

*Mike Shank Interview with John Lingle
February 8, 2013*

When did the actual sale of your DW12 chassis take place?

We sold the chassis to Schmidt early last week.

Was this sale part of any type of partnership a la Andretti Autosport/HVM, or was it an outright sale?

It's an outright sale for right now.

Were you guys looking to sell, or were you approached by the team about your chassis? Were you actively shopping the car?

We weren't too active with it to be honest with you. I've been approached a dozen times throughout the life of us owning that car, which has been a little over a year now. I've been approached several times during that time period, and we just weren't ready to throw in the towel. We were working on lots of different programs, and they were taking lots of different shapes and coming and going. This one was just the right time for us based on how things went for us in IndyCar and how I felt that I was managed there by them – and based on where sports car racing is, where it's headed over the next five years, and how I've been managed *by them*. That made it a pretty easy thing right now.

I have an inherent love of the Speedway. That's how I grew up – I grew up three hours from the Speedway, and so we'll continue to see if there are any opportunities there. I have a great group of 20-22 guys that are very good at what they do, and they are almost all open-wheel guys. If we can get a backer, maybe we can do a partnership with another team that has a second or third car, and then we'll look at that.

Did you have to have any type of conversations with IndyCar prior to selling the car?

No, not at all. We are all independent contractors, so when we decide to sell a car we are free to do so.

Have you any talks with the current IndyCar management since Randy Bernard's departure?

They have never called me, not one time.

How often were you in contact with Randy Bernard's management group?

Through the month of May, we were very intense with them. Very intense. After that, nothing. Virtually nothing. We had some leads pop up here about a month and half ago, and that was the first time I had heard from them since basically June. Then they had their upheaval and a lot of other things going on. My little deal was not really that big of a deal in the grand scheme of things. They were losing their leader, and there was a lot of stuff going on there. Their having new teams is not a priority, and that's fine. That's their strategy for now. I just think that it's not a great strategy.

It could have been handled better, but at the end of the day it's up to us to get there and they don't have to do anything. We all choose to be in car racing for whatever our reasons are. I underestimated the need for new teams, and I don't mean in a financial way but in lots of other ways. I love open-wheel racing. I always have. That's where I come from, and that's what I love to do. It's just hard to break into it.

Do you feel that any of the other teams hindered you from breaking into IndyCar?

No. Not at all. All the other teams were good to us. That was never a problem. In fact, when I went to the owners meeting last February, I was treated very well by everybody. It's definitely not about that.

At what point did Michael Shank Racing actively quit trying to secure an engine lease?

We tried to get a motor all the way up to the Mid-Ohio race last year, but there was just nothing doing.

Do you feel that your strong ties with Ford Racing in GRAND-AM hindered you in getting an IndyCar engine in any way?

In no way do I feel that.

Now that your car is sold, do you regret not taking a Lotus engine for a run at the Indy 500 last year?

Absolutely, positively not! Zero regrets. Never, ever will I question that decision. That was the best decision I have ever made as a car owner. I paid my dues 20 years ago when I was coming up the ladder, so there's no need to pay any dues now. I've paid my dues in full 10 times over.

You mentioned on Twitter that the engine lease was the problem in 2012 but hinted that it was not the problem in 2013. What was?

Now, the problem is just being able to raise the money to go to Indy and do it right. It's just another battle that we would have to take on. With as good as we are doing with our sports car program right now and the future of sports car racing, I need to spend my energy where I'm wanted and where I'm successful.

Do you see any scenario where you would return to IndyCar with your own car and team, or would any future deal be a partnership of some sort?

The short term answer is that right now it would only be a partnership. I don't want to reinvest in that equipment right now when I'm trying to expand my sports car program. My investments go toward what works for me right now. If there's a way we can contribute to another team that has the equipment and the motor lease, then we may look at that. We have no races (sports car) in the month of May. I want to be clear, though -- I won't do it if it jeopardizes anything that we are doing in sports car racing. Three different groups have talked to me about it, but we haven't had serious contract talks with anyone yet. All my guys come from open-wheel, and they have a love for the Speedway. We'll see what it brings us.

If one of those deals came together, do you think one of your drivers, like Gustavo Yacaman, would come along with the deal, or would you be dependent on that group having a driver and sponsor in place?

The only way that it would work right now would be if someone else had the package ready to go and just needed a good team and good personnel to be able to support it. We have a lot of the equipment to be able to do it, and we would look at that potentially.

So you guys could be ready to go fairly quickly if the right deal came along?

Yes. I bought a lot of stuff to support the IndyCar, and I still have all of that.

We're all trying real hard. We've invested every dime of my life into racing, I promise you. It's been very good to me, but it's been very frustrating at times as well. But overall, I've been a lucky bastard to get to do it.