

# Contour Hardening: Heat Treating Company, Indy Car Sponsor

Major sponsorship of an Indy car was working out well for racing fans Mike Chaplin and John Storm. On May 25, a warm, clear day, the co-founders of Contour Hardening watched from their racetrack suite as their car, a bullet on wheels, tore into sixth place at the Indy 500.

The black-and-white car, Contour's gear logo big on its nose and sides, was racing around the track at more than 200 miles per hour, until lap 62.

Driver Richie Hearn was coming out of a quarter-mile straightaway on the track's north end. But, coming out of the short chute, he was driving on the high side of the track and raced across a stretch of "marbles." Those are little bits of tire rubber that come off the cars during the race and are blown to the track's high side, near the outside wall.

Chaplin, Contour's vice president, says: "It's like walking on marbles." And what happens to the car? "It goes where it wants to."

The car went into the outside wall. Hearn wasn't hurt in the crash, but the car was too damaged to go on. Officially, he finished 28th, his starting position. As for Contour, its major sponsorship was a one-race deal for just the Indy 500.

It was also a deal put together at racing speed, in little more than a day. But,

in a sense, it was a deal six years in the making.

Based in Indianapolis, Contour's ride to major sponsorship started May 16. Chaplin and Storm were at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway that Friday for practice day, when the track is open to drivers to practice with their cars.

They were also at the track because they wanted to become major sponsors of a car and driver, and they'd heard there were cars and drivers without major sponsors.

That day they found what they were looking for. The Sam Schmidt Motorsport team had a driver, but didn't have a car. Team Penske had a spare car, though, and owner Roger Penske was willing to loan it to Schmidt.

Still, Schmidt didn't have a major sponsor. Chaplin and Storm solved that problem in five minutes. Chaplin recalls their reaction to the chance: "We sort of looked at each other and said 'Let's go do it.'"

They were able to decide so quickly because they'd sponsored Indy cars for five years. From '97 through '01, Contour had been an associate sponsor, with small logos on its cars. Chaplin and Storm hadn't sponsored a car in '02, but they were still very familiar with Indy racing and sponsorship and could make a

snap decision.

The two race fans finished the deal Saturday, May 17. Hearn and Contour's car qualified on the 18th and the next Sunday jumped off the starting line at the Indy 500. But 62 laps later, they were done.

"It could have been a winning car," Chaplin says. "It was just as quick as any of the front runners."

Despite the car's finish, there is business value in Contour's sponsorship. The value comes from the fans who know the Indy rules for sponsorship.

As Chaplin explains, under Indy rules, sponsors with certain products, like motor oil and gears, have to use their products in their cars. Consequently, the Indy cars sponsored by Contour have raced using gears manufactured by the company's subsidiary, Contour Performance Products, and heat treated by Contour itself.

Thus, on race day, after the green flag is waved, Contour's car becomes a demonstration model as it tears around the track. Fans aware of the rules will see Contour's gear logo and know the company's support goes deeper than a coat of paint.

And those fans who are current or potential Contour customers will leave the track with an idea of how much stress and strain Contour gears can endure. The idea may suggest to them how the gears might perform in their applications.

"It's a 230-mile-per-hour billboard," Chaplin says. ☉



A Racing Billboard—The letters on the tires are blurs, but Contour Hardening's gear logo is clear on its car as it races at the 2003 Indianapolis 500. "It's a 230-mile-per-hour billboard," says Mike Chaplin, Contour's vice president.

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