

It was the always the eyes. They could have been the prototypes for the eyes Clint Eastwood created for his “Dirty Harry” and “Man With No Name” movie characters.

George Follmer had them first.

The eyes were your first clue whether or not it was safe to approach. Which way did the corners crinkle?

Now spending septuagenarian, semi-retirement years selling real estate in a northern Idaho suburbia, George Follmer was the “racer’s racer.”

Tenacious yet adaptable, he could coax a car through corners with the gentleness and precision a father gives to his newborn child, or with the fervor that same father displays the first time the kid wrinkles a fender.

He handled people the same way.

Southwest Beginnings

Follmer was born in Phoenix, a brief stay until his father, an engineer for a company that made flour mills, moved the family to suburban Los Angeles.

“I did okay in high school, when I focused on books instead of girls,” he laughs, but he delayed college until he’d served a hitch in Uncle Sam’s Army following the Korean war.

“I was a company clerk for an intelligence outfit in Bavaria, Germany,” he says. That placed him close enough to France to give him impressions of the French people which stayed in his mental gun holster for the rest of his life.

He earned a business degree from Pasadena City College, found work selling fire and casualty insurance, married and became the father of a son and two daughters.

THE RACER’S RACER

Lean back in your chair and hum a few bars of Sinatra’s “I did it my way.” **By Dave Arnold**

“My dad was very upstanding and honest. Maybe that’s where some of it came from,” he contemplates. “I never liked being around people who were b.s.’ers and liars and told you black is white.”

Follmer’s fabled career record as a wheelman shows four professional road racing championships, with 37 professional wins on 22 circuits in four countries.

He was magical to the worldwide racing media who flocked to professional sports car races in the 1960s and ’70s, an era when Trans-Am and Can-Am races had as large a following as did routine NASCAR events, and bigger than most USAC races.

Want a no-punches-pulled quote? Ask Follmer. He’d always call a spade a spade.

But those allowed into his inner-circle also knew the man who could verbally reduce to rubble drivers like Francois Cevert and Jackie Oliver, car owner Don Nichols, USAC official Bill Smyth, and a cowering corner worker at Le Circuit Mont-Tremblant who he felt was begging for a knuckle sandwich.

“I may have hit him, maybe I didn’t,” Follmer laughs. “I really don’t remember. I know I drew back on him and really intended to deck him, though. His lack of common sense was partly responsible for Ford losing the 1969 Trans-Am championship.”

We’ll get into that later.

Also in that era, sports car and drag racing were making footholds on America’s lower left coast, thanks to the influx of military-trained auto and airplane mechanics, and the 1957 opening of the new Riverside International Raceway, with its triplex of road course configurations, and a back straight so long that half-mile drag races were held on it.

“I bought a two-year old Porsche Speedster in 1959 and decided to learn how to race,” he recalls. “It was a dual-purpose car at first, like most of them in that era, but that didn’t last long.”

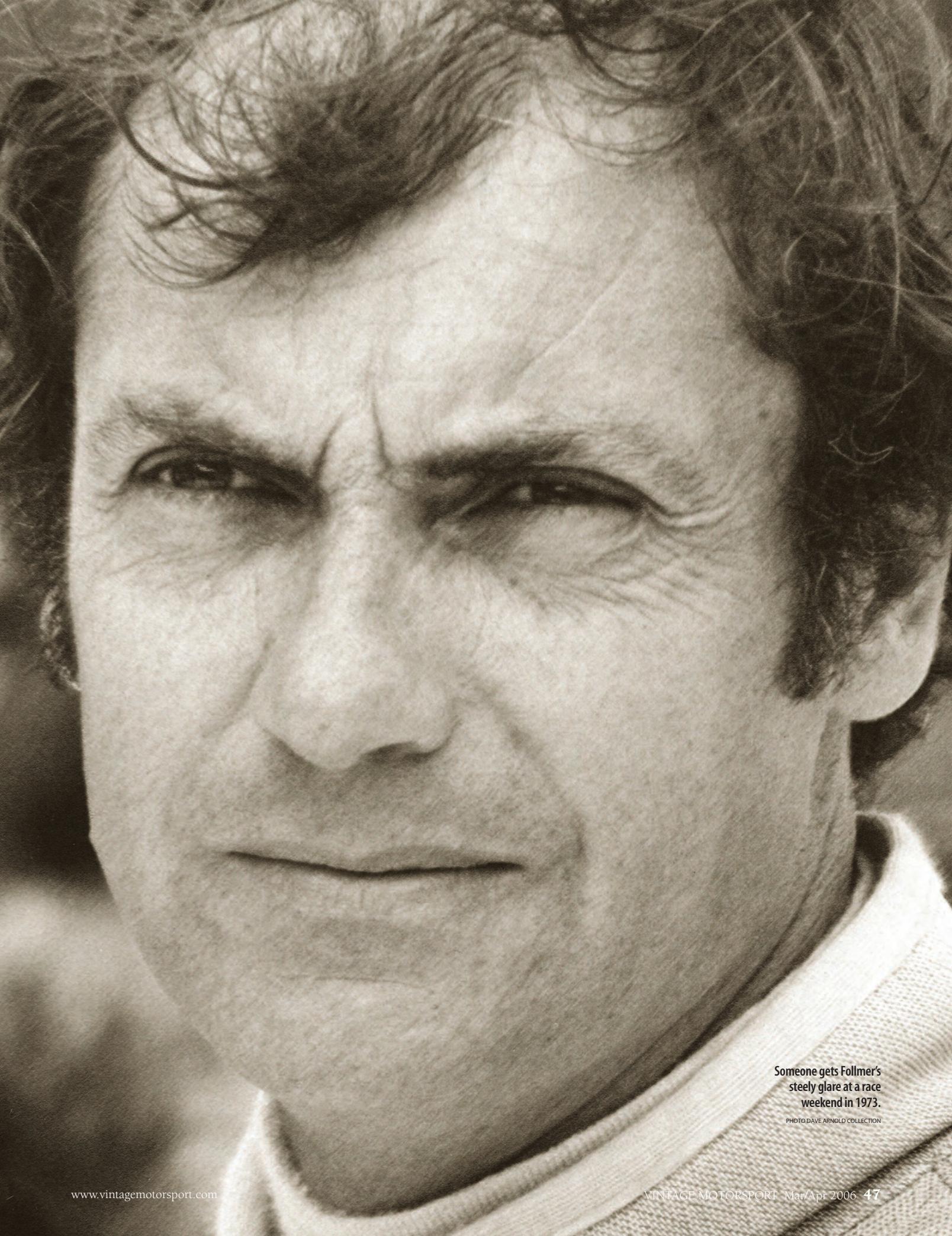
Follmer, the Speedster, and later a Porsche 550 RS, laid waste to E Production and D Production competitors in 1960-’61 Cal Club events at long-gone tracks like Santa Barbara, Palm Springs and Marchbanks.

Follmer’s first Porsche carried the number 16, in honor of his son Jim’s birthdate, a number which would be his identifier for the rest of his career, whenever that was an option.

Through Porsche Club events, he befriended Tom Nuckles, the owner of Trans-Ocean Motors, a Pasadena Porsche dealership.

“Tom was my benefactor and patron. Without him, I wouldn’t have gone anywhere,” Follmer says. “The U. S. Road Racing Championship series caught my eye, so Tom and I decided to see what we could do with a Lotus 23.

“The car was bought from Lotus for \$4,000 and we had



Someone gets Follmer's
steely glare at a race
weekend in 1973.
PHOTO DAVE ARNOLD COLLECTION

to assemble it ourselves. We spent many nights fabricating it in Bruce Burness' parents' two-car garage—Bruce still lived at home—cutting sheet metal pieces with a sabre saw and bending them.”

The chassis was the perfect choice—the engine, not so much.

“I thought a sleeved-down Corvair would work, and be a lot less expensive than a Porsche,” he says. “That was a bad decision. Other Lotus 23 guys like Chuck Parsons, Ed Leslie and Bobby Unser were using Cosworth-Ford engines so, over the winter, we spent \$10,000 to buy a new 904 engine from Porsche and made it fit in the Lotus chassis.”

The Lotus-Porsche combination smoked the Cosworths throughout the 1965 USRRC series where Follmer, Bruce and Tom hit the road in a cross-country tour, won six of nine USRRC races in the Under Two Liter class, and finished high enough in the overall order to win the series championship...as a rookie.

Word of Follmer's USRRC championship with Porsche power reached the desk of Porsche A.G. Motorsports head Huschke von Hanstein, who saw to it that Follmer had a proper Porsche 904 GTS to race at Sebring in 1966, alongside 25-year-old Lt. Peter Gregg, USN. Their car, chassis #904-091, had won its class at Le Mans the previous year. Gregg and Follmer won their class with it, too. Excellent start!

Success made Follmer stare up the racing ladder toward the class which won races overall. In mid-1966 he paid \$10,000 for a Lola T-70 MkII chassis with a 333cid Al Bartz-built Chevrolet engine for the new Can-Am series.

He began the 1967 USRRC season with his Lola, but in June received a phone call from a new friend, a call that would change the face of his career.

“Roger Penske asked if I'd drive Mark Donohue's Camaro in Mid-Ohio's Trans-Am,” Follmer says. “Mark had to be at Le Mans for Ford and Roger had an obligation

At Mid-Ohio's Trans-Am in 1971, Follmer's Boss 302 gets the power down.



PHOTO DAVE ARNOLD COLLECTION

to Chevrolet.” Follmer finished third and didn't hurt the car, exactly what Penske wanted out of him. That result for a debut race in a Penske car would pay many dividends in the future.

For that fall's Can-Am series, Penske called again, asking Follmer to cover Donohue's backside, and drive Mark's 1966 championship Lola T-70 MkIII Chevrolet.

Ponycars Hit The Track

Trans-Am racing took off in 1968. Penske was there with one—sometimes two—Camaros, Jerry Titus with a Mustang from Carroll Shelby, and upstart American Motors had Follmer and Peter Revson in the new Javelin team run by Jim Jeffords with Ronnie Kaplan building the cars.

“Ford didn't have a full-time spot for me on Shelby's Mustang team past Daytona,” Follmer says. “The Javelins were in their early stages of development so they weren't as well sorted-out as the Fords. The Fords still had the 289 engine and we had a 304, so we had the power to beat them sometimes.”

Follmer and Parnelli Jones were paired in the 1969 Trans-Am series for Bud Moore's Ford Mustang team, Ford being one of five manufacturers supporting the series to varying degrees.

Follmer won the Bridgehampton race, then came St. Jovite where he qualified on

the pole and ran off into the lead for 14 laps until one of the valve springs failed.

It was also when Ford lost the series with five races to go.

“We were having trouble with valve springs,” Follmer says. “In fact, we had to replace them after every practice and qualifying session. And this one let go on lap 14.”

The valve touched a piston, knocking a hole in it, allowing the crankcase oil to puke out the exhaust pipes and onto the track.

“I pulled off the track and parked the car where it would be safe,” he recalls, “but I could see the big oil slick I'd left on the track and told the corner worker to put out the oil flag.

“He was French-Canadian and claimed he couldn't understand me. Funny, because I understood him! I did everything I could except draw this jerk a picture, and he still wouldn't do it. A simple car-off-course flag would just make all of us go faster to get past whatever it was, but we knew to slow down for an oil flag.

“What I was asking him to do seemed like common sense to me,” Follmer says. “Maybe it was because he was French and it was giving me flashbacks to my time in the army in Europe when I had to deal with the French and developed my impressions of them.”

Within moments, friends arrived. Horst



Follmer jump-started his career in the fast Lotus 23 Porsche, racing here at the '65 Mid-Ohio USRRC.

PHOTO DAVE ARNOLD COLLECTION

GEORGE FOLLMER *continued*

Kwech, Ron Grable, Tony Adamowicz and Ed Wachs all crashed into Follmer's once-pristine car, and into each other, as did Peter Revson, in the second Team Shelby Mustang, who landed on the second story of the pile and twisted a shoulder when he exited the car, not realizing its relative altitude. Six race cars were reduced to trash.

The incident had an even bigger impact as the season wore on.

"That crash cost Ford all our momentum" Follmer says. "Mustangs won four of six races prior to that, and none for the rest of the year. Parnelli and I had faster cars than Penske's Camaros; and Shelby's cars had every trick that Bud's cars had—or so Homer Perry from Ford told Shelby—but they just didn't qualify or run as well as Parnelli and I.

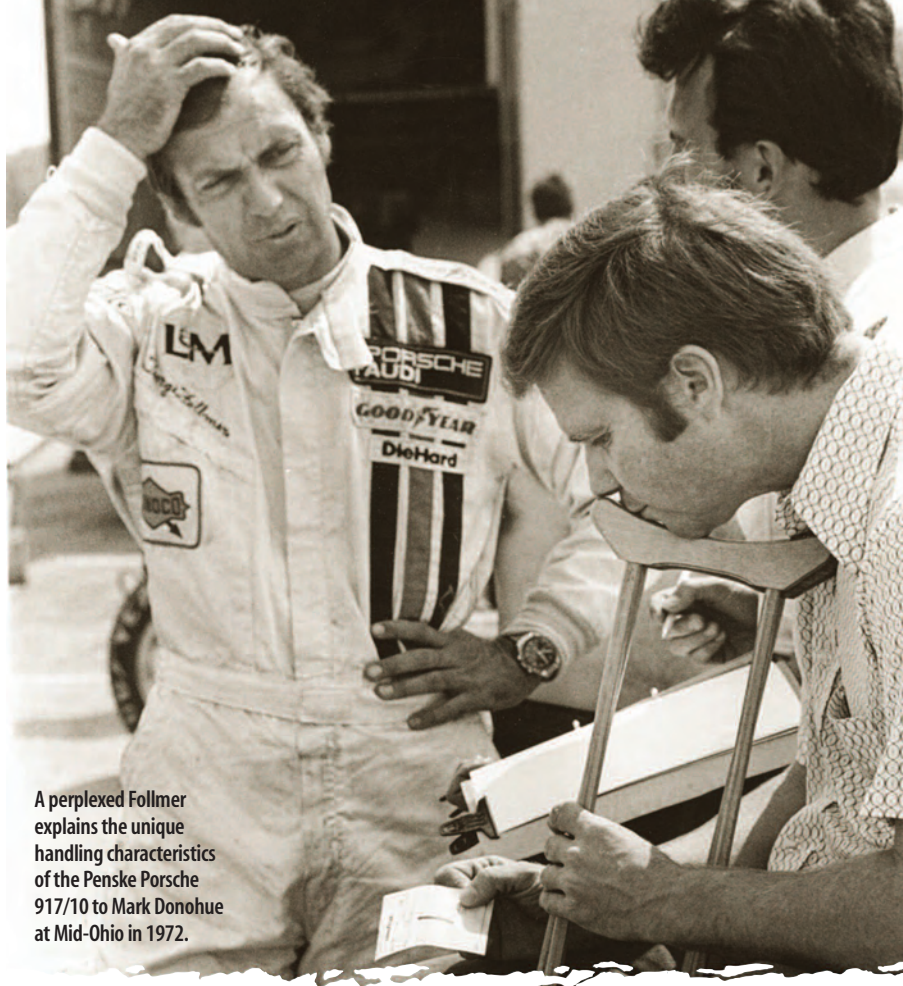
"But that was also the year Parnelli and I had trouble with our Firestone tires. They'd qualify great and run great for 12 or 14 laps but, by then, we'd have burned them off the car and have to pit.

"The third race of the season, at Bridgehampton, it rained heavily. Firestone just didn't have a good rain tire, and despite the great working, testing and financial relationship I had with them, my assignment with Ford was to win races, so I switched to Goodyears and won by 79 seconds over Mark. Parnelli was into Firestone too deep to switch."

For many years, Follmer was not the showcase driver on any major multi-car team. And when the necessities arose, he could always dutifully finish behind Mark.

"That was always a 'given' with Mark and Roger. There was no question Mark was the team leader and you'd play behind him. I was okay with that, though. It didn't affect my pay check. Roger has always been somebody I could trust. I knew he'd do the right thing, financially, by me, and he did."

Penske Racing switched from Chevrolet Camaros to the hapless AMC Javelins in



A perplexed Follmer explains the unique handling characteristics of the Penske Porsche 917/10 to Mark Donohue at Mid-Ohio in 1972.

1970, taking on a manufacturer which, in two years of trying, had not won a single race, thus removing AMC's little coupe off the consumer ponycar radar.

Jones won five races and the new Drivers Championship for Ford; Follmer, Elford and Milt Minter each won a singleton, while Donohue needed only five races to put the Sunoco Javelin in the winner's circle for the first time, and the first of his three wins on the season.

Despite all the hoopla, only the Penske Javelin and Moore Mustangs were Olympics swimmers in the allegorical pool; Dodge, Plymouth, Pontiac and Chevrolet were the

fat guys wearing black socks with a Speedo.

Also during the 1970 season, Follmer and Don Nichols formed their first alliance with the Advanced Vehicle Systems Shadow Can-Am car, a hallmark Trevor Harris radical design. Picture a kart with a big-block Chevy engine and a body design so unique that the upper half of the engine is hanging out in the breeze.

"Firestone built 10-in. diameter front tires for the car. That allowed Trevor Harris to design a door-stop-shaped body for the car with only 13sq.ft. of frontal area, but it left no room for my feet or a clutch pedal.

"The clutch, which I only used to launch



At Road Atlanta in August '72, Follmer runs hard in his Roy Woods F5000 Lotus-Ford.

PHOTO HAL GROCKER

PHOTO DAVE ARNOLD COLLECTION

GEORGE FOLLMER *continued*

the car, was hand-operated, but I had to twist my feet 180-degrees to work the gas and brake. The front springs looked like engine valve springs and we didn't yet have gas-filled shock absorbers to work with them."

George walked away in the midst of a test session a few days before the Mid-Ohio race. Vic Elford was quickly imported. It lasted nine laps and the Shadow was never seen again. It raced 46 laps in its three-race career.

"My career was going good in 1970," Follmer says. "I knew I'd hurt it if I stayed with this program."

Roy Woods bought Penske's Javelins to race in the 1972 Trans-Am series and hired Follmer to drive one. Brainerd was his fourth win in five races. It was also his 14th consecutive Trans-Am win or second place finish, dating back to the 1970 season finale at Riverside.

The 917—Like Nothing I'd Ever Driven

"The Brainerd win had clinched the Driver's Championship for me and I was sitting in the sun in Dallas, catching a little R&R, when he found me."

Roger Penske was calling again.

"All he said was, 'Mark's been hurt in an accident. When can you be in Atlanta?'"

Mark Donohue had inadvertently unlocked rear bodywork come loose at high speed, standing the new Penske Porsche 917/10 on its tail during a pre-race test. Mark's injuries were extensive and severe.

"I was there that night



Follmer's Roy Woods Javelin leads Jerry Thompson's Mustang at Mid-Ohio in '72.

PHOTO DAVE ARNOLD COLLECTION

and one of the crew guys picked me up at the hotel shortly after five the next morning. Since it was for Roger, and with these circumstances, the Road Atlanta people had opened the gates for him at 6 a.m.

"I'd never even seen the track until we got there," Follmer recalls.

"That Porsche was Mark's baby. He'd been deep inside that program since its inception, probably deeper than Porsche's own people. Everything good about that package was because Mark had re-engineered it that way and made it work. I've never been hesitant to jump into a new car and test it, but this wasn't like anything I'd ever driven.

"Mark had been let out of the hospital the next morning. He was on crutches, in a lot of pain, looked awful, and really had no business being there. But you had to understand what the success of the 917/10 Can-Am car meant to him, personally.

"We did some slow laps in a rental car with Mark giving me pointers. Adjusting to this specific situation, adjusting to a new track, and knowing in a few minutes you were going to be driving a car more refined and powerful than anything you've ever driven in your life—that's a lot of pressure on anybody.

"The 917/10 was a brutal car because of its horsepower and braking capabilities, and it didn't like high-speed corners. It was good on slow corners, but the fast ones—and Road Atlanta has some fast ones—it was like you had to walk it through the corner on a leash before you unloaded it. And you better be pointing it straight when you did!

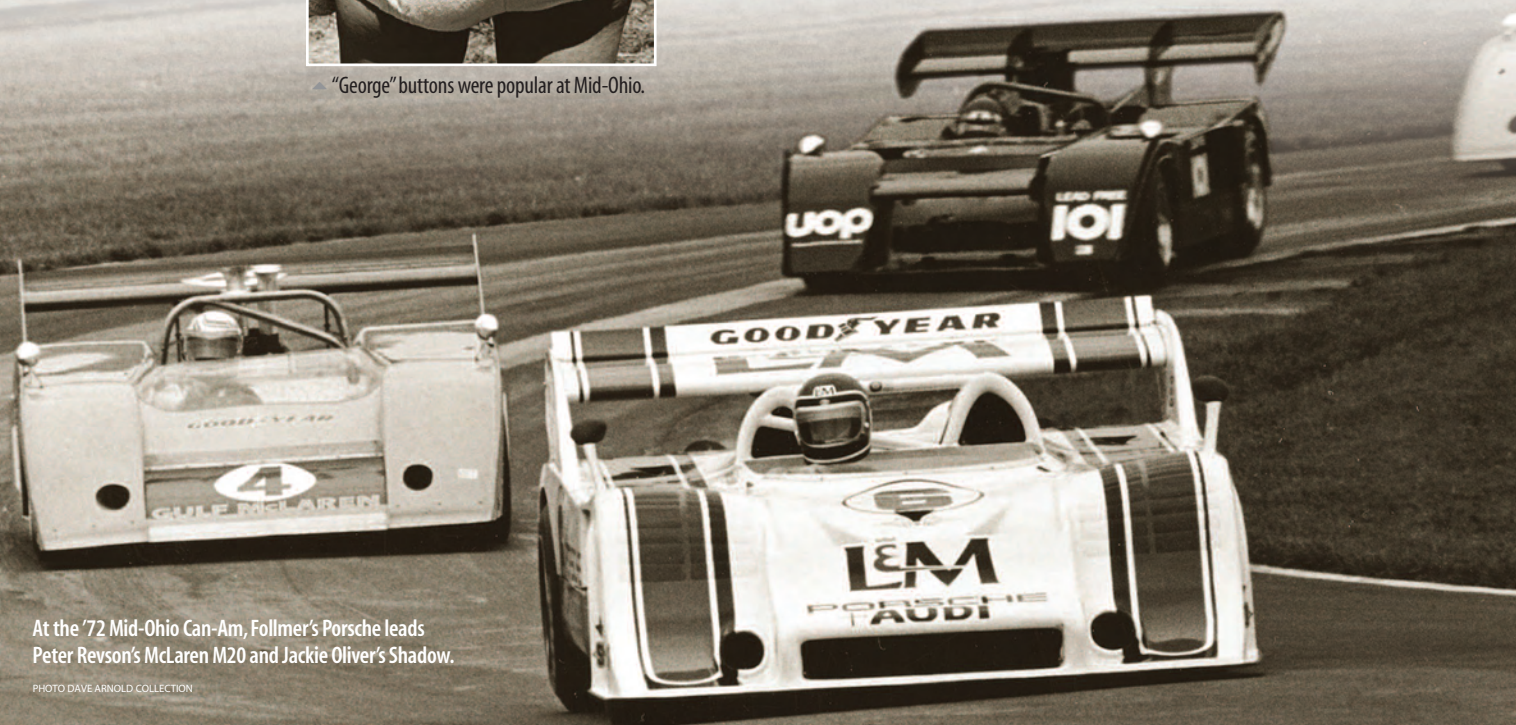
"Roger's and Mark's only two orders for me were to not hurt the car and to win the race. I qualified second to Denny Hulme in the McLaren M20—he crashed early—and I won by a full lap. Roger and Porsche were very happy.

"I was first asked to drive one of Roger's cars in 1967, and the last time was in 1974. I'm the longest-running substitute driver Roger ever had. I'm proud of that.



PHOTO DAVE ARNOLD COLLECTION

▲ "George" buttons were popular at Mid-Ohio.



At the '72 Mid-Ohio Can-Am, Follmer's Porsche leads Peter Revson's McLaren M20 and Jackie Oliver's Shadow.

PHOTO DAVE ARNOLD COLLECTION

"The next race was Watkins Glen and the car wasn't as it should have been. Dr. Ferry Porsche and Helmut Flegl were there, and a lot of European journalists Porsche had flown over, which only made it worse.

"We finished fifth, two laps down, after a blower valve spring stuck."

According to Donohue, in his 1975 autobiography, "The Unfair Advantage," "Roger was blaming Flegl, and Flegl was saying Follmer was no good. Someone at Porsche called Roger and suggested he get another driver. They [told Roger] to contact Andretti, or they would get [Jacky] Ickx. Roger called to ask what I thought."

"Part of the problem," Follmer admits, "was I didn't yet know enough about the car to tell the crew what to do, and Mark wasn't there because of his injuries and treatment. Mark had a lot of this car in his head, which he'd done with any car I ever drove for Penske. And I understood that.

"Roger stood up for me, and he was right. The more I drove the car, the more I understood it and the faster I got. Meanwhile, Revson and Hulme were on their game with the McLaren M20. There was nothing wrong with that package and we couldn't afford to give away any races to them.

"It wasn't until the Mid-Ohio race where I really felt comfortable in the Porsche. Mid-Ohio was a difficult track to drive because of the turbo lag off slow

corners. It took me a while to learn to tell myself it was okay to put the throttle down."

He qualified on the pole with a new track record, and led all 80 laps to beat Jackie Oliver by 1:33.038sec.

"At Watkins Glen, we stepped all over ourselves with that car, and at the entirely wrong time considering who all was there.

"THE MORE I DROVE THE CAR, THE MORE I

The car wasn't drivable, and Porsche just couldn't understand I did not develop that car—Mark did—I was just the guy told to win the races in his absence. We were awful there, but by Mid-Ohio, I had more miles under me and it all worked out."

Let George Do It

Because the rift between Flegl and Penske/Follmer at The Glen quickly got to the media and the public, it was at Mid-Ohio where boxes and boxes of buttons suddenly appeared, with the L&M cigarettes logo and a simple message reading "Let George Do It."

"That deal was by L&M's PR guy, Cope Robinson," Follmer remembers.

"Cope brought boxes and boxes of 'Let George Do It' buttons and pretty soon everybody in the paddock, except the McLaren guys, was wearing one as a sign of support for me."

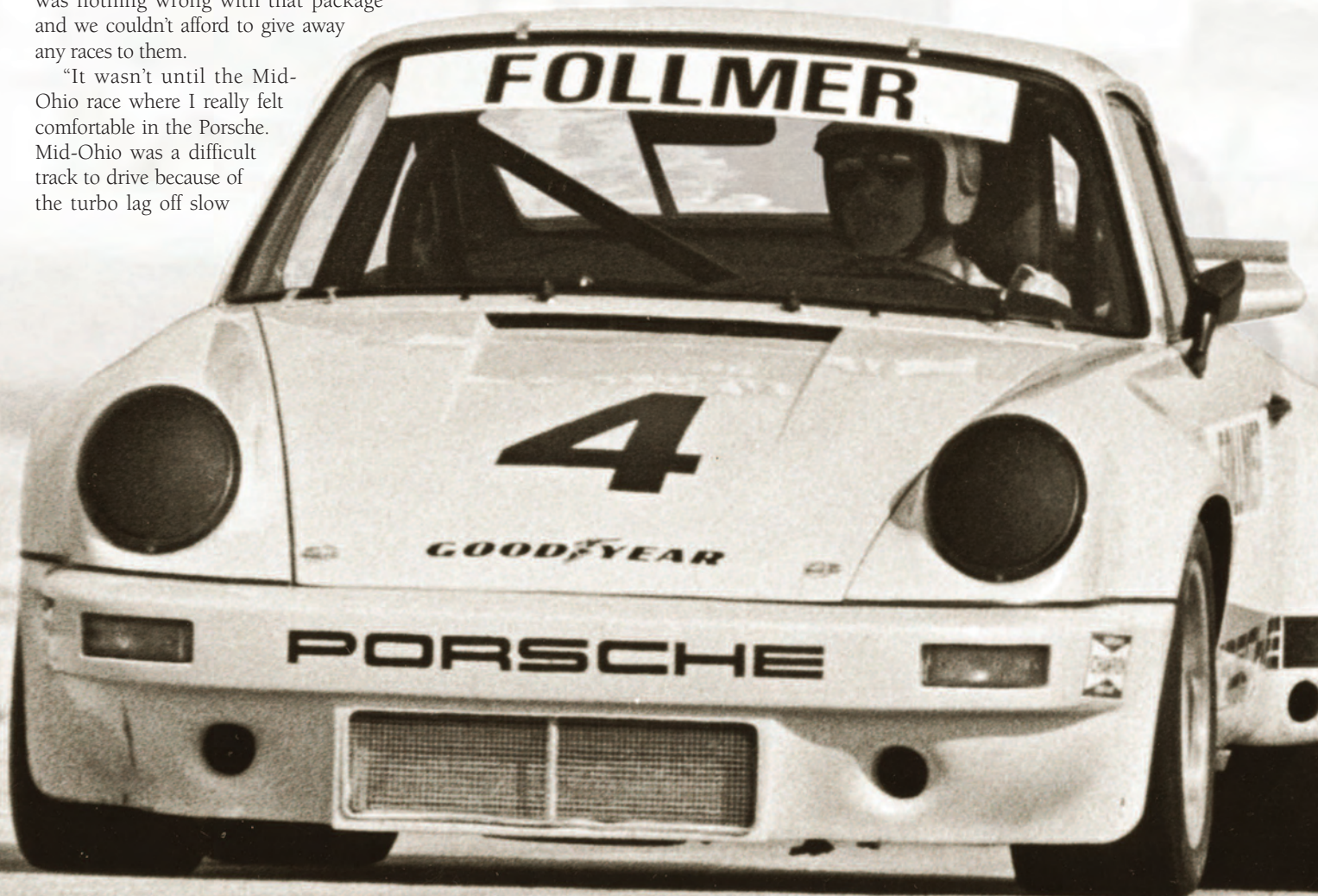
The phrase was the title of a 1940 British movie about a simpleton, George Hepplewhite, who causes disasters through

his own incompetence, then solves them through sheer dumb luck.

There was redemption, however. "Before the 1973 season, I got to test the 917/30 at Weissach and at Riverside. Everything wrong with the 917/10 was corrected on the 30, much of it due to the additional seven inches of wheelbase. The short wheelbase of the 10, going up through the esses at Riverside, made that a very wicked car."

Reuniting With The Old Cars

George drove the L&M Porsche 917/10 chassis 003 a few years ago at the Monterey Historics.



"The car was then owned by Bruce McCaw. His shop sent the fuel metering unit to Europe for repair, and it was stolen. They had to use an alternate system which made the car run rich, and a Porsche 917/10 running rich isn't a fun car to drive."

He's also played with some of his old Mustangs.

arms. It was built especially for Parnelli, but he didn't like the way it drove. I liked it and did well with it.

"These cars are all worth well over \$300,000 now but, at the time, they were disposable."

Over the years, many things have changed George's facial expression from his

SCCA races which conflicted with USAC dates, and suggested if he declined the offer, perhaps his USAC driver's license would be pulled.

"Deke Houlgate, one of the top PR guys in the business, got hold of the story and fed it to the *L.A. Times* for the next day's paper. He made it sound like I was ready to walk away from USAC and sue them, which I wasn't, but I understand.

"It all boiled down to right-to-work issues. USAC wanted to restrict where I was allowed to work. I didn't think that was fair, I got in Smyth's face and told him so in no polite terms.

"They didn't bother Parnelli, even though he was doing Trans-Am, too. Parnelli was a major USAC headliner as a car owner for Al Unser. I wasn't a headline star, but I wasn't at the bottom of the heap, either. I'd won the Phoenix race the year before, and since I lived in Pasadena, I did have certain amount of name attraction to the L.A. media. I was big enough to get some ink.

"It was over the next day. I backed Smyth down. Once the story hit the papers, I think he was afraid if I got a lawyer, the first thing the lawyer would do is get an injunction to stop the race, which would have really screwed him.

"Thing is, I wanted to do all three series because I'm a racer. This is my living, and being a racer is a short career, either voluntarily or involuntarily. Unless we fund it ourselves, we have no insurance plan, no retirement policy, no 401Ks. My point was they can't keep a guy from working."

That was the second time in two years Follmer stood on his hind legs and spoke very pointedly to someone he felt was not using his head.

Another "Follmer Moment"

George drove the 1973 Formula 1 season for Don Nichols as Jackie Oliver's teammate in the Shadow DN1 cars. He scored his first F1 points in his first race—a sixth place at Kyalami. All the more remarkable was the fact that on that day, at age 39 years, one month and four days, he became the eldest man to start an F1 race.

With the next race—the Spanish GP at Montjuich—came his first podium, behind Emerson Fittipaldi in Colin Chapman's Lotus and Francois Cevert in Ken Tyrrell's Tyrrell.

"On the victory podium," Follmer says, "Cevert started creating a big scene, yelling at me that I was blocking him. I told him, 'If you're faster than me, you

UNDERSTOOD IT AND THE FASTER I GOT."

"I've driven them, not hard, mind you, but hard enough," he says. "The three best cars that are still around—Vic Edelbrock's, Brian Ferrin's and Jamey Mazzotta's—were restored by Richard Rodeck, who has done a wonderful job with them. Vic's, especially, looks way better than it did when it was new in 1969. That was the car that was destroyed at St. Jovite. Richard went to Bud Moore's shop in 1982, dug it out of the weeds behind the shop where it had been tossed 13 years earlier, and bought it for \$500. Brian's car was a body-in-white leftover from 1970 that got put away, then I raced it a couple of times in 1971.

"Jamey's 1970 car is probably the best one because of what it had on it. That was a Lee Dykstra-build with a multi-link rear suspension instead of the normal trailing

friendly "gotcha!" looks back to that intent, steely glare.

During the 1970 Labor Day weekend, George was doing repeated cross-country flights between the USAC 500-miler at Ontario Motor Speedway and Connecticut's Lime Rock Park, where he was again teamed with Bruce Burness as his chief mechanic for a Formula 5000 Lotus 70-Ford in the SCCA's Continental Championship series.

At OMS, he was approached by USAC's Bill Smyth.

"This guy was a perfect model for the 'Peter Principle,'" George says. "He was so far over his head in his job, past his capabilities, and was willing to try anything to make himself look good. I think he assumed I'd fight him verbally. I'm sure I would have fought him...physically."

Smyth advised George to stop running



In Porsche Carrera RSRs, Follmer leads Mark Donohue during a 1974 IROC event.

PHOTO HAL CROCKER

GEORGE FOLLMER *continued*

should have been able to pass me easier.' I mean, I'm not going to pull off the track and park for somebody.

"Maybe it was that anti-French thing again, too."

Follmer and Oliver also teamed for the 1974 Can-Am season in the Shadow DN4 cars. Now a lackluster series with only five races, Follmer finished second to Oliver in the first three races, twice won the pole and twice set the race's fastest lap.

At Mid-Ohio, Roger Penske pulled the Porsche 917/30 out of mothballs and entered for it Brian Redman, who easily won the pole, followed by Follmer and Oliver.

Because of a damp track and Donohue's choice of hand-grooved tires, which were not working, Redman played it cautious and followed the duo running nose-to-tail in their black cars.

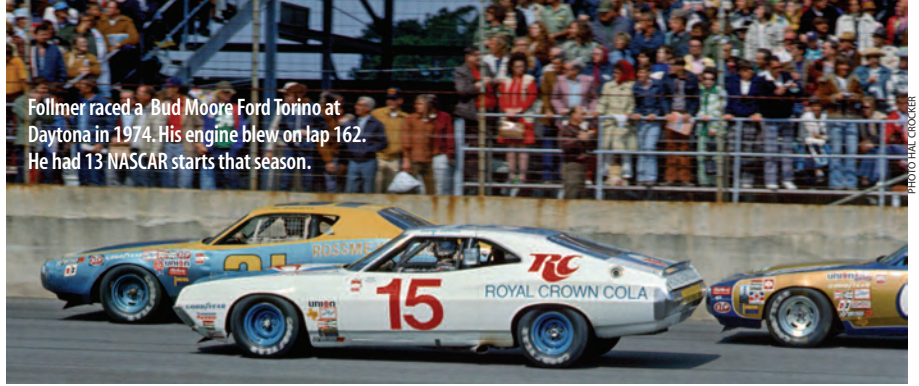
We'll let Redman narrate the story from his front-row view:

"The first heat race was run under wet conditions, which I managed to win by conserving the tires as the track dried. However, it looked like it would be wet again for the start of the final and I asked Mark what would happen to the handling if we grooved the slicks, and the track dried out. 'Nothing,' he replied.

"I took the lead, but the two Shadows were very close. Early in the race, coming over the 'hump' at the start of the back straight, I opened the throttle a fraction too soon. Instantly, the car snapped sideways and whilst I was 'sorting it out' both Follmer and Jackie went past.

"I now sat behind them watching a tremendous duel which terminated when George tried to make an impossible pass braking for the 90-degree right-hander at Turn 7. He hit poor Jackie right in the door, sending him sideways. Unfortunately for

Follmer raced a Bud Moore Ford Torino at Daytona in 1974. His engine blew on lap 162. He had 13 NASCAR starts that season.



At Road Atlanta in July '74, Follmer drives one of his favorite cars, the awesome Can-Am Shadow.



Follmer, his Shadow was too badly damaged to continue. After returning to the pits and flinging his helmet to the ground, he immediately left the track in a less-than-congenial mood!"

"I knew I was faster than Jackie, especially at Mid-Ohio," Follmer recalls, "and it wasn't the first time he'd blocked me. If I could just pass Jackie, then Brian could worry about him, because Brian and the 917/30 were who we had to focus on, not each other."

Follmer hoofed it back to the pits to have a squinty-eyed, arm-waving conversation with Don Nichols.

According to the press notes, exactly two minutes after Follmer arrived in the pits, his rental car was off the track premises and headed down the highway.

"I honestly can't remember if I got out of my driver's suit in the paddock, or in the car while I was driving," he laughs.

Penske had entered the 917/30 at Mid-Ohio perhaps as a favor to Mid-Ohio promoter Les Griebing, or to the SCCA; either way it was to help put paying spectators in the seats for the failing series.

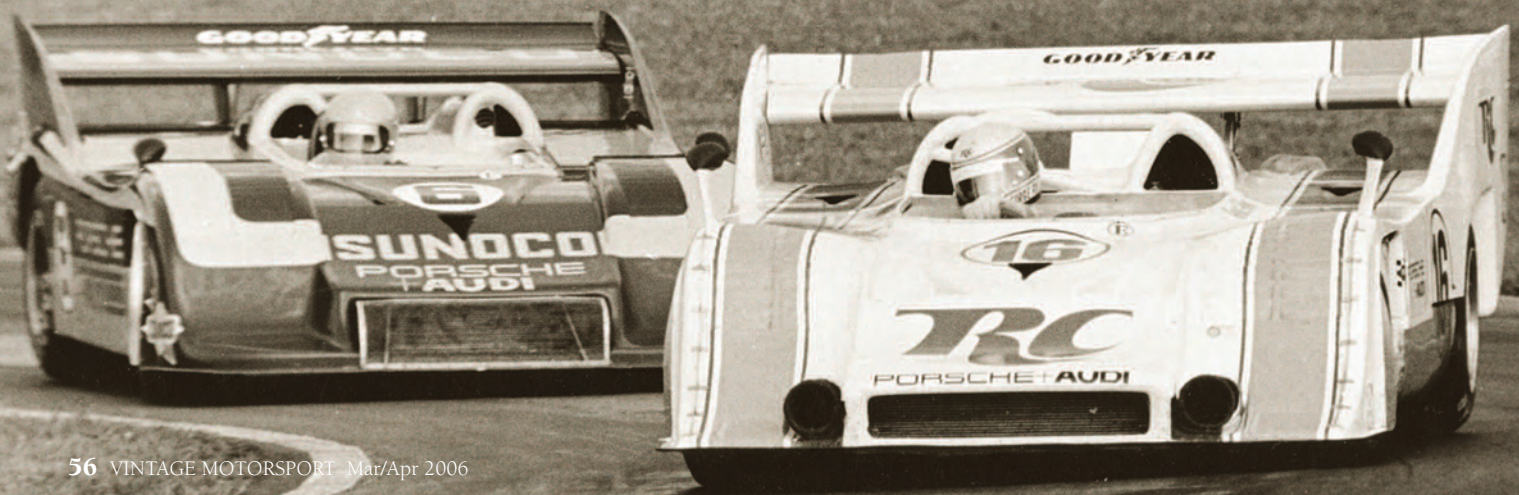
Mid-Ohio was the last race for one of the most fabled race cars in American history; two weeks later, after the Road America race, the season abruptly ended for lack of promoter interest. It laid dormant for two years before the name, but neither the concept nor its popularity, was revived.

The Big One

Somewhat unnoticed, another dry spell crept into George's career, hot on the heels of

Follmer has his mirrors full of Mark Donohue and his 917/30 at the '73 Mid-Ohio Can-Am.

PHOTO DAVE ARNOLD COLLECTION



the greatest year of his time in the business.

Save for an IROC win at Riverside in 1973, Follmer's last regular series win had been his debut race in the Penske Porsche 917/10 at Road Atlanta that April.

He went back to what he knew worked. Connections.

Porsche paired Follmer with Vasek Polak's operation for the 1976 Trans-Am season in a Porsche 934 Turbo. He responded beautifully with two wins, eight podiums, and the Driver's Championship. He also raced the 934 for Polak in 1977, winning at Portland, and won the 1978 IMSA Camel GT race at Laguna Seca in Polak's 935.

George teamed with Herb Caplan for the Can-Am series—1977 in Brian Redman's 1976 F/5000 championship-winning Lola T333C, with a sleek, full body and a new name—Prophet.

Then there was the crash.

"By Laguna Seca in '78, we had the Prophet running strong. We'd already won at St. Jovite and should have won a few more races," he says.

"In Saturday qualifying, I was in the downhill section after the Corkscrew when I was passed by another car. His tires kicked up a small rock which lodged in the butterfly of one of my fuel injection tanks.

"I got the car turned but when I lifted before the corner it left the ground, but the engine didn't shut down.

"The master kill switch was on the steering wheel and I hit that, but I was going pretty fast, went off the track, flew 100 feet over a culvert and over a fence into the spectator area where it nosed into the ground quite hard."

The impact broke his right ankle, tibia and fibula, his sternum, and crushed some vertebrae.

GEORGE FOLLMER CAREER WINS

DATE	TRACK	SANCTION	SERIES	CAR
04/11/65	Pensacola	SCCA	SCCA USRRRC	Lotus 23-Porsche
05/02/65	Riverside	SCCA	SCCA USRRRC	Lotus 23-Porsche
05/23/65	Bridgehampton	SCCA	SCCA USRRRC	Lotus 23-Porsche
06/27/65	Watkins Glen	SCCA	SCCA USRRRC	Lotus 23-Porsche
08/15/65	Continental Divide	SCCA	SCCA USRRRC	Lotus 23-Porsche
09/05/65	Road America 500	SCCA	SCCA USRRRC	Lotus 23-Porsche
10/31/65	Riverside	SCCA	SCCA USRRRC	Lotus 23-Porsche
03/26/66	Sebring 12 Hr	FIA	FIA World Sports Car	Porsche 904 GTS
03/03/68	Stardust	NASCAR	NASCAR Late Model	1957 Chevrolet
03/30/69	Phoenix	USAC	USAC Champ Car	Cheetah-Chevrolet
06/22/69	Bridgehampton	SCCA	SCCA Trans-Am	Ford Mustang
05/31/70	Bryar Park	SCCA	SCCA Trans-Am	Ford Mustang
08/01/70	St. Jovite	SCCA	SCCA Continental	Lotus 70-Ford
09/27/70	Mid-Ohio	SCCA	SCCA Continental	Lotus 70-Ford
02/27/71	Ontario	NASCAR	NASCAR Late Model	1961 Ford
05/31/71	Bryar Park	SCCA	SCCA Trans-Am	Ford Mustang
06/06/71	Mid-Ohio	SCCA	SCCA Trans-Am	Ford Mustang
10/03/71	Riverside	SCCA	SCCA Trans-Am	AMC Javelin
05/06/72	Lime Rock	SCCA	SCCA Trans-Am	AMC Javelin
05/29/72	Bryar Park	SCCA	SCCA Trans-Am	AMC Javelin
06/17/72	Watkins Glen	SCCA	SCCA Trans-Am	AMC Javelin
07/04/72	Brainerd	SCCA	SCCA Trans-Am	AMC Javelin
07/09/72	Road Atlanta	SCCA	SCCA Can-Am	Porsche 917-10 KL
08/06/72	Mid-Ohio	SCCA	SCCA Can-Am	Porsche 917-10 KL
08/27/72	Road America	SCCA	SCCA Can-Am	Porsche 917-10 KL
10/15/72	Laguna Seca	SCCA	SCCA Can-Am	Porsche 917-10 KL
10/29/72	Riverside	SCCA	SCCA Can-Am	Porsche 917-10 KL
03/25/73	Vallelunga 6 Hr	FIA	FIA World Champ. For Makes	Porsche Carrera RSR
05/10/73	Spa 1000km	FIA	FIA World Champ. For Makes	Porsche Carrera RSR
07/08/73	Road Atlanta	SCCA	SCCA Can-Am	Porsche 917-10 KL
10/27/73	Riverside	IROC	IROC	Porsche Carrera RSR
05/30/76	Nelson Ledges	SCCA	SCCA Trans-Am	Porsche 935 Turbo
09/05/76	Trois Rivières	SCCA	SCCA Trans-Am	Porsche 935 Turbo
06/12/77	Portland	SCCA	SCCA Trans-Am	Porsche 934 Turbo
04/30/78	Laguna Seca	IMSA	IMSA Camel GT	Porsche 935 Turbo
06/25/78	St. Jovite	SCCA	SCCA Can-Am	Prophet-Chevrolet
10/11/81	Laguna Seca	SCCA	SCCA Trans-Am	Chevrolet Camaro

"The doctors said my ankle was so badly mangled that they wanted to cut off my foot at the ankle. I loudly told them that was my throttle foot, and they were to do everything possible to repair it, which they did.

"They did the best they could, but it was never great after that. Around 1997, a friend told me he knew of a doctor in Seattle who did artificial ankle replacements. He re-broke the leg, got it lined up right and replaced the ankle. It isn't flawless, but I'm no longer in the heavy pain I had for 20 years. That was awful.

"Meanwhile, I was in physical therapy rehab, worried about my career, and Bobby Rahal and Danny Sullivan were trying to get my ride with Caplan. Racing is a competitive business for drivers. Out of sight, out of mind, you know?

"I had to come back as soon as possible. My first race was six months later, the Camel GT event at Riverside, driving a Porsche 935 for Vasek Polak with Derek Bell and Brett Lunger. We finished third, but honestly, I wasn't ready."

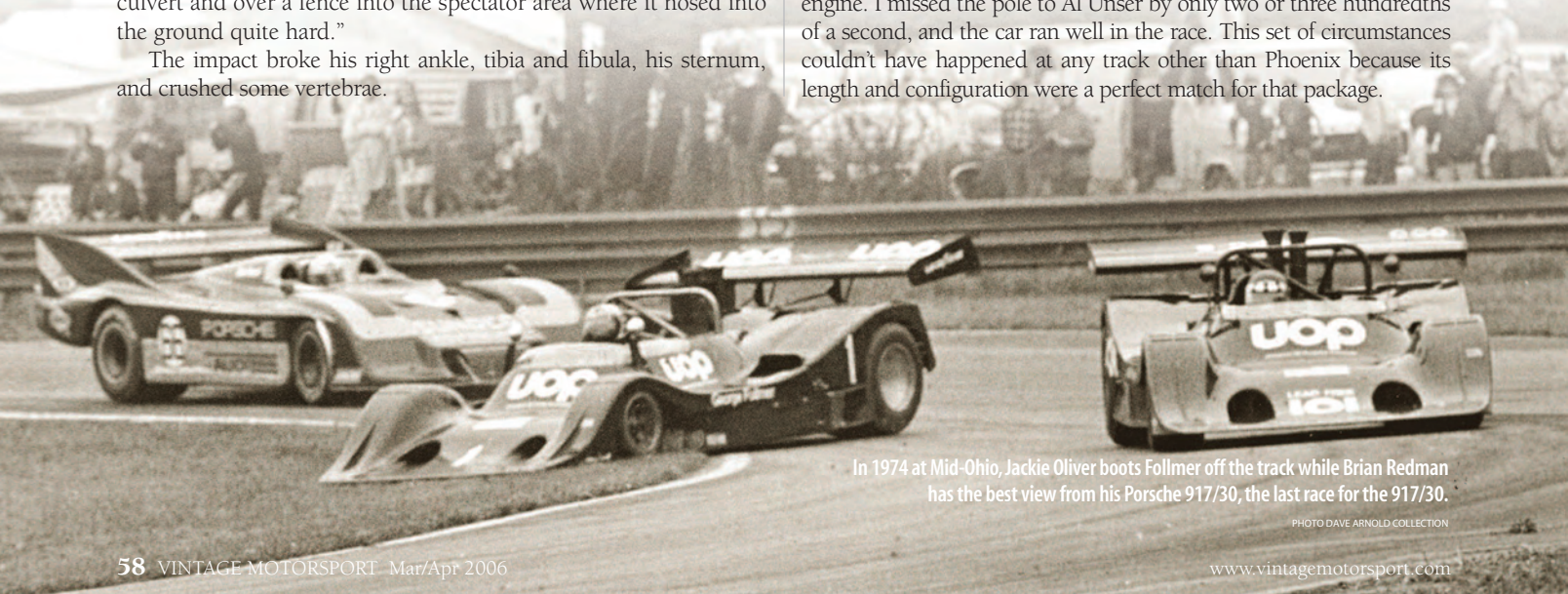
Ask George to name a race or two for which he wants to be remembered.

"The 1969 Phoenix USAC race and the 1972 Mid-Ohio Can-Am," he quickly answers.

"At Phoenix, the Howard

Gilbert Cheetah-Chevy had a 'magic' mechanical package that would not have produced the same result anywhere else; and at Mid-Ohio, we overcame a multitude of problems with Penske's Porsche 917/10.

"Phoenix was the first and only USAC race won by a stock block engine. I missed the pole to Al Unser by only two or three hundredths of a second, and the car ran well in the race. This set of circumstances couldn't have happened at any track other than Phoenix because its length and configuration were a perfect match for that package.



In 1974 at Mid-Ohio, Jackie Oliver boots Follmer off the track while Brian Redman has the best view from his Porsche 917/30, the last race for the 917/30.

PHOTO DAVE ARNOLD COLLECTION

GEORGE FOLLMER *continued*

"I did a lot of testing on that engine and chassis. We were running 15 percent nitromethane in the alcohol and, because we had to carry so much fuel, the car was really heavy in the first part of the race. But as the fuel level dropped and the car got lighter, I was able to drive around the leaders on the outside."

The results show Unser led the opening 14 laps until he dropped a valve. Mario Andretti then led until he broke a half-shaft, then Bobby Unser until he had another engine failure in Dan Gurney's Eagle.

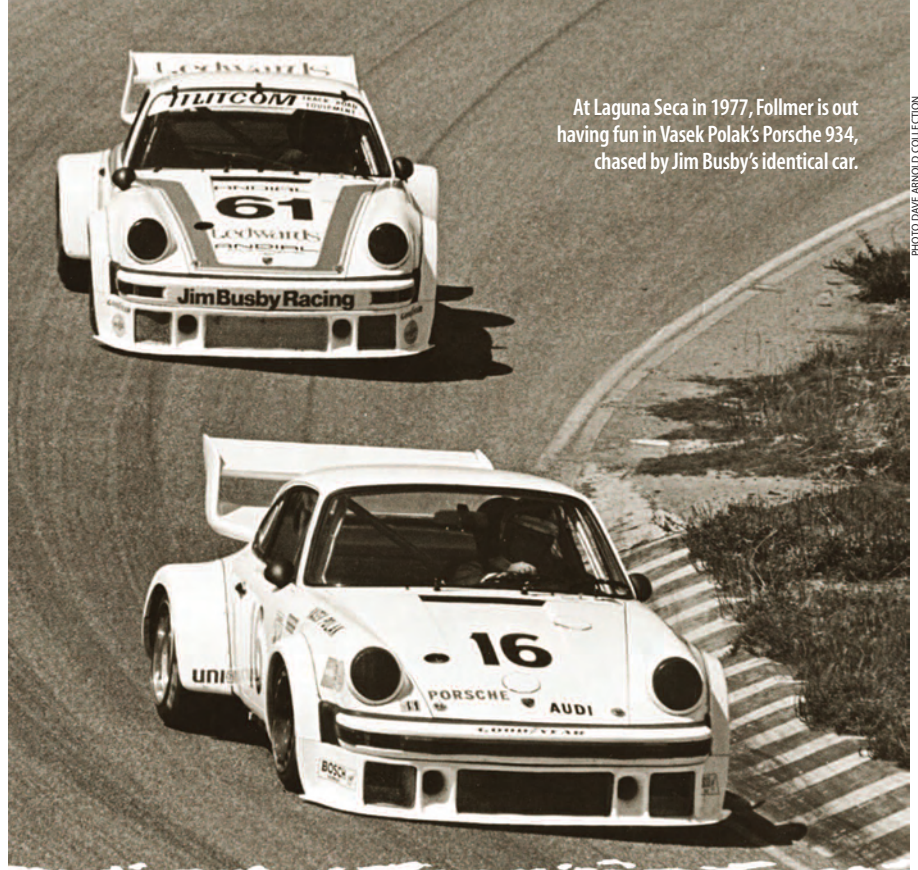
By lap 122, after shadowing the leaders all day, George was in the lead. When the checkered flag fell at lap 150, he was three laps ahead of the second-place car.

"It didn't have the top speed to be competitive on a bigger oval, or even on the USAC road courses that utilized long straights on their drag strips, like IRP and Donnybrooke," he says.

"Mid-Ohio was where I finally came to grips with Penske's Porsche," he says. Mid-Ohio was a good track for George. By winning the Can-Am pole that weekend, he simultaneously held the qualifying records in Can-Am, Trans-Am and Formula 5000.

"It rained off and on during the race," he went on to say. "We'd just got the 18-in. wide rear wheels for the Porsche, and with slicks, it was like water-skiing. In fact, I spun the car twice but didn't hurt anything."

"I really wanted to bring it in and change tires, but Roger wouldn't let me. He just




At Laguna Seca in 1977, Follmer is out having fun in Vasek Polak's Porsche 934, chased by Jim Busby's identical car.

PHOTO DAVE ARNOLD COLLECTION

stood out there by the wall, like he always did, holding the sign board with my lap time, and every time I came by, he'd calmly pointing one finger up the track as if to say, 'just keep going.' I was really getting very upset with him, but it worked out in the end, and from there on out, I felt I 'knew' the 917/10 and its capabilities."

Two significant honors justifiably give George a feeling of pride for his career—his 1999 enshrinement in the Motorsports Hall of Fame, and the 1972 Jerry Titus Memorial Trophy from the Auto Racing Writers and Broadcasters Association.

You can just see the corners of the eyes relax and the grin begin. 

Driving the Prophet at Laguna Seca in 1978, Follmer had the worst crash of his career.

PHOTO HAL CROCKER

