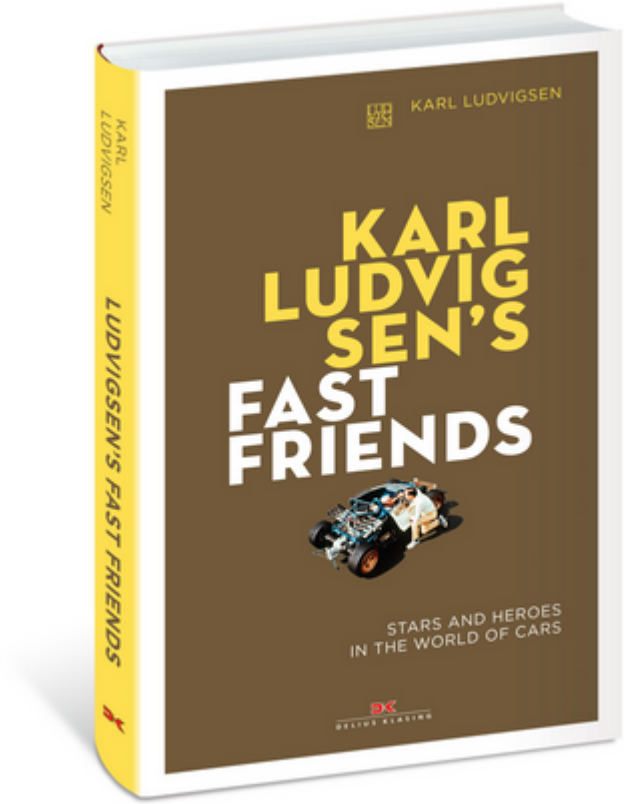
For Your Bookshelf – Karl Ludvigsen’s Fast Friends – Stars and Heroes in the World of Cars

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Karl Ludvigsen’s Fast Friends – Stars and Heroes in the World of Cars

Reviewed by Kieron Fennelly

Author: Karl Ludvigsen

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190 A5 pages paperback/softback, or as an e-book

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Karl Ludvigsen looks back over his sixty years in the automotive world, both as an employee and as a journalist, compiling this collection of profiles of senior industry figures with whom he has worked or has interviewed during that time. In A5 format and with 190 pages, it is an unusually compact book by the author's standards, it makes nonetheless a fascinating and informative read.

Naturally enough, *Fast Friends* is strong on the author's specialist areas, Mercedes, Porsche, and also General Motors where he worked in the 1950s and 60s, but Karl Ludvigsen is nothing if not eclectic. One of his GM colleagues was a contemporary, yet today virtually unknown: Stefan Habsburg, a sion of the disenfranchised former rulers of Austria, was a mechanical engineer whose flair for drawing earned him a place in the legendary Harley Earl's design department. Despite suffering viral encephalitis and losing much of his medium-term memory, Habsburg fought back and returned to work for GM design where he operated the company's first computer graphic terminal as well as proposing styling for a small car for GM to tackle the ever-popular VW. This design, observes Ludvigsen, looked remarkably like the Golf of a few years later.

Where the author profiles the more familiar, he takes a different tack: another former colleague was John Delorean, who Ludvigsen says, always received a poor press this side of

the pond, almost entirely associated as he was with the failed Northern Irish venture. Delorean's mistakes here were evident – based in the US he was far too remote and the lack of a RHD car meant the home market (and PR) was disastrously neglected. However, what was blatantly overlooked was that Delorean himself, a brilliant and inventive engineer with 44 patents to his name, had for years outshone contemporaries and superiors at General Motors. A gifted and finally isolated man who perhaps flew too close to the sun, John Delorean's reputation was unfairly besmirched implies the author, who convincingly redresses the balance here.

Elsewhere, at the end of 1961 Ludvigsen meets Phil Hill and asks him about his winning season after which Ferrari had strangely ignored him. The interview is a model of concision: Hill's replies are precise, direct and portray the Californian very much as the thoughtful, analytical yet somehow uncertain champion we now know he was.

The profiles of Alexander von Falkenhausen, the man behind the modern BMW ohc engine and Larry Shinoda (1963 Corvette Stingray, inter alia) expose these two inspired, but relatively unknown individuals to the wider public their efforts deserve.

Verdict

A real handbook for auto-historians, *Fast Friend*s comprises 23 portraits almost all of which offer historical perspectives which are all the more compelling because they are largely based on first hand material. Two minor disappointments are the uncharacteristically thin piece on Paul Frère and the book's cover which appears to show Zora Arkus Duntov, but he is not among the profiles.