

“Trouble at Mill” - story derived from a random fiction square - words shown in bold

The season started well for Black Bear Racing with the 3 time world champion Johnnie Carlton in poll and completing the race unchallenged, with a 5 second lead. Second place went to Charlie Fergus driving for PegasusF1 Racing. The driver gets all the attention of course and the glory which is what the spectators want to see. But back in the pits which the spectators don't see things are far from normal, if there can be such a thing as normality in the challenging world of Formula One motor racing.

The management of a team which only involves two drivers in the front line, that is who actually race, and are in the line up of the 20 competing drivers on the grid, is much wider with **creative** designers, development engineers, mechanics, secretaries and also a medical support team which altogether adds up to over 100 employees working in the background.

We are talking about a highly competitive sport, having high financial risks working at the leading edge of technology with highly strung personalities alcohol fuelled wild parties and the inevitable in house fighting and arguments.

Johnnie Carlton, the lead driver for Black Bear won nearly every race last season with the strong backing of his team. Now in the new season the team's future is under threat. There is an accusation being levelled at the team manager Willie Wingate who has been accused of inappropriate behaviour towards a female **secretary**, Sally Ramsbotham, who supports the pit wall personnel and **garage** staff who monitor all the telemetric data coming in from the cars on the track and the radio link with the drivers. She is a key player in the team.

On the surface there was good rapport between the rival teams Black Bear Racing and PegasusF1, in particular their managers Willie Wingate and Roland Smith often enjoyed a drink together. There was even a rumour that Roland Smith team manager at Pegasus had been seen partying with Sally Ramsbotham.

It is difficult for a team manager such as Willie Wingate during a race when everybody is focussed on the job in hand - having the correct tyres available at pit stops and the wheel changing crews in place with tools poised, not to raise his voice and possibly being accused of being **bossy**. But there is a difference between being **bossy** and being assertive isn't there?

The evening race in Bahrain after a hot day with wall to wall **sunshine** had been thwarted by slow wheel changes in the pits and one of the mechanics repeatedly delayed the release of the

car. This made Wingate angry as vital seconds can affect the race position of the cars when they rejoin the circuit at the pit lane exit.

After the podium and that wasteful display of Champagne squirting around, an inquest was held into the rear nearside slow wheel change on Johnnie Carlton's car. Wingate was suspicious that somebody was trying to sabotage Black Bears race. The issue was traced to a faulty spanner - or was it?

Then it was party time but there was an absentee - Sally Ramsbotham did not appear at the hotel venue, maybe she was unwell or decided on an early night ready for the long flight home tomorrow? Wingate was concerned and found the **nurse** in charge of team health matters, to see if Sally had sought help. The answer was no she hadn't.

On the following Tuesday back at the factory and team headquarters Willy Wingate was called to the directors' suite and immediately suspended for alleged gross misconduct brought by Sally Ramsbotham. Wingate strongly denied the allegation and was desperately trying to recall what happened on that afternoon in the pits. It was all very tense he recalled – did he swear in front of Sally even directly at her? Did he accuse her of anything or question her competence? Wingate was at a loss.

Two weeks until the next race and he would not be part of it until the inquiry into his alleged behaviour was complete. Without Wingate's input to managing the run up to the next race they would be sunk. This was the discussion going on in the rest of the team.

A few days later Sally Ramsbotham turned up for work at the headquarters in a brand new Aston Martin Vantage GT3? This raised eyebrows as her salary and background would not have supported a car costing that much. Whose car was it? Soon it was being suggested that Pegasus Team boss Roland Smith was having an affair with Ramsbotham, could this be an attempt at sabotage?

The metaphorical **knife** was firmly in the back of team manager Wingate.

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