

# Who's racing cars anymore? Not anybody like you or me



**DAN MCCOSH**

Detroit's first running of the Innotech Grand Prix on Belle Isle, where the deer and the antelope play, was at least a qualified success. Execration-ingly well-organized, the Grand Prix moved the crowds on and off the island considerably faster than the average Sunday afternoon Teamster's picnic. The course was terrific, and the driving as exciting as it gets.

A couple of months from now, the hangover will set in, as Detroit hosts the Formula One race in the U.S., and the reason is that it is just too expensive — about \$3 million per race, and the last Formula One race in Phoenix drew fewer than 20,000 spectators.

This weekend, on the Detroit River, a handful of unlimited powerboats will be running what may well be their last season. These guys haven't attracted big-time corporate sponsors, and the half-dozen or so of the thumblers still run-

ning aren't enough to fill out a racing season.

What gives?

The common pattern to all this is that what started as a gut-level, half-raising spectacle that millions could identify with ends up as a big-backs event staged for TV. In the early days of stock car racing and outlaw racing, powerful machines roared out of back-country garages. Characters raced them, outlaws and good guys battling it out, and the crowds that turned out were cheering for real heroes. Today, the top drivers are second-and-third generation, simply because the name recognition gets the top sponsor money. It's pitiful that today the biggest sponsors of racing cars are cigarette companies otherwise banned from the airwaves. The promoters couldn't care less about a living and breathing crowd, as long as it gets on the air.

Now they are trying to breathe life into Detroit Dragway again, where anybody used to be able to pay an entry fee and line up to race along with the best. Run what you bring. Who ever heard of a sponsor on television?

That's the kind of racing that just isn't for sale anymore.

Dan McCosh is automotive editor of Popular Science magazine.

## Save from NEXT PAGE

look at thousands of pieces of merchandise and know it's one price." "Customers see that new merchandise is priced only at a dollar, and when they shop at other places, it's higher," said Jeffrey Bell, district manager for Dollar Tree. "They feel they get excellent value for a dollar."

### Shoppers profiled

"Generally, somebody who is a budget shopper, who has a tight pocketbook, will shop at a 13 Below," Marx said. "An affluent shopper may go to a dollar store. It's something to do. It's a penny arcade for adults."

Dollar Tree, now in its third year of business in Michigan, has stores in Troy, Rochester Hills, Southfield and Livonia. Dollar Bill's first came to Michigan last July and now has stores in Livonia, Redford and Westland.

Variety stores generally are viewed as impulse rather than destination stops.

"We put them into plazas and malls basically because we have the shoppers coming to us," Bell said. "We kind of draw a lot of customers into those stores."

### 'Sharp customers are dollar aware. They will shop better stores and end up buying from us.'

**Rob Laski**  
general manager for 13 Below

"We started 5 1/2 years ago. We've had numerous people (competitors) come after us. We found it very challenging when we started. Some would say it's a junk store. It's quality merchandise at a value price," Bell said.

### Merchandise varies

Customers never really know what they'll find in variety stores.

"We usually don't have the same merchandise for repeat buys," Bell said. "It's a surprise every week. Our main office is in Norfolk, Va., but each individual store orders as per their needs."

Corporate provides a list of available goods, Bell added.

"It (concept) is real sexy now," Marx said. "You never know what's going to be there. People have fun with them."

Merchandise offered generally is of decent quality, he added. Supplies come from odd lots, remnants, over-shippments and canceled orders.

"All is first-run merchandise, no seconds, no damaged goods," Laski said. "We work with buying offices in New York. Probably at any point in time, we have 100-200 buyers looking for us. When a deal pops, we buy. We do a dollar figure. If we can't, we pass." Dollar Tree buys directly from manufacturers to save on shipping costs, Bell said. About 20 percent is closeouts, he added.

13 Below has stores in Troy, Redford and Livonia. "Sharp customers are dollar aware," Laski said. "They will shop better stores and end up buying from us."

### Shoppers comment

Several shoppers were interviewed last week outside of a Dollar Bill's and 13 Below store at Redford Plaza.

"I've seen the same cereal in grocery stores for \$3 or \$4 dollars. Here, it's a dollar. You can get real good bargains," said Angie Cruz.

"You don't have to pay that much money and they have nice clothes," said Jessica Montgomery.

But those sentiments weren't unanimous.

"Everything you buy in those (variety) stores is cheap," said Kevin Kulyk. "I don't think it's worth it." Their stores are profitable, Laski and Bell said, declining to provide specific numbers.

Marx wonders whether the mushrooming of variety stores can be supported by the customer base.

## BUSINESS PEOPLE

**MARVIN J. FUDALLA** of Bloomfield Hills was appointed general manager, IFF SWF Auto-Electric North America. Fudalla had been vice president for business planning and administration with Vexplex Corp.

**JOSEPH J. PIETRANGOLI**, most recently director of purchasing at Jered Brown Brothers in Troy, was named director of purchasing at Jervis B. Webb Co. in Farmington Hills.

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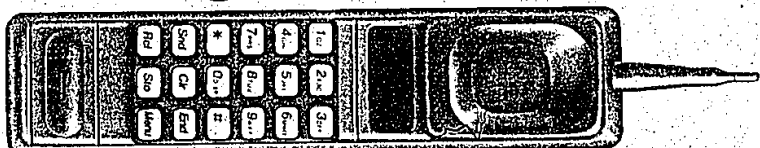


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