

## Warwick Brown (OKG67) – In His Own Words

The “Tasman Series” was held in two countries: New Zealand in January and Australia in February on eight different racetracks over consecutive weekends. This schedule was murder on the mechanics and engineers, but fantastic for the drivers.

The year I won the Tasman, I was also successful in winning the NZ Grand Prix held at Pukekohe Circuit near Auckland. In doing so, I became one of only two Aussie drivers, I believe, to win both the NZ and Australian Grand Prix’s double. My “Tasman Series” win also resulted in our Team and myself becoming the only Australians to ever achieve this international result.

The Tasman Series was run for 12 years (1964 – 1975). It was designed for the fastest and quickest open wheel racing cars of the day. Approximately, halfway through the Series, the F 5000 cars were added to the mix as they were proving to be the quickest and most spectacular formula cars racing on the world stage during that time. Additionally, the top F-1 drivers of the day were finding it more difficult time wise to visit the Antipodeans for two months out of each year, even though it was held during the European winter holiday period. When the F 5000s started to race, they dominated and were driven by some F-1 drivers of the day and other international Champion drivers.

In the 12 international Series conducted, there were eight winning drivers (myself included). Only three are still living

Bruce McLaren* – New Zealand (F-1 Driver)	1964
Jim Clark* – Scotland ( F-1 World Champion)	1965, 1967,1968
Jackie Stewart – Scotland (F-1 World Champion)	1966
Chris Amon* – New Zealand (F-1 Driver)	1969
Graeme Lawrence – New Zealand (F-5000 Champion)	1970
Graham McRae* – New Zealand (F-5000 Champion)	1971,1972,1973
Peter Gethin* – England (F-1 Driver and F5000 Champion)	1974
Warwick Brown – Australia (F 5000 Driver)	1975

\* deceased

During the first six years, the cars were the current F1 and F2 cars of the day powered by slightly reduced size capacity engines (3.0 Litre down to 2.5 Litre). During the second six years, the F-5000 type (5 Litre capacity) cars were added. The racing became closer, and the spectacle, the noise, excitement and pure violence of the cars was unprecedented.

It was during my first full Tasman Series in 1973 that I suffered my massive near career ending accident at the Surfers Paradise Raceway. I was 23 years old at the time. Two broken legs, every bone in both ankles broken and I was only centimetres away from being a quadriplegic / paraplegic when the engines water pump penetrated the seat back into my back. The result was three months in hospital and about nine months to recover. It’s fair to say that this decade in motor racing was the most dangerous time in all history. By today standards, the tracks were very unsafe, the cars’ strength to sustain impacts was minimal and the speeds were unbelievably high – all a recipe for high injury and death rates for drivers.

Following my 1975 Series win, which went down to the final 8<sup>th</sup> round at the International Sandown circuit in Melbourne, there were three drivers, including myself all tied on 30 points. I led all the laps except the final two when I ran out of fuel. After a quick pit stop, I finished 6<sup>th</sup> to win the Series by a single (1) point. It was the closest finish of the Series.

The Series subsequently folded due to politics, politics and money, especially with the financially weaker New Zealand promoters. During the following four years, 1976-1980, the Australian promoters still carried on and they ran their four races, with the Series renamed the "International Rothmans Series". I won the 1977 and 1978 editions. During the 1977 series, I won the "Australian Grand Prix" at Sydney's Oran Park Raceway. In the 1978 series, I won four out of the four races, an unprecedented clean sweep.

So, in terms of a Driver's bucket list, the winning of his own country's Grand Prix is a dream come true. However, in terms of his career momentum, winning the second most prestigious racing series did far more to promote my career. On my return to the US following this Tasman Series victory, the American's were not overly surprised to see me racing competitively with their own icon drivers, Mario Andretti (1978 F-1 World Champion) and other US heroes like the Unser brother's AL and Bobby, and Englishman Brian Redman (whom I personally rated the best of the best that I ever raced against).

Finally, my disappointing and only Formula 1 race at Watkins Glen in the US, which I raced for Frank Williams in 1976: the car, and in fact the whole weekend, were a disaster for us. However, I did out-qualify my Italian teammate, Arturo Merzario who had driven for this team for the whole year. I gave the team their 2<sup>nd</sup> best race result for the year (14<sup>th</sup> place). The car finished with no front brakes and two of the five gears missing. That race in 1976 placed me as the 9<sup>th</sup> Australian driver to ever race a Formula 1 car. Current Australian driver Daniel Ricciardo is number 17. A rare club you will agree.