

GRAND PRIX

Formula One in the deadly years



a novel by

Richard Melville

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by Richard Melville

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This is a work of fiction.

Reviews

I read the above story over two days, as I found it hard to put down.

The adventures of Will portrayed a lifestyle that most men can only dream about. He ticked all the right boxes with Formula One, sailing a Super Yacht and having affairs with beautiful females.

The description about racing in his machine was really excellent; you feel as if you were behind the wheel. This must be the best technical description of Formula One racing ever written.

I have to admit that I was sorry to come to the end of this story and only hope that there will be a sequel. — Roger Ashley Wilson

I was surprised how much I enjoyed this book. Will, the power struggle, politics and intrigue of F1 was interesting. The author clearly has knowledge of the F1 paddock. Great story that takes in racing, sailing and business. — Bruce Elliott

Over the years I have tried to find a good Formula One novel. I finally found it. — Douglas Harper

A fascinating insight into the exhilarating world of F1 motor racing, and the risks the drivers took to succeed. — Julie Haynes

About the Author

Grand Prix: Formula One in the deadly years reflects the life experiences of Richard Melville. Born in Jamaica, and after winning the Jamaica Grand Prix as a twenty-year-old, Richard set off for Europe to go motor racing via the US. There he shared an Austin Healey Sprite at Sebring with soon-to-be Formula-One World Champion Graham Hill, in 1961.

Among crashes, the highlights of that year in Europe were leading the BMC Team to Team Prize and Manufacturers' Award at the Nürburgring 500 Kilometre race, and winning at Snetterton in England.

In 1962 he teamed up with Ian Walker Racing. A big crash at Goodwood in the ex-UDT Laystall Lotus Elite the morning of Stirling Moss' accident was followed by a year of mechanical failures. He was the only survivor of the Ian Walker drivers. The other three were killed over the next few years. Those were the deadly years.

Richard returned to Jamaica, where he built up a successful construction business. During the course of this, he learned to fly, flying back and forth to Central America and the US, and not racing again till 1972.

Club racing Formula Fords in Florida wasn't challenging enough: Richard soon switched to the professional Gold Star Formula SuperVee series. He found himself an amateur against professionals, while running a difficult business, in what became known as the bad years in Jamaica. The Manley socialists with all their theories had come to power, cosyng up to Fidel Castro, nationalising businesses, causing capital flight, resulting in draconian laws, and destroying the economy, which never recovered.

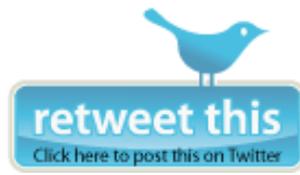
Richard's experiences are reflected in the novel. While trying to win an extremely competitive championship, he was being

distracted by the frustrations, failings, and challenges of a large cattle operation in Central America that was going wrong. At the same time Richard was running his construction business in violent times, while looking for opportunities to transfer it to Central America, extricating himself from Jamaica before the doors were closed, as had happened in Cuba.

By 1976 the risks far exceeded the rewards and after the union goons told him that they knew where he lived, Richard moved himself and his family to New Zealand, where he continued motor racing for another two seasons, finishing third in the New Zealand GP behind soon-to-be Formula One World Champion, Keke Rosberg, and soon-to-be Indy Car Champion, Bobby Rahal.

By 1980 Richard had set up the first contract processing lamb boning plant in New Zealand. The obvious inefficiencies in meat processing soon resulted in machines being developed and patented to enhance the handling and packaging of meat cuts.

Richard soon got hooked on the Kiwi sport of yachting, and after owning several yachts finally built his kauri wooden yacht *Grand Prix*, a half size version of *Imperialist*, designed and built by arguably the best designers and builders anywhere. After racing up to the Pacific Islands and Australia over the years, Richard has recently sailed *Grand Prix* to New Caledonia and across to Australia, and is now planning his next adventure.



Reading the first chapter of a new book: Formula One in the deadly years by Richard Melville. Get the first chapter for free!

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William Harold Archer pulled down hard for the last time on the shoulder straps of the six-point harness. He opened his hands and flexed his fingers, as he would do many times before the race was over. Grasping the gear lever with his right hand, he blipped the throttle, pushed in the clutch, released it, pushed it in again, and pulled the gear lever against its spring loading, to the left and back, graunching it into first gear.

At six feet, he was left little space by the aerodynamicists, and sat gripped in his seat in a semi-reclining position, shoulders squeezed in by the bodywork, his head enclosed by the roll-bar supports. He could see straight ahead and a bit to the side. The mirrors were near-useless. But it didn't matter as far as he was concerned: if he couldn't see them, they weren't there.

Among all the howling engines, Will couldn't hear his own, but he could feel the vibration through the back of his seat as he blipped the throttle. He knew his engine was making a racket behind his head, but he couldn't differentiate his racket from the rest. He hoped that the little fat man standing on the rostrum would drop the flag quickly, for if he delayed, and the car engine didn't overheat, the clutch would certainly burn out.

He was on the front row of the grid, in the last race of the season, but he wasn't on pole, which meant that he was on the left-hand side of the track, going into a right-hand corner. This was both a disadvantage and an advantage. On the outside the track was clean and well "rubbered in", as that was the path all the cars took into the downhill right-hand corner. On the inside of the corner, the grip was much less, because there was no rubber left on the road by previous cars braking hard into it. However, the pole-sitter had the inside line for the first corner, which ultimately gave him the advantage. Will hoped to jump the start, but he had to do it without getting caught. He was an expert at jumping starts. Starts weren't

the problem; finishes were. He hadn't finished many races this season: he had crashed in some, and had had mechanical problems in others. All in all, not a brilliant season, but at least he hadn't spent half of it in hospital, as he had in the previous one.

The starter lifted the flag over his head. Will increased the revs to 8000, and fixed his eyes on the starter's left shoulder. The instant that shoulder came up, he was going to drop the clutch. Waiting for the flag was too late; he needed to get into the right-hand corner from the left-hand side of the track, before all the others stormed up the inside. Will was not aware of the crowd in the stands to the left, nor the pits to the right. He was aware only of the roar of the engines, and the tightness in his chest. The shoulder moved! Drop the clutch, feel the wheelspin, ease off a bit, feel the tyres grip. "Get out of first gear quick, before you over-rev it," Will talked to himself: "Careful with the shift into second, don't miss it, can't hear the engine, too much noise." Total pandemonium; into third, into fourth, no time to look at the rev counter, nobody alongside.

The track sloped steeply down to the first corner. Down the hill, glance in the mirrors, just ahead of the pole car, out to the left-hand edge, brake hard, don't lock the brakes, the nose dips touching the ground, third, second, look in the right mirror, clear. Got the bastards! Up against the outside kerb, off the brakes, turn into the apex, the front wheel rides up over the red-and-white sloping kerbs, boot it, the back steps out, flick in some opposite lock, feel the rear of the car squat under power, drift to the outside of the corner, over the outside kerb, launching itself off the kerb with the engine howling. Will shifted up through the gears, third, fourth; look in the mirrors, all clear, through the long flowing esses, drifting from kerb, to kerb, to kerb, beautiful, onto the straight, into fifth.

Will checked the mirror to see what was happening behind him; he glanced at the gauges. All okay. He must plan for the end of the straight, as the bastards would be all over him by the time he got there. Slipstreaming, they would have towed each other up to him. If they got too close, he would have to use the inside line to protect his corner, forcing them to go around on the outside. He didn't want to, as this would cramp his entry, slowing him down; but he might be forced to. This was a very fast, oval-track-type corner, steeply banked downhill. Once committed, that's it, do or die, you

couldn't back off, or you would lose it, and then it would be into the Armco, or into the Armco and the pine forest. Ray Milligan, the team owner, always claimed that it could be taken flat in fifth, but nobody ever had. Everybody braked; there was a limit to insanity.

They were getting closer and closer, slipstreaming up to each other, like a bunch of cyclists. He shifted to the right to protect the corner. He looked in the mirrors, which gave a blurred vision of them all over the track, fighting for position, darting this way and that. Will talked to himself, "Concentrate, concentrate, focus, forget the rest, and go for the high line." The triple Armco barrier lined the outside, with the solid wall of pine trees beyond. It was a blind approach. He glanced at the mirrors. "They are closer, wide line, careful, careful, gently, gently, just rub the brakes, carry the speed. Nobody inside, go for the apex, watch the inside kerb come up, front wheel to the edge of the striped, sloped kerbing, don't touch it, could flick you into the Armco at this speed." The G force pushed his head sideways and forced his ribs into the seat. The car drifted to the outside, up against the Armco, close, out of it, away.

Downhill, left-hander coming up, not as steep, not as fast, ignore the mirrors: if you can't see them, they aren't there. Turn in to the apex, wheel up on the kerb, and drift out to the edge, fantastic! Right-hand uphill first-gear hairpin, don't let them down the inside, wait, wait, wait, push down hard on the brake pedal, till the wheels almost lock, nose just rubbing on the ground, car squirming around, working the wheel to keep it straight. Will turned in under brakes, tyre smoke coming off the unloaded front wheel. Ease off, don't lock the inside front, use the uphill to slow down. Skip fourth, third, second, first. Careful: don't over-rev it, feed in the power. Rear end steps out, quick flick to opposite lock, feed in the throttle, rev counter in the red, second, third, fourth, fifth, every time on the red line. Short, flat, straight section; check the mirrors, not so close, good.

Right-hander coming up, brake, third; roll it in, feed in the power — smooth, good stuff. Short downhill straight rising to the next one to a left-hander, watch the kerbs, good. Talk to yourself, talk to yourself, and don't do anything stupid.

Short straight, into fourth early, sweeping right-hander, ease off, on again, from kerb to kerb to kerb in a beautiful sweeping arc. "Let

the turkey eat, feel it suck down, work it, work it, balance it, balance it, don't let it get away from you." Onto the pit straight. Search the pit wall; look for the board, that's it, good. Look in the mirrors, a bit of space, turn one coming up again, over to the left-hand edge, wait to brake, wait, wait, on the brakes, squeeze the pedal till the car starts to squirm, third, second, turn in, over the kerb, the car lurches into oversteer, catch it, power on, slide to the outside, over the kerb, away, up the gears, through the esses, onto the straight, into fifth.

Will pushed himself away from the wheel, opened his hands and tried to force himself to relax, inhaling deeply and exhaling, checking the gauges: temperature okay, pressure okay. Check the mirrors, think, use your head, can't keep going like this with full fuel, tyres won't last. For the first time since the start, he was aware of the flag marshals and the crowd. He checked the mirrors. Good; they were starting to spread out.

As he blasted past, the pit board showed plus 1.5 secs. "Good, pulling away!" End of the straight; yellow flags being waved furiously. "Smoke! Jesus, what's happened now? I can't slow down, they'll close up, but track may be blocked, oil flags, oil, on the racing line? Where? Look in the mirrors; they aren't slowing, into the smoke, on to oil, shit, sliding, sliding, sliding, work the steering, don't lose it, Armco coming up, going to hit, going to hit, oh shit, oh shit. Jesus made it."

On the pit straight, pit board plus 1.8 secs, good, into turn one, white flag. Ambulance, watch it, up through the esses on the straight, waving white flags, there's the ambulance. Oh shit, who this time? Off at the fastest part of the circuit. Over the Armco, into the pine trees. Poor bastard. Okay, check mirrors, still there, yellow flags, oil flags, more than before, less smoke, into the smoke, onto the oil, sliding, sliding, work it, work it, keep it straight, out. Mirrors, the bastards are closing in, Jesus.

Pit board, plus 1.3 secs. "Got to shake them loose or slow down through the yellow, can't keep this up." On the straight, less smoke, fewer yellows, oil flags, full blast into the oil, sliding, sliding, twirling the wheel this way and that, good control, great, away!

Will knew that they couldn't pass under the yellow, but he didn't

want to give away the distance in front that he had worked so hard to get. He didn't want to hit the ambulance either. That would be instant death. As the race progressed, he gradually inched away from the second car, his chest expanded, breathing deeply, filling his lungs with air. Was this euphoria? He didn't know. Did mountaineers feel like this? His mind kept flicking back to the car in the pines. Hope it's not too bad. He had seen so many people die in his career. At least one per year. And he had had so many near-misses himself.

He opened his hands on the wheel, and pushed himself back in the seat, taking another deep, deep breath. He was in total control. This was what it was all about. He was on top of the world, king of the mountain. It was all happening in slow motion. Braking into the corner, he could feel the car pitch forward, turn in under brakes, the weight on the outside front wheel, feeling the back lighten up, turning in, turning in, feel it roll, down the gears, fourth, third, second, inside front wheel on the apex, on the kerb, ease off the brakes, slowly onto the throttle, more and more throttle, feel the rear start to squat, feel the G forces, feel the transfer of weight from front to rear, rear still coming around, straightening up the wheel, powering towards the exit, perfect. How many hours had he spent testing to get this car like this?

There were no guarantees. Sometimes it would work today, and not tomorrow. But today he was on top of the world. Nobody could touch him. He would win this race, and the season was finished — the last race of a difficult season. They had had engine failures, in the mad rush for more horsepower. The more horsepower they got, the more unreliable the engines became, and the further back in the championship they fell. The further back they were, the more risks they took, which resulted in more crashes. They had finally won one. It was a high that would carry them into the next season.

They were on the rostrum, but there was no shaking and squirting magnum bottles of Moët at each other. Jean Luc was dead. Instead they toasted him.

“Why didn't you slow down under the yellow flags, you crazy bastard? Do you want to die as well?”

“Why didn't you?”

“Jean Luc is dead, and here we are celebrating. What a macabre sport; if we were at war, there might be some sense to it. Our odds of surviving are lower than fighter pilots in a war, and we call this sport. This is a good year. Only Jean Luc. Last year Louis and Taffy. Next year maybe you and me, madness.”

“What are you going to do Carlos?”

“I don’t know, I don’t know, madness.”

The pall of Jean Luc’s death hung over the track. But Will knew that it would make no difference. There would be an investigation and ideas offered for improving safety, but he knew very little would come of it. A grieving fiancée, grieving parents. But it would all soon be forgotten. Next season they would be right back into it as if nothing had ever happened. The drivers were friends as far as it went, which was probably just as well. They did not socialise as much as in past years. Egos and competitiveness prevented any real relationship between them. It was too professional now, too hard, too competitive, and there was too much at stake.

“Will, did you see what happened?”

“Of course not, it was behind me. I only saw the smoke and the ambulance. I didn’t even see any damage to the barriers. I only saw the smoke.”

“There are some terrible rumours floating around.”

“I know, I have heard. But I don’t want to talk about that now.”

“For Christ’s sake don’t pull that stunt under the yellow again — slow down, one day it’s going to backfire on you!”

Back in the luxurious motor home, Will sat slouched in the leather armchair with his overalls zipped down to his waist.

“Where is Angela, Ray?”

Ray looked down at the carpet. “She’s gone.”

“Gone where?”

“Just gone.”

“How do you mean, just gone?”

“My friend, she said that she was fed up with waiting for you — you were never going to stop racing. She had been to the hospital once too often, and didn’t want to go to the morgue.”

“Did Jean Luc set her off?”

“Probably, she just left without saying anything to anybody.”

Where has she gone, Ray?” he insisted.

“I don’t know, probably New York.”

“I’d better go and find her.”

“Let her go,” Ray said. “Angela’s gone. She’s better off, you’re better off. Now, debriefing time.”

“It’s the last race. Let’s skip it.”

“We have to do it now, while it’s fresh in your mind.”

“How can I think clearly? Jean Luc is dead. Can’t we put it off? Besides, it’s the end of the season. There’ll be a new car next year, so the information is out of date anyway.”

“Will, you know as well as I do it can’t wait, so let’s start at the beginning.”

They went through the ritual, the same ritual that they had gone through after every race, every practice and test session for the last five years. How did the car feel in this corner, and in that? What happened on the turn-in? How did the steering feel? What about the brakes? Good or bad wasn’t an answer. How many revs were you pulling at a particular spot? Were the gear ratios right? What happened if you used a higher gear in a particular corner? What do you think needs improving? Nothing was left to chance. The exact feel was required. The debriefing was recorded to help with the ongoing development of the racing car. Ray would say, “Communicate with me, talk to me; if you don’t we won’t progress.” But sometimes Will felt as though Ray was prying into his soul, so wouldn’t come up with his exact feelings. It was almost too personal. But he knew it had to be done. Ray could virtually

read his mind, interpreting Will's feelings and ideas to reality.

"Are you going to the party?" asked Ray after the debriefing was over.

"No, I think I'll go down to the boat for a while."

"Do you want the plane?"

"No, you keep it. See you in ten days. I'm going to try to sneak out the back."

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The riot of colour that followed the first cold snap heralding fall in northern New York always lifted Will's spirits. On both sides of the highway lay a glorious tunnel of trees, every colour between silver and gold. It was so beautiful that it made Will wonder, "How did this happen? There must be a God." His mind drifted from one thought to another. They had finally won a race. It had been a terrible year, but finally it had all come together. Now Jean Luc was dead. But Ray never gave up, and had finally produced a race-winning car. He was a pain in the arse, but he was one hell of an engineer and organiser. He certainly knew how to get the best out of people; but he would drive Will crazy with his repetitive questions.

Ray had been a racing driver once. He had never got to Formula One, but he had been on his way until somebody ran over him. He was in a Formula Three race at the Nürburgring when the car broke down. While walking back along the public road, he was hit by a road car that he had not heard coming. Ray now walked with a stick, and had to use a hearing aid; however, he was sharp as a tack, and even with his stick he could outdrive most people. He could still be competitive in a Formula Three car if he had a mind to.

Ray's whole life was the team. He had no home life, nor any other interests. He lived in an old Georgian house just up the road from the workshop. Ray was a perfectionist. Way beyond any kind of perfection that would be expected in the normal business world, or in any other world for that matter. He drove Will crazy at times, but Will knew that he would leave absolutely no stone unturned in

producing the very best of every component that went into his racing cars.

Ray treated Will like an errant son, forgiving his antics with a rueful smile; however, he was unforgiving when such antics related to the racing cars. God help anybody who left a speck of dirt anywhere on the car or in the workshop. He demanded top performance from everybody in the team, including Will. He grilled Will every time he drove, whether in a race, a practice, or a test. Ray had to know exactly what was going on, in every last detail; he left nothing to chance. Every experience had to be examined and re-examined in minute detail, corrected or built on, in his mind there was no such thing as luck. That was Ray Milligan.

Will wondered what Angela was up to. Had she really left because of Jean Luc? She didn't even know him. She had wandered off before, usually when she got the idea in her head that there was another woman around, and she was usually right. The truth was that Will was easily bored and couldn't take domesticity; besides, she wanted to get married, and Will wasn't into that. He wasn't sure whether he was glad she had gone. She had been around for so long that he had grown accustomed to having her around. He supposed she would show up, when whatever was bugging her blew over. In any case there was this spunky chick in the city, so he was glad Angela was out of the way, at least temporarily.

Will laughed, as he remembered the time Angela sent him for her car. She said June, her little fat friend, would take him to pick it up. They left in her VW and headed for the street where Angela said she had left her car. They drove up and down the street with Will getting more and more irritated. "Where did she leave the damn car? Do a U-turn here," he said, but she hesitated, and the opportunity was lost. "Oh God," said Will, "stop, let me drive. Stop here." She was getting flustered.

She stopped, and Will hopped out, opened her door, but she was still sitting in the driver's seat. "Move over," but she didn't move. Frustrated, Will reached in and pushed the seat back and sat on her lap. Did a U-turn and drove up the street, still looking to see if he had missed the car. He couldn't see the blasted car anywhere. "Shit, where's the f—ing car?"

He was so irritated that he almost forgot he was sitting on Angela's little fat friend, squashing her. He had not meant to upset her. All of a sudden he noticed her warm breath on the back of his neck. Her breathing was heavy and he thought, "I must be squashing the breath out of her." Then he realised it was a lot more than that, and felt himself hardening. He should get out of the car. He looked down, and her little fingers were straight out, rigid, tense. Will didn't think, and wasn't sure why he did it. He picked up her right hand, and gently placed it on his stiff organ. She did not move, just left her hand there, but she didn't remove it. "Oh shit," thought Will, "what have I done, Angela is going to kill me."

Then Will felt the warm breath increasing rapidly, and a slight hesitant moving of the fingers, followed by a gentle squeezing, increased breath, heavy stroking, and then a solid grip. Not a word was said, dead silence, except for the now out of control breathing. Will climbed out of the seat. "Please, don't go," she said.

"Oh God," thought Will, "on this street, here and now, true it was dark, and there were no lights on in the houses, but what if?"

Will gently lifted her out of the seat, pushing the front seat forward, laying her on the back seat. She lay there with her eyes wide open, breathing uncontrollably. "Are you sure that you want to go through with this?" asked Will. She nodded vigorously without a word, still staring directly into his eyes. Will couldn't remember when he had ever been so excited. He felt his organ throbbing with blood. He pulled the door shut, and gently slid her dress up to her waist, reached down, and as she lifted her fat bottom off the seat, pulled down her panties.

She lay there with her smooth white belly, with the little belly button, and straight, light-brown pubic hair, her eyes wide open staring, as he pulled off his pants, then switched her focus onto his engorged organ. Will had not kissed her nor touched her, but took his organ and rested it against her vagina, still looking directly into her eyes. She was so wet, that Will pushed his organ between her legs, sliding it along her vagina. June opened her eyes as wide as they could go and pushed up. Will very slowly slid his organ up and down her vagina, and between the cheeks of her fat bottom. Then she lifted one leg over the front seat and the other over the back seat.

Will slowly and very gently pushed the head of his organ against her vulva, feeling resistance and pulled back. Her eyes widened. "Have you done this before?" asked Will. She nodded, and then shook her head. "Oh God," thought Will, "I shouldn't be doing this; she is an innocent." She looked directly into his eyes and said, "Please." She was so wet; she glistened in the slight light. Will slid the end of his organ from her clitoris right around the back and to the front again. She was so wet now that Will slowly slipped the head of his organ into her, working it gently, very, very slowly. He inched in bit by bit, and she never took her wide open eyes off him. Will had never felt one like this before. Her vagina seemed to be clamped to his organ. It was so tight, yet so wet, he could feel every rib, every part sucking onto his organ, as he slowly slid in and out. She held onto him and came and came, time and time again. And when he went in as far as he could go, she suddenly grabbed him, and pulled him into her. No longer the compliant little fat chick, but the out- of-control woman thrashing about, grabbing, biting, kicking, scratching, bucking, kissing, till he thought his lips might bleed, her tongue searching in his mouth, as she humped up against him, willing him on.

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Will laughed as he remembered. That was the sweetest thing that had ever happened to him. In a VW, on a side street of all places. He hadn't done it in a V Dub since he was a kid. Then he had thought that there was no better place. And now he was sure he had been right. He hadn't bothered looking for the car after that, and caught a cab back to Angela's. When she saw him she exploded. "You dirty bastard," she screamed. "You did it, didn't you? Poor June, poor June." No matter how much he lied, it made no difference. He never saw June again, and she remained friends with Angela. The dirty bastard Will had done a number on her, and both of them made sure that Will never saw her again. That was an experience that he would always treasure, and never forget. He smiled whenever it crossed his mind.

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