

## **BILL BRACK the "FORMULA YEARS" 1967-1979**

*By Michael Boyer*

In 1965 Bill owned SPORTS CARS UNLIMITED in Clarkston where he became the Canadian Distributor for Lotus, while racing the Mini he also was getting involved with Lotus cars. In 1967 his first race with a Lotus came at Mosport in a Lotus 47, a type of Europa with a twin cam engine, car number #85 .

Bill won the 3 hr or 100 lap Centennial Sundown G.P. of Mosport in his Lotus 47GT. Bill took the lead from the start but fell back to 3<sup>rd</sup> when he pitted for fuel, he then roared back to take the win.

Note: This type of racing should be seen to be appreciated. To see the cars blasting through the night, with their multi-lighting systems ablaze is quite exciting.

(Canada Track & Traffic 1967) During time Bill also raced Lotus 41 and became The Formula B champion.

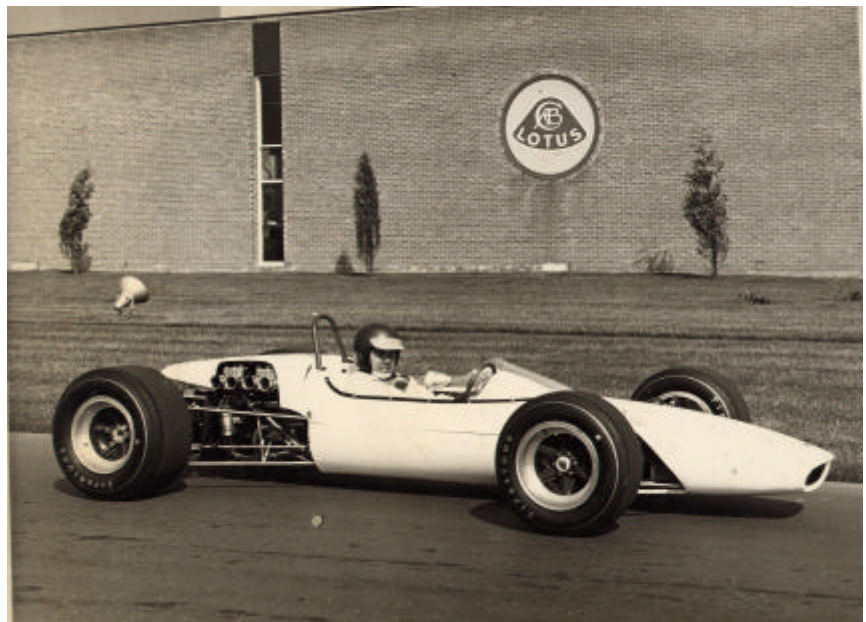


Photo: Bill with his Lotus 47GT Mosport 1967

In early May of 1968 Bill with his Chief Mechanic Doug Crosty returned from England with a brand new Lotus 41C 1600cc to race in the Formula B series, on May 26 Bill came in 2<sup>nd</sup> place at Le Circuit in Quebec and on June 8<sup>th</sup> he took first at a race at Harewood Acres. He then went on a U.S. tour with both the Lotus and the Mini.

On June 16<sup>th</sup> Bill started The War Bonnet G.P. at Tulsa Oklahoma in 20<sup>th</sup> position, he finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in class and 7<sup>th</sup> overall, by July he lead the formula series in points, there were already people in the pits talking about Bill being next years Canadian Champion. During this time Bill met Dick smothers of the Smothers Brothers fame that also raced a Lotus 41; Dick went on to race in Formula 5000.

Photo: Bill Brack at the wheel of his new Lotus 41C at the Lotus Test Track at Hethel in Norfolk England. May 1968



On July 6, 68 Bill won the Feature race at Harewood Acres with the fastest average lap of 99.8 mph. The next weekend July 20th saw Bill ran the

Mosport 250 stock car race on Saturday, fly to Ste. Jovite on Sunday to race the Mini in the sedan class and the Lotus in the formula series which he won again.



Bill in his HOT WHEELS Lotus 41C at Harewood Acres July 6, 1968

The biggest race of the season for the Canadian Formula Championship was the **SUNDOWN GRAND PRIX OF ENDURANCE** held at Mosport in August. Bill won this race hands down. But it was on September 22 that Bill hit the big time, racing in his first Canadian Formula 1 Grand Prix. Bill drove Graham Hill's (F1 Champion) back-up car at Mont.Tremblant in Quebec for team Lotus. Being the Canadian distributor for Lotus Bill called Colin Chapman and asked if he could drive the spare car, after some dissuasion they agreed. For \$ 6,000.00 Bill could drive the spare car. A week before the

race, Graham Hill came to Toronto for a press show, On the way to St. Jovite Bill told Graham that he was really excited about driving with him and told Graham that he made an arrangement with Colin Chapman to race the spare car, Graham replied "WHAT ? Not bloody likely mate!" after Hill and Chapman had words at the track, Bill was told that he could go out and do 5 laps in practice and that's all, then he was told he could do 5 laps in qualifying and then that's it, Bill eventually started the race in 17<sup>th</sup> place. The only Canadian in the race, Bill moved up quickly and was running in the 13<sup>th</sup> spot when unfortunately Bill dropped out with a broken drive shaft on lap 18. The Lotus 49 had a weakness in the rear drive shafts. They had a tendency to twist. There would be a vibration then they would snap. Bill's car had no problems, but Graham's car had the vibration. Over night before the race, team mechanics switched the drive shafts from Bill's car to Graham's car and vice-versa. As Graham Hill was in a tight battle for the World F1 Championship at the time. Bill's best time was 1:39.5 on the gruelling 2.65 mile circuit, his best lap was faster than four of the G.P. regulars. Mario Andretti took the same Lotus 49 Bill drove and put it on the pole at the Watkins Glen G.P later in the season.



Bill in the pits with his Lotus 49 Mosport/69

By the end of 1968 Bill had won his share of races in both the Mini and in the Lotus 41C winning the Sundown G.P in August almost assured him to win the Eastern Canada Formula B Championship which he did in convincing fashion. Not only did he win the Championship, but he was also the U.S. Formula B Champion.

In the spring of 1969 Bill Brack & Ted Slavens opened their fourth dealership British United Automobiles at Yonge and Church streets in Toronto. Bill who had returned to England during the winter with thoughts of buying a new race car for the new series named the Gulf Canada Series bought the Lotus 49 Indy car. In 1966 the Lotus team had shipped this car to Indianapolis for the 500 but they never used it so they shipped it back to England where Bill bought it from Rob Lamplough who bought it from Colin Chapman who owned The Lotus Engineering Co.

Originally designed for a four cam Ford engine Bill's idea was to "stick a V8 in it and go racing" Bill had the Lotus shipped to the Lotus F1 shop, because there was no frame behind the driver, Martin Wade of Lotus did the drawings and made a frame to fit at the rear of the monocoque to hold the V8. The big V8 engines came from a friend of Craig Hill (another Canadian racer) who use to build Dragster engines in Detroit, they shipped over a few engines and installed one it with the new space frame. Lotus didn't charge Bill a penny for all the work they performed on the Lotus 49, the work Lotus did on Bill's car assisted them in bringing out their own Formula 500 car the next year.

Bill also teamed-up with Castrol Oil as his main sponsor, the new car would be known as the Castrol Lotus GTX, the single seat Formula A Lotus had a minimum weight of 1,250 lbs, and engines were limited to U.S production V-8s of 5,000cc(305 ci), and between 450 to 500 h.p. 1969 was not a good year for Bill and the Lotus team, after blowing up the engine up the day before; Bill won the first race on May 18 at Mosport, after that team Lotus was plagued with mechanical problems:

May 25- Le Circuit: after only 23 laps, the oil pump gave up.

June 8- Denver: ( Bill's debut in the Continental series) was a Disaster, Bill spun and damaged the car,

June 22- Edmonton: Bill finished 3<sup>rd</sup>,

June 29- Vancouver: after taking the pole in the rain a broken rocker arm shelved him on lap 38,

July 6- Kent: Engine trouble lap 32,

July 13 Winnipeg: Suspension trouble out early,

July 20- Elkhart Lake: After 18 laps engine Trouble again

August 10- Donnybrooke: Broken timing gear on lap 19

August 17-Harewood: Won this race but barely after having a 3 lap lead on Dave Ogilvy of Vancouver, a rear suspension arm snapped on the Lotus with only 8 laps remaining, Bill dragged the broken suspension and a wheel across the finish line just 2 seconds ahead of Ogilvy to take the win. ( only his 2<sup>nd</sup> win of the season) Bill average speed for the last lap was just over 30 mph.

August 23- Mosport: After qualifying 10<sup>th</sup> the engine developed Transmission woes. The crew repaired the problem overnight back at the shop, however the truck, towing the race car broke down on Hwy 401. Bill never started the race.

September 1- Lime Rock: Farewell to the Lotus 49 GTX after a spectacular crash with Dick Simon. Simon's front wheel hit Bill's rear wheel as Bill was attempting to pass spinning Bill into the bank and flipping him on his head, Bill trapped upside down with fuel soaking him Chief Mechanic Doug Crosty defied the marshals who wouldn't let him cross the track and pulled Bill to safety. Bill was in third place in the standings with 22 points for the Gulf Canada Series, after Destroying the Lotus GTX, Bill had to rent Al Pease's Lola T104 who had his car up for sale due to losing his sponsor earlier, to finish the season.

September 14- Trios Rivieres: North American's only race through the streets Bill only lasted 8 laps when he dropped out with a broken suspension part. Bill started his second Canadian Formula 1 G.P. this time at Mosport driving a BRM P133. Phil Lamont who was the Dunlop distributor for Canada was also the Track manager for Mosport at the time and he made arrangements for Bill to drive a spare car. According to Bill he finished 7<sup>th</sup> but it was recorded as a DNF for some unknown reason. Bill finished 3<sup>rd</sup> overall in the Formula A series. Not the kind of season Bill and team Lotus were looking for.

1970 saw Bill switch to a Lotus 70 (powered by a Chevy V8) and his eye on the Canadian Formula 5000 championship in the SCCA Continental series with Eppie Wietzes (who was 1969 series champion) as his target.

Although now more comfortable driving in the Formula A series Bill still wasn't having the kind of season he had hoped for. Bill was always in the hunt for the Championship. Meanwhile in the Gulf Canada Series Bill continued to have a bad season with only 1 win (the last race of the season at Mosport Oct 11, 1970) driving a Lola



Bill "Flying High" in his Castrol GTX Lotus 70 Limerock 1970

May 24: Lucerne100 at Edmonton	Qualified 5 <sup>th</sup> 1:29.0	finished 12 <sup>th</sup>	
June 7: Seattle G.P.	Qualified 11 <sup>th</sup> 1:19.6	finished 15 <sup>th</sup>	
July 5: Dallas G.P.	Qualified 13 <sup>th</sup> 1:31.8	finished 3 <sup>rd</sup>	\$2,300 in winnings
July 18: Road America G.P	Qualified 7 <sup>th</sup> 2:16.3	finished 6 <sup>th</sup>	
Aug 1: St. Jovite	Qualified 5 <sup>th</sup> 1:38.1	finished 16 <sup>th</sup>	clutch
Aug 16: Minnesota G.P.	Qualified 5 <sup>th</sup> 1:36.0	finished 4 <sup>th</sup>	\$1,950 in winnings
Sept 7: Lime Rock G.P.	Qualified 8 <sup>th</sup> 0:53.6	finished 20 <sup>th</sup>	Oil leak
Sept 13, Mosport	finished 5 <sup>th</sup>	behind 1 <sup>st</sup> Mark Donohue, 2 <sup>nd</sup> Eppie Wietzes, 3 <sup>rd</sup> David Hobbs.	
Sept 27: Mid-Ohio	Qualified 10 <sup>th</sup> 1:13.8	finished 11 <sup>th</sup>	
Oct 25: Sebring	Qualified 7 <sup>th</sup> 1:06.38	finished 14 <sup>th</sup>	Overheating

**Eppie Wietzes driving a McLaren M10B again won the Formula 5000 Series Championship for 1970.**

**In 1971 Bill was to take possession of a Brand new Lotus 70B first seen at the London Racing Show, but when his sponsorship fell through the car was refitted with a Ford engine and sold.**

**Bill continued to race the Lotus 70, but with limited success. At the Donnybrook L&M Grand Prix Bill finished 5<sup>th</sup>. But again failed to take the Formula A Series. Formula B came in as the Canadian Championship Series in 1972 and he ran only one race in a rented car that first season.**

**1972 Bill again got a ride in the Canadian Grand Prix at Mosport on Sept 24, with the help of friend Phil Lamont, driving a BRM P180 he started 23<sup>rd</sup> but spun on lap 20, in Moss Corner and was unable to restart the engine. This was to be Bill's last appearance at a Formula 1 Grand Prix. Jackie Stewart won the race in a Tyrrell-Cosworth 005**

**1972 was to be his last year driving the Lotus 70.**

**In 1973, the strictly Canadian Racing Championship Series for Formula B cars was entitled the "Players Challenge series". Bill started to race in this series and won the Championship driving a 1971 Lotus 59/69, with his Crew Chief Doug Crosty by his side. Earlier in 1972 Bill and Doug went to the International Race Car show in London England and saw the Lotus 59/69 mounted on a wall at the Lotus display, Dave Walker (who went on to be a Team Lotus F1 driver) had driven the car and had won 25 (out of 32 starts) F3 races with it in England a year earlier. In late 1972 Bill saw an ad for the same Lotus 59/69 in Autosport magazine. Bill told Doug that they should buy it and put a twin cam engine in it.**

**The Lotus 59/69 was 1 of 3 built by Lotus Chassis # 69; the car was built using the best of the Lotus 59 front suspension and the best of the new Lotus 69 rear suspension. With that they took a now 3 year old race car, put wider 10 inch tires on the rear with narrow 8 inch tires up front and blew away the competition. In one race at Elkhart Lake there were 25 Formula B's there, on the first lap Bill passed 20 cars for the lead and won the race. His total earnings for the season were \$3,100.00.**

**The following year in 1974 the Series evolved into a single North American series. Named the Formula Atlantic championship Series. It had started in Europe in the early 1970's The CASC the governing body of Canadian road racing was the first organization in North America to see the potential of the series, they decided to use the Atlantic series for the Canadian Driving Championship. Players Tobacco was the main sponsor and the Championship was the first to be televised nation wide. This series ran in the U.S. and Canada until 1982.**



Bill in the Lotus 59/69 Mosport 1974

In 1974 Bill won his second of three Canadian Driving Championships. again Driving the STP Lotus 59/69 he took the Championship with 128 points, 4 wins, and total earnings of \$24,615.00 in addition to Bill winning the Championship, his Crew Chief and friend for 7 years Doug Crosty also won the Mechanic of the year award for his outstanding preparation of the car which carried the Day-Glo red STP colors to victory. In Bill's last race of the 1974 season in Halifax, the Canadian Chevron distributor came up to Bill and give him a Chevron B29 to race. Bill remembered it well, we painted it and in the rain won the race going away, I lapped the field twice ...the car was that good!

In 1975 Bill did it again, but this time driving the Chevron B29 full time. Bill won the Championship this time with only 1 win but strong finishes all season long. In the history books, Bill Brack is known as only winning two consecutive Formula A Championships 1974-1975, but when you look at the records Bill won 3 consecutive Canadian Driving Championships 1973-74-75 quite a feat considering Gilles Villeneuve also won 3 consecutive Canadian Championships (But all in Formula A ). Bill won his in Formula B and Formula A class.

After winning his third driving Championship in the Chevron B29, Bill was one of two drivers who got to debut the new Chevron B34 in Cape Town South Africa in January of 1976.

Bill continued to drive a Chevron, throughout the season. On May 16/76 Bill finished 2<sup>nd</sup> behind Villeneuve at the Edmonton International speedway. A month later on June 13 at the Gimli Motorsport Park in Winnipeg, Bill was 2<sup>nd</sup> on the grid beside Villeneuve, he finished 3<sup>rd</sup> and also had the fastest lap of the race 53.021. A month later Bill won at St. Jovite on July 11. Bill was leading the series in points with Gilles Villeneuve right behind in 2<sup>nd</sup>, with only two races left in the season Bill was involved in a crash when a back-marker rear-ended him during a yellow flag, and wrote the car off. Dashing all hopes of a 4<sup>th</sup> Championship. Bill finished the season in 3<sup>rd</sup> place with 67 points.

In 1977 the Series had a new sponsor and was renamed the Labatt Challenge Series. The seven race series took the drivers and crews across Canada starting on May 22 at Mosport and ending in Quebec City on Sept 25. Bill driving a March-Ford 77B was once again gunning for the series championship, but the season didn't start off the way Bill wanted it to. In the season opener at



Bill Brack Mont-Tremblant 1975

Mosport on May 22, Bill should have been third on the grid behind Gilles Villeneuve and Price Cobb after he broke the qualifying record with a time of 1.18.802.

He was making a bid to take the pole position in his March STP Special in the last qualifying session of the day when he blew a tire. The Day-glo red March rolled over twice and Bill's wrist was broken in the process and was unable to race on Sunday, so

the much awaited duel between Bill and Gilles Villeneuve would have to wait until the next race in June.

Bill and Gilles had some great battles on the track they were always so close in points that no one could tell who would take the Championship until the very end. That's the way it happened again in 1977. Bill was leading the series with 87 points with Gilles in 2<sup>nd</sup> going into the last race of the season at Quebec City on Sept 25, all Bill had to do was to finish ahead of Villeneuve to take his 4<sup>th</sup> Championship in 5 years, but again it was not to be. Bill's transmission broke, he was a DNF and no points. He finished 3<sup>rd</sup> behind Gilles Villeneuve and Bobby Rahal. If it wasn't for bad luck in 1976 and 1977 at the end of the seasons Bill Brack would have won 5 straight Championships!!!

Bill continued to be a force driving his March 78B STP Special though-out the 1978 season, winning at Trois Rivieres and always finishing high in the standings. In one race in Hamilton, the Labatt Hamilton Championships on Aug 6/7 a race that ran through the streets of Hamilton saw Bill running well until lap 22 when Bill hit a tire wall in corner 5 taking Bill out of the race. Bill's first and last race of 1979 was in April in Long Beach Ca. By then it just became too expensive to race without a major sponsor and the money.



Bill Brack in his March 78B 1978

In 2004 Bill and his friend Jimmy Johnston formed the Historic Formula Atlantic Association. An Association to reunite former Atlantic cars and preserve a piece of Canadian motorsport history.

The Sommet Des Legends race at Mont-Tremblant that summer brought Bill and an old friend together again, Bill had brought his 1971 STP Lotus 59/699 (his 1973 and 1974 Championship winning race car) to race, also in attendance was the 1975 STP Chevron B29 the same car Bill won his 1975 Formula Atlantic Canadian Driving Championship with. It was the first time in 29 years that Bill saw the car, Bill even took it out for a few laps in practice.



Bill Brack's 1973 and 1974 Championship winning car 1971 Lotus 59/69 Mosport 2004



Bill Brack with his two Championship winning cars (L-R) 1975 STP Chevron B29 and 1971 STP Lotus 59/69 Mont-Tremblant 2004



## ***Bill Brack      1967-1979   The Formula Years***

### **1967**

**His first race in a Lotus 47GT at Mosport**

**Won the Centennial Sundown Grand Prix of Mosport (Lotus 47GT)**

**Eastern Canada Formula B Champion (Lotus 41C)**

### **1968**

**Eastern Canada Formula B Champion (Lotus 41C)**

**U.S. Formula B Champion**

**Only Canadian in the Canadian Grand Prix   Mont Tremblant ( Lotus 49B )**

**Won the Sundown Grand Prix of Mosport ( Lotus 41C )**

**Bill would sell you a new Lotus 41C through his Dealership SPORTS CARS UNLIMITED**

**For only \$ 8,500**

### **1969**

**3<sup>rd</sup> overall in Formula 5000 Series (Lotus 43 GTX & Lola T104)**

**Tied for 1<sup>st</sup> in class with Don Merriman who drove Lotus 61**

**Only Canadian driver in the Canadian Grand Prix   Mosport (BRM P133)**

### **1970**

**Finished 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Dallas Grand-Prix (Formula 5000 )**

**Finished 1<sup>st</sup> at Mosport in the Gulf Canada Series**

### **1971**

**Was one of nine drivers who drove for BRM. Among them was Jackie Oliver and Brian Redman.**

**Finished in 11<sup>th</sup> place in the series with 30 points.**

### **1972**

**Only Canadian driver in the Canadian Grand Prix**

**Mosport (BRM P180 )**

**Member of the BRM racing team**

**Finished 15<sup>th</sup> in the standings for the series with 30 points**



**Bill at the 1972 Canadian G.P.**

### **1973**

**Canadian Formula B Champion. 1971 Lotus 59/69 (Players Challenge Series)**

### **1974**

**Canadian Atlantic Champion driving a Lotus 59/69 with 128 points and 4 wins.**

**Won the Players Challenge race at Mosport in the Lotus 59/69 103.287mph**

**Driving a Chevron B29 (only 16 were built) Bill drove the B29 it's first victory on August 18 in Halifax, Nova Scotia.**

## **1975**

**Canadian Atlantic Champion driving a Chevron B29 with 1 win**

## **1976**

**Bill was one of two drivers to debut the new Chevron B34 on January 24 at a Cape Town South Africa Formula Atlantic race.**

**Finished 3<sup>rd</sup> in points with 67points**



**Bill Brack in his Chevron B29 Mosport 1975**

## **1977**

**Finished 3<sup>rd</sup> in standings behind Gilles Villeneuve and Bobby Rahal driving his STP Special March 77B**

## **1978**

**Driving a March 78B Bill won at Trois Rivieres**

## **1979**

**Bill's last year racing**

**Last race was in Long Beach Ca. in April finished 19<sup>th</sup> in race**

**Retires from racing**

## **1993**

**Bill Brack was one of the first 10 members to be inducted into the Canadian MotorSport Hall Of Fame**

## **2003**

**Bill was invited to participate in the Toronto Molson Indy by driving his Championship winning car the Lotus 59/69 in a parade lap in front of thousands of race fans.**

**Bill returned to racing and to his roots. Driving a re-creation of his 1968 "HOT WHEELS" Mini in the VARAC Vintage Series.**

## **2004**

**Bill with friend Jimmy Johnston forms the Historic Formula Atlantic Association**

**The HFAA hosted the first annual Historic Formula Atlantic race at Trois-Rivieres**

**Bill Brack returned to competitive racing in his Lotus 59/69 in the Historic Formula Atlantic Series.**

Only 3 men have ever won back to back Canadian Atlantic Championships:  
Bill Brack, Gilles Villeneuve and David Empringham

Only 1 man has won back to back to back Formula Atlantic Championships

Gilles Villeneuve 1976, 1977, 1978

Bill Brack won 3 consecutive Canadian Formula Championships

1973 Formula B

1974 Formula A

1975 Formula A

Today: Bill Brack still races in the VARAC Vintage series and in the Historic Formula Atlantic series. His son Kyle is following in his fathers foot steps, In 2004 Kyle raced in the Honda Michelin Challenge Series



Lotus 59/69 1974



Bill driving the BRM P180 in the Formula 1  
Canadian G.P. Mosport 1972