



ash - through the esses

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Through The Esses - Fabcar Looks To The Wind For A Brighter 2006

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Those who know the history of the origins of the Grand American Rolex Series Daytona Prototype class know that Dave Klym was right there at the very beginning, lending his voice to the call for an "American" series that would open up opportunities for chassis builders. Klym - as the owner of Fabcar, a company with a proven track record in race car construction - had a keen interest in developing a series that would lead people to buy new racecars. Cars that companies like his, and Kevin Doran's Doran Designs, and Max Crawford's Crawford Composites could build. New cars meant new dollars and, perhaps, even more success on the race track, leading to the sale of even more new cars.



Those initial discussions occurred at a time when the costs of sportscar racing - and the factory teams that were winning races left and right - were making it harder and harder for smaller constructors to sell cars. It was a time when a new approach was needed if the builders were going to prosper. With the end of the 2005 season one race away, it is appropriate that we take a look at what the Grand Am "experiment" has meant to Fabcar and what the future holds for the Brumos Racing team, the team that runs a pair of Fabcar FDSC cars. This team hasn't missed a single Grand Am Rolex Series race since the very first one, the 2003 Rolex 24 hours.

At the start, when the other six approved chassis builders had not yet appeared with sorted cars ready to race, the Brumos team was often atop the podium. As the months went by and the cars from Doran, Riley and Crawford started to get up to speed, the visits to the podium suddenly became a distant memory. And it has been some time since a Brumos driver has taken home a trophy.

No trophies translate into no new sales. Dave Klym understands the basic law of demand, which is simply this, "If you have what I want, I'll buy it." And what buyers want is a car that can win races. That would explain why Bill Riley and Max Crawford have sold cars to several buyers. Their cars have been winning most of the races lately.

But Klym is still a believer in the opportunity presented by the Grand Am approach to sportscar racing, and he talked with us about some of the changes to come. Changes he hopes will put the Fabcar name closer to the top of the call list of prospective buyers.

"We have several things going on now that should help us next season. Grand Am has now allowed us to use what is called a drop gear adaptor. This means we can lower the transmission four inches, thus improving weight distribution and lowering the center of gravity. Anyone building a new Porsche-powered Daytona Prototype is now authorized to use this. I wish I could have used it two years ago!

"We also have a new Porsche engine to try out. To my knowledge Porsche doesn't have a brand new

engine for the Daytona Prototypes. What they do have is the latest iteration of the same engine we have been running for the last three years. We have this latest version in the car now - we just got it from Germany on Monday - and the real differences we can see are things like the water pump intake and plumbing changes. If there are internal changes I don't know about them.

"In some respects running our car with the Porsche engine is like taking a knife to a gunfight. We have the smallest engine in the field with our 3.8 liter flat six and we are up against 5 liter V8's. We have a horsepower advantage - maybe. On a lot of tracks our top speed is as quick as almost anybody. But the torque out of the curves is just not there. I don't yet know what we can expect out of this latest engine version."

Acknowledging the growing disparity between the leading chassis of Riley and Crawford versus the other five cars eligible for the series, Grand Am recently conducted wind tunnel tests to compare the aerodynamic capabilities of each car. Klym feels the test results were a case of good news - bad news.

"We really didn't gain much from the Grand Am wind tunnel testing. We learned that there are cars that are really good aerodynamically, and then there are cars that were bad. Our car is up near the top of the really good cars. In some aspects we were better, in others we were worse. Grand Am told us we were in pretty good shape which, in a way, was bad news because that means we can't request any major changes. If we did, they would just tell us we don't need them.

"They feel we can achieve what we need to achieve within the current rules as they are written. We are trying to do that. We can't change a nose or any body component that is outside the rules. We can change anything that is in front of the front wheel from axle center line down, and we are playing with that a little bit. We can also do anything on the back spoiler, within the regulations. I think you will see a lot of people making changes in this area."

Looking to find even the most miniscule aerodynamic advantage, Klym has contracted with another well known racing name to see if there aren't some other changes just waiting to show themselves in a strong wind.

"We have made some gains. We also have commissioned Dan Gurney to do a wind tunnel model. The reason for this is the cost of a model in a wind tunnel versus testing at a race track. Anyone running a Daytona Prototype will spend around \$25,000 to \$35,000 for a day of track testing. That is a lot of bloody money! And, say you want to change an under tray or a splitter or something. That is an hour taken out of your \$35,000 day that you aren't running the car on the track. With a wind tunnel model, you can run tests for a hell of a lot less money. And you can run the tunnel for hours where you won't get all the hours you pay for at the track."

Besides Klym and Brumos Racing's efforts to find more speed, there is another group now testing a Fabcar in preparation for the 2006 season. But this team decided this American built chassis should have an American built engine. They opted for the same engine that the SunTrust Riley and Howard-Boss Motorsports Crawford cars run.

"We put a Pontiac motor in a car for Dave Watson and RVO Motorsports (The former Dariusz Grala - Cegwa car). Virtually everything from the fire wall back is new. They have been testing the car with good results and I am hoping they will be at the Rolex 24. We have been keeping in touch with them about the testing and I know they really want to get familiar with the car and the Daytona Prototypes before they say much about it."

The other primary factor involved in getting a car to go fast lies in the placement of capable feet on the pedals and professional hands on the steering wheel. In the #58 Red Bull sponsored Brumos Racing Porsche-Fabcar, two of the best in the business share the driving duties. Klym feels they provide all the necessary talent needed to compliment the engineering side of the equation.

"David (Donohue) and Darren (Law) make a really good combination. They bring a real strength to the team both as drivers and as far as feedback is concerned. One is more analytical while the other comes back with totally different feedback but the same results. They are both positive and upbeat professionals. I love working with them.

"Our most competitive race to date was the last race. We ran in fourth place for the first hour. Darren kept telling us on the radio how well the car was running. Unfortunately when David was in the car someone ran into the back of us and bent over the tailpipe and that blew the engine. We just sent the engine to California where Porsche Motorsports North America will do the rebuild for us."

Klym sees blue skies behind the clouds and he expects next season to be brighter than the one just coming to an end. He sees cause for optimism for both his company, and the Grand Am series. But he would like to see more exposure for the series.

"We are excited about the prospects for next year. We have done a lot of engineering work and while it is the same car, it's different. We have a lot of testing scheduled. We have the drop gear version of the car to test. We just got the drop gear two weeks ago. Porsche helped us with the design work and we are building that car right now. This is chassis #7 - the old PAP Parts car, and it will become the new #58 car. As soon as we come back from Mexico we are taking that car down to Florida to test it. Then we have a two day test in Homestead (Speedway). If all goes well, we will make the same changes to the other Brumos car. It is an expensive change over, and we just won't have enough time to convert two cars in time for Daytona.

"I have said it before that we are in the entertainment business and I think we put on some really entertaining races. What I can't understand is why we aren't getting any real recognition from the mainstream sporting press. Zero! It is the fastest growing Motorsports series in the world and all we see are little paragraphs about the races. No pictures or feature stories. I just don't understand why we aren't getting the coverage I think we should. It seems the only way we get any press is on the internet. The funny thing is the print media guys don't hesitate to stop by our paddock and have a free meal!
(Laughing)"

2006 is shaping up to be a high water mark for Grand Am. New teams are still coming together. Some teams are reforming into new and stronger operations. Additional cars are coming out of the Riley and Crawford shops per recent announcements. And maybe, just maybe the Picchio, Multimatic and Chase models will finally get up to speed and have real solid representation in the series for the season. Regardless of what others are doing, and a lack of sales for new Fabcars aside, original series collaborator Dave Klym is pleased with what the Grand Am Rolex Sports Car Series has become.

"I feel the results we have seen so far have exceeded my expectations. I know that Jim France is very happy. They are talking about 40 Daytona Prototypes at next year's Rolex 24 at Daytona!"

And Dave Klym wouldn't mind if several more of them had a Fabcar decal on the side.