



Of Mice and Men

By Guillaume

As I was casually reading Jean Louis Moncet's column in Autoplus the other day, I was a bit surprised to read that our – Facebook – friend thought that new teams didn't give a nice image of the hyper-professionalized sport that is F1, and when he compared them to the big teams, he saw themselves as amateurs.

True, the substance of the speech might not be that wrong, but let's stand back. A bit more than ten years ago started a revolution in which the biggest and most influent people were devouring the little ones. *Nihil nove sub sole*, really. After all, Mercedes, Ferrari, Maserati, Alfa Romeo used to be there in the 1950s, i.e. before the wave of artisans or "garage owners" – as Enzo Ferrari called them – happened. The manufacturers left that way during the first wave. Other manufacturers came back, but this time as motorists – again from time to time. Then, under the impulse of Bernie Ecclestone whose commercial action has been the basis of the exponential merchandising for F1, firms started to come back. Thus Mercedes took a greater importance at McLaren, and Ford bought Steward up to set up Jaguar Racing. At the same time Renault was with Benetton, Toyota ex-nihilo and Honda through Dallara were to take the same path before the tragic loss of Postlethwaite. The same went on with BMW, at first with Williams and then with buying Sauber up.

With the agreement of the FIA and Max Mosley, the stake of the Formula One Management's chairman was probably to compensate the predictable loss of millions that were invested through marketing by tobacco brands. A very few people, if nobody, contested at the time. Brands whose sport legitimacy could not be criticized wished to be at the top of the competition to technologic leadership, by a means that could be even less criticized: Formula 1. Moreover, the commercializing potential of a success was huge. Even though Ferrari is an exception – although one can criticize them on other subjects – the others were trying in a very artificial way to go on stage so as to provide their mass-production range a hint at being a team. It is very tough when the range is all but sprightly.

So these were end-nineties and beginning-noughties marketing entries. Let's remember Ford CEO Jac Nasser's sentence soon after his group bought up Steward: "We have bought up the Steward Team and the motor-builder Cosworth to immediately transpose without a third actor our long-term strategy."¹ This is quite clear: we are young, sportsmen, willing to do our utmost and ready to prove what we've got on the road. And especially win on every field.

Ecclestone as well as big manufacturers themselves were fully aware that motorsport races were the most popular ones when they were dominated by big manufacturers. Worldwide, the media value made profitable in theory the costs of running a F1 Team. But they didn't plan that there would be many losers because of the competition among several manufacturers. Cycles and success aren't working together, and if we add to the defeat the weight of a world crisis in the automotive field, it makes costs increasing a lot. And then the marketing tool was the first fuse to blow so as to save money. The danger was there. While private teams have remained faithful to F1 for decades, manufacturers go in and out of competition according to the marketing plans and strategies. Losers got

¹ Adapted from this quote: "Nous avons racheté l'écurie Stewart et le fabricant de moteurs Cosworth pour transposer immédiatement et sans acteur interposé notre stratégie à long terme"

bored: BMW, Toyota, Honda and so on. In F1, failing costs a lot, which brings us again to Jean-Louis Moncet's words.

Thus, three new teams that were quite artisanal at the beginning would DIY to make up for the big team's withdrawals. Right, I admit his clear-sightedness on the non-viability of the USF1 project that was *so American* and that it was much ado about nothing eventually. There is no happy end this time. But let's go back, I dunno, like 20 years before, in an era when big manufacturers which also happened to be motorists started to make the comings and goings of arrivals and departures a common thing. If three artisanal teams among twelve teams are almost an anachronism in F1, in its current definition, what should we have said when the 1990 season offered us more than 20 teams.

So we're back in 1990. Twenty teams competed throughout the season: AGS, Arrows, Benetton, Brabham, Coloni, Dallara, Eurobrun, Ferrari, Leyton House, Life, Ligier, Lola, Lotus, McLaren, Minardi, Monteverdi, Onyx, Osela, Tyrrell and Williams. Only 10 out of 20 scored, but for how many artisanal teams? Let's study those teams case by case.

Let's skip on the big ones. McLaren is on top, Ferrari – despite its chequered results – is there, too. Williams's promising V10 Renault engine is starting to pay off. Benetton carries on improving, with Piquet helping them a lot. One can stop the big teams' list right now. Did I forget something? Really? Lotus? Brabham? Those are then shadows of their glorious pasts. But let's make a list out of it.

In 1986, AGS unloaded in F1 with a car that was built by... seven mechanics! The first seasons went by. One could feel the loss of money very easily. Then Bouygues arrived but they were a kind of bubble scheme, so money never came. Drivers who brought a lot of money, such as Tarquini – the reigning WTCC champion! – went there before Ted Lapidus' arrival. But internal dissensions with Hugues de Chaunac and a single seater that was a kind of failure made the sponsor flee. AGS would disappear at the end of the following season.

In 1990 Arrows' cash is in the red. This season is a transitional one, but with only two points scored, that was not getting better. Directors such as Jackie Oliver asked Footwork more money – Footwork being their main sponsor. Ohashi, Footwork's CEO, accepts under one condition: buy the team. Thus Arrows became Footwork the year after as well as some few more years.

In 1989 Brabham was bought by a Swiss financier, who was condemned for fraud. After a short burst the same year, Brabham collapsed in 1990 before disappearing in 1992.

Coloni is being offered an engine packaging by Subaru in 1990. Enzo Coloni, who considered it as a gift from the skies, would change his mind very quickly. The Flat 12 Subaru is neither reliable nor efficient. They came to regret the old Cosworth which they would take back at the end of the season thanks to Subaru leaving, giving Coloni some cash as compensation. After four seasons, they only managed to attend 13 Grand Prix, none of them occurring in 1990! Coloni left F1 at the end of 1991.

That season Dallara recruited – wait for it – a designer from Coloni! Everyone feared the worst, the first qualifying sessions were promising but it won't last long. Reliability is a nightmare and they never scored any points. Plus, the single-seater can't manage to qualify well on the grid. Dallara stormed out from F1 in 1992 so as to keep its reputation in other disciplines. We'll see how it goes this year with Hispania.

With two cars and despite not having enough money whatsoever, Eurobrun started its third season, too. Performances seemed quite good but very quickly their drivers can't manage to qualify repeatedly. In San Marino, Claudio Langes was fired because the team cannot align two cars. The new mid-season single-seater didn't change anything, so Walter Brun stopped messing about at the end of the year.

What's under Leyton House is March – Max Mosley's former team. Here again performances seemed quite good but it's far from what it used to be with Mosley. At the end of 1992, March and Leyton House have spent all their money and won't come back afterwards. Pity, they may have been one of the least far-fetched teams among artisan teams.

Life is one of those offbeat teams F1 has known. At the end of 1989, Ernesto Villa buys First's chassis, which was a dead project before it actually came to life. Taking former-Ferrari worker Fransco Rocchi on as a partner – master of the V8 Ferrari, they got going on a crazy project: a V12 that is supposed to reduce the wheel base while keeping V12's attributes. Then an absurd engine came to life – so they discovered later on. Drivers would always fail to qualify. The team replaced the engine with Judd and would remain in memories as a team which was rather much ado about nothing while occupying some space in F1 grids than doing anything else.

In 1990 Ligier was living the darkest period in its history. Its cars qualified quite regularly, but they failed to score any points at the end of the season – just as what they did the year after, besides. Plus Ligier still suffered from the loss of the Renault engine, making do with Cosworth and hoping for better days. These days would come when Flavio Briatore proposed an agreement which, despite being uncertain, would benefit both Benetton and Ligier.

Lola, although struggling a lot, knew how to take advantage from racing incidents, finishing the 1990 season in sixth position, i.e. Lola's best result since – 1962! It is true that the team is alternatively present, but – Lola withdrew from F1 at the end of 1991 after a mixed season, before coming back in 1993 without scoring any points, as well as in 1997 for a deafening fiasco.

Lotus suffered from its decline. Piquet failed to replace Senna, and after he left, it's the descent into hell. They scored a few points, but nothing more than that. Häkkinen brought some fresh air, but the team disappeared in 1994. *Chef d'oeuvre in danger 1990.*

The same year Minardi kept on learning F1, without scoring points this time, contrary to what they did in 1988 and 1989. But Martini's gift attracted sponsors, thus allowing Minardi to survive during fifteen years or so through a policy that saw both drivers bringing money and gifted drivers to train.

Let's now link Onyx and Monteverdi's fate. Onyx came from F3000 and turned Stefano Modena into the intercontinental champion in 1987. Earle, Onyx's boss, decided to come into F1 with the help of Alan Jenkins, formerly working with McLaren. Driven by Gachot and Johansson and propelled by the Cosworth engine, the Onyx that used to be so promising happens to be one of the most awful single-seaters, because they failed to pre-qualify. Things improved slightly but they still lack reliability. Let's skip ahead of the rest of 1989 where Onyx finally succeeded in scoring! The team lacked money for 1990 and Earle has to sell its team to Jean-Pierre Van Rossem, who is a total eccentric! He was wearing stuff we hadn't seen since the 1970s. He was provocative as well as a European Parliament candidate. He was arrested repeatedly for embezzlement of public funds. The season started in the blur and single-seaters from the past year were first used. Seeing the non-qualifying sessions, Peter

Monteverdi intervenes. He is a Swiss billionaire, who happened to be a former driver as well as a car dealer. He became owner, fired Stefan Johansson to replace him by the Swiss Gregor Foitek who had worked with Eurobrun, which only goes to show that some people find the best seats. Then he fired Alan Jenkins, too, as well as Steve Poster, among other key people. The team was decimated and everything collapsed. Monteverdi turned into a megalomaniac while he faced the non-reliability and non-competitiveness, taking the technical director's place... The second part of the season is awful: the Onyx started to fail qualifying. They failed to have enough money. Monteverdi was insisting and made the team build a car with worn components for Foitek, something which Foitek's dad refused. This event marked the end of this unspeakable madness, in the 1990 Hungarian GP.

Osella was more serious as a team. Well, kind of. After five seasons without scoring any points, and five points scored in ten years, the team had very serious financial issues. Soon after the beginning of the season, the wise Enzo Osella decided to sell the rest of Osella to Gabriele Rumi. The team would then be called Fondmental, which after some seasons in manufacturers without much success (without failing totally either), became one of Minardi's partners.

Tyrrell achieved quite well on that year thanks to someone who was promising at the time – Jean Alesi. As for Ligier, Tyrrell was waiting for some better days that were only too rare until Pollock-British American Tobacco-Villeneuve took over the team in 1998.

So to end this article, the 1990 season was a very good one, in spite of the upcoming sterile environment. Yet, many crazy or ridiculous teams came up to life. The thing is, we must let time to launch to this year's new teams. Of course, this would have been much easier with the budget cuts, which has as many advantages as drawbacks. We already could see that in other sports, actually. This thing was what put doubts on Hispania-Campos's attendance, because planned budgets aren't extendable and in this economic situation chasing sponsors is not that easy. So Jean Louis Moncet, let's not criticize teams coming in the business this season, shall we? It is true that it's like DIY. It is true that it may refer to amateurism compared to the big teams. But fundamentally with some big teams and small mice, we're in the same situation as in the pre-manufacturers and almost pre-Mosley era (if I shall put it that way). The 2010 DIY teams look pretty professional compared to those which were there in 1990! It's their job to grow and to be rational economically speaking. The sole professionalism should remain there. It takes all kinds to build the sport; at least if this brings something to the sport.