



Speed Bump - Slow Down For Some Automotive Tales

A Column By Hal Tretbar

Iceberg in the Desert

Anyone remember the first United States Iceberg Grand Prix? It was run in June, 32 years ago. The temperature was 100-plus in the shade and crew members were wilting. The track surface was beginning to crumble. Yet the race was run with only 6 of 22 cars finishing.

Grand Prix racing awards points toward an international driving Championship. Grand Prix in the USA (but not necessarily a United States Grand Prix) started in Indianapolis, 1950-60. No overseas drivers or cars were entered in the first race. American drivers Johnnie Parsons 1st, Bill Holland 2nd, and Mauri Rose 3rd, won international points.

Subsequent Grand Prix courses were:

- Sebring, FL 1959;
- Riverside, CA 1960;
- Watkins Glen, NY 1961-80;
- Long Beach, CA 1976-83;
- Las Vegas, NV 1981-82;
- Detroit, MI 1982-88;
- Dallas, TX 1984;
- Phoenix, AZ 1989-91;
- Indianapolis, IN 2000-07;
- Circuit of the Americas, Austin, TX 2012-present.

Sometimes there were two races a year. In 1982 there were three Grand Prix races in the United States.

The most unusual course was the one in Las Vegas. *MotorSport* magazine reported, “The makeshift road course at the Caesar’s Palace and Casino in Las Vegas epitomized the madness that afflicted Formula 1 in the United States during the 1980s. Constructed in the hotel’s parking lot, the course was over two miles of



bordered by concrete barriers, no visual landmarks, (run counter clockwise) and no

atmosphere, just the latest show in town.

They used taxi drivers to bed down the new tarmac and the general reaction was better than expected... Caesar’s Palace staged the final races for the driver’s championship. Both Nelson Piquet and Keke Rosberg claimed world titles here.”

In an effort to emulate the success of the Monaco Grand Prix, there were races through the streets of Long Beach and Detroit. Detroit was the most successful, running for six years.

There is a fascinating back story to this first of these three United States Grand Prix Races that were held in Phoenix, Arizona.

Bernie Ecclestone was a British entrepreneur who had been involved with Grand Prix racing for many years. He became wealthy by selling TV rights for the races. Then he was able to buy and control The Formula One Group, the organization that arranged and scheduled Grand Prix races.

Wikipedia gives us the background for the Phoenix Grand Prix. In the late 1980s Bernie Ecclestone began to charge a higher premium for race organizers to host a Formula One event. For 1989 he demanded Detroit organizer Chris Pook pay \$3 million and build a new and improved pit complex. Pook refused and instead switched to IndyCars for the races.

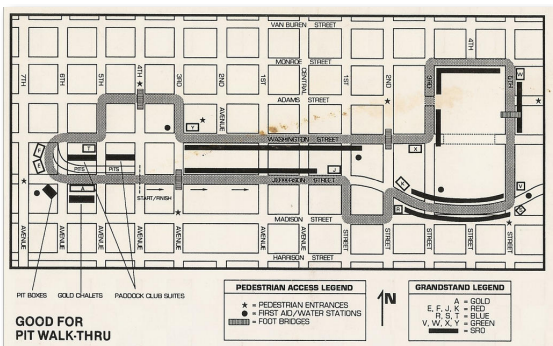
Starting in 1986, there was interest in Phoenix hosting a Grand Prix race on downtown streets. A Phoenix Grand Prix Committee met with Bernie Ecclestone several times overseas who was enthusiastic about the possibility. Wikipedia has this to say about the Phoenix street circuit:

On Jan 13, 1989 the Phoenix City Council, headed by Mayor Terry Goddard, agreed to stage an annual Formula 1 race on a five year contract.

The Phoenix City Council also voted to spend \$9 million of taxpayer’s money on race circuit infrastructure over the five years. It was well known to the organizers that Phoenix can be very hot in the

summer, but never-the-less, Phoenix inherited Detroit's scheduled slot on June 4, 1989. The city had only four months to finish the 2.36-mile-long circuit. This required fencing off and repaving the road surface as well as building grandstands, garages for the pit crews, and other infrastructure. The project was so massive that the local media joked that the city looked as if it were preparing for a Soviet invasion.

Arguably it was the least imaginative F1 circuit ever. The track was laid out in downtown Phoenix where the terrain is as flat as a billiard table, and all the city blocks were originally laid out in perfect squares. In the original course layout, 10 of the 13 corners were 90-degree urban street corners, while the 1991 track had nine.



Drivers were unhappy with the bumpiness of the streets. There was a lack of visual landmarks to gauge their location. They had to use sponsor signs and office towers as reference points. The one saving grace of the circuit was the width of the roadway, never getting below 19 meters and often 15.

In the inaugural race in 1989, Ayrton Senna took the pole in his McLaren Honda but suffered an electric failure a little over halfway through the race. The heat of the Phoenix desert was hard on teams and drivers, and only six cars finished. Alain Prost, Senna's teammate, won the

race ahead of Riccardo Patrese in a Williams Renault. Phoenix native Eddie Cheever placed third in an Arrows Ford.

In attempt to beat the scorching heat, the event date was changed to be the season opener the next year. It was held on March 11, 1990. Senna won. Jean Alesi finished second in a Tyrrell Ford. Thierry Boutsen drove a Williams Renault to third place.

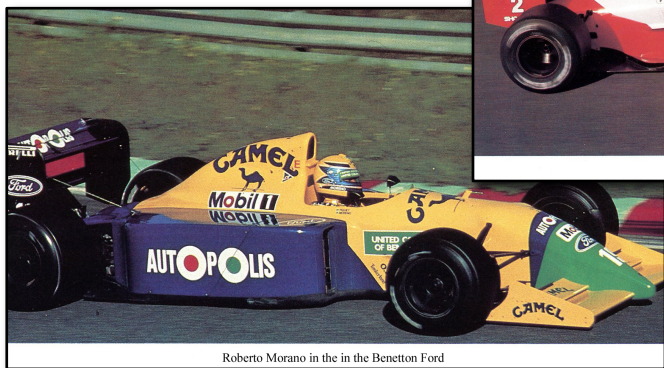
2021 is the 30th anniversary of the 1991 Phoenix Iceberg Grand Prix. By the way, what does an Iceberg have to do with this race in the Sonoran Desert?

Iceberg is an Italian Luxury fashion design house, established in 1974. Why would they want to sponsor a Grand Prix race? Perhaps they had seen how successful the Benneton Formula One team was. The Benneton family ran a worldwide chain of clothing stores. They began by sponsoring the very good Tyrrell F1 team in 1983. In 1986, they bought the Toleman F1 team. Under the Benneton name and management, they won many races. Their driver Michael Schumacher went on to win the World Championships in 1994 and 1995.

Who knows why Iceberg would start their advertising campaign in Phoenix, surrounded by desert and dude ranches? They seemed to melt away and did not sponsor any other racing events.

The last Phoenix United States Grand Prix was on an overcast day on March 10, 1991. This summary is from Ayrton Senna's website:

It was a dual between Ayrton Senna and Alain Prost. Prost was already a three-time champion in 1985, 1986, and 1989. Senna was a two-time champion in 1988 and 1990. In Phoenix, Prost had won the race in 1989, Senna in 1990. There was no way to proclaim a favorite, especially since this was the year's first race.



Roberto Moreno in the Benetton Ford



Gerhard Berger in the McLaren Honda



Alain Prost in the Ferrari

McLaren-Honda would be racing the same drivers; Ayrton Senna and Gerhard Berger. Ferrari had Alain Prost and Jean Alesi. Benneton-Ford would field the Brazilian duo of Nelson Piquet and Roberto Moreno.

Qualifying placed Senna first. Prost was second in a Ferrari. Third and fourth were the Williams-Renaults with Riccardo Patrese and Nigel Mansell. The third row were Nelson Piquet in a Benneton-Ford and Jean Alesi, Ferrari.

On Sunday, Senna started well and the first few positions remained unchanged. Ayrton as usual in street circuits, peeled away from his rivals. With Senna in the lead, a fierce battle for second place raged between both Williams cars and Prost's Ferrari. Both Mansell and Patrese's Williams Renault left the race with gearbox problems.



Senna made a pit stop to change tires. Nelson Piquet took advantage of the stop to complete a few laps in second place. But the Ferraris came back with new tires and took the position away from him.

Seeing that his rivals were having gearbox issues, Senna decided to take it easy in the final laps. The Brazilian finished 16 second ahead of Prost, after leading from start to finish – 81 laps in a two-hour race.

Prost raced on to a second place finish, while Alesi had to retire due to gearbox problems nine laps from the end.

Nelson Piquet was third in a Benneton-Ford. The Tyrell cars came in 4th and 5th. Again, reliability was a factor with only nine cars still running at the end of the race. Retirements were from: gearbox (8), engine (6), fuel

pump (1), collision (1), and one spin off.

On Oct 7, 1991, Ecclestone called the City of Phoenix from his London office to say that Formula One would not be returning to Phoenix ... giving no explanation as to why. He agreed to pay the city \$1.2 million for the cancellation. Later he was asked whether poor attendance was to blame for the cancellation. Ecclestone replied that the issue was not the lack of spectators, but the "inability to put more than 20,000 seats in a position where people could see more than a small part of the race."

The Phoenix media noted that more people attended the Chandler Ostrich Races than attended the Phoenix Iceberg Grand Prix.

Trivia from Ayrton Senna's website: To alleviate pre-race tension, Senna visited some traditional Arizona ranches where he practiced lassoing and was given cowboy holsters. When asked if he was target practicing, he smiled, "No I am training to draw first."

The *Arizona Republic* reported that thieves broke in to the rooms of Senna and Prost at the Phoenician Resort during the race. Prost lost \$12,000 in cash and some clothes. Senna lost a compact disc player, cologne and sunglasses.

Jim Wheelock furnished the Official Program and newspaper articles for this story. He said he enjoyed visiting the pits and that the race was quite interesting.

The Official Program showed that one of the many sponsors of the Phoenix Grand Prix was Intergroup Health Care of Arizona.

Interestingly, I had been Chairman of the Board of Directors until 1986.



Editor's Note: Attending one of these races were the Crowleys and Kepners, SAR club members. Barb sent me these memories of the event: "I remembered how exciting it was to mingle at a cocktail party for the event. It truly was an international happening. Several drivers were there to sign autographs. I recall how surprised I was at how slim and fit (and short) many drivers were. It seemed that most had large, thin, long, pointed noses? Could it be that aerodynamics were improved because they didn't have as much wind resistance and they could be used like rudders on an airplane? Haha.

During the races, the roar of the engines was almost deafening as they echoed through the canyons of the downtown skyscrapers. The Phoenix heat was oppressive. The viewing areas were very limited and the concrete barriers were so high that all we could see were the rear wings of the racecars. We ended up watching most of the race on TV from our air-conditioned hotel rooms! The powerful engines could still be heard (and felt) inside the room."



Speed Bump Bonus!

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All About the *Footwork* Porsche

OK Porschephiles. Raise your hand if you have heard of the *Footwork* Porsche Grand Prix race car. OK, then what do you know about the checkered history of the Porsche 3512 engine? Right! It was a normally aspirated 3.5 liter V12. But what about the rest of the story?

In the mid-1990s, Japanese entrepreneur Wataru Ohashi wanted to promote his logistics company, *Footwork Express Co.*, so he purchased the British based *Arrows* Formula One racing team. The team was officially renamed *Footwork* in 1991 and secured the latest Porsche 3512 engine.

International businessman Mansour Ojeh recently died on June 6, 2021. What does he have to do with Porsche engines?

Ojeh managed his investments through a holding company, *Techniques Avant Garde* or TAG. It became known as TAG Huer when he bought the Swiss watchmaker Huer. The TAG Group became interested in Grand Prix racing in 1979 when they sponsored the *Williams Team* that won world championships in 1980 and 1982.

Then Ojeh became a major investor in the *McLaren Racing limited*, founded by racecar driver Bruce McLaren in Britain. In 1983 he enlisted Porsche to design and build a compact 1.5 liter, twin turbo V6.

Because it hadn't been involved with Formula One racing for many years, Porsche was reluctant to have its name on the engine fearing bad publicity if it failed. However, within a few races, when it became apparent that the TAG Huer engines were the ones to have, the "Made by Porsche" badges began to appear.

It was so successful that in 1984 it powered Niki Lauda in a *McLaren* to a world championship with teammate Alain Prost close behind.

The *McLarens* with the Tag Huer engine earned two more championships with Prost in 1985 and 1986.

Wikipedia notes that two years after the last Tag Huer was delivered in 1987, Porsche

decided to develop a normally aspirated 3.5 liter V12 to meet the new Formula One regulations. Hence the designation 3512.

Veteran Porsche designer Hans Mezger produced an 80 degree angle V12. Remembering the mistake in not putting their name on the Tag Huer engine, Porsche publicized their association with the *Footwork* racing team.

Problems quickly became apparent. The 3512 was too heavy and under-powered compared to the V12s of Honda and Ferrari. In fact, it was too wide for the new *Footwork A11C* chassis, so they started the season at the Phoenix Iceberg Grand Prix using last year's chassis.

At Phoenix, the *Footwork* Porsche driver Alex Caffi did not qualify. His teammate Michele Alboreto dropped out half way through the race with engine trouble. By the third race at the San Marino Grand Prix, the new chassis was enlarged for the 3512.

In its first appearance, one of the new cars was immediately destroyed when the suspension failed at high speed. Caffi failed to qualify. Caffi then damaged the second new car in Monte Carlo. By June 1991, the performance of the *Footwork* Porsche was so miserable that a new engine was needed. Much to Porsche's embarrassment the 3512 was replaced by the lighter and more powerful Brian Hart prepared Cosworth-Ford DFR V8.

After Five more seasons of mediocre performance, the *Footwork* team was sold to Australian Tom Walkinshaw in 1996 who renamed it *TWR Arrows*.

The *Footwork* Porsche story is now part of Porsche AG's colorful history.

PORSCHE V12

For the exclusive use of *Footwork* V12 at 80°

This new engine, from the firm which won the F1 World Championship of drivers in 1984-85 and 86, is used by the Japanese team *Footwork* (formerly *Arrows*) based in England. Its salient technical feature is a power drive taken from a train of gears in the middle of the crankshaft, in order to reduce vibrations.

