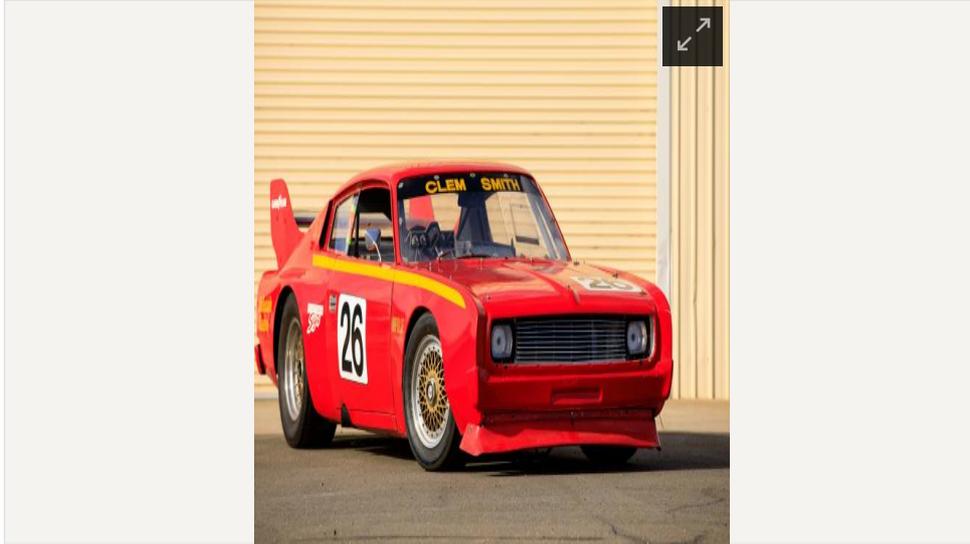


D'oh! Honda fails as Fernando Alonso gives his McLaren Styk



Mossgreen will auction three Valiant Chargers.

JOHN CONNOLLY THE AUSTRALIAN 12:00AM June 17, 2017

You know in Homer's *Odyssey* where Odysseus goes through all those tests before he wins through at the end? I particularly like the bit where Homer (Simpson, not the author), who plays Odysseus (or you may know him better as Ulysses) crosses the River Styx and the skeletons on the riverbanks are singing and dancing to *Lady* by the 70s band Styx. Homer yells "Oh, this is truly hell", referring to one of the worst songs ever inflicted on man, woman and skeletons.

Of course, the other great bit is where Odysseus/Ulysses/Homer (not the author) is being lured by sirens singing a reworded version of Barry Manilow's shocker *Copacabana*. Carl points to the island where the sirens are and tells Lenny to steer heedlessly towards it. Lenny replies, "heedlessly it is!"

Anyway, you're not here for a lesson on the classics. The point I am trying to make is Fernando Alonso has a lot in common with Odysseus/Ulysses/Homer (not the author). A lot of smart people regard the 35-year-old Spanish F1 driver as one of the greatest of all time. He certainly had his own version of the Odyssey to get through to become the youngest double world champion in history. Just as an aside for readers and columnists of a more mature bent, Juan Manuel Fangio won the F1 championship at 46 and Paul Newman won his last race at 81. Hope for us all.

Unlike most F1 drivers, Alonso came from a tough background. His father, Jose Luis, was a mechanic at Rio Tinto Explosives and an amateur go-kart racer who would have liked to have had a professional racing career. He built a kart for Fernando's eldest sister Loreno but the three year-old snaffled it for himself. On weekends, Jose Luis and wife Ana would drive for hours to race meets but insisted Fernando study in the back seat. No school results, no racing. Ana sewed his racing suits, adjusting them as he grew.

Lack of money was holding back Fernando's career. He became a master in the wet because his parents couldn't afford wet-weather tyres. He had to do well in a very ordinary kart because there was no money for anything better. So, at age 12, Jose Luis and Ana sent him off to live with Josep and Maria Marco, who ran a kart academy. They both trained him and treated the young racer like a son. At 13, it was clear that Fernando had "the look of Senna".

OK, in 2001 the 20-year-old Alonso drove a Minardi for Australia's Paul Stoddart. He impressed enough for Renault to hire him as a test driver and within a few months he was driving for real. Two world championships later he drove for Ferrari and went to McLaren for about \$50 million a year, or more than I earn a week.

Talk about the River Styx. Honda provides the engines for the team. They are so bad that when the media asked Lewis Hamilton what he would like to see in future F1 engines he quipped "No Honda!"

Take last Sunday's Canadian Grand Prix. Alonso was only two laps away from earning his and his team's first point of the year, when his engine conked out. This is his fifth retirement of the season.

"For the first time this season, running in 10th place within spitting distance of the flag, we dared to hope," McLaren's Eric Boullier said.

"OK, what we were daring to hope for were hardly rich pickings: a solitary world championship point for Fernando, who had driven superbly all afternoon, as he's driven superbly every race-day afternoon for the past 2½ years.

"But, after so much toil and heartache, even that single point would have felt like a victory, and then came yet another gut-

wrenching failure.”

Alonso had skipped the Monaco Grand Prix to drive a McLaren Honda in the Indy 500 in May. And guess what? With 21 laps to go, Fernando was in sixth, he had led a lot of the race and ... yup you guessed it the Honda engine carked it, was brown bread and slipped off its mortal coil. As Homer (Simpson, not the author) would say, “let’s all go out for some frosty chocolate milkshakes”.

On to other matters: I hope you’ll be joining me at Mallala Motorsport Park on the weekend of August 19-20, when Mossgreen auctions the Clem Smith collection. Clem, who died early this year, was a motorsport legend. He made his money in the car business and spent it on collecting cars, driving them fast and bringing the Mallala racetrack back from the dead. Unfortunately, Clem’s family have sold the track so we don’t know if the famous roast lunches will continue, or even for that matter if Mallala will continue as a serious petrol-head park.

He did so much for our sport that he was awarded the Order of Australia Medal and the Australian Sports Medal. Best of all he loved Valiants. Three Chargers are in the auction, including the one he raced to a handy position in the 1978 Sports Sedan Championship. Apart from the Valiants there’s a 1955 Healy, a 1950 XK 120, a 1968 Cooper S and a heap of serious pre-war cars including a 1938 Hudson Terraplane.

All *The Weekend Australian* Racing and Rally teams will be there, putting on some special event with Mossgreen involving the special pens that don’t work, the black plasticky bags, a couple of random polo shirts and, of course, lots of Coopers to keep us all healthy. We are still working on the wine.

jc@jcp.com.au

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