

Watkins Glen 1974

"WHEN THE 1974 U.S. Grand Prix is remembered, the ride most likely talked about isn't Carlos Reutemann's winning BT44 Brabham-Ford. Nor is it the 312B3 Ferraris Niki Lauda and Clay Regazzoni drove, or the Surtees TS16 of Austrian rookie Helmuth Koinigg, who would die in a crash on lap nine in the race. For those at Watkins Glen 30 years ago, one vehicle is remembered above all: a Greyhound bus.

The chartered Greyhound carried Brazilian fans to the upstate New York circuit to cheer Emerson Fittipaldi that October race weekend. Fittipaldi was entering F1's Glen round tied for first in points with Regazzoni. A high finish for Fittipaldi could potentially result in his second championship in three years, and clinch McLaren's first constructors' title.

On the Saturday before race day the Greyhound delivered the Brazilians to the main paddock area. Reportedly its driver escorted his passengers to their grandstand seats, leaving the unattended coach unlocked. The bus was then stolen, demolished, and quickly burned by a mob of mostly drunken spectators. At least 12 other vehicles, four of them reportedly stolen from race fans camping nearby, were similarly destroyed. All met their fate in the Glen's Bog, that infamous mud bowl outside the tunnel leading to the start-finish line.

The Bog had been mayhem central since the 1960s. Not only the Grand Prix event, but Can-Am, F5000 and other series annually attracted the Bogladytes, who paid \$15 general admission to basically party all weekend; few of them cared much about racing. At some point the Bogladytes began bringing in old vehicles to burn in the swampy pit. By 1974 "bogging" your heap at Watkins Glen had become a tradition, performed in front of hundreds chanting, "The Bog wants a car!" as they pounded it with a hail of rocks. Despite a police presence, Glen management appeared to tolerate the lawlessness as long as it was confined to the Bog.

Eyewitnesses to the Greyhound barbecue recall seeing the \$40,000 bus being driven by "a shirtless longhair" into the Bog area. He circled the pile of wrecked car hulks at high speed, the crowd pummeling the bus with whatever they could find. The Greyhound finally crashed into the car pile and stopped. In a scene right out of Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome, flaming rags stuffed into its fuel tanks ignited a thick, black plume of diesel smoke seen for miles in Schuylar County. It burned for hours.

The incident was the last straw. The Bog was bulldozed soon after the 1974 Grand Prix and is now part of the Glen's parking area. Regazzoni finished the race in 11th; Fittipaldi's fourth-place earned him the title. The Brazilian fans celebrated at the start-finish area with their hero. When it was time to leave, Greyhound sent another coach for the ride back to New York City." (photo by Glen Schostak)

