

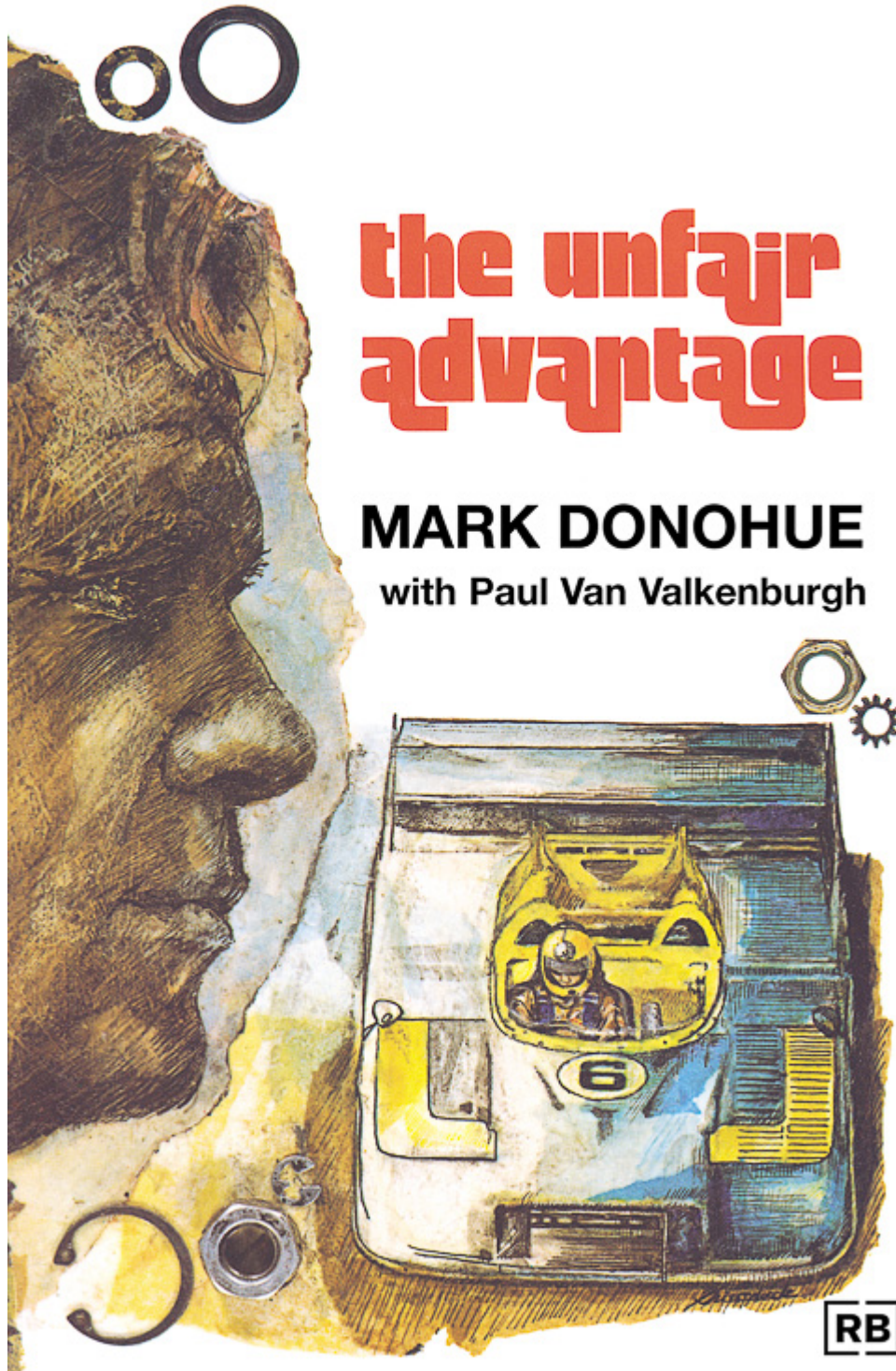


www.porscheroadandrace.com

The Unfair Advantage

Published: 27th November 2017 By: Glen Smale

Online version: <https://www.porscheroadandrace.com/the-unfair-advantage/>



The story of Mark

Donohue's racing achievements has been told in numerous magazine articles over the years.

His achievements too, in the famous #6 Sunoco Porsche 917/30 in the 1973 Can-Am series, have been similarly covered many times. But until I read *The Unfair Advantage*, I had little knowledge of Donohue's struggle through the various other racing cars and series that he competed in between 1958 and 1975.

Reading *The Unfair Advantage* recently, I discovered just what a down-to-earth guy Donohue was. His manner and his approach to anything that he tackled, whether small or large, was the same - he was thorough to the *nth* degree. In short, Mark Donohue was the sort of guy you would want to have as a buddy, because he would just as soon help you fix your soapbox as help you take the engine out of your race car.

There is no doubt that Donohue's mechanical engineering studies helped him to develop an analytical approach to problem solving, which in turn made him an invaluable asset to the Penske organisation.



Donohue runs away from the field in the McLaren M16 at the 1971 Pocono 500. This would be Donohue's first Indy car win. *Photo by Barry Teis*



The Penske team circa 1971. From left to right: Bill Blankenship, Don Cox, Earl MacMullin, Don Kean, Chuck Cantwell, Dick Webber, John Woodard, Bill McCormell. Mark Donohue sits on the Ferrari 512, opposite the McLaren M16. The Javelin can just be seen in the background. *Donohue Collection*

"And remember in '71, when we had the best car at the [Indianapolis Motor] Speedway and lost the transmission, and then went up to Pocono? That was probably the most dynamic run he ever had, when he raced against Joe Leonard and those guys. He just blew everybody off. He was outstanding that day. Outstanding."
-Roger Penske

The Penske shop in Newtown Square, Pennsylvania, 1971. While driving for Penske Racing, Donohue spent most off-track hours here working with the mechanics on the painstaking engineering that went into each car. He actually lived for a time on the top floor of the building in the foreground. *Photo by Pete Lyons*



160 BentleyPublishers.com



The high-winged Lola T190 at Sebring. This was the car's only race, and Donohue's first Formula A race. He would run in the top three for the weekend, but ended up not finishing due to a clogged fuel filter (see page 213). *Photo by Barry Teis*

Together with work colleague and friend, Paul van Valkenburgh, the pair recorded on tape approximately 150,000 words covering Mark's life as a racer. Van Valkenburgh then knocked that into shape so that the reader could enjoy this unparalleled story of pain, growth and glory. The author of the book, Paul van Valkenburgh, is quick to point out that he merely moved a few words around here and there, to make the story that much more readable. All of which just goes to show that Donohue dictated the narrative pretty much as you see it.

What makes this account of Donohue's story so refreshing, is the fact that he is so honest in admitting when he made a mistake or messed up. This is so uncommon in today's society

where people are quick to look for someone else to blame in order not to look bad, because it may negatively affect their image. Donohue analyses the races he competed in, telling the reader where he blew it, or where he was able to get one up on the rest of the field.

The title of the book comes from his hard work in trying to improve the cars he raced in order to gain an advantage, or as he put it, an unfair advantage - hence the name of the book. The writer, or rather Mark Donohue himself, explains how they tested and retested numerous cars, exploring ways in which the team could improve their chances on the track. You have to take your hat off to Roger Penske, who in all of this, never wavered in his belief and support for Donohue, and this no doubt played a big part in building his confidence on the track.

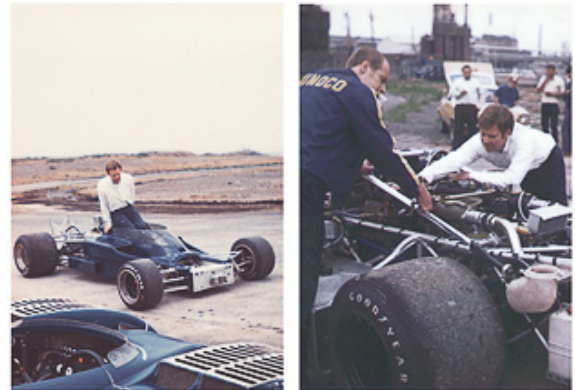


The 1200+ horsepower 917-30 Porsche at Mosport in 1973. This was its first race and Donohue would not win due to an accident. Aside from Mosport, whenever the 917-30 finished, it won. *Photo by Don Markle*

Donohue checks the wing angle on Hurley Haywood's 917-10 while Eckart Schneider, one of Haywood's mechanics (on left) Haywood (second from left), and John "Woody" Woodard (behind Donohue) look on. *Photo by Hal Crocker*



Donohue and the Porsche 917-50 leading the field at Laguna Seca in October 1973. A hopeful George Follmer in the 917-10 tucks in close behind, but Donohue would go on to win this race as he did most of the others with the 917-30. *Photo by Cam Warren*



The skid pad at Sun Oil's Marcus Hook facility. Donohue works on both the 917-30 (left) and the Lola T330 (right) at the same time. Both cars are not even fully painted yet and the aerodynamic louver modification to the front fenders of the 917-30 is clearly visible in primer. This is where the suspension of many cars was sorted out. *Photos by Tom McKeon*

The book is written mostly in chapters that cover a year at a time, so that the reader can follow Donohue's progress and development with ease. Donohue was also quick to give credit and praise where this was due, especially to his faithful chief mechanic, John Woodard, but he would equally not suffer fools who he came across on the track.

As van Valkenburgh pointed out in his introduction, Mark Donohue was not born a great racing driver, but that over time, with much hard work, he became a great racing driver. Having spoken with racing drivers and others who were around when Donohue was racing, you are left with no doubt that he was just like the guy next door. And couldn't we do with a few more like him today!

If there is one thing that I was slightly disappointed with in this book, it is that there is no final chapter given to explain the circumstances surrounding the very untimely and tragic accident that took his life. It isn't that, as readers of this type of book we are not aware of when or where he died, but it would have rounded off a truly engaging story of a great racing driver, in a respectful way.

I am sorry I was not able to buy a copy of the hardcover edition of this book when it was originally published in 1975, but the new softcover edition is enhanced with 100 new photos, as well as a preface written by Mark's two sons, Michael and David. A chronology of Mark Donohue's racing career is also included.

This story kept my attention from beginning to end, and I thoroughly enjoyed every page. If you are interested in historic racing today, or an avid follower of Porsche racing history, or simply a motorsport enthusiast, this book will satisfy all your needs. You don't want to miss getting a copy of this new edition, if you, like me, missed out first time round.

Key Information

Title	The Unfair Advantage
Authors	Mark Donohue with Paul van Valkenburgh
Publisher	Bentley Publishing
Published	2000
ISBN	978-0-8376-0069-7
Pages & images	368 pages; 53 color/62 B&W photos
Format	155.5mm (6 1/8 in.) x 235mm (9 1/4 in.)
Cover	Softcover



www.porscheroadandrace.com

Language	English
----------	---------

Price	\$34.95
-------	---------

Written by: Glen Smale

Share this: