

While the winning McLaren-Ford has the front and center spot in Jim Blaisgano's acrylic painting of the 1982 Grand Prix, the identity of the site is strong and clear



Jim Blaisgano calls this group of working paintings his sketches although they are done in full color. He studies them and picks the most effective elements from each for the final painting. The one at top left may eventually become another 1982 Detroit Grand Prix painting.

Staff photos by Mindy Saunders

Grand Prix painting—precision artistry

By Corinne Abelt
staff writer

Finally, it all came home.

For a decade or more artist Jim Blaisgano of Birmingham has gone to England, Monaco, California and New York — wherever Grand Prix (Formula One) races are held — to take pictures and gather data.

He uses this information in his paintings. Blaisgano is one of a relatively small number of artists who enjoy an international reputation for their handling of subjects related to Grand Prix auto racing.

Last year, for the first time, he was only a half hour drive from the big event. Together, he and his son Joe, a teacher in Tucson, Ariz., took 18 rolls of film on Detroit's first Grand Prix.

Not long after the race, he had a call from the office of Walter Hayes, vice president of public affairs for Ford Motor Co., about commissioning a painting of the race. The winner was a McLaren Ford driven by John Watson of Ireland.

THE PAINTING was reproduced on the cover of the May issue of Ford Times and as a limited-edition poster. The original and several

working drawings are part of the corporation's collection.

"It is a major statement about the Detroit Grand Prix," said Blaisgano who is always concerned about setting the scene and conveying the atmosphere as well as depicting a telling moment in the actual event.

Because his reputation rides as much on his meticulous attention to mechanical detail as it does on his considerable painting skills, Blaisgano studied several thousand photographs of the Detroit race.

In addition to the almost 700 color photographs which he and his son took, Jerry L. Anderson of Ford's photography department supplied hundreds more.

Still, Blaisgano said he didn't have all the information he needed. When GKN Automotive Components put the winning car on display at Cobo Hall during the SAE convention in January, Blaisgano did sketches of details not clearly shown in the photos — the writing on the nose, the shape of the air scoops, the front suspension, where it is tied into the body, and how the brake line runs along it.

He even sketched areas that wouldn't show in the painting. "Because I still wanted to know what was going on with the suspension in

relation to the air ducts and inside the skirt."

The scene which Blaisgano and Walter Hayes decided to go with has the Renaissance towers and a large crowd on the right, the winner in the foreground, the Ambassador Bridge in the left rear, and a photographer perched on the wall at left.

THE THREE drivers of the cars behind the winner (not in the order they finished) are Nigel Mansell, Great Britain; Didier Pironi, France; and Keke Rosberg of Finland, current world champion.

The setting is one of the two fastest stretches of the Detroit course, and Blaisgano said they were probably going at least 160 miles an hour there, although they all are capable of much faster speeds.

Blaisgano said the Detroit Grand Prix becomes more significant because there are only 16 races on the whole schedule, "probably 10 are in Europe. This was the last year for the Long Beach Formula One race. Next year it will be CART cars (Indianapolis 500-type cars)." The Las Vegas race will change to CART cars this year.

He said Formula One racing is exciting because the car body and engine design, from year to year, are

innovative and constantly changing.

HE WAS complimented when Robert McCabe, the founder of Detroit Grand Prix racing, came out to Birmingham twice to see the sketches and progress. Blaisgano said McCabe's two visits "were most encouraging to me."

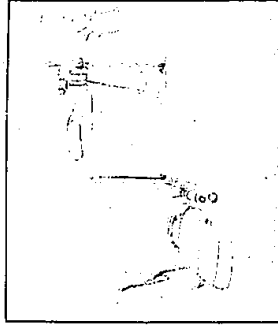
While Blaisgano always refers to his preliminary works as sketches, many are complete in themselves, done with color and detail.

For the Detroit Grand Prix painting, like many others, he ended up with one wall of the living room filled with sketches so he could study, look them over and decide on the final composition.

One of the early sketches, rejected for this commission, may itself end up as a full-blown painting. The corner of Christ Church is on the left, the cars in the center and race marshals on the right.

There is a display of Blaisgano's original sketches for the Detroit Grand Prix as well as several European races and drivers photographs of other works in the lobby window of First Federal of Michigan in downtown Detroit to coincide with the Detroit event.

With this commission completed, he is working on sketches in prepa-



Detail drawing was done from a close-up look at the actual winning McLaren-Ford when it was exhibited at Cobo Hall last January. With a fine arts degree from Notre Dame, five years with General Motors Styling and many more as a Grand Prix painter, Blaisgano has an inside track on the mechanical details that are important to the success of his work.

ration for a series of paintings for the Ernest and Julio Gallo Winery of California.

Vineyards and the wine-making industry are another Blaisgano specialty.

For relaxation in his few free moments, he likes to do small still lifes of fruit and vegetables, more

closely aligned to Old Master works than pistons and cam shafts.

Blaisgano is one successful artist who may never have a local gallery show. Commissioners keep him busy most of each year. Traveling usually is combined with research. He keeps on his own personal fast track.

"Electra's Garden" by Dorothy Delahanty of Beverly Hills was awarded first prize by show judge Ken Gross, who is the director of the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association. The entries were pre-selected by a committee from the sponsoring, Central Woodward Christian Church of Troy. The show, with more than 60 artists, will open at 5 p.m. Friday.



Church fair mixes food, fun and art

Central Woodward Christian Church of Troy has been expanding the festivities that go along with its art fair ever since the event started four years ago.

This year's art show and sale will be held Friday and Saturday and will find the men of the church cooking hot dogs on the lawn and helping with the homemade ice cream for the ice cream social.

Inside and on the lawn will be a variety of art work by some 60 or more artists.

There will be quite a lot of repeats from last year and some from all four years," said Cy Galley, art show chairman, explaining that she tries to get a good representation from many kinds of artists — painting, sculpture, photography, loaded and blown glass, fiber and graphics.

Since Galley started the art fair and has been involved in a leadership capacity ever since, she enjoys some particular satisfaction. "It's been quite worthwhile for us from a monetary

standpoint and we're picked up new members through these shows."

Commenting "This church loves to eat," she said dinner will be served on Friday evening, lunch on Saturday and the ice cream social on Saturday.

The artists are invited to participate and Galley and her committee screen the work and then invite a judge to choose the winners.

This year, Ken Gross, director, Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association judged the entries.

Award winners are: First prize, Dorothy Delahanty, watercolor; second, Carole Hadley, watercolor; third, Constance Powell-Teeple, mixed media; unique in show, Lee Young Sung, oriental embroidery; merit awards, Nancy Bagle, Phil Savaglio and Susan Velick; honorable mention, Bill Borden, Pamela Thompson, Jody Lutz, Pat Dunn Bremner and Steven Yurmanovic.

The fair will be open 5-9 p.m. Friday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, 3855 W. Big Beaver (at Adams), Troy.