



★★ DAN'S THE MAN ★★

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM MCCRAW

Dan Gurney Honored With Edison-Ford Medal

For only the second time since 1989, the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, has awarded the Edison-Ford Medal for a lifetime of innovation, this time to everybody's favorite American racer, Dan Gurney.

At a 300-person gathering at the museum, emceed by CBS and PBS television's Charlie Rose, a galaxy of racing stars from Sir Jackie Stewart to Roger Penske to Leonard Wood, Jim Busby, Ray Evernham, Rob Dyson and Peter Brock turned out to salute one of America's most successful racers.

As driver, designer, builder, and team owner, Gurney garnered a total of 51 wins in 312 events in 20 different countries in Formula One, NASCAR, Grand Am, Indy cars, Can-Am, Trans-Am, and IMSA GTP sports cars. His company, All-American Racers, built 158 Gurney Eagle single-seaters over the years, and fielded 19 Eagles among the 33 starters at the 1973 Indy 500.

His cars won the Indy 500 three times, twice with Bobby Unser and once with Gordon Johncock, between 1968 and 1975, and Gurney-designed Toyota GTP cars also won the 12 Hours of Sebring and the 24 Hours of Daytona.

Gurney is credited with being the first race winner to deliberately spray the crowd with champagne, and more importantly,

the first to work with Bell to develop a full-face helmet for auto racing use. He developed the famous Gurney flap for a rear spoiler, designed the Alligator, the world's first recumbent motorcycle, and built the first Delta Wing race car at his shop in California.

His most notable achievements, as Charlie Rose pointed out during the slide show, were winning the 1967 24 Hours of Le Mans with co-driver A. J. Foyt in the Ford GT40 Mk IV (he had won the GT class there in 1964 with co-driver Bob Bondurant in the Cobra Daytona Coupe), and designing, building and driving his own creations, the Gurney Eagles, in Formula 1 and Indy competition.

Gurney, now 83, is the only driver ever to win a Formula 1 race driving a car of his own design—the Belgian Grand Prix—only a week after Le Mans, in 1967. During his 15 years in the seat, he drove for Ford, Shelby, Ferrari, Maserati, BRM,



Guest of honor Dan Gurney enjoyed the evening with his wife, Evi.

Porsche, Brabham, Chrysler and Toyota, among others.

At a media luncheon on October 29th, Gurney said that his move from Long Island to Riverside, California, was the beginning of his education about cars.

"I often felt like the junkyards were all universities. You could learn a huge amount by seeing what guys like Henry Ford and the GM guys felt was the peak of their era, and it was very instructive. Good stuff."

He said he was attracted by the unpredictability and the risk involved in racing. "Unpredictability is something that appeals to me a great deal, and I think that it's the same today. The element of risk was there before, and it's still there today."

He was asked if he was ever scared of a particular race car during a race.

"The involvement, before you're in the race, when the car is being designed, engineered, you're very much involved with that. You're not going to be in the pits,



Peter Brock (right) joined Gurney at the ceremony.

you're going to be in the cockpit, but once the race starts, you need to drive, and you're probably involved in analyzing your own performance, like taking that last turn, the tachometer in a particular gear. There's plenty of room to pick up your foot."

In his time with Toyota, he says, the Gurney-designed race car won 17 races in

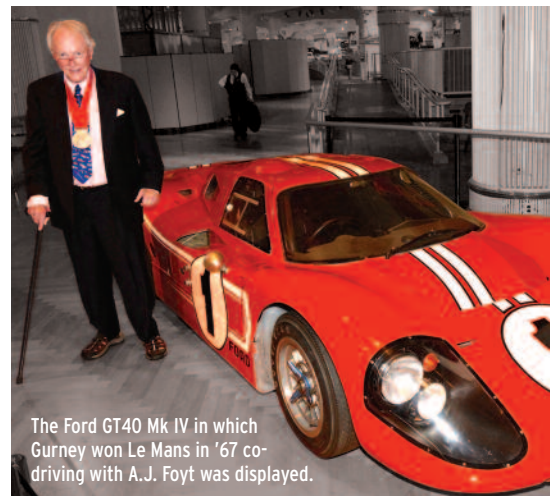
a row in IMSA competition, and there would have been more, except that Toyota asked him not to go to Road America, to sit one out, because the car was so dominant.

Asked if he ever had the desire to get back into a race car after he retired, he was emphatic. "No. I believe that if you're not one hundred percent confident that this is what you want to do, then you shouldn't do it, when it is as risky as it seemed to be. I never got to a hundred percent. Age, and a gradually increasing feeling that racing isn't the only thing in the world. When you're involved in it, you look forward to meeting your competitors, whether you like them or not, and when you wake up and realize that they are no longer there, you get lonely."

Asked if he had a solution for some of the motorsports series that are lagging in attendance, and TV ratings, he said, "I moan all the time that there seem to be more and more things that you're not allowed to do. I don't necessarily feel that we should tell people how much money they can spend. When the rules were not so restrictive, you could come up with innovations that didn't necessarily cost a lot of money. I think that speed has proved to be less important than the car. I think that being efficient was pretty good."

"I suppose that the Le Mans race, after 10 years of learning, was the most satisfying. I don't know why they put me and A.J. together, because we were competitors. The general idea was that we were going to go fast, but not for very long. I went through a long, drawn-out explanation of how I thought we should be. Fortunately, I had decided how to do it before practice ever began. I was copying the knowledge that Briggs Cunningham had. He always finished better than I did at Le Mans. I realized that it wasn't so much a race as it was an endurance contest."

"I told that to A.J. and I doubt that he



The Ford GT40 Mk IV in which Gurney won Le Mans in '67 co-driving with A.J. Foyt was displayed.

was receptive to it, but I did all of the early testing and set the car up. Not too much downforce, not too little, just enough to get through the Mulsanne kink. Then he got in the car and went just as fast as I did. The Achilles heel of that car was the brakes. The car would run 212, 213 on the straightaway and then slow down to 40 for the right-hand turn—all that energy went through the brakes, and they wouldn't last."

Did this man, who competed successfully in so many arenas, miss out on anything? He said that he would have liked to try sprint cars, and that he would have enjoyed rally driving. His biggest regret, he said, was not winning the Indy 500 as a driver.

He told us that he admires, among engine men, Keith Duckworth, one of the co-founders of Cosworth, Harry Miller and Leo Goossen. "Goossen was about 76 years old when I met him but he had the enthusiasm of a teenager. He helped us when we were running Offys. He would carry a sketchpad and keep drawing it out until he got to the perfect solution. Working with him was a terrific experience."

At the evening ceremony emceed by Charlie Rose, which included a documentary narrated by another newsman, NBC's Brian Williams, and comments from Jim Hall and Carroll Shelby, Gurney was presented the Edison-Ford Medal by Edsel Ford II, who said of Gurney, "There is not a person in this sport who does not respect Dan Gurney for what he's done and who he is. He's a great car builder, a great innovator, and a presidential candidate. Dan Gurney is a man who respected the sport as much as it respected him. We honor him tonight for his great innovations and for his contributions to the sport. Let us also honor him for being a great man." 🏁



Edsel Ford II, Dan Gurney, Charlie Rose, the museum's president Patricia Mooradian and director Christian Overland.