



Beast: The Top Secret Illmor-Penske Race Car That Shocked the World at the 1994 Indy 500

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Corporate intrigue, secretive design work, and covert gamesmanship took center stage at the 1994 Indy 500. The race was a turning point in American open wheel racing, and the 1,000-horsepower engine developed for Team Penske by Illmor was part of the deconstruction of the Indy 500. In a story that reads like a spy novel, this dramatic day in racing is revisited with behind-the-scenes reporting by best-selling author Jade Gurss.

Beast: The Top Secret Illmor-Penske Race Car That Shocked the World at the 1994 Indy 500 Details

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Steve Whittaker says

Highly recommend

Excellent book...not just for race or sports fans, but anyone interested in success, whether it be in life or business. What do I mean by that? Buy the book and find out!

Mac McCormick III says

Motor Sport history books are few and far between and IndyCar history books are even more rare. I feel lucky to have read two very good ones in the last month. The first was one I reviewed a few weeks ago: Black Noon: The Year They Stopped the Indy 500 by Art Garner. The second, and the subject of this review is Beast: The Top Secret Ilmor-Penske Race Car That Shocked the World at the 1994 Indy 500 by Jade Gurss. Both books involve Indianapolis 500s in seasons that changed IndyCar. Specifically, Beast is about Roger Penske, Mario Ilien, and Paul Morgan's pushrod engine project for the 1994 Indianapolis 500. I remember watching that race; twenty years later it's incredible to read the story behind it that all but a few knew at the time!

Gurss has done a good job of balancing the story and the technology. Sure there could have been more technical information but if he had gone too far to the technical side I think the book would have a more limited appeal and wouldn't engage as many readers. As a fan of the technical side of racing, I'm satisfied with amount of technical content. The differences between pushrod and overhead cam engines are described and technical drawings are included to illustrate the complexity of what Ilmor and Penske were trying to do. There is also good narrative on the process of not just building but testing and developing an engine, too. The reader come away with an understanding of how racing engines don't just come to be overnight. I enjoyed the description of the process and the testing but it was also good to read about the personalities of the major players and the men behind the scenes; unlike today's social media world, we didn't have Twitter and other outlets in the mid 90's to hear from them and get insights into what makes them tick - but we certainly have through this book. Paul Morgan is certainly a man I would like to have met.

You can't broach the subject of American open wheel racing in 1994 without getting into the origins of the CART/IRL split that was beginning to occur. This is the one part of the book where readers may have a problem with Beast, but I think Gurss has handled it well. He definitely points the finger at Tony George (and not without good cause) but he also makes it clear that there was plenty of blame to go around. This is a subject that deserves and would fill a book on its own but he treated it well and in my opinion fairly. Going any more in depth on the topic would have taken away from the main subject of the book.

I have no problem giving Beast five out of five stars. It is an excellent read; once you start it's a hard book to put down. Race fans will love it because it tells the story of an epic effort from inception to development to the race. Non race fans would likely enjoy it because it's just a great story of accomplishment on its own. I highly recommend this book - go out and grab a copy today, you won't be disappointed!

Phillip Nolte says

I was a huge fan of Indycar (CART) racing at this point and remember watching the time trials and the race with huge interest. This book provides the behind the scenes scrambling necessary to get these "cheater" engines well enough developed to finish a 500 mile race. Lots of interviews with drivers and team owners. A must read for Indianapolis 500 fans.

Dave says

Beast is the nickname given by driver Emerson Fittipaldi to a very special and very powerful engine that was created specifically for the 1994 Indy 500, and this book is the behind-the-scenes story of how it came to be. Successful team owner and businessman Roger Penske decided to take advantage of a lapse in the rule makers' good judgment and commission an engine that wound up running just one race. The amazing part of the story - well documented and told in a vivid manner - is that the designers and engineers produced this engine in less than 11 months. That is truly an amazing feat.

The early chapters alternate between the 1993-94 story line and background on the principals involved and racing itself. At times, Gurss seems have trouble walking the line between assuming we know some facts and assuming we know nothing about racing. At times he dumbs it down too much for a fan like me, but at other times I would read something that only afterwards I realized was probably confusing to a lot of people. Most of the time, he struck a good balance. And when it came to the internal, technical aspects of engines, I think he did a great job of using analogies and other tricks to make it understandable for the non-mechanically inclined like me.

At the same time I was reading this book, I was also reading a biography of rocket engineer Wehrner Von Braun (my report on that book will probably come in August). But it was fascinating that, while the design process has changed dramatically since WWII with the use of computers, the testing process really didn't change much. Test the rocket or the engine - whichever it may be - until something breaks. Improve the area that failed, and test it again, hoping to go farther or higher or faster until something else breaks. Improve that part and repeat. The basics of testing and improving a design hadn't really changed in 50 years.

I enjoyed the book. Probably it will attract mostly auto racing fans, but I think it's an interesting enough story that others will enjoy it too.

Michael Flanagan says

I went into this book knowing nothing about Indy Car Racing but that did not stop me loving this book. From the opening pages the author draws you into the intriguing racing world of the early 90's and introduces to some of the legends of the Indy 500.

The author takes us into Illmor and Penskes secret plans to develop a motor to blow their opponents off the famous Brickyard. The time frame was tight and the engine had to built from scratch in complete secrecy.

Not being an engineer I was totally amazed at what was achieved and the problems that where overcome.

The result of this engine known simply as the "Beast" is now a part of Motoring history. The story behind it is less known and this book is a tribute to the truly exceptional work done by all to bring it to fruition. This book is a highly entertaining read even for those not interested in Motor Racing.

Clayton Nash says

This is fun if very unstructured. Basically they build an engine - taking advantage of a loophole - in 10 months while keeping it secret. There are no massive technical mysteries to be solved - just solid engineering. That said it's pretty interesting to see behind the curtain a bit.

Roger says

Loved this book! I remember the engine and the race in 1994. Team Penske made it look so easy. This book tells a riveting story and details the Blood, Sweat and Tears it took to be Penske Perfect on the 29th day of May, 1994.

Dan Hiner says

The book was excellent! This is a good documented book that also shows how FTG ruined American open wheel racing. Disgusting man!

I was amazed at how this engine came together and was impressed how they handled all the stress for 5 months! Great read for all auto racing enthusiasts. Again I will say it...way to go FTG...idiot.

Steven Tessier says

I remember the "Beast"

Lived in Indianapolis during the month of the "Beast". Remember the hand wringing and strong feelings. The book covers the history of the time but not quite the very strong emotion. Well worth the read.

Brook says

If the names Ilmor, Penske, Fittipaldi, or Lil Al and Big Al don't mean anything to you, you can stop reading the review now. This is an engineering love and adventure story (closest I can describe it).

This book has a very specific subject: the innovative (as in "we found a loophole") pushrod engine that Ilmor came up with for Penske Racing for the 1994 Indy 500 (and only for the 500).

The story starts with Ilien, Morgan (IlMor) and Penske realizing that changes from the 1993 to 1994 season allow a definite advantage if you are willing to build your own pushrod engine (i.e. you no longer had to use a production block to start with).

From there, this is a story of how a team of men and women went from an idea in their head to a working engine in 12 months. This would be a feat unheard of for the likes of Honda or GM. To have an independent shop (with Mercedes-Benz money, but none of their engineers) built a winning race engine from actual scratch in that time is simply impossible. And yet, this is the story of how it was done.

The author puts just enough of the personality and history of the major players (engineers, drivers, and the businessman Penske) to take what is essentially an engineering story and turn it into a barnburner (for this reader). You'll see guest appearances (so to speak) from Smokey Yunick, Senna, Andretti, and Bobby Rahal, plus a dozen other names you probably haven't thought of in a while.

Most of the book is the story of how the engine came to be. The race itself comprises probably the final 10% of the book. I could not put this down. To see someone build a performance engine in the nascent days of computing (when...well, when you had pushrod engines in IndyCar) is fascinating.

Trisha says

Must read if you love Indy:)

Brian Finegan says

A race i missed

For years I had been going to the 500. This race I listened to on the radio during my brothers graduation from high school. To read a behind the scenes take on what transpired is amazing. Being a racer myself. The level of determination was second to none. Well done and a great read with all the action behind the scenes.

Michael Topp says

Great history and historical time in open wheel racing.

Love the inside look at the historical motor. Solidified my longtime opinion and knowledge of Mr. T. George. Loved learning more on the Ilmor company. Penske is still the same.

AshleyS says

An interesting look at what teams can achieve when they're highly motivated and pull together

Tells the story from all angles: team bosses, designers, drivers, mechanics and regulators. Book is structured around in depth interviews with key insiders in the project

Some nice, bite sized insight into engines without ever becoming dull or too technical

Historical overview of Indy car racing was welcome, for an F1 fan, to give some context

Matt Payne says

An incredible account of arguably the last real innovation that went to the Indianapolis 500.

The mystique and 'cloak and daggers' that went into pulling this program off between Penske in the US and Ilmor in Europe was extraordinary. From testing right under the nose of their closest rival in freezing conditions to the regular late night challenges, it is a brilliant story and feat of engineering and sport.

I had been meaning to read it since Jade first wrote it, however with the opportunity to work at and attend the Indianapolis 500 for the first time in 2016 - and being fortunate enough to know the author in an online sense for some time - I owed the sport and Jade the respect of reading it.

I have minimal technical knowledge (or interest for that matter) and I was able to follow how 'The Beast' developed. To be fair, my lack of technical understanding was one of the reasons I held off reading it in the first place. During the course of reading, I oft reflected on how simply and eloquently it had been written. Only when I got to the end did Jade explain this (and I won't wreck it for you!).

It is not only the technical challenges that were faced but the personal ones as well. The moments before the race co-incided with the passing of Ayrton Senna - who had shortly before had joined the Penske team for a test of its IndyCar.

The moment for me of the book however was when I settled into my seat for the flight from LAX to Indianapolis for the first time on a wonderful adventure. 'The time' had come for Al Unser Jr to qualify The Beast. The methodical nature of the description added even more to the physical excitement of what I was going to experience over the ensuing three weeks.

Not only did I get to see and feel that Qualifying excitement direct from Gasoline Alley, but the day of the Indianapolis 500 is one of those very rare pieces of sporting folklore that leave even the most hardened men weak at the knees.

If you aren't technical and have been holding off on reading this book for that reason, don't any longer, get into it, it does not disappoint. You can purchase it [here](#).
