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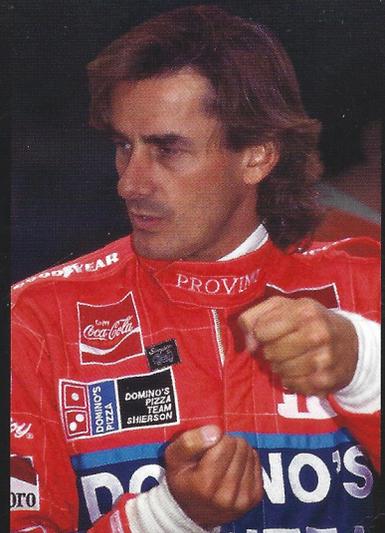
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My Favorite Race

ARIE LUYENDYK

1990 Indianapolis 500



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MY FAVORITE RACE



Very competitive Lola T9000 was designed by Bruce Ashmore, and Luyendyk put his on the front row at 223.304mph.

ARIE LUYENDYK

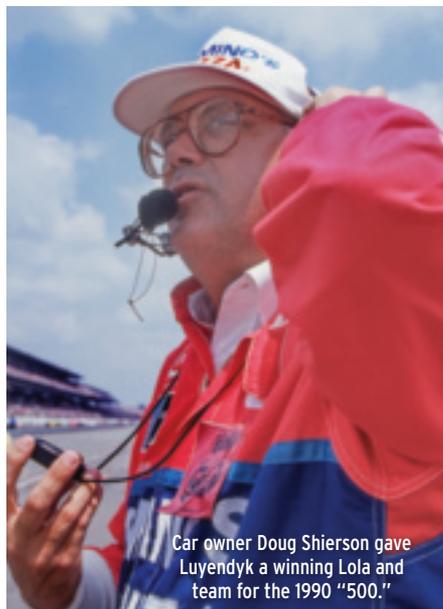
1990 INDIANAPOLIS 500

BY GARY WITZENBURG | PHOTOGRAPHY BY BOB HARMEYER

It's no surprise that Indy 500 winners often cite their first (and sometimes only) Indy win as their favorite race, largely because of its career significance. Dutchman Arie Luyendyk is no exception, though he had to narrow it down from many: "I have to choose my 1990 Indianapolis 500 win because it meant so much," he says. "It really made the difference in my career. It was my sixth year of racing Indy cars, so finally breaking through and winning meant a lot." And that was also Luyendyk's first Indy car win, despite some earlier near misses, including Portland in 1988, where he would have won had his car not broken toward the race's end.

Indy 500 competitors in those days spent most of the month of May "driving around that crazy oval every day," Luyendyk says. His ride was the red and blue Doug Shierson Racing Domino's Pizza Lola-Chevrolet No. 30, that number signifying Domino's 30-minute delivery guarantee at the time. "We did not have a chance to qualify on the first weekend because of weather," he relates, "so I qualified on the second weekend and ended up on the front row next to Rick Mears and Emerson Fittipaldi, who had the pole. That was a great confidence booster."

Arie started racing in 1972 in The Netherlands in Formula Vee 1300, then Formula Ford, Formula 3 and Formula Super Vee, winning a number of Dutch national titles and the 1977 European Super Vee Championship. "But I was stuck in Super Vee so long I thought I would never have an opportunity to move up. I



Car owner Doug Shierson gave Luyendyk a winning Lola and team for the 1990 "500."

could never find the money to do Formula Two." But when he moved to the States in 1984, he won that year's U.S. Super Vee title with Provimi sponsorship, which impressed Provimi owner Aat Groenevelt enough to earn him a season with Provimi's Indy car team in 1985. "It was thanks to him that my career took off here in the United States," he says.

Luyendyk's debut Indy experience was intimidating at first. "I was with a small team and very green," he admits. "We had just one car, so we knew that if we crashed, it would be over. And I knew that if I hit the wall, it would hurt. I wasn't scared but very careful, probably a little too careful, yet I ended up being fairly fast and competitive. As the race was going on, the track was getting better, I was in the groove, going really well and thinking, 'Yes! I can go fast here. I really like this!' And you have to like it. If you don't like it, you're not going to be fast."

Rookie of the Year

He finished an impressive 7th and was Rookie of the Year, which would be the best result of his first five 500s driving for Provimi, then Hemelgarn, then Dick Simon Racing. Then came 1990. His team spent



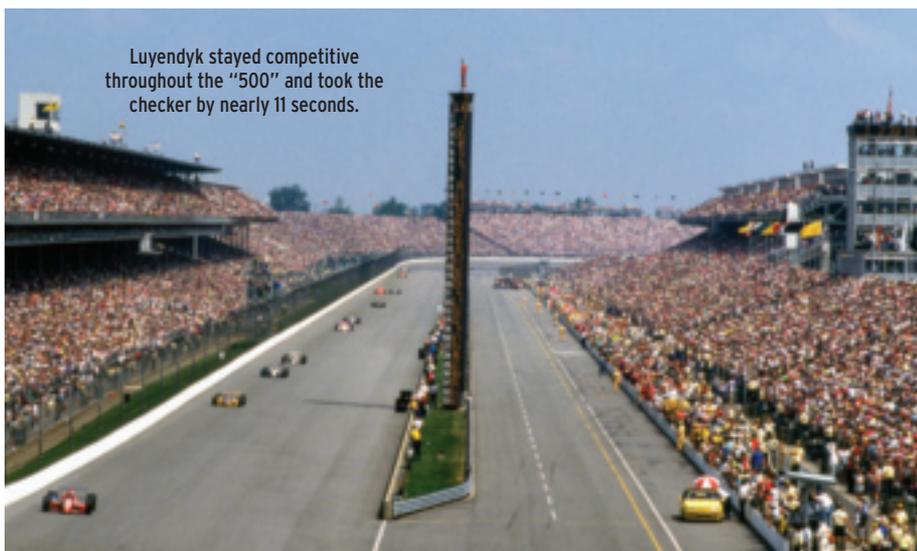
the week between the two qualifying weekends practicing and working on race setup. “We tried a lot of things to get ready,” Arie recalls, “and we were ready. Teams like Penske, Newman-Haas and Kraco had a lot more resources, but our car handled really well, and we were quite happy with it. Whether it was windy or not, warm or not, my car was really good, and I felt very confident about my chances. That was a good feeling.”

Following the start, he settled into third for a while, then “picked up a bit of understeer, so the car didn’t want to turn into the corners as well,” he relates. “We made adjustments on our first pitstop, but I still had some push and kept running around third, fourth, fifth. Emerson was leading, about 20 seconds ahead. I was talking with Doug on the radio, saying, ‘I can’t race the leader, but I want to know where he is so I can pace myself.’”

Then things improved. “In qualifying, you run low downforce for speed. During the race you keep working on the car—front wing adjustments and adding or reducing rear wing angle—to get the balance right and reduce understeer or oversteer. Temperature and wind affect your balance at Indy, so at every stop, you adjust to those conditions, and we kept tuning the car at every stop. Then we finally got it spot on, exactly where it needed to be. From then on, it was a rocketship! Everything clicked, and I was going a lot faster, close to my qualifying speed.



Conferring with his crewman, Luyendyk kept trying things to dial in the Lola.



Luyendyk stayed competitive throughout the “500” and took the checker by nearly 11 seconds.



Subtle adjustments during pit stops dialed in the Lola-Chevrolet for the final charge at the checker.

“Emerson was really quick that day, but he had blistering tires and had to make an extra stop, which put him a lap behind. Rahal was leading, and I was reeling him in at a big rate. But I took my time to pass him because there were back-markers involved. Then, coming out of Turn 2, I was following Scott Goodyear and picked up a draft from him, then got a draft from Bobby, ducked underneath and passed him at the last moment going into Three. It was a great pass, and I was able to hold him off, stayed in a comfortable lead and won the race. It was just a great day. When it's your day, it's your day, and that was my day!”

What was he thinking as he neared the finish? “Leading by I think 12 seconds, I kept reminding myself to stay focused because it's not over yet. I pictured my parents sitting in front of their TV watching with my in-laws. And because it was such a big deal when Emerson won \$1 million, I thought, ‘I'm going to win a million bucks!’ But I had to put those things out of my head and just focus.

“I was doing everything overly carefully while trying to maintain a rhythm, being careful and staying far away from back-markers while passing them in case they hit



Luyendyk collected \$1,090,940 for his 1990 Indy 500 victory.



the wall, and praying that there were no more yellows. Luckily, there were no more yellows.” But he missed the last-lap white flag as Fittipaldi was passing to un-lap himself on the front straight so was surprised to see the checkered waving his next time by. And with very few cautions that year, Arie's race average speed of 185.981 mph set a record that stood until Tony Kanaan topped it in 2013 at 187.433mph.

Luyendyk would lead several more Indy car races and win six more, including Phoenix and Nazareth the next year, Phoenix again in 1996, Indy again and Texas in 1997 and Las Vegas in 1998. He counts that '91 Phoenix win as an important validation of his '90 Indy victory. “After winning Indy, we had a few more good races, a fourth and a fifth, that year,” he says, “then led the Michigan 500 before somebody crashed and I ran over debris, which cut my tire and caused me to crash.” But then his team was sold, and the new owner was a nightmare. “After Indy, we tested just one half-day because he wouldn't give us any money.”

“So going into 1991 with Vince Granatelli racing, people were saying that my Indy win might have been a fluke, and that's what made that Phoenix win so gratifying. And back at Indy that year, I finished third after losing a lap at the beginning of the race for a spark plug change. So we were showing that we were competitive.”

Pole Man

Soon known as “The Flying Dutchman,” Luyendyk was fastest qualifier for the 500s in 1993, 1997 and 1999, and his astounding 1996 qualifying speed of 237.498 set a record that stands today, though it came on the second day of qualifying so did not earn him the pole. His second Indy win came from the pole-position start in 1997 with Treadway Racing. “In '97,” he recalls, “I was leading the race, Scott Goodyear was second, and

we had a really late yellow. I said to myself, ‘This time I want to see that white flag and not be surprised. So, I was focused on the starter's stand and just cruising, because when they're going to go green the next lap, they give you a one-finger signal that means you'll see the green next time by. And that didn't happen, so the team was saying, ‘One more lap under yellow. Bring it home, baby!’ Then I'm looking at the starter's stand, and I see the white flag... then the green flag. What the hell?”

“I thought I was going to get passed left and right because I was so surprised. But nobody passed me since everyone else did the same thing. Good thing I was focused on the starter's stand to see that white flag, because it helped me in the end. It was a USAC mistake that it went green for one lap without notifying the teams. Then going into Turn 1, they turned on the yellow again! But I was not going to slow down and kept on going. Then it went green again, then yellow again going into Three. They were messing everything up.”

Luyendyk retired from racing after the 1999 season, then did some color commentating for ABC sports. But his love for Indy drew him back there in 2001 (he finished 13th), 2002 (14th) and 2003, where his car was withdrawn after a practice crash. Since then, he has enjoyed retirement while overseeing son Arie, Jr.'s, Indy Lights and off-road racing career. And he was fittingly inducted into the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Hall of Fame in 2009 and the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America in 2014.

While Luyendyk started as a road racer and earned many victories on road courses, among them the 1989 Sebring 12 Hour and 1998 Daytona 24 Hour, he did his best work on oval tracks. “I always liked ovals because of the speed,” he says. “Oval racing was really fun, and the fastest corners on road courses were my favorites. I used to hate slow corners. Pretty much any oval is fun if your car is set up properly.”

