



## Keeping heads cool

### Architect adapts space device to build race drivers' helmets

By Tom Henderson  
staff writer

If Sunday is a hot, sweltering day in downtown Detroit, many of the Grand Prix drivers will thank a local architect for the funny little cap that keeps them cool.

Dennis Carlson is the architect. The little cap with the tubes running out the back has become a full-time business that grossed \$230,000 in its first fiscal year, which ended May 30. He runs the business, Carlson Technology, out of a small office in the McLaren Engines building on Eight Mile in Livonia.

Autos used to be Carlson's hobby. For a living, the Farmington Hills resident was an architect for Harley, Ellington, Pierce, Yee and Associates of Southfield.

Carlson designed the pediatrics department at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, the chemistry lab addition at the University of Michigan and the Dalton Center at Western Michigan; he was heavily involved in the Volkswagen of America headquarters on Big Beaver in Troy, the Wharton Center for the Performing Arts at Michigan State and the Energy Control Center for Consumers Power in Jackson; he was in charge of site selection for the Oakland Technology Park in Auburn Heights, which will be the location for the new Chrysler and EDS headquarters.

WHILE YOU can take the man out of the car, you can't always take the car out of the man. As a sophomore at Livonia Bentley in 1962, Carlson won a national contest for model-car designing and building; cars have been a passion for him since.

But it wasn't until 1977 that Carlson began easing into the business of auto racing.

"I was listening to J.P. McCarthy after (Bruce) McLaren had won the Indianapolis 500 in 1976, and he said McLaren operated out of Livonia," said

Carlson. "I thought, 'Jeez, wouldn't that be fun to be part of an Indy team?' I drove up and down Eight Mile, but in those days there wasn't a sign on the building. So I went to a phone booth and looked up the phone number and address. I kept driving by saying, 'No, there'd never be any need for someone like me.' It took me until 1977 to get up enough nerve to stop by ever."

It turned out there was at first a little need for someone like Carlson, and then a big need. He began hanging out doing odd jobs just to be part of a racing team. In 1978, one of McLaren's drivers, Patrick Tambay, passed out from heat during the Brazilian Grand Prix, and McLaren asked Carlson if he could design a cooling system for the drivers to wear.

Carlson had worked with NASA on solar heating projects in the mid-70s and asked NASA for advice on how they kept astronauts cool in space. NASA used a glycol solution running through tubes into a cap fitted over the astronaut's head.

What was good enough for NASA was good enough for Carlson, who designed a system involving tiny pumps, tubes and a tight-fitting cap for Grand Prix and Indy drivers and incorporating a vest for drivers of the much-larger stock cars.

THE RESULTS ARE, as they say, history. As word of mouth spread among the drivers, so did demands for more systems. Up to 10 of the 24 Grand Prix drivers in Sunday's race will use his \$2,500 systems if the weather is hot. He has sold up to 200 of them over the years to all types of racers, including 74 in his first year of full-time labor, and expects to sell 100 this year.

Among Grand Prix teams that have bought his systems are McLaren, Lotus, Tyrrell, Renault and Williams. Indy drivers using it are Bobby Rahal (who wasn't wearing it when he won this year's Indy), Al Unser Jr. and Geoff Brabham. Stock-car

drivers include Geoff Bodine, Dale Earnhardt, Cate Yarborough, Bill Elliott, A.J. Foyt and Richard Petty, who recently won his 1,000th race in one.

The most telling example of Carlson's success was perhaps in the Dallas Grand Prix in 1984. Keke Rosberg drove to victory on a day when it was 142 degrees on the track, and 115 in the pits and credited the system for staying cool.

Ironically, one of the drivers who didn't use it — "we can't afford the 8 pounds," said his crew chief, whom Carlson tactfully refuses to name — collapsed from the heat; a photo of him sprawled unconscious on the ground next to his car adorns a wall in Carlson's office.

Said Bodine after winning the Budweiser 500 in 90-degree weather in Delaware in May: "I might not be here if I hadn't had it. . . the suit had me fresh at the end when we had a sprint situation."

ALL OF WHICH has Carlson looking ahead and not back. Though he walked away from a well-paying job and 15 years of seniority when a six-month leave of absence expired last year, he has no regrets.

"When Rosberg won the Dallas Grand Prix and I picked up a New York Times and Dallas Herald and they had segments saying Rosberg was wearing one of my cooling systems, that gives me more satisfaction (than architecture). . . Things haven't slowed down for me to regret it or even think about it," said Carlson, 40.

He admits to 80-hour work weeks, which include building units at McLaren at night when the engine builders go home and traveling the world ministering to the needs of his clients.

(He employs two part-timers and one full-time employee, Barry Reynolds of Redford.)

The only regret I would have had is if I had decided to remain an architect and never found out what I could do with this," he said.



PAUL EGGERT photo

Dennis Carlson, in his office at Carlson Technology, made a dream come true: 'Jeez, wouldn't that be fun to be part of an Indy team?'

## Detroit chamber taps suburbanites

Area residents are among those named directors of the Detroit Chamber of Commerce at the organization's annual meeting Tuesday.

Serving their first three-year terms are William L. Alken, president and chief executive officer of ACO Inc., Robert E. Carlson, president and chief executive officer of Crowley Milner Co., and A. Robert Stevenson, vice president of government and public relations of K mart Corp., all of Birmingham; Richard M. Gabrys, partner in charge, De-

lroitte, Haskins & Sells, of Bloomfield Hills; and George H. Hill, president of Diversified Chemical Technologies of Farmington Hills.

Confirmed for second three-year terms were Richard H. Bicerly, senior vice president of human resources management services for Burroughs Corp. of West Bloomfield; and William F. Pickard, owner/operator of McDonald's restaurants and president of Regal Plastics of Bloomfield Hills.

## State venture funds go to AA, suburban firms

High technology companies in the suburbs and Ann Arbor are the biggest receivers of state venture capital investments, according to the Michigan Department of Treasury.

Treasurer Robert A. Bowman said the state retirement system has invested \$48 million in the past three years in 23 companies. About one-third went into Oakland County suburbs, and another one-third went into Ann Arbor firms.

"So far, Michigan retirees have benefited from a \$9 million return from our venture capital investments in this state," said Bowman.

SUBURBAN FIRMS receiving \$15.3 million in state investments are:

• Percepton Inc., Farmington Hills, maker of machine vision systems — \$6.2 million in December of 1982. It was the largest single investment in the state.

• ALC Communications, Birmingham, telecommunications, \$3.4 million in July of 1983.

• Vixen Motors, Pontiac, recreational vehicles, \$5.7 million — the third largest investment.

Seven Ann Arbor firms received \$14.9 million in investments, and

Bowman called that area the "Silicon Valley of the Midwest."

They are Synthetic Vision Systems Inc., \$5.4 million; Concor Computer Corp., \$1.2 million; Irwin Magnetic Systems, \$1.8 million; Applied Intelligent Systems, \$2.6 million; PTC Technologies, \$1.3 million; Attache Software, \$2 million; and ST Systems, \$300,000.

"While our first priority is to make money for our retirees, it's exciting to be able to invest in high-tech ventures that will lead us into the next century," he said.

## The 1985-86 Detroit Area Women's Yellow Pages

A Directory of Women in Business, Professions, Services, and Women's Organizations.

(Serving Oakland, Wayne & Macomb Counties)



Order of current Women's directory.

## Women's directory readied

Preparations for the 1986-87 "Tri-County Women's Yellow Pages" are under way.

The directory will contain listings from women in Oakland, Wayne and Macomb counties. Publication is set for the fall. New material should be submitted by July 1.

Some 40,000 copies of the directory are distributed free to women's organizations, women's centers and bookstores.

Last year's "Women's Yellow Pages" listed 280 women in 95 occupational categories, including private detectives and veterinarians. Largest groups were attorneys, counselors and certified public accountants. Best represented areas were Birmingham, downtown Detroit, Southfield, Livonia and Farmington.

Copies of last year's "Yellow Pages" are available free by calling publishers Maggie Hostetler and Lorr Sipes in Ann Arbor at 662-2957. Both work at other jobs — Hostetler as a freelance writer and Sipes as an architect.

The tri-county publication is an outgrowth of their four-year-old Ann Arbor directory. Across the nation, 50 such directories are published, they said, and the publishers have organized a national association.

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