



an eagle takes flight

IN THE 100 YEAR HISTORY OF GRAND PRIX RACING, DAN GURNEY REMAINS THE ONLY AMERICAN TO DRIVE A CAR OF HIS OWN CONSTRUCTION INTO THE WINNER'S CIRCLE OF A FORMULA 1 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT.

| Story by Mark Dill | Photos courtesy of ARR archives |

Not since July 25, 1921 had an American-made car – Jimmy Murphy's Duesenberg – scored a Grand Prix triumph. Never since the Formula 1 era beginning in 1950 had an American product won a Grand Prix. The story of Dan and his Eagle, mixed with media and the community of hardcore American gear-heads gave the USA a new recipe for instant legend.

In the lyrical words of Frank Sinatra, 1967 was a very good year – certainly for Dan Gurney. At Brands Hatch, England in March, he won the Formula 1 non-championship "Race of Champions," in his Eagle outfitted with his new 12-cylinder Gurney-Weslake engine. It had been 46 years since an American-built car won a Grand Prix.

In April, Gurney edged Parnelli Jones for a Trans-Am victory in 113-degree heat at Green Valley, Texas. He qualified on the front row at the Indianapolis 500 and won the Indy car Rex Mays 300 at Riverside, California. With A.J. Foyt, he gave Ford a victory over Ferrari in the 24 Hours of Le Mans in June. A NASCAR triumph for the Woods Brothers at Riverside in January 1968 demonstrated his versatility, with victories in all major fields of racing in less than 12 months.

Any of these successes could define a driver's career, but none compared to the biggest moment of all – Gurney's triumph with his Eagle-Weslake in the Formula 1 world championship Belgian Grand Prix

on June 18, 1967. While the success of Brands Hatch was terrific, a championship race win was another level of accomplishment. It did not come easy.

Despite qualifying second to two-time world champion Jim Clark with a lap at 149.340mph

on the fast Spa circuit, unfortunate circumstances forced Gurney to get off to a terrible start. The cars started on a downhill straight and crews used a wheel block so the driver didn't have to risk burning his clutch. Somehow, the Eagle rolled over the block just before the starter waved the green. As Gurney worked to get the car in gear, the field shot by and he got away late. His work cut out for him, he sliced his way through the field. Clark was leading,

but a burnt spark plug in his new Lotus 49 Ford-Cosworth ended his hopes on Lap 11.



PRECURSOR
The victory at Brands Hatch to open 1967 showed great promise for the Eagle in the upcoming Grand Prix season.

AIRBORNE

Gurney's Eagle takes flight at the undulating Nürburgring in the '67 German Grand Prix. Leading by 42 seconds with only two laps to go, a broken universal joint ends his hopes of a second victory in as many months.

VERSATILITY AT ITS FINEST.
GURNEY'S AMAZING RUN.

magical year



TRADITION IS BORN
"Sharing" the champagne
at Le Mans in 1967.

Maybe not an actual "calendar year" but nonetheless, in a 10-month period Dan Gurney had one of the most diverse string of victories in racing history. Few drivers, over the course of their entire career, have scored victories in sportscars, stock cars, Indy cars and Grands Prix, but Gurney was able to accomplish the feat in the 1967-68 racing season.

Included in those victories was a dominating performance at Le Mans where he teamed with A.J. Foyt. But perhaps more lasting than the victory was the tradition Gurney started. Champagne was often handed out to winners for celebration, but after the win at Le Mans, Gurney felt it appropriate to "share" some with the surrounding photographers. So, as you sit and watch the celebration on Victory Podium for this year's United States Grand Prix, remember to thank Dan Gurney for that time honored tradition of spraying the champagne. ■

From April '67 to January '68, Gurney racked up wins in all major fields of racing. In addition to the Grand Prix-winning Eagle, here are the cars he did it in:

Ford Mercury / Cougar

Green Valley, Texas
April 16, 1967



Ford MK-IV

24 Hours of Le Mans
Le Mans, France
June 10-11, 1967



EAGLE / GW Ford

Rex Mays 300
Riverside, California
November 26, 1967



Ford / Wood Brothers

Motor Trend 500
Riverside, California
January 21, 1968



yell at his crew, "fuel pressure!" This was a worrisome message as the team had failed to finish any of three world championship races ran up to that point of the season, and fuel feed problems had caused two of the disappointments.

For four laps the Eagle faded, falling from the biggest image in Stewart's mirrors to 13 seconds behind the Scotsman. Down the straights, the Weslake was faltering and threatening to quit. Miraculously, the problem suddenly stopped.

His engine at full song, Gurney whittled at Stewart's lead, at the rate of two seconds per lap. On Lap 21, in front of the grandstands, the 36-year-old Californian swept into the lead. From there, he continuously pulled away, finishing the 28 laps of the 8.74-mile circuit with a 63-second edge on Stewart. His 145.938 mph average was a new record, as was his fastest lap of 148.848.



JUBILATION

The famous Eagle "beak" shows prominently as the 36 soars through the Ardennes Forest (above) in Belgium. Gurney's excitement is evident as he is congratulated in the pits (below).





THE CHECKERED FLAG

Gurney, with arm raised in celebration, steers his Eagle across the finish line on the downhill pit straight at Spa.

The crowd of 60,000 loved it, especially a large group of American servicemen who trailed Gurney to the European races. The military following was so enthusiastic the American hero was flown by helicopter to a packed stadium 40 miles away for a patriotic celebration.

The Belgian Grand Prix was only the second outing for the race-winning Eagle, which the Press nicknamed "titanium car." The name came about because the exhaust system was made from titanium, a light, sturdy metal. This characteristic, combined with a magnesium chassis, made the car one of the lightest and most structurally sound Formula 1 racers up to that time. Widely regarded as one of the most beautiful Grand Prix racers in history, it is remembered for its classic Eagle "vestigial beak" nose, conceived by Gurney and chief designer Len Terry. Unfortunately, Spa was the car's one shining moment as it finished only one (third in Canada) of the other 10 championship races on the schedule.

Four titanium cars were built and today are tucked away in museums in Europe and the United States. The Eagle that won the 1967 Belgian Grand Prix is in the Miles Collier private collection in Naples, Florida. A common misconception is that the cars were built in England, but Gurney's company, All American Racers, constructed all of them at their shop in Santa Ana, California.

While the titanium Eagle's success may have been Gurney's greatest, there were many others. One of the most versatile drivers in history, Gurney had seven Formula 1 wins with seven more in Indy car and five in NASCAR, all at Riverside. He also won 10 world championship prototype and GT sports car races, including Le Mans, the 12 Hours of Sebring, the Daytona Continental and the Targa Florio. Three Can-Am victories rounded out his resume. Although he never pulled off an oval track victory, he finished second in the Indy 500 twice.

What makes Dan Gurney even more special is that his accomplishments extend well beyond driving. He retired as a driver in 1970, but enjoyed great success as a team owner and manufacturer as his Eagles won three Indianapolis 500s. Always an innovator, Gurney introduced the full-face helmet to both Formula 1 and Indy, and in 1963 brought Colin Chapman and Lotus to the Indianapolis 500 to change that historic race forever.

In what Gurney later called his "greatest compliment," Jim Clark's father shared with the American that he was the only driver his late son feared. Dan Gurney will receive a Lifetime Achievement Award at the first annual William K. Vanderbilt, Jr. Concours d'Elegance Weekend, July 27-29 at Newport, Rhode Island. Vanderbilt organized the first international road race in the United States over 100 years ago on the public roads of Long Island, New York, near where Dan Gurney was born on April 13, 1931. ■