

Adrián Fernández

Champ Car Champ Likes to Take it *Fast*

Adrián Fernández is no fool. He knows which memories to keep and which to forget. Right now the mind of the Mexican-born Champ Car (CART) competition driver holds this: “The wins,” he says. “Every time you race a race, there are always going to be good memories and sad memories, but the good memories come from winning the race.”

As owner of Fernández Racing, a CART circuit team that consists of one car, for now, and a world of promise, this is a man for whom motorsports were made. The 37-year-old speed demon began racing motocross at age 8 and entered his first competition at 16, the 24 Hours of Mexico. A few Formula Vee titles followed; next a dalliance with Formula K. And finally when he made a name for himself in the Formula 3 championship, where in one year he racked up seven pole positions and four race wins before the Long Beach Grand Prix in 1993 claimed him as a Champ Car darling. This, his 10th full season of competition, sees Fernández’s wins – three



road/street course and four oval, not including June’s sweep of the G.I. Joe’s 200 in Portland, OR – happily crowding out the sad in the driver’s prodigious mix of memories. Never mind, indeed, the two major accidents of 2002 – one in Vancouver, the other in Australia. It’s the wins, always, he thinks about.

“I have something inside me, you know?” says the competitor, who is single and lives in Paradise Valley, AZ. The skill and talent, the *feel* for speed, “it’s something I don’t have to think

about that much. Early in my career and now, I have always felt it is so natural. Other drivers were struggling more and I...” have a special gift for the road and track? “I have the speed to be able to perform at the front, the fitness level and strength to keep a good

rhythm through to the end of the race when it matters most, and,” he adds, “the ability not to throw the race away by stupid mistakes.” Spoken like a true champ, whose confidence was forged as a child tagging along while racing uncles Santiago and Jose scorched the track at Mexico City’s Hermanos Rodriguez racetrack. “Racing was a family thing,” he says. “Every Sunday I’d go to the mountain trails with them, and friends.”

It makes sense, then, that

Fernández, whose dearest dream is to cream all competition for the 2003 Champ Car World Series title (11 races to go), is enamored with aviation. He owns a Learjet 31A (“very fast”) which a professional pilot flies, and it is in this he speeds here and there among competitions. Given a extremely rare moment off, Fernández heads to Cabo San Lucas (“a special place”), Acapulco, Honduras, even Belize. “Most of the time in the air I’m tired, I’m sleeping,” he laughs. But oh how he is tempted one day to take the Lear’s stick himself. It was teammate and buddy BJ Jones that gave him the aviation bug.

“He used to let me co-pilot with him in his Aerostar and I could see all the benefits of the plane, you know? How convenient it was! How easy. Later when I was successful and doing so many appearances I decided I needed some other means of transportation if I wanted to race for long periods time. Otherwise, it was too much! I couldn’t do the things I needed to do. I was getting tired and I thought it was affecting my performance. I knew I had to get a plane.” He adds: “I love being fast but to fly yourself you have to really do it properly. I mean, it’s not like racing; you can’t make a mistake, you know? I take too many chances already in races. But still, you never know what future will come and since I’m not going to drive forever...”

Since he plans not to drive forever Fernández decided to become – and flourish – as the CART circuit’s only



competitor who also is a devoted team owner. Fernández Racing, the baby he and motorsports vet Tom Anderson conceived in 2000 to provide the driver a future “for sure” in Champ Car challenge – and excitement – is providing all the involvement Fernández ever could want. “I knew it was going to be hard work but maybe not this hard,” he says of keeping #51/Tecate/Quaker State/Telmex, the team car, and the driver, himself, ever win-worthy. But as a competitor who never has had a manager (“I sold all my sponsors myself”) and has been his own boss, made his own rules, from the get-go, Fernández in truth is jazzed.

“It is a big big challenge, yes?” he says. But with seven top finishes since 2001, the team’s first season, “it is a big big accomplishment, too. I have really wanted to do that, you know?”

We know. Fernández always has had in his mind one thing: the win. ✕

Fernandez and his rides, both sleek and fast: a Learjet 31A and the Lola B2/00-bodied CART competitor (above); Fernandez out front on the track - his favorite race position (below).

