

With 27 SCCA Championships won, this driver was super smooth both on and off the track.

By John Jeppesen

Jerry Hansen

THE SCCA'S ENIGMA

There was a nearly 20-year period in the Sports Car Club of America's history when Jerry Hansen ruled the roost. The former Minnesota businessman racked up a total of 27 national championships. While it's hazardous to say *never*, it is very likely this feat will never be topped. That's because no amateur driver or team can afford to bring three or four cars to the Runoffs and run the table like Hansen did. Duane Davis was a contender, but he retired. John Heinricy has 13 and is still winning championships but may run out of years before he hangs up his helmet. "I would like to win my last national championship when I am 80," the Heinrocket says. "Now we know how likely that is to happen but I don't have any plan to stop," he adds.

Hansen won his first title in an expensive A Sports Racing Lola T70 at Daytona in 1967. Fittingly, he won his last national title in A Sports Racing at Road Atlanta in 1984. In addition to wins in Formula B and ASR, he took the top podium step in a slew of different classes including Formula A, B Sports Racing, A-and B-Production and GT1. It has been said that he bought many of the wins, buying the best cars. It's true to some extent, but his brilliant driving skill provided the competitive edge. The simple fact that he won five SCCA Trans-Am pro races and an early F5000 race is a testament to Hansen's prowess.

Incredibly, he beat some of the best professional drivers on their way up. That includes Milt Minter, Bobby Rahal and

Danny Ongais. He was outclassed by the Porsche 917 twice and outgunned it twice. The 1972 gunfight was with the aforementioned Minter. It was an historic battle as Hansen was waging war on two fronts, the first with the nightmarish Lola 310 and the other with his more-than-able foe in the 917. Hansen reportedly said this was the best race in his career.

Hansen had his fill of A Sports Racing detractors whining that he bought the latest Can-Am professionally prepared cars, so he switched classes to the smaller but blindingly quick B Sports Racing. This class was the spawning ground for drivers shooting for a Can-Am professional ride. Hansen's burnt orange Lola T292 squared off against an ascendant Bobby Rahal. It was what the Brits call a "ding-dong" race, full of passes and re-passes. Hansen prevailed in one of the Runoffs' most exciting duels. The whining ended on the spot.

So, what makes Hansen tick? It's essential to understand the man before the race car driver comes into focus. They are tightly interwoven. Hansen is a complex man, an enigma. He's part P.T. Barnum and part J.P. Morgan. Which part of the personality one encounters depends on the situation. He seems to be very humble, transparent and friendly when you first meet him. He is very likeable, charming and fun to hang around with. That said, there's a different person under that veneer when it comes to doing business. That Hansen is fiercely competitive, cunning and manipulative. He lived the term "Show me the money."

Hansen grew up in South Minneapolis. His entrepreneurial talents were apparent at an early age. He began humbly, picking



Nov. 29, 1970, Hansen battles at Road Atlanta's SCCA Runoffs in Turn 5.

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In SCCA racing, Jerry Hansen won more championships than any other driver, the podium a familiar place.



up trash. He got the idea driving through alleys to ditch the constabulary, lights flashing. He got stuck behind a garbage truck and reckoned he could make a buck or two doing that. So, he hooked a small trailer behind his car and offered to haul the trash for a couple bucks less. Pretty soon he had a sizeable customer base and a tidy income. That ended when the big boys in the big trucks said continuing his little business would be hazardous to his health.

Then he thought buying some of the numerous South Minneapolis apartment buildings might be worth a shot. Not surprisingly, Hansen's holdings grew. One story says a University of Minnesota professor was handed a note in class to alert Hansen of some pressing need for one of the many Minneapolis apartment buildings Hansen owned.

In the business world, Hansen simply had a knack for deal making, which continues to this day. He moved into the stock market and became a top-producing broker for Paine Webber. Hansen learned the art of the deal from Tom Aune, a successful and colorful member of the Twin Cities investment community. When Aune took a position in a security, Hansen dutifully followed his mentor's every move. Aune got rich and so did Hansen. Hansen left Paine Webber to diversify his portfolio in other areas.

Hansen's wealth fueled his racing career. His very first races were on a drag strip racing his Corvette on a dare. He came to the strip as a spectator and went home



In 1977, Hansen's rear-engine Lola T192 sprint car was quickly outlawed when competitors couldn't keep up. Crew chief Mike Lindorfer is standing at the front of the car.

BILL PETERS

HANSEN IS A COMPLEX MAN, AN ENIGMA. HE'S PART P.T. BARNUM AND PART J.P. MORGAN. WHICH PART OF THE PERSONALITY ONE ENCOUNTERS DEPENDS ON THE SITUATION.

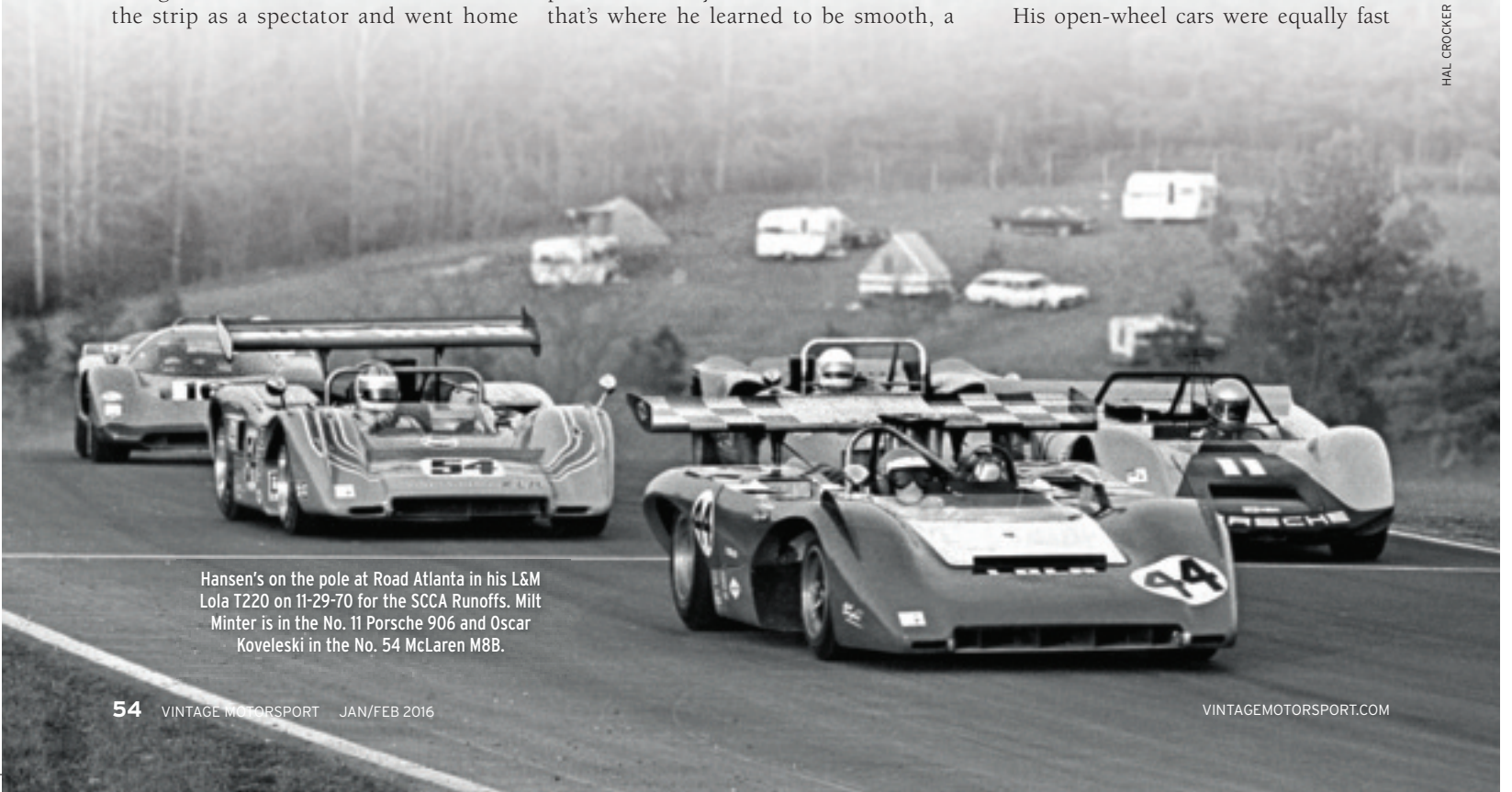
as Southport airport and the old Met Stadium track. Although he preferred big, high-horsepower cars that led to later fame, the equal opportunity racer also piloted the lowly Formula Vee. No doubt that's where he learned to be smooth, a

trait that is a hallmark of his driving style.

Hansen drove a dizzying array of fast cars throughout his career. Almost all carried the Number 44 on their flanks. One of the exceptions was when he raced against Bob Tullius' Group 44. Most of Hansen's cars were year-old, fully sorted pro "hand-me-downs." One exception was a small-block Cobra. Later on he gravitated to a mixed bag of A- and B-Production Corvettes. Championship number 26 was won in an ex-IROC Firebird.

There's an assortment of closed-wheel sports racers from Lola, McLaren, Chaparral, Lotus and the Lee Dykstra-designed Wolverine. His final championship was behind the wheel of the VDS-001 in 1984.

His open-wheel cars were equally fast



Hansen's on the pole at Road Atlanta in his L&M Lola T220 on 11-29-70 for the SCCA Runoffs. Milt Minter is in the No. 11 Porsche 906 and Oscar Koveleski in the No. 54 McLaren M8B.

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and impressive. The most successful was the Lola T330, winning a slew of Formula A championships. He said he drove “used cars.” Okay, but, the “used cars” included those driven by Brian Redman, Peter Revson, David Hobbs, Patrick Tambay and Geoff Brabham. The 330 was Brian Redman’s Formula 5000 championship-contending car. It was developed by racing legend Jim Hall, the father of the Chaparral. It was the development chassis for the Lola T332, logging miles at the famed Rattlesnake Raceway in Texas. Mike Lindorfer, Hansen’s crew chief at the time, said that even though it was a development mule, the 330 was faster than the 332. It was only beat a couple of times in its history. It even intimidated Danny Ongais at one SCCA Runoffs event.

Hansen’s Lola T192 has the most interesting legacy. He bought it in 1971. It was raced in SCCA Nationals at Elkhart Lake and Brainerd that summer and won the American Road Race of Champions event at the end of the year. History for the car in 1972 is unclear but some say Hansen sold the car to Daniel Kampo for SCCA racing and then “borrowed back” to use in SCCA Nationals in 1973.

Hansen and crew chief Mike Lindorfer came up with a clever idea: Let’s run the car in USAC. That’s when the chassis was reskinned with .060-in. aluminum and fitted with a full roll cage to meet USAC sprint car rules. They figured if Jimmy



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Clark won with a Lotus at Indy, they could do the same on a USAC short track in Minnesota.

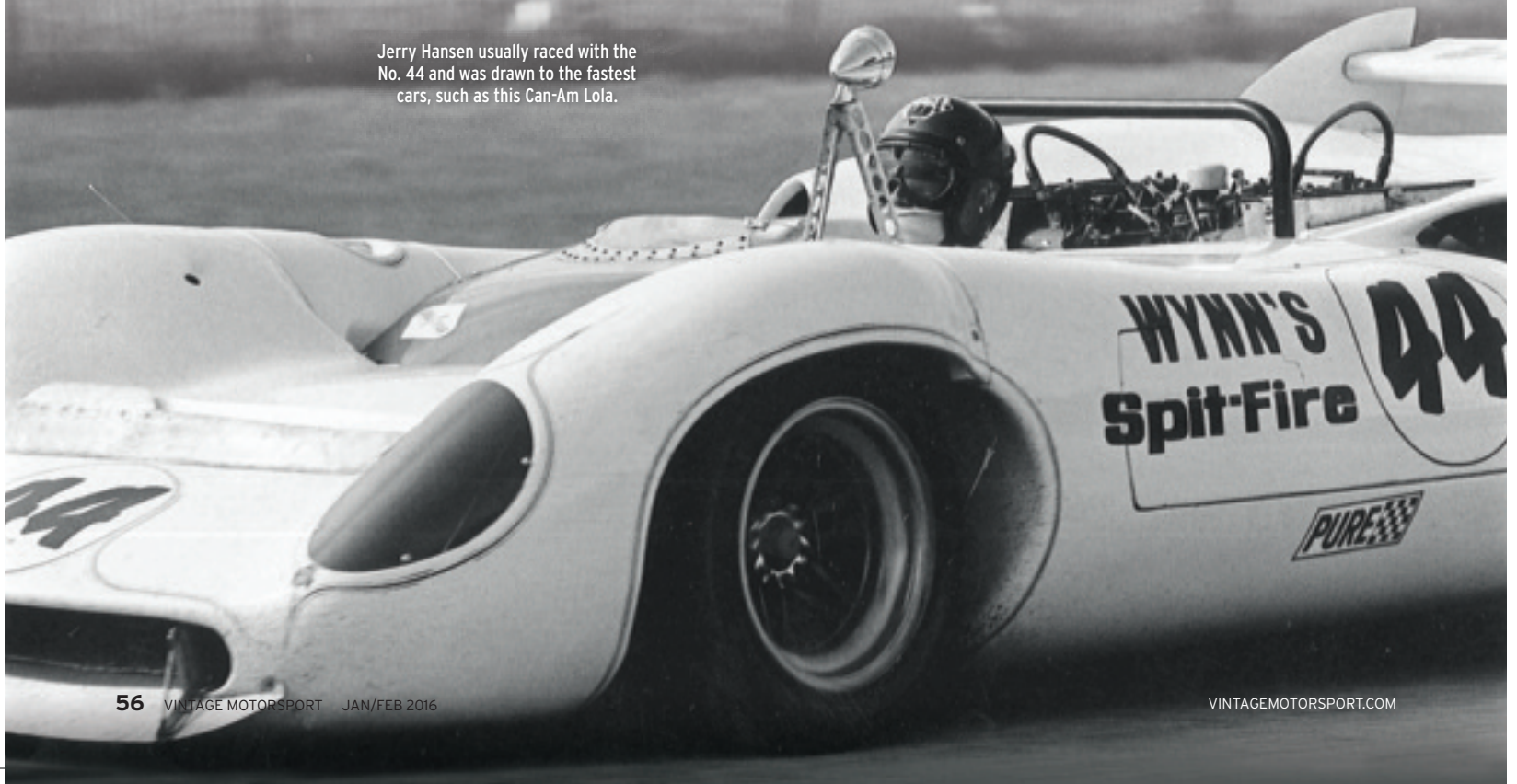
Hansen created a huge ruckus at the Minnesota State Fair with his low-slung formula car. It decisively won the USAC and IMCA Sprint Car races including the 100-mile IMCA race on the final week of the fair. The classic sprint car roadsters didn’t have a chance against the mid-engine Lola. Hansen broke the USAC track record on Aug 26 (18.82) and the IMCA track record five days later (19.09). Another blistering qualifying time (19.21) put the No. 44 Lola on pole for the premier 100-mile enduro.

The other drivers and owners vehemently protested everything...the roll cage and the fact that the Lola had rear view mirrors. So, Hansen taped over the mirrors and started shotgun on the field from the last row. It didn’t matter. The former college hockey player carved his way through the field like Wayne Gretzky.

The other drivers would attempt “hip checking” Hansen into the wall, but by the time they got there the orange No. 44 was gone. It wasn’t long before Hansen vaulted into the lead. The lap charts are long gone, but Hansen lapped the field at least once, maybe twice. The victor and crew hastily packed up and left the track immediately after taking the checker as there were rumors that some drivers had a “special” victory celebration planned for the No. 44 crew. Not surprisingly, rear-engine cars were banned from sprint car racing at the end of that season.

Not only did Hansen have superior equipment, he had the best mechanical talent of any Minnesota amateur driver. At first, he had a ragtag group of friends “helping” him at the track. The result was a predictably high number of DNFs. That’s when Scotty Beckett came on the scene. The DNFs disappeared under Beckett’s watch, but Hansen’s demands ate into Beckett’s bread and butter car repair business, so they parted company. Roy Campbell replaced Beckett and proved to be a true innovator, securing more national

Jerry Hansen usually raced with the No. 44 and was drawn to the fastest cars, such as this Can-Am Lola.



TOM SCHULTZ

titles. Campbell's inventiveness got the attention of a professional team, so Campbell left for the big time.

Many flatly say Mike Lindorfer was the best crew chief Hansen ever had. He is as much a legend as Hansen himself. Some will even go as far as to compare him to Smokey Yunick or Junior Johnson. Lindorfer was a brilliant self-taught innovator. Like Yunick and Johnson, he would study the rulebooks and look for small gaps, then drive a truck through them. He always had a smirk on his face as the tech inspectors would tear their hair out in post-race impound looking for the Lindorfer silver bullet. He'd often use misdirection to lure the inspectors away from clever tweaks. That's why Hansen was rarely, if ever disqualified.

Lindorfer was also a crafty tactician. Hansen was up against Danny Ongais for the Formula A national championship. Lindorfer knew they were in for a big fight. Ongais was a hot and fearless driver in 1974, headed for Indy cars. After Hansen qualified on the pole, Lindorfer discovered massive cracks in the cylinder heads. Lindorfer put in a panic call to Franz Weiss, Hansen's engine builder. Weiss said all engines were taken by Formula 5000 teams racing that weekend.

Lindorfer dumped as much Bars Leaks into the cooling system as he dared and told Hansen to stand on it during the morning pre-race warm up. Hansen complied and came within a 10th of his record pole time. Rather than hazard a loss to an amateur, the ascendant Ongais loaded up and left the track, citing "safety problems" with the car. Had he pushed Hansen even a little bit, Hansen's engine would have blown to bits. Hansen scored an easy win as a result of Lindorfer's guile.

Steve Kranz took over wrench turning in 1976 and did a remarkable job of delivering fast and reliable cars. He frequently consulted with Lindorfer to give Hansen his own version of the unfair advantage. Kranz and his crew added another 15 titles for Hansen. Lindorfer returned in 1984 in an unsuccessful bid for another GT1 title but engineered Hansen's 27th and final championship in A Sports Racing, Hansen's happy hunting ground.

Hansen's story would be incomplete without Dick Roe. The two were like Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. Butch (Hansen) could get the Kid (Roe) to do anything. Hansen and Roe first got together drag racing fuel-injected Corvettes, which morphed into road racing on temporary Upper Midwest tracks mentioned earlier. They stepped up the game when they got a

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In A-Production Corvettes, Hansen was a formidable competitor. He clips the apex in Turn 2 at Road Atlanta during the Runoffs in 1972.



Hansen is aboard his '72 Lola T300 (HU6) F5000 in the rain. He won the '72 SCCA Runoffs in this car.

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Waiting to roll out on track at Road America, Hansen's Lola is ready to rumble.

ROAD AMERICA ARCHIVE

pair of Minnesota-built Devin-bodied Echidnas. Hansen won his very first sports car race in that car in 1961 at Wilmot Hills. Hansen was quick to jump for the next best thing, so he bought a Cobra. Roe followed suit in Cobra's little brother, the Shelby GT350. Hansen's need for speed grew so he moved again into modified cars such as the McKee Chevette, an early

McLaren, and the Wolverine, a Lee Dykstra special. As Hansen kept moving up, Roe moved out.

Hansen's biggest gambit came in 1974 when he purchased Donnybrooke, a track built in Brainerd, Minnesota, two hours north of Minneapolis. George Montgomery built the three-mile road course in 1968 and hosted USAC Indy Cars, the original



Can-Am, Trans-Am and Formula 5000 races. Great racing and legendary drivers weren't enough to overcome several major management blunders that shut the gates in 1972.

Saved and Renamed

Hansen and Roe saved the track from the bulldozers and renamed it Brainerd International Raceway as a goodwill gesture to the Brainerd community. Dick Roe then took charge and slowly rebuilt relationships with the Brainerd-area city fathers. Roe used his connections in state government to get a permit allowing camping on the vast BIR facility. That was one of Montgomery's biggest blunders. Roe then proceeded to improve the track's meager infrastructure, transforming it into a world-class racing facility. Roe also used his connections to muzzle neighbors who came very close to closing the gates permanently for state noise violations.

Hansen rarely showed up for business meetings, but always to compete on the ultra-fast, three-mile circuit. He literally and figuratively owned the joint. Roe says he could set a clock after every race as Hansen would be at the office asking for his share of the gate.

The track grew, attracting record crowds. It made another leap when the NHRA came on the scene, quickly overshadowing professional SCCA and IMSA road racing events. That's when



Hansen won his 27th and final championship in this VDS-001/Chevy Can-Am, that formerly was Geoff Brabham's winning ride.


JOHN ROBINETTE

Hansen decided to cash in and take the track public. And, that's when Hansen's dream life started to unravel.

Hansen used every ounce of selling savvy and charm to make the IPO completion requirements. He was relentless, leaning on anyone, anywhere. One person recalls visiting a Brainerd auto dealership and heard one end of the owner's phone call. He was obviously getting a hard sell. When he hung up, the person just said: "Hansen," and the other guy sighed and said: "Hansen."

Stockholders grumbled when the BIR stock price took the express elevator down. When the stock tanked, many investors were extremely upset. No doubt Hansen pitched the upside potential of the stock but not the downside risk of any stock purchase. Hansen and his young family grew weary of the bad vibes and pulled up

stakes for some Florida warmth. Hansen and his wife Connie split in that period and he moved to Maryland to be near his son Franz and his grandchildren. What could have been a time to bask in success had turned into a voyage into obscurity.

The final chapter of Hansen's life is now being written. He has been turned down for induction into the SCCA Hall of Fame several times. He absolutely qualifies, but the rumors and innuendo over many off-track business disputes weigh heavily against him. Today, the 70-something former racing star is a world removed from the halcyon days. Hansen plays tennis every week, dotes over his grandchildren and ironically can be found picking up trash as a community service along local roads and highways...and is regularly pitching new investment deals. That Hansen will never change. 

With Bobby Rahal (left) and Mike Hall on the podium in 1974, Hansen holds up 10 fingers and the trophy girl two, signifying 12 Runoff wins, this time in B Sports Racing.



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