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Through The Esses - Team HLM - From Infiniti To Beyond In Grand Am

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Peter Law and Frank Howard are two men with a background in business - and in the business of racing - who have joined forces to create Team HLM (Howard & Law Motorsports). In 2006, they plan to introduce a pair of brand new Infiniti G35 coupes into the Grand American Rolex Sports car Series GT class, beginning with the Homestead race. The cars are currently under construction by Max Crawford's team of car building craftsmen working out of his North Carolina based Crawford Composites / Crawford Race Cars complex. The cars will be powered by 4.5 Liter Infiniti V-8 engines prepared by Menards Engineering.



Peter Law is an accomplished racer and team owner who hails from Australia, just a strong boomerang toss away from Max Crawford's native New Zealand. The two 'down-under' racing veterans enjoy a mutual appreciation for their similar heritage and history, and for what they have accomplished in Motorsports.

Law is also the proud father of Darren Law, the professional racer who co-pedals a Brumos Racing Porsche-Fabcar with David Donohue in the Daytona Prototype class in the Grand American Rolex Sports Car Series. Just as son Darren is looking to make a new start with a new Porsche powerplant and improved Fabcar chassis for 2006, so too is dad Peter looking to start anew with a new car and engine combination in the GT class.

We talked with Peter Law about this new beginning for a man who has been in racing since the 1960's. His experiences go all the way back to the glory days of the Canadian-American Challenge Cup (Can-Am) and time spent wrenching for Roger Penske and Mark Donohue. And in case you didn't know, Mark Donohue is David Donohue's father.

Funny that the father and son connections should come full circle so many races later.

Peter gave us a bit of background information about his time in the racing arena.

"I have been in the sport practically my whole life. My background includes time spent in the late 1960's and early 1970's working with Roger Penske and Mark Donohue in the Can-Am series. We ran the United States Road Racing Championship and then moved into the Can-Am running against Bruce McLaren and Denny Hulme. Eventually I was involved with the first IndyCar program Roger ever ran, which was an Eagle with a stock block V8 that we ran at Riverside in the L.A. Times Grand Prix.

"From there I returned home to Australia and ran some race teams of my own. I was the owner and we won the Australian Touring Car Championship in the 1970s. But I found it very difficult to make a living in racing in Australia, and since that was what I wanted to do I decided to come back here to the states. I ran a team for a man who owns a raceway in Oklahoma. I also raced in SCCA F Production for a while,

and Sports 2000 then got out of the seat in the mid 1980's to put my son in the car. Now he races for Brumos Porsche in the Rolex Series."

Today Law runs a sports marketing company - Garrett Sports Marketing, based in Arizona - and has been involved with that end of the racing business since about 1996.

Sportscar racing in North America offers many choices for a new GT-based team. There is the SPEED World Challenge, the Grand Am Cup and Rolex series, the American Le Mans Series, American GT, Trans-Am (well, at least there was a Trans-Am) and SCCA to choose from. We wondered how Frank Howard and Peter Law came to choose the GT class in the Grand American Rolex Series as the place to showcase a new car.

"In 1999, when Grand Am started, I really liked their philosophy. I've watched sportscar racing all my life in this country and it has always had its spikes with the factories coming and going. There has never been any real consistency. It has always been driven by the manufacturers. When they are finished with their R&D they move out and those series that were built around their participation always seem to go down. When I saw the Grand Am business model I was impressed. And I have worked with Grand Am to bring some sponsorship to them through my sports marketing company.

"Frank Howard and I got together last year when he was running a Mazda RX-8 in the ST class. I was working with him to secure sponsorship and we got to talking and we found our basic philosophy about the sport was the same. Because we had so much in common in terms of the way we thought a race team should be run as a business is run, we decided to join forces and form Team HLM."

Howard has some time behind the wheel but has been most successful in the world of business. He brings a love of the sport, and an appreciation for solid business principles to Team HLM. This is what he had to say in the team's first press release:

"After months of discussions we agreed in principal that the Grand American world could support a race team using contemporary business principals. As such we created a company, Howard & Law Motorsports, to manage a race team, 'Team HLM'. We studied suppliers and marketing opportunities and settled on Infiniti, Crawford Race Cars, and MEI as our business partners. The support from Infiniti has been fantastic along with our strong working relationships with Max Crawford and Chris Sumner (MEI)."

Law gave us an overview of his partner's business acumen, a key element of the Team HLM effort.

"Frank Howard grew up in Southeastern Ohio and graduated from Ohio University in 1974. He started out working in the field of water chemistry, later he was a synthetic lubricant chemist and went on to get his MBA in 1983. He spent many years honing his business skills while working at the Mead Corporation in a financial operations position. Today he owns real estate properties as well as a company called Southpaw Enterprises which manufactures and distributes products to the occupational and physical therapy community around the globe.

"Frank's racing resume includes running in the SCCA spec series and some open wheel races. Last year he bought two Mazda RX-8's from Sylvan Tremblay and ran in the ST class of Grand Am Cup as Southpaw Racing. He ran that team and was also a driver in one of the cars. When we discussed joining forces to form Team HLM we agreed it would be a truly professional effort and there would be no gentlemen racers participating. We will only be using professional racers in our cars."

The choice of an Infiniti GT car was an outgrowth of Law's involvement with an Infiniti powered DP team. Like any good businessman, Law saw an opportunity and decided to pursue it.

"I had worked with the Hypersport guys and they were running the Infiniti in their Daytona Prototype. When Frank and I decided to start Team HLM we looked at all the cars out there and the different classes

we could run in. We felt there was a strong argument for building a prep 2 car for the GT class, using the Infiniti engine. We felt we could put a competitive package together with a car manufacturer that wasn't currently running a car in the class. We talked with Infiniti about it and they have been supportive. We are optimistic that if we can show them a good job and build a good relationship with them, there might be even more support made available to us in the future."

One way to start a good relationship with an accomplished automobile manufacturer is to have a good working relationship with people who know how to build great race cars. Law can attest that he and Howard have entrusted their future to one of the best car builders out there, Max Crawford.

"I had talked to Max a year or so ago and I got to know him and (Crawford Team Designer) Andy Scriven and I really liked them both. They seemed to be really nice people. I looked at what Riley had and there really wasn't another builder out there who could do what we needed. I think Max had a deal to build a Corvette that later fell through, and when I told him what we wanted to do he was excited. He had been looking forward to building a GT car but it didn't happen so he was very supportive of what we were trying to do."

Max and Jan Crawford are building a pair of G35s from the ground up, working out of their ever-expanding facility in Denver, North Carolina. They are located in an area where NASCAR shops abound, and they even build parts for stock cars, but the real game is in building sportscars. Team HLM is indeed getting off to a fast start. "Crawford is building the whole car for us. Grand Am rules say you can buy what is called a prep 1 car, like a Porsche, Ferrari or Maserati, which are uni-body cars. Or you can race a prep 2 car where you build a tube-frame chassis strictly for racing but use a body that looks like the street car. Ours is a prep 2 car with the engine in the front and the transmission in the rear and the body panels made of carbon fiber. To the naked eye it will look like a regular street car."

Fans won't have to check for double vision when Team HLM is on the track, for the plan is to run a pair of G35s in the series.

"We intend to run two cars in the series. Both are being built presently. We will probably use one as a test mule and transfer that data to our second car. We should have two cars at the Homestead race. The cars won't be ready until February and we will use February and March to test. Providing all goes well we will run our first race at Homestead. And we had planned to have a roll out of the car at Daytona for the Rolex 24, but it won't be ready by then. However, we will announce the team and the drivers at the Rolex race weekend.

Law told us that he and Howard don't expect to put forth anything less than a fully professional effort. And the two of them are already looking ahead to what might be open to them in the racing seasons ahead.

"We expect to run a full season in GT for 2006. We will probably start a development program mid-year to get us into a Daytona Prototype for the 2007 Rolex 24. We haven't decided if we will run cars in both classes in 2007, but our ultimate goal is to run a DP car in Grand Am. More than likely the car would be an Infiniti powered Crawford.

"We hired Geoff Carter as our team manager and he comes to us from Champ Car with an impressive resume. His job is to put the nuts and bolts of our Team HLM staff together. We do have two guys from last year's team we are keeping with us and Geoff is interviewing people now to bring the rest together for us.

"The team is based out of Dayton, Ohio and we are using the race shop Frank has there already. We also have a corporate office based out of Phoenix, where I live but I have no intention of moving back east where it is cold!

"Once we are a functioning unit, and as we progress as a professional and seasoned race team, we

expect to move closer to our ultimate goal of running a DP."

We wondered what Law would consider to be a successful first season for this new team that is building a brand new car and introducing a new chassis / engine combination into the GT class.

"For us a successful first season would be to compete for the win at every race. We feel we have the right driver combination and the right car. Until we test of course, the car is pure speculation. But the engine is a proven product and Crawford is a proven chassis builder. I would be disappointed if we didn't compete. Of course, when you miss the first two races - especially the 24 hours - thinking you could win a championship is a real stretch. But I would like to say we think we might have an opportunity to finish in the top 5 in the championship."

Team HLM will be one - make that two - to watch in 2006. We wish them well and we hope the continually expanding Daytona Prototype class will still have an empty spot on the grid for them, come 2007.