

RAPID RESPONSE



My inside story as a motor racing life-saver

Dr Stephen Olvey

FOREWORD BY ALEX ZANARDI

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First published in August 2006

Haynes Publishing Sparkford, Yeovil, Somerset BA22 7JJ

Web site: www.haynes.co.uk

Customer Services: Telephone: 01963 442030 Fax: 01963 440001 E-mail: sales@haynes.co.uk

Marketing Department: Telephone: 01963 442031 Fax: 01963 440908 E-mail: marketing@haynes.co.uk

Haynes Publishing is a trading style of J H Haynes & Co Ltd registered in England, number 1449587

Registered Office Sparkford, Yeovil, Somerset BA22 7JJ

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PREFACE - GERMANY 2001

Raceday dawned gray and dreary with a distinct threat of rain. More than 80,000 spectators found their way into the ultra-modern race track located about a mile from the autobahn connecting Berlin and Dresden. Closer to Dresden, the track lay neatly organized next to the small town of Klettwitz, and had been christened the Lausitzring Eurospeedway. We had arrived for the race early and were watching the opening ceremonies get underway. They would become the most touching and meaningful I had ever seen. It was hard to believe Dresden had been on the wrong side of the Berlin wall just 12 years before. The procession unfolding before us included some very tough-looking former communist policemen and firemen. They were marching in uniform holding tiny American flags. German schoolchildren marched behind them dressed surprisingly as American pioneers, many with large, genuine tears wetting their ruddy cheeks. Our brightly uniformed crewmen were lined up soldier-like behind their respective racecars. Each of them soon alternated hand-in-hand with the German officers as the band played the American national anthem. Only 12 years since the despair and desolation behind the Iron Curtain, it was truly unbelievable!

The race was now less than an hour away. Alex Zanardi was going through his pre-race ritual. The other 25 drivers were doing the same. Each with a different set of habits and superstitions developed over years of competition. Some still feared the color green, some would dress in a certain order, left glove always on before the right one. All the drivers were in final preparation for the grueling and dangerous 500-kilometer test of strength and endurance that lay ahead.

The pageant slowly drew to a close with Scottish pipers playing a mournful rendition of *Amazing Grace*. Most of those gathered were by now, in tears. The poignant display had been hastily but beautifully put together in response to the horrible events of September 11, 2001. The day we landed in Dresden.

My wife Lynne and I, along with my good friend and associate Dr Terry Trammell and his wife Rhonda, found out about the terrorist attacks shortly after we arrived at our hotel three days before the race. We had flown from Miami to Frankfurt and then on to Dresden for Championship Auto Racing Teams' first race in Germany. Terry and I had been working races together since 1984. He was CART's Chief Orthopedic Consultant and I was the Director of Medical Affairs. The two of us had dedicated our adult lives to treating and preventing injuries to racecar drivers.

Following check-in, we were approached by a very apprehensive CART official. He told us in near hysterics that a plane had just crashed into the World Trade Center in New York. My first thought was that some pilot had really screwed up. The four of us rushed our rooms to catch CNN. Lynne reached the TV first and nipped it on just in time to see the second plane crash into the remaining tower. Stunned, we both sat down in absolute silence. CNN abruptly switched cameras to reveal an additional crash site Pennsylvania, followed quickly by the scene of havoc around the crumbled wall at the Pentagon. What on earth was happening. It appeared that our government was systematically being attacked and destroyed while we were stuck in Germany, 4000 miles away. The first thing that came to my mind was the safety of the rest of our family. Our three children and three grandchildren were in the United States. Where were they? Were they okay? Why did this happen? Why are we over here now for Christ's sake?

"Assholes!" I didn't know what else to say. "Cocksuckers!" My vocabulary is very limited at times like this. Lynne sat in stunned silence. "Oh my God!" she finally replied.

The two of us were paralysed, helpless to know what to do next. There was this tremendous urge to flee. But where would we go? All flights to the U.S. had been cancelled. We tried to make a call. All phone lines were busy. We were stuck! Thankfully after another hour or so it appeared the attacks were over, at least for the time being. We hastily showered, changed clothes, and headed for the hotel lobby. We certainly had no desire to be by ourselves! The lobby was packed with people. The hotel staff had thoughtfully placed a big TV just outside of the bar and everyone was sitting or standing around it still in disbelief. Dave Hollander, a burly fireman who drives one of CART'S four Safety Trucks, was wandering around aimlessly his face despairingly pale. His daughter, we learned, worked in Building One of the World Trade Center. He was a wreck. No answer on his daughter's cell phone, no service, no way to call out at all.

The hotel allowed dinner to be served anywhere in the lobby so most of us tried to eat something. Vodka seemed to be the best answer for the moment. Around seven o'clock German time Hollander finally heard from his daughter. Luckily she had kept her morning dental appointment just a few blocks from her office. With that good news everyone began eating in earnest for the first time since breakfast. We loosened up a little and managed to survive the night. Anger and hostility remained the predominant emotions.

The next morning Terry and I headed for the race track as we had been doing for the past 20 years. Lynne and Rhonda were with us. Flights to the U.S. were still grounded so it became business as usual. The four of us were awash in a wide variety of emotions, but we still had a job to do. We headed on to the autobahn.

Reportedly, the track was only 30 miles from our hotel. I drove the rental car while Terry served as my navigator. The wives jumped into the back seat. Bad deal! Terry and I could get lost trying to find our way out of a two-room house. Years before, en route to one of our races in Portland, Oregon, the two of us had been driving for a suspiciously long time after leaving the airport. We were trying to find our assigned hotel, supposedly in Portland. When we sailed past a sign on the Interstate reading: 'Seattle 10 miles' we realized we had really screwed up. Our sense of direction had not improved much in the ensuing years as we managed to get within 14 miles of the Polish border. Screaming voices from the back seat finally convinced us to turn around. We had driven more than 100 miles out of our way.

When we finally did reach the track, we were surprised to find such a beautiful facility. The slightly banked two-mile oval had been built entirely on speculation. Former East Germany still had over 20% unemployment. In addition to the oval, there was a seven-mile road course and a second, larger oval that was used primarily for testing. Debt service on a facility that size was phenomenal!

The mood at the track was somber, as expected. Everyone was robotically going through the motions required to put on a CART event. Terry and I were no exception. We began our search for the infield medical center. A large Red Cross Hag identified the facility. It was very German; simple, functional, clean, and extremely well equipped. What a change from the early days! I had arranged for all of the necessary life-saving equipment to be in place well in advance of our arrival. Thanks to the German medics I was able to duplicate what we have in our mobile medical unit back home. It would have been cost-prohibitive to move our own stuff to another continent.

In preparing for the German race, I had neglected one thing. None of the German doctors spoke a lick of English. This was a major oversight! Fortunately the daughter of one of their physicians spoke perfect English. I quickly appointed her chief translator. If something bad were to happen, we needed the ability to communicate rapidly and effectively with our German partners. We carefully unloaded our supplies. These consisted primarily of specialized orthopedic splints and some popular over-the-counter drugs not available in Europe in a form familiar to most of us Americans. We also carried equipment used by our trainers that was no different than what any other traveling sports team might carry. Once settled in, we began to get acquainted with our German hosts. Without exception, all of the Germans on the medical staff were extremely friendly, and very empathetic to what had happened to America the day before.

The helicopter crew arrived on schedule, always a worry for me until they actually appear on site. Unlike several past experiences in other countries, the Germans provided us with everything they had promised. We had state-of-the-art

cardiac and blood pressure monitors, the latest German ventilator, blood warming devices, fluoroscopy, a movie version of X-ray as well as conventional X-ray, and a complete operating room suite with anesthesia. We were equipped to handle any life-threatening emergency that might present itself. At least that's what we thought. We numbly dug in for the event, still working mostly by remote control.

We hope you enjoyed reading this short extract from the preface to **Rapid Response My inside story as a motor racing life-saver**.

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