

NOT ENOUGH ODDS

by D. M. Bartley

IT IS QUESTIONABLE that ever in the history of racing has there been an event fraught with so many complications and tensions as the second Grand Prix of Cuba. The accident, which unfortunately killed seven spectators and injured 30 more, was not nearly as serious as that of Le Mans in 1955, but the political tension which culminated in the unbelievable kidnapping of world champion Juan Manuel Fangio, the fantastic number of armed policemen and army men crowded into the pit areas, guarding the Sports Palace, stationed at very close intervals around the entire 3.46 mile circuit and even in the hotels where the drivers and crew members were staying; all this made it impossible to forget that one was in a country on the edge of serious revolt.

The abduction itself was accomplished with incredible ease. The night before the race one man walked into the crowded lobby of Fangio's hotel, leaving two cohorts standing at the entrance. The man walked inconspicuously over to Fangio's chauffeur who was standing several yards away from the desk where Fangio was talking with friends about where they should have dinner. The man quickly frisked the chauffeur, then moved over to the group at the desk, showed his gun and spoke quietly but directly to the champion.

"You are Fangio?" he said. "Will you come with me, please, I am from the 26th of July Movement. Don't resist and you won't be hurt." (Fangio said later, "I felt he meant it.")

The two men blocking the entrance then let their pistols be seen. As the abductor walked Fangio out of the lobby, he said again to the astonished people in the lobby, "Don't move or I'll shoot," and that was the last anyone saw of the five times world champion for the next 29 hours.

With this, the entire city of Havana went wild. Moments later, the newspapers and wire services received phone calls saying, "This is the 26th of July Movement. At 8:55 p.m. we kidnapped Fangio." And within the hour, a cordon of police so tight that a cockroach couldn't have passed through it unidentified was thrown around the perimeter of the city.

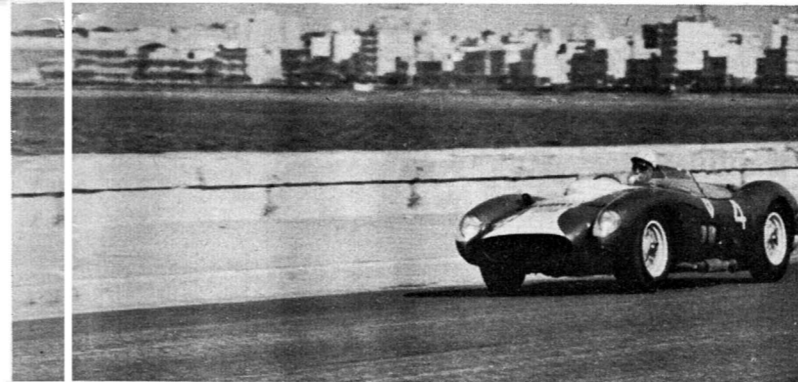
Of that first hour, Fangio says, "Just outside the hotel was a car. The three men with me were very courteous and said please, would I lie down on the floor of the back seat because they didn't want me to be hurt if there was gun fire. I did. They took me to a home where we stayed for perhaps 15 minutes. Then I was put into another car and driven—for not very long—to another house in the suburbs where I was kept for less than half an hour. I did not know where we were; I don't know the city of Havana well. I was in the back seat on that trip. I asked if they had a hat I could borrow since I didn't particularly want to be recognized then." (A Latin himself, Fangio is not unaware of the "shoot now, think later" temperament.) "Finally I was escorted to yet another car in which we traveled to a third home where I was kept until my release."

That night and the next morning, the homes and haunts of all know rebels, their friends and neighbors were searched without avail. On race day, practically every important official in Havana received anonymous phone calls, but what these unknown callers said to them—the police, the Sports Commission, Marcello Giambertone (Fangio's manager), the Argentine consul, the ambassador and the newspapers, wire services and radio and television stations—varied a great deal. Fangio was in safe hands and would be returned—immediately; for ransom; later; right after the race; at an



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Spectators gather at foot of monument to sinking of battleship "Maine". This sparked American intervention in Cuba, ending Spanish domination. At right, Moss speeds along the Malecon in North American Racing Team's 4.1 4-cam Ferrari, owned by Chinetti, de Vroom and Arents. Below, Fangio, released by rebel kidnapers many hours after the race had been stopped, recounts his experience.



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Wide World

unmentioned future date; Fangio would not be returned—ever. Fangio had been delivered to an address on the farthest side of the city from the circuit. Fangio was already in the distant headquarters of the revolutionists in Oriente Province. And no one—President Batista, the Argentinian officials, de Tomaso or Fangio's many other friends, nor the rapidly-growing horde of reporters and photographers—had the slightest idea which calls were genuine.

In the meantime, Fangio had not been having a bad time of it. "In the third house, after many more apologies by my captors (who seemed to be genuinely sorry that they had felt the need of involving me in their political matters), I was given a pleasant bedroom and had a good night's sleep in a comfortable bed. Probably the room was well guarded but I was not made aware of it.

"In the morning a woman brought me coffee, then breakfast in bed." Fangio grinned as he continued. "I must say that the 'accommodations' were in every way as good as those of a first-class hotel!

"I passed the morning and early afternoon in pleasant conversation with these men who did not seem to be bad sorts at all. They asked me if I wanted to watch the race on television but I said 'no.' Later that evening I did see television films of the accident. It was terrible."

As the hours passed from late afternoon into evening after the race, there was real concern for the champion, for there seemed to be no reason beyond their own self-protection that his kidnapers should not now return him. Finally, late that evening, the revolutionists telephoned an address to the Argentine ambassador, saying that Fangio would be found there. Around 11 p.m. he was again moved, for the fourth and last time, to a home on the outskirts of Havana, escorted into the empty house and told to wait there. He had not

been there long when the Ambassador himself arrived.

Fangio does not have a great deal to say about the entire incident, beyond what has already been quoted here. He does not know who the men were, "doubts" that he would recognize them again, has no idea where he was taken. He repeats that he was consistently well-treated.

As for missing the race, the champion summed it up neatly. "No, it was a sad race. I am not sorry I wasn't there."

Several days after, a cartoon appeared in a Havana paper which delighted the champion. It showed him being forced at gunpoint into the driver's seat of the kidnap car. The caption read, "Now you drive and then we'll see if they can catch us!"

Later Fangio told me that the only real concern he had had during the entire incident was that the rebels would find a way to take him to Oriente Province.

"I had visions of myself, bearded and wearing a forage cap, being forced to drive arms trucks up and down those mountain trails!"

It is futile to discuss the impropriety of the revolutionists in taking a great sportsman in order to further their pur-

poses. It is a *fait accompli*. The Cuban public undeniably felt that the successful abduction of Fangio proved that the rebels had a good deal more strength than expected. Further, they were effective in delaying the race, in drawing attention to the expenditure of government funds on sporting events when, in the opinion of the revolutionists, such funds should be spent instead to alleviate Cuba's serious unemployment, and unquestionably proved that the tremendous number of police were totally ineffective in protecting any given individual.

Even excluding the general tension so heightened by the Fangio kidnapping, the over-all organization of the Cuban Grand Prix was very bad. Less than a week before the race the organizers realized that they had no flags. On practice day, one of the flagmen attempted to indicate that there was oil on the course by waving *both* the red and yellow flag simultaneously. (And what was he doing with a red flag anyway?) The day before the race, the organizers still hadn't been able to obtain competent time-keepers, and less than one hour before the race began, I was asked if the time-keepers might borrow my stop watch. There was no communication between flag stations. The loudspeaker was unintelligible out on the course. At the time of the accident, red flags were waved near the site of the crash, but not elsewhere. And such proximity of spectators to the road should not, of course, have been permitted.

The brief race actually began about 1¼ hours late, partly because it was rumored that Fangio had been released and was on his way to the circuit, and partly because of incompleting organization. Gregory in John Edgar's old 4.9 Ferrari was first off the line. Moss quickly passed him in the North American Racing Team's 4.1 Ferrari. Then the Englishman held a very narrow lead for most of five laps, with Carroll Shelby in a 4.5 Maserati not far behind in third. On the fifth lap, Gregory passed Moss into the lead. Moments later, the Cuban driver Cifuentes lost control and plunged into the crowd.

In spite of all the poor organization of the race itself, the rescue work was quick, effective and totally above criticism. It was necessary to stop the race in order to get the injured out of the infield to the hospitals. Within a very short time, the ambulance teams had all the victims delivered to hospitals.

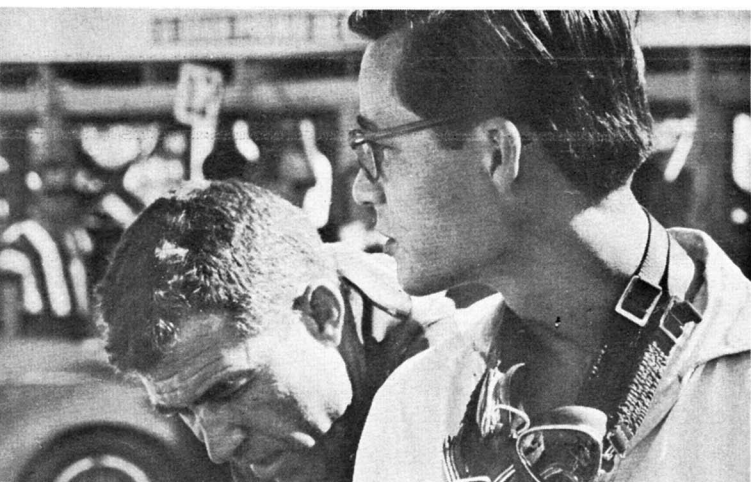
At the time of the accident, the drivers suffered considerable confusion. Red flags were shown at the accident site immediately, but not everywhere else. Because some drivers remembered the mis-use of the red and yellow flags during the previous day's practice, and others knew that according to regulations only the Clerk of the Course had the authority to stop a race, the response to the flags was far from uniform. Gregory, in the lead, slowed immediately at his first sight of the red flag at the crash scene. Moss didn't, and passed Gregory before the finish line. Moss was consequently awarded first place, the five laps constituting, according to F.I.A. regulations, a completed race under the circumstances. But the solution was clear, as Moss and Gregory agreed to split their prize money. Shelby was a definite third, but there is not much accuracy for the remaining 23 places.

As the rescue work continued, there was much concern in the pits as to whether or not someone had poured oil on the course, for a number of drivers agreed that they had never seen a road so slick. When one remembers that two practices *each* had been held for stock cars, production sports cars, motorcycles and modified sports cars in the two days preceding the race; that *all* of the first three groups had already raced on the course, laying down no small amount of rubber and oil during these preliminary races; that Mieres' Porsche had already stopped because it had lost *all* of its oil; that after four laps, Perdisa's Maserati was in the pits because it needed oil and that Bob Said's Ferrari clearly could be seen to leak a trail of oil through the corners, the suggestion of sabotage recedes into the ridiculous.

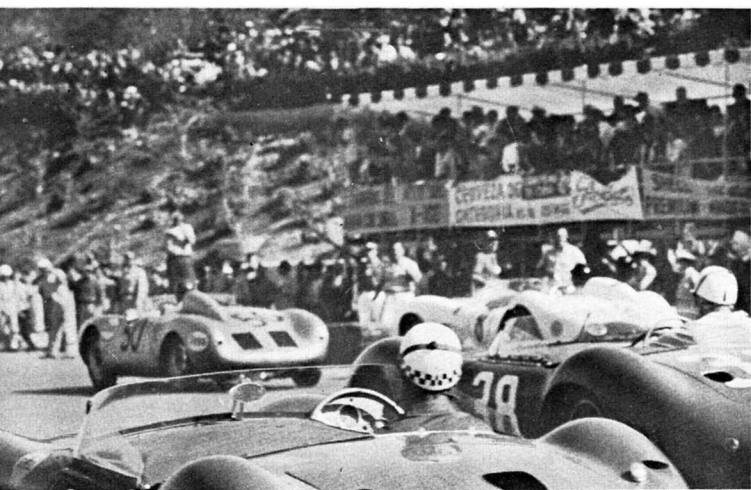
Before the start, spectators make last minute decisions about which side of the road to watch from; while in the pits, center, Shelby and Gregory confer.



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CUBA '58 (Continued)

Cifuentes certainly did everything he could to prevent the accident, but he was in over his head, so to speak. An amateur driver of little experience, like some half-dozen other drivers at Cuba, he should not have been accepted in a race of this calibre. The situation he found himself in initially was not too serious nor uncommon. Perhaps a well-experienced driver could have recovered without difficulty; Cifuentes did not.

It is, of course, true that any driver can lose control of his automobile at any point on any course in the world. The real question is that of making the best possible odds against such an accident involving any spectators.

At Cuba, the very nature of the course makes for poor odds. It is a long narrow loop running in gently sweeping curves following the shoreline for perhaps a mile and a half on Malecon Boulevard, followed by a half mile or so of connecting narrow streets which loop back to a shorter land-side stretch of the Boulevard, along which the pits were located. For some distance on either side of the little park between the two long curved stretches is a 50 foot-wide grass boulevard. Spectators were massed to the curb on both sides of this boulevard, as well as around most of the course. One reporter remarked that it looked as though they used spectators for snowfencing.

Beyond the danger inherent in the course itself, more problems stemmed from the fact that the entire organization was handled by the overworked personnel of the Cuban Sports Commission. Mr. Ernesto Azua, its competent director, worked incredible hours, but his ability to take care of all of the details of a major international race was seriously hampered by the work required from his Commission to arrange and promote two other major sporting events in the same week.

Without a doubt, he and everyone else involved with the event did their best. The conclusion must be that the best was not good enough. The F.I.A., which sanctioned the race again, having known that in 1957 spectators were permitted dangerously near the course, sent no observers to Cuba. The Cuban Sports Commission, with the best intentions in the world, set itself a job which no such small group of people could have handled properly. Human beings can accomplish just so much in a given length of time. They made a further error in not re-inviting such well-experienced racing officials as Canestrini, Kovacevitch and Bologna, who were of immense help last year.

Furthermore, as Nello Ugolini, team manager for Maserati, points out, the time has come when there *must* be qualification trials for entrants in international races. The seven people who were killed did not die as a result of a fluke accident like that of Le Mans. They just didn't have enough odds.

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After a fleet-footed Le Mans start, the course was crowded with speeding sports cars. Beyond Crawford in foreground are Mieres, Hill and Schell.