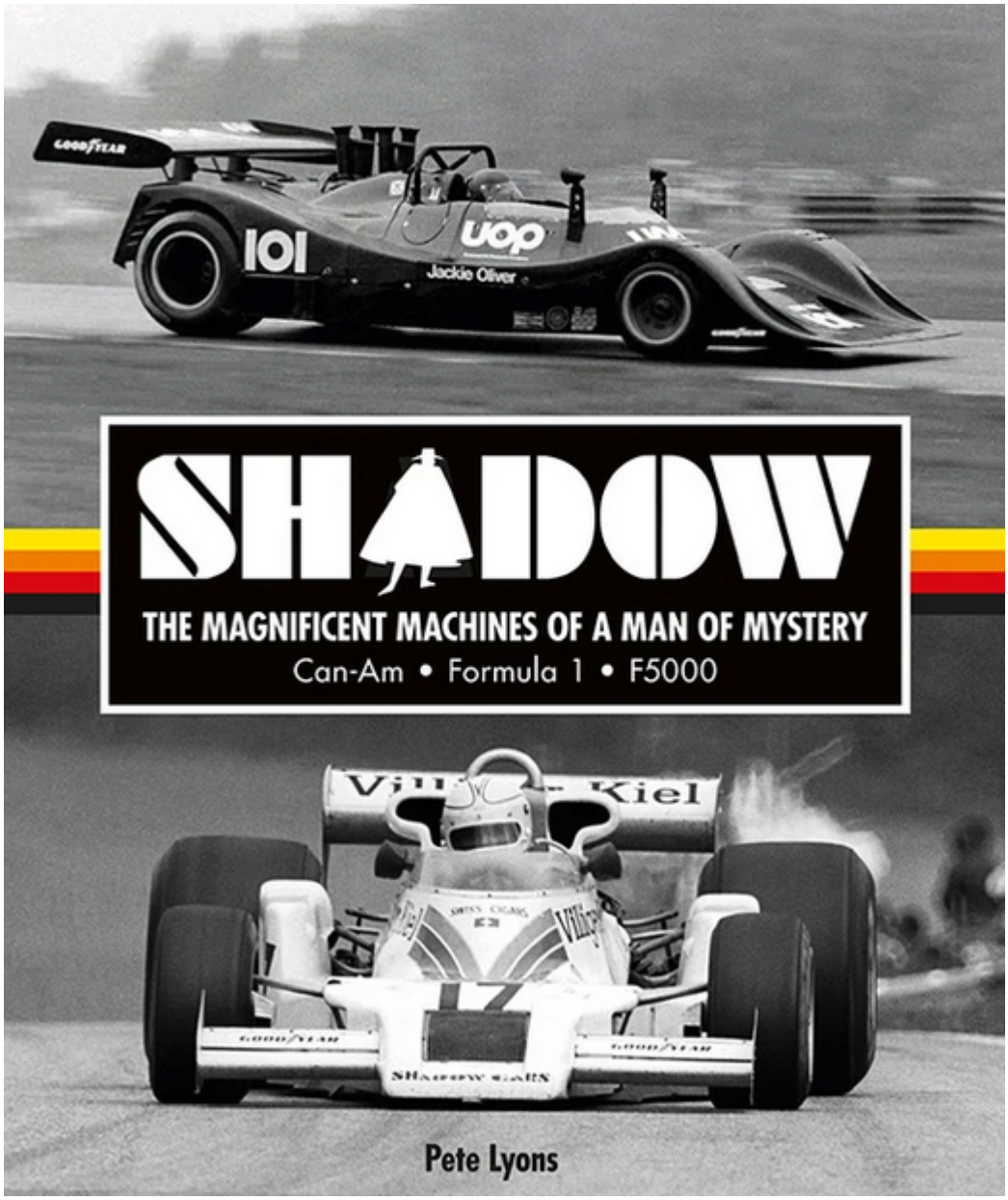
For Your Bookshelf: Shadow: The Magnificent Machines of a Man of Mystery

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Reviewed by Kieron Fennelly.

Title: Shadow: The Magnificent Machines of a Man of Mystery

Author: Pete Lyons

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The man of mystery is of course Don Nichols whose dramatic looking Shadow racers were such a feature of Formula 1 and the Can Am series in the 1970s. Born in 1924, Nichols was old enough to fight in the latter stages of the War in Europe and was wounded at least twice. The experience failed to deter him and he returned to the military in the early 1950s, taking an administrative position in Japan after studying the language beforehand. He liked to imply that it was some sort of intelligence role, but would never expand on this, even in old age when author Lyons tried hard to probe him. Clearly the aura of mystery, symbolised by his famous logo, the black hatted and capped spy, was something Nichols cultivated systematically.

A natural entrepreneur, he prospered in Japan, quickly spotting a market for imported car parts and becoming the Goodyear representative as well as starting a second family. A tall and imposing figure, in Japan he appears to have honed his ability to make contacts and charm favours and money, characteristics which would set him in good stead when, by now a rich man, he returned to the US in 1968. First-hand experience of top-class motor racing through his tyre business gave him the taste to build and run his own team and characteristically he looked at the race series least constrained by rules – the Can Am championship. As the Can Am waned, he turned his attentions to Formula 1.

Pete Lyons details the dozen years of races in which the distinctive Shadows, none more so than the daringly diminutive small-wheeled car with which Nichols began his campaign, were almost always worthy also-rans, their high points a Can Am championship in 1974 and the odd grand prix victory. Nichols however, usually gave his sponsors value for their dollars, particularly United Oil Products whose UOP logo became world famous, but as the decade wore on, the increasingly technical Formula 1 proved too deep for his pockets and

designers and drivers left him, not simply for greener pastures, but simply to get a pay cheque. Nichols's capacity to have people work for nothing was legendary and eventually it would turn employees against him. Sometime Shadow driver and later senator for Nevada Ralph Townsend remarked that the educated and eclectic Nichols was good company, cerebral even, but at the end of a dinner, "He'd stick you for the bill even though *he* had invited *you*."

This is an ambitious book, but Lyons marshals his material deftly, his race summaries have a light touch which make them not only easy to absorb, but also leave the reader keen to know what happened next, such is the author's skill at drawing his audience into the story. The work is punctuated by extensive interviews with individuals central to the plot. Particularly notable are contributions from designer Tony Southgate and from Shadow's long-time driver Jackie Oliver whose exasperation with Nichols finally contributed to his leaving and establishing the rival Arrows team. But the most revealing interview is undoubtedly with Penny, Nichols's third child who worked with him on the Shadow project and again twenty years later.

If Lyons's folksy prose is very different from the elegance of a Karl Ludvigsen, his style is engaging and he is the equal of Ludvigsen in the endeavour and depth of his research: His occasional gentle correction of the memoirs a contributor reveals the crosschecking instinct which marks out the serious historian. Ulsterman John Watson might be mildly surprised to learn he has an "Irish brogue," but a this is a pedant's quibble in the otherwise compelling authenticity of Lyons's account.

VERDICT

As a racing reporter Pete Lyons witnessed much of the Shadow decade first-hand: he shows how Nichols sought to be *the* all-American race team, something Briggs Cunningham (with more money and less success) had attempted twenty years before. Single-handedly the calculating Nichols charmed engines from the likes of Ford, Chrysler and Matra, plus countless sponsors' dollars, and harnessed the brainpower of some of the best designers and engineers. Like many who worked with him, the reader is left wondering where some of

that money came from year after year, but as the author says, that story would make a different book. It would also be a far less valuable book than this superb and fascinating historical work to which the enthusiast will want to return time and time again.