

PHIL HILL: Yankee Champion

First American to Win the Driving
Championship of the World

Revised, Expanded Edition by
William F. Nolan

Brown Fox



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PREFACE

TO THE SECOND EDITION

In the 46-year history of the international Formula 1 Grand Prix Championship, the highest prize in global racing, only two Americans have taken home the coveted GP Crown: Phil Hill in 1961 and Mario Andretti in 1978.

Phil Hill: Yankee Champion stands today as the only book-length biography of our first American World Champion—from his California boyhood in Santa Monica through his championship victory in Europe. However, when *Yankee Champion* was originally published in 1962, Hill was still an active driver, with many races ahead of him; his career had not ended.

With this revised edition, Hill's full story is finally told. Racing enthusiasts can be assured that the record is now complete within these pages. I wish to acknowledge the generous help of *Road & Track's* executive editor, Richard Homan, and the magazine's librarian, Otis Meyer. I also wish to acknowledge Alma Hill for her courteous response to my questions regarding her husband. Of course, Brown Fox Books' Mark Godfrey made this present edition happen, and carefully worked with me on the updating and revisions. Finally, a tip of the helmet to Jim Sitz, who reviewed the text for historical accuracy. My profound thanks to all of you.

Except for minor updating, the basic text of *Yankee Champion* (through 1961) has not been altered, but for this revised special edition I have replaced Chapter 26, "Of Speculation and Statistics," with an extensive new chapter, "The Post-Championship Years," which details Hill's last six seasons of racing and updates his life from retirement in 1967 through his present-day activities in the 1990s. Additionally, the photos gathered between covers are all newly-selected, providing dramatic visual testimony to Phil Hill's career as one of America's legendary racing champions.

William F. Nolan
West Hills, California
June, 1996

INTRODUCTION

FROM THE ORIGINAL EDITION

Phil Hill was the first American to win the classic 24-Hour race at Le Mans, the first American to win three times at Sebring, the first American to win a modern championship Grand Prix*—and had finally become the first American World Champion.

My initial view of Phil's spirited driving was at Pebble Beach, as a spectator in April of 1955, and we did not meet until the following year, when I talked to Hill in the pits at Palm Springs, California, during a sports car meet at the desert spa. He recalled that I'd already written a short profile on him for the West Coast magazine *Fortnight* earlier that year—and when I asked him if he'd consent to a tape-recorded interview he agreed. I wanted to know more about Hill and I was certain that many other sports fans did too. Our talk was quite successful. I found Phil to be a very articulate individual, strong-minded and quite introspective, possessing an ability for self-analysis which extended well beyond that of the average professional sportsman.

We've often met at races around the world since that initial interview, and I have seen Phil drive at Monte Carlo, Nassau, Sebring, Torrey Pines, Riverside and many other road circuits over the years. During this period, I continued to gather material relating to his life and career. We made additional tapes together at his home in Santa Monica. As a result, I sold some half-dozen major articles on Phil to various magazines. However, I was only able to use a fraction of my collected data in these published pieces, and a full-length racing biography seemed the logical solution. In May of 1961 I began work on this book—and its scope was naturally enhanced by Phil's championship at Monza.

*Only one other fellow countryman had ever scored a similar victory: Jimmy Murphy, in 1921, captured the French Grand Prix in a Duesenberg.

I wish to acknowledge Hill's generous help in the preparation of this story, and the reader will note that I have made extensive use throughout of our taped interviews, not only to allow Phil to speak for himself, but to show (through his own words) the kind of man he is. Strict biographical form would not have served as well. Therefore, much of what has happened in the colorful career of America's finest road driver is seen from a very personal perspective—just as the diaries of Stirling Moss were utilized by Robert Raymond when he wrote the first biography of that fleet Briton in 1953.

It seems appropriate to close with a quote by an anonymous young dueling student from the University of Heidelberg, relating to all who choose to enter any form of highly competitive endeavor, be it swordsmanship or auto racing:

Sport has always possessed an element of honor, a test of endurance and courage in crisis. It gives each man a chance to find his own merit and to demand more of himself than anyone can demand of him. His duel is not a personal fight with another, but a test of the spirit and of the will to defy his own nature. From such tests, champions emerge.

Phil Hill passed such tests, and he truly earned his championship. America can be proud of him.

William F. Nolan
Burbank, California
June, 1962

Nerve and Speed at Pebble Beach

WHEN THE HANDSOME, night-black Jaguar Special, with its white number 2 in sharp contrast against the dark body, was rolled into a fifth-row position for the Pebble Beach Cup Race, the afternoon's 25-lap main event was about to begin. The date was November 5, 1950, and California's Monterey Peninsula was hosting its first annual sports car meet over the wicked, tree-lined 1.8-mile Pebble Beach circuit.

The site was ruggedly picturesque, set in a lush, 20,000-acre private playground near fashionable Del Monte Lodge overlooking the blue-glitter sweep of Carmel Bay. Sponsored by the San Francisco region of the Sports Car Club of America and the MG Car Club, three other contests had already been run that afternoon. In the last of these, the Monterey Unlimited Class Race, for the large, fast cars, the black No. 2 Jaguar, driven by brash, aggressive Santa Monican Phil Hill, had finished in second position, despite a severe handicap. While Hill was attempting to speed-shift into fourth gear in an effort to close the distance between his machine and the leading Allard, the lining had pulled loose from the clutch plate, dropping the pedal to the floor. Repairs of such a major nature were out of the question.

Therefore, in this 45-mile main event, Hill would be forced to practice the hazardous and difficult art of shifting without disengaging the clutch. Tendrils of fog moved ghostlike between the tall pine and cypress trees ringing the circuit, and Phil knew that the surface would be damp, slick from the rubber deposited by other cars. Mistakes could be costly here. He sat nervously in the cockpit, hand poised over the starter button as Al Torres prepared to wave the green flag. Hill's XK-120 Jaguar was in gear; theoretically, when the engine fired, the car would move away — but this was not the case.

As the flag dropped, and the other machines exploded into action, the Jag's engine refused to fire. Frantically Hill punched the button, then waved his arm for a push start. His pit crew, led by Richie Ginther, put their muscles to work, and the modified 3.8-liter powerplant abruptly burst into Jaguar thunder. Hill's car was last off the grid by a full 300 feet, but he wasted no time in self-pity. By the end of the first lap he had gained two positions, and could already see the leader, Arnold Stubbs in a V-8 60 MG Special, approximately a quarter mile ahead on the front straight. On lap three, pushing hard, he had moved up behind the XK-120 driven by Bill Breeze, and the two Jags stormed around the turns, nose to tail.

Phil was having his troubles, as expected. Several times, in downshifting from fourth to third, he would misjudge his revs and drag the rear wheels, as the skidding machine headed for the hay bales. Yet he kept the car on the road, and continued to hound the other Jaguar.

By the ninth lap Stubbs had pitted with the MG Special, and Mike Graham's big Cadillac-powered J2 Allard was in command. But Breeze and Hill were pressing close behind, and Graham steamed into the hairpin, saw he couldn't make it, and shot up the escape road, giving the lead to Bill Breeze.

Hill increased the pressure, forcing the pace, and now he could see that Breeze was slowing down earlier for the sharp turns — meaning his brakes were failing. On lap 11 Hill blasted past the other Jag, and Breeze retired on the following lap, drums smoking.

With more than half of the race remaining, Phil Hill had taken over the number one position, but he was confused by a chalked pit signal from Ginther reading: LONG LEAD. Was some driver named Long up there ahead of him in another car? Having started last, Hill had no way of being sure that this fellow, Long, had not been ahead of Stubbs from the beginning.

As a result, Phil began pushing the Jag to its limit in his effort to overtake a mythical opponent. But now his own brakes were rapidly failing. He skidded into bales, dragged the rear wheels and roared up escape roads when his speed was too great to negotiate a turn. The crowd, totaling more than 7000, roared approval at his hair-raising performance as he brutalized the black Jaguar around the twisting circuit.

Now the fog was thickening, closing in, and as Hill passed the pits he read a scrawled ONE on the board held by Ginther. Again he misunderstood, assuming that he had only one lap to go, and that it was too late to worry about catching Long. Actually, seven laps remained in the contest. Behind him Don Parkinson had moved his XK Jag into second spot, and Graham was rapidly making up lost ground in the Allard after a time-consuming pit stop to replace a broken fan belt.

Hill finally accepted the fact that he was leading when the checkered flag did not appear, but with the fog rolling in, and with his brakes all but nonexistent, his position was far from ideal. If he slowed to a safe speed it might well mean defeat at the hands of Parkinson.

Hill maintained his furious pace, abruptly swerving to avoid a deep hole which had opened on the second turn, regaining control as the circuit straightened. His gearbox threatened to disintegrate under the forced shifts, and engine heat was climbing—but Al Torres was ready with the checker on the last lap as Hill slid the hairpin and aimed the nose of the Special at the final straight. Torres leaped high in the air, dipping the flag down with a matador's flourish as the black Jaguar howled past the finish line to claim the 45-mile victory.

At twenty-three, Phil Hill had won his first important road race in a wild, impressive display of nerve and speed. His brakes and clutch were gone; the fenders of his Jaguar were battle-scarred by contact with numerous hay bales—but he had won the Pebble Beach Cup.

Eleven years later he would win the Championship of the World.

TABLE OF PHIL HILL'S INTERNATIONAL SUCCESSES

Reflecting first, second, and third-place showings in Formula and sports car events, 1954–1967, and including International records established in 1957 and 1959.

NOTE: *All racing successes attained in sports and GP Ferraris except where noted.
Speed records attained in MGs.*

1954			
November	19-23	<i>Carrera Panamericana (Mexico)</i>	2nd
1955			
March	13	<i>Sebring 12-Hours (U.S.)</i>	2nd w/Shelby (1st in Index)
December	9	Nassau Governor's Cup (Bahamas)	2nd
December	11	Nassau Trophy (Bahamas)	1st
1956			
January	29	<i>Buenos Aires (Argentina)</i>	2nd w/Gendebien
May	27	<i>Nürburgring (Germany)</i>	3rd w/Gendebien and Portago
June	17	Grand Prix of Portugal (Oporto)	2nd
August	12	<i>Grand Prix of Sweden (Kristianstad)</i>	1st w/Trintignant
August	25	Messina 5-Hours (Sicily)	1st
1957			
July	13-14	Reims 12-Hours (France)	2nd w/Seidel
August	11	<i>Grand Prix of Sweden (Kristianstad)</i>	2nd w/Collins
November	3	<i>Grand Prix of Venezuela (Caracas)</i>	1st w/Collins
December	6	Nassau Governor's Cup (Bahamas)	1st
December	8	Nassau Trophy (Bahamas)	3rd

International Speed Records established at Bonneville, Utah, in 1957:
 In Class G, 750–1100 cc, supercharged model MG EX179 w/Ash and Wisdom
 200 Miles 131.89 mph
 500 Kilometers 132.39
 500 Miles 131.38
 1000 Kilometers 131.34
 3 Hours 132.62
 6 Hours 132.13
 12 Hours 118.13 (The same car, unsupercharged.)

NOTE: *Italic entrees indicate that event counts toward sports car Manufacturers' Championship.
 Bold italic entrees indicate that event counts toward Grand Prix World Championship.*

PHIL HILL: Yankee Champion

1958

January	26	<i>Buenos Aires (Argentina)</i>	1st w/Collins
March	22	<i>Sebring 12-Hours (U.S.)</i>	1st w/Collins
June	21-22	<i>Le Mans 24-Hours (France)</i>	1st w/Gendebien
June	29	<i>Monza 500 (Italy)</i>	3rd w/Musso and Hawthorn (result of 3 heats)
Formula 1			
September	7	<i>Grand Prix of Italy (Monza)</i>	3rd
October	19	<i>Grand Prix of Morocco (Casablanca)</i>	3rd

1959

March	21	<i>Sebring 12-Hours (U.S.)</i>	1st w/Gendebien, Gurney, and Daigh
June	7	<i>Nürburgring (Germany)</i>	2nd w/Gendebien
September	5	<i>Tourist Trophy (Goodwood, England)</i>	3rd w/Gendebien, Brooks, and Allison
October	11	<i>Riverside (U.S.)</i>	1st
December	1	<i>Nassau Trophy (Bahamas)</i>	2nd
Formula 1			
July	5	<i>Grand Prix of Europe (Reims, France)</i>	2nd
August	2	<i>Grand Prix of Germany (Avus-Berlin)</i>	3rd (result of 2 heats)
September	13	<i>Grand Prix of Italy (Monza)</i>	2nd

International Speed Records established at Bonneville, Utah, in 1959:

In Class E, 1501–2000 cc, model MG EX181:

1 Kilometers	254.91 mph
1 Mile	254.53
5 Kilometers	232.97
5 Miles	238.36
10 Kilometers	234.49
10 Miles	191.03

1960

January	31	<i>Buenos Aires (Argentina)</i>	1st w/Allison
May	8	<i>Targa Florio (Sicily)</i>	2nd w/Trips
May	22	<i>Nürburgring (Germany)</i>	3rd w/Allison and Mairesse
Formula 1			
May	29	<i>Grand Prix of Monaco (Monte Carlo)</i>	3rd
September	4	<i>Grand Prix of Europe (Monza, Italy)</i>	1st

Table of Phil Hill's International Successes

1961

March	25	<i>Sebring 12-Hours (U.S.)</i>	1st w/Gendebien
June	10-11	<i>Le Mans 24-Hours (France)</i>	1st w/Gendebien
Formula 1			
May	14	<i>Grand Prix of Monaco (Monte Carlo)</i>	3rd
May	22	<i>Grand Prix of Holland (Zandvoort)</i>	2nd
June	18	<i>Grand Prix of Belgium (Spa-Francorchamps)</i>	1st
July	15	<i>Grand Prix of England (Aintree)</i>	2nd
August	6	<i>Grand Prix of Europe (Nürburgring, Germany)</i>	3rd
September	10	<i>Grand Prix of Italy (Monza)</i>	1st

1962

February	11	<i>Daytona 3-Hours (U.S.)</i>	2nd w/Ricardo Rodríguez
March	23	<i>Sebring 12-Hours (U.S.)</i>	1st in GT Class w/Gendebien
May	27	<i>Nürburgring (Germany)</i>	1st w/Gendebien
June	23-24	<i>Le Mans 24-Hours (France)</i>	1st w/Gendebien
Formula 1			
April	29	Aintree (England)	3rd
May	20	<i>Grand Prix of Holland (Zandvoort)</i>	3rd
June	3	<i>Grand Prix of Monaco (Monte Carlo)</i>	2nd
June	17	<i>Grand Prix of Belgium (Spa-Francorchamps)</i>	3rd

1963

March	23	<i>Sebring 12-Hours (U.S.)</i>	1st in Class w/Gurney (Cobra)
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1964

February	15	<i>Daytona (U.S.)</i>	1st w/Pedro Rodríguez
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1966

June	5	<i>Nürburgring (Germany)</i>	1st w/Bonnier (Chaparral)
September	24	Canadian Grand Prix (Canada) (Can-Am series)	2nd (Chaparral)
October	16	Laguna Seca (U.S.) (Can-Am series)	1st (Chaparral)

1967

July	30	<i>BOAC 6-Hours (England)</i> (Hill's last professional race)	1st w/Spence (Chaparral)
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