

Anne's View from the Beach: Bruce Ashmore - 'A New Way to Write the Rules'
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Bruce Ashmore is a race car designer with great passion for the sport.

Briton Ashmore has been responsible for highly successful Lola and Reynard Indy racers and is currently involved in C&R Racing's race-winning Silver Crown effort, in addition to his work with ARC (Auto Research Center) in Indianapolis. And in his spare time he helped engineer A.J. Foyt's improving 2006 IndyCar Series squad. He'd like to work with auto manufacturers to design new cars just because he's never done it.

Bruce absolutely loves motor racing.

Never was Ashmore's love of racing more evident than when he spoke to his peers in late November back home in the UK, during the World Motorsport Symposium – a gathering that appeals to some of the top designers and engineers in Formula 1 and other branded disciplines.

Asked to speak during the second day of this symposium about trends in aerodynamics, Ashmore started with a history lesson in recent race car aerodynamic design and finished with a plea: "We need to develop a new way to write the rules. Motor racing should be the leading edge of technology. It was once before and it should be again."

Those words ought to be branded on rulesmakers' foreheads.

Instead of building spec cars that allow usually only well funded teams to spend the money to develop their open wheel tubs (in America, see Penske, Ganassi, Newman-Haas, Forsythe), Ashmore – and apparently many of his peers who stuck around to talk about those ideals in Q&A after the speech – believes it's a better idea to start over.

"Choose new materials to base a new set of rules on. It might be a steel tube frame chassis, for instance," Ashmore suggested, "something that is cheaper to start with. Then allow development in areas such as traction control, driver aids, aerodynamic configurations and alternative engine configurations."

Bruce Ashmore has been around since the middle 1970s, so has participated in the growth in the use of aerodynamics to improve car performance. Guys like him were so successful that sanctions had to find ways to slow the cars.

CART, Champ Car and the Indy Racing League have all roiled against the advances well funded teams paid for to advance the aero properties of their chassis. If designers found a tweak that worked, the sanction would find a way around it, making the differences between chassis smaller and smaller as to make them all the same.

And that's what Bruce Ashmore would like to see stopped before it invades Formula 1, before every F1 car looks the same, except for sponsor identification. "The worrying thing for me is that F1 is going down the same road. Every year they introduce some restrictions.

"The more the rules restrict you," Ashmore said, "the more expensive and detailed the project needs to be to find that gain to win the championship."

Following Ashmore's remarks, there was a lot of give-and-take amongst the aerodynamic experts, but few of them could speak for the record. Suffice to say that some of F1's brighter lamps agreed with the views put forth by their colleague and hope to follow through with further discussions.

"I was speaking from the heart," Bruce Ashmore said. He and Sergio Rinland, former chief designer at Sauber have "agreed to work together to try and change the rules somewhere in motor racing."

That's good news for the future of motor racing.