crowd wanting this so bad.”

“One lap from the end, Patrese passed me at the end of the straight and it was so easy ‘cause the engine was dying.”

Even James Hunt, commentating in the British Broadcasting Corporation box with Murray Walker, had written off the Frenchman ... “all (Patrese) has to do is stand up and the car hold together as he is clearly faster than Tambay.” Hunt had barely uttered those words ...

Then completely to everyone’s surprise: “I am following him through Tosa to Acque Mineralli and was about 20 meters behind him and he just flies off the road by understeering, going too wide into the corner.”

The Italian veteran, whose Grand Prix starts record is only outnumbered by Rubens Barichello, made a rare mistake and plowed his Brabham BMW BT-52 headlong into the tire barriers ... “and the crowd goes wild!”

Not only does Tambay’s wounded Ferrari cross the line first at home in front of the mighty Tifosi, but a year-old grudge that had come to be part of spiritual folklore in Formula 1 was vindicated. Ferrari No. 27 rightfully wins at Imola! This was enough to whip the crowd into a frenzy. In the minds of those present and Ferrari fans everywhere, Villeneuve had been *avenged*!

“A half lap later I am at the checkered flag and the car just sputters through Tamborello down to Acque Mineralli and the car just stops ... the car just dies on me and that’s it.”

Here come the Tifosi ...

First a trickle ... a few fans run out to the stricken car. As Tambay climbs from the cockpit he is lifted onto the shoulders of a number of fans. “They all seem to be aware of what was happening.” Tambay recalls, “There were so many people and they were all saying ‘you have avenged him, you have

avenged him!’ They all knew the story and they all knew what was happening. It was just a very strange feeling.”

Joann Villeneuve would even call Tambay later that evening and say the same.

Then a hideous throng—Tambay, surrounded by uniformed policemen is quickly removed from the growing mob around the car, celebrating into a frenzy fueled by Italian wine, and the Prancing Horse.

Tambay believes many factors were at play during those victorious weekends. “The two Ferrari victories were obtained during a period of unsurpassed tension, stress and pressure.” He pauses to gain composure ...

“Everything went like the script of a novel, where you can see it happen before it happens ... I am a bit mystic about things like that.”

“I have encountered the No. 27 so many times in my life. I didn’t realize it at the time, but looking back there were so many times. The garage we were in was number 27. My son (Adrien Tambay) won the Imola AutoGP race 27 years after I won the San Marino Grand Prix.”

He still talks to Gilles. “When my son won the race, throughout the whole race I was communicating with my buddy ... through prayer.” 