

Talented Brazilian Gil de Ferran (*right*) has yet to fulfill his undoubted potential. His second season in Indy Car racing was spoiled by a number of unnecessary first-lap accidents.

Below right: With team owner Jim Hall (*left*) announcing his retirement from racing, de Ferran is switching to Derrick Walker's team in 1997.

Bottom: The Pennzoil Reynard-Honda was expected to be a regular race winner but a disappointing season yielded only a single win at Cleveland.



Hall Racing

Base: Midland, Texas

Driver: Gil de Ferran

Sponsor: Pennzoil

Chassis: Reynard 961

Engines: Honda Indy V8

Tires: Goodyear

Wins: 1; Poles: 1

PPG Cup points: 104 (6th)



Hall Racing held a great deal of promise in 1996. Gil de Ferran's confidence had been boosted by a superb victory in the previous year's finale at Laguna Seca and the Gerald Davis-managed team was properly prepared after a concerted test program following its switch to Honda engines. A second-place finish at Homestead was surely a portent of things to come.

For a variety of reasons, however, the season did not go at all according to plan. Quite why is harder to assess.

The team was hobbled by all man-

ner of glitches in the early part of the year, and the excruciating loss in Long Beach, where de Ferran led handily until felled by a broken hose clamp, of all things, was especially hard to take. The Brazilian worked well with his two engineers, Bill Pappas and Chuck Matthews, and Alex Hering's crew always presented him with two of the most immaculate cars to be found anywhere along pit lane.

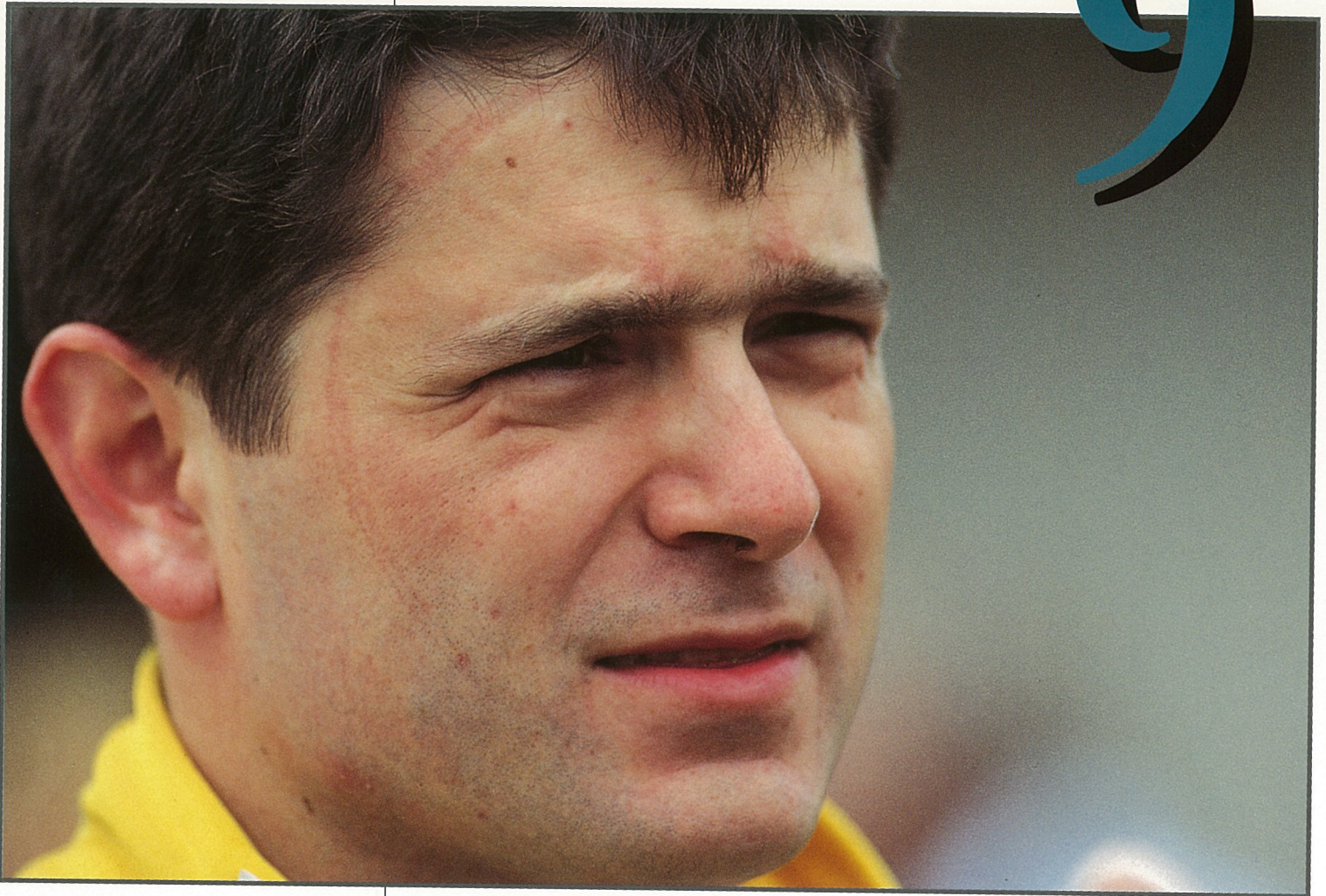
The victory in Cleveland was a true team effort. A decision was made early on to employ a two-stop

strategy, which turned out to be a smart move. Excellent pit stops and a disciplined drive by de Ferran brought a welcome reward.

Surprisingly, apart from his pole in Long Beach and a second on the grid at Road America, de Ferran rarely qualified well. Perhaps that fact contributed to his involvement in a series of first-lap incidents, which effectively killed his chances of winning the championship after working his way into contention three-quarters of the way through the season.



gil de ferran

*Gil de Ferran**Date of birth: November 11, 1967**Residence: Indianapolis, Ind.**Indy Car starts in 1996: 16**PPG Cup ranking: 6th**Wins: 1; Poles: 1; Points: 104*

Gil de Ferran was much in demand during the month of July. His victory at Cleveland moved him firmly into contention for the PPG Cup title and he was engaged in talks with several team owners about a drive in 1997. His name also had been linked to at least a couple of Formula 1 opportunities. De Ferran ultimately signed for Derrick Walker following Jim Hall's decision to retire, although the fact he slipped to sixth in the point standings represented a major disappointment.

It was truly a topsy-turvy year for the Brazilian, who began as one of the favorites for honors following his superb victory at the end of the 1995 season and Hall's subsequent decision to switch to Honda engines. A second-place finish at Homestead represented a promising start. De Ferran ran equally well in front of his home fans in Rio, only to be delayed by a fuel system problem. But that setback paled into insignificance at Long Beach, where he controlled the event until a hose-clamp failure robbed his engine of boost with just five laps remaining. Fifth place represented scant reward.

His drive to victory in Cleveland was exemplary, but in the latter part of the year he became involved in a series of first-lap mishaps. Matters came to a head when he accused Zanardi of pushing him off the road at Road America; but de Ferran had been under strict instructions from his team not to try any bold moves on the first lap . . .

De Ferran was curiously inconsistent during his sophomore season. He will need to improve upon that anomaly, and curb his enthusiasm in the early laps, if he is to fully realize his obvious potential.