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Mick De Haas doesn't do many deals – but when he does...

Thank you for the title

Mick De Haas has returned to the big league of agents, thanks to a ground-breaking deal with ING to shepherd its entrance into Formula One. No one could have done it better.

By any measure the 2006 Italian Grand Prix weekend was an extraordinary one for Formula One. Michael Schumacher's retirement announcement, Spyker's purchase of the Midland team and Fernando Alonso's controversial qualifying penalty all dominated the headlines at different points over the weekend. Away from the limelight, however, the seeds of another major story were being sown in the paddock, indeed Formula One's biggest commercial story of the year.

Almost unnoticed, five executives from Dutch financial services group ING arrived in the paddock on Saturday morning to view presentations from Ferrari, McLaren and Renault as it decided where to place its multimillion dollar sponsorship budget. It was a crucial weekend, masterminded by Dutch agent, Mick De Haas. He was involved in all stages of negotiations as ING eventually chose a title sponsorship package with Renault and a large trackside branding campaign, worth a reputed US\$75 million a year in direct spending on the property and at least as much again on execution.

The deal propelled De Haas to a new status as one of Formula One's handful of top super-agents. In the fickle world of sponsorship agents, he was top dog again.

Despite a low profile in Formula One in recent years, De Haas is a veteran of global sports sponsorship. He began his career in advertising, following in his father's footsteps. He learned the trade working in various European cities for the Burson-Marsteller agency. However his big break came in 1978 when he set up in London: "I was invited for a job at West Nally, which at the time was one of the growing agencies that held the rights in soccer and the Olympics, run by

Patrick Nally. It was a breeding ground for the original sports marketing people." As well as De Haas, alumni of West Nally also include the likes of Karen Earl and Michael Payne.

At the time, De Haas was responsible for managing the accounts of sponsors such as Canon and Coca-Cola. He recalls it was an eye-opening experience: "I realised that a lot of these companies were not taking sponsorship very seriously. From a conventional marketing background I was already astonished that these companies were spending months deciding on advertising campaigns, not actually thinking seriously about sponsorship but spending all this money."

It was a situation he sought to rectify and which signalled a change of career course. He joined Canon in 1980 as sponsorship director for the Japanese company's World Cup programme. "This was my first experience of supplying the sponsorship," he recalls. "I developed a sponsor policy for the company, looking at a structured programme for soccer and other areas that fitted the particular product group of the company. We developed programmes for different products and countries and it was very interesting to develop an integrated sponsorship campaign but also to activate it and I spent a lot of time working with agencies to make it value for money, which can still be difficult."

De Haas and Canon's move into motorsport sponsorship came in a very casual way in early 1981. The well-known sportscar driver, Richard Lloyd, casually handed De Haas a drawing of his Porsche sportscar, which he had speculatively decorated with Canon's livery in the hope of enticing it into a deal. It was to have the desired effect, although De Haas didn't think so at the time. He recalls: "One evening three months into the job one of the Japanese bosses invited me for a drink in his office and we got talking about Le Mans. I showed him the picture and the next morning I got a call from the company's president. He said, 'Do you think we should do this?' and I replied, 'It's a nice thing for Canon to be associated with Porsche, but don't expect to win'. He said: 'Ok, let's do it, as long as I don't have to go because I don't like the noise'."

It was the start of something big for De Haas, as he recalls: "Three or four years later Canon came to me and said,

'We should be in Formula One'. CSS, the agency for Williams at the time, came to my office with a proposal from Williams, who had just lost the Saudi money. I told them it had to be approved by Japan, so I sent them there to do a presentation, never thinking they would come back with it and that it would end there. Three weeks later I got a call from Japan asking me to do a contract."

So began the long partnership between Williams and Canon. De Haas managed all aspects of the sponsorship, which in the early days included negotiating hospitality deals with each individual circuit. "It was complete chaos and hard work," he remembers.

In 1984 he left Canon to join Guinness as sponsorship director. But Guinness underwent many management changes and virtually withdrew from sponsorship, and in 1986 he left to set up his own agency called MDH Communications and started working with his old client Canon again – until it ended abruptly in 1993 when Williams signed with Rothmans. That was a bad moment and it is clear that the manner of Canon's departure from Formula One and the conduct of the Williams team at the time still leaves a bitter taste. De Haas chooses his words carefully and says: "Because of Frank Williams, Canon finished in 1993. They signed Rothmans despite the fact that there was an agreement with Canon for the next two years, but that's the way it happens in Formula One. They left on a bad note after a very successful period, with three world championships. The fee was about a zero less than we now pay with ING." It was made worse by the fact that De Haas considered Frank Williams a personal friend. Canon's Japanese executives were so offended that they decided to get out of Formula One altogether despite a typically opportunistic last-minute pitch by Flavio Briatore, Benetton's team principal. De Haas says: "Canon had a budget to go for another two years. I had a call from Flavio in the summer of 1993 and he made a very interesting offer for the sidepods, but it was more to screw Frank than anything else. Unfortunately the Japanese people at Canon were so hurt by what Frank had done they left Formula One, which was a very great shame."

Frank Williams, for his part, prefers not to recall those events, but history shows Rothmans was offering as much as three times what Canon was and with a very expensive new driver joining the

ING branding takes prominence on the Renault R27 at the Australian Grand Prix, Albert Park, Melbourne, Australia, on Wednesday 14th March 2007.





team, necessity prevailed. Although out of Formula One, De Haas's agency continued to work in motorsport circles, acting for Nissan, Chrysler's Viper programme, Audi and Bentley in sportscars. He also worked in other sports and does not like to be pigeon-holed as a one-trick agent, as he says: "The initial philosophy of the company was to purely work as a consultant to a company's sponsorship, mainly on international projects like motorsport, winter sports, Olympics and soccer." With the bad taste of 1993 in his mouth, De Haas lost some enthusiasm for Formula One and was not to visit the paddock again for 13 years, in fact until Monza 2006. In that period Formula One's loss was the rest of sports' gain.

In fact the roots of De Haas's relationship with ING can be traced back to 13 years ago. Then he was contracted by an event called Sail Amsterdam, held every five years, to look after its five main sponsors. It was a job he did in 1995 and again in 2000. "One was Heineken, another was ING," he recalls. "The chairman of the committee of the event was Hans Verkoren, who later became a board member of ING and developed ING Direct.

"In 2004 I was working on a project for another bank, ABN AMRO, in the Volvo Ocean race. They asked me if I could organise a stopover in Amsterdam, so we spent four months developing that and suddenly ABN changed their minds

and said we should do it in Rotterdam. I was very frustrated because we had a readymade plan. Before the race organisers made the decision I asked them to give me two more weeks, because I noticed ING sponsored one of the Australian boats in a small way. So I called Hans Verkoren – it was nice to call someone on the board – and we arranged a meeting with his head of communications Nick Jue. We met in January 2005 and we eventually decided it wasn't right for ING, but Nick told me they were reorganising and the chairman wanted to look at sponsorship."

Six months later De Haas's agency was appointed to research the extent and effectiveness of ING's sponsorship. >

Mick De Haas photographed at Schiphol International Airport, Amsterdam, The Netherlands on Thursday 26th April 2007.



The lion of ING is everywhere and it has integrated quickly as Renault's title sponsor. It is a source of immense satisfaction to agent, Mick De Haas.

< What he found surprised him. "They only had experience of marathon sponsorship and to such a degree that people compared marathons to the Olympics. You have to be very careful if you're brought in as an outsider by the boss to tell them they are wrong."

De Haas ordered an analysis of the company's marathon programme, as he puts it, "to see if it worked". He adds: "I wanted to find out what ING's competitors were spending and why and on what. The final question was to ask whether there was a case to have ING do a major sponsorship."

Under De Haas's control a small team from ING was formed to run the sponsorship analysis. De Haas also hired two agencies: ING's existing brand identity specialists Interbrand and, following a four agency pitch, the Frankfurt-based Schmidt Und Kaiser which has previously run Allianz's sponsorship.

But ING executives at the time were vehemently anti-motorsport and with De Haas's background were suspicious of

where he might lead them. "We had a bit of non-cooperation early on," De Haas admits. "Some people at ING knew I had a background in motorsport so that was off limits. People said to me 'we will never do motorsport' and I never put it on the agenda. But through the process it had to come onto the agenda if they wanted to examine a global sponsorship."

Despite that the sponsorship team presented its findings to the ING board in June last year. As De Haas describes it: "We did a very thorough investigation about the brand, the value and the deal. I think we proved in the end that a good sponsorship programme would be the answer for them. We said the best options were international tennis with the ATP and the other was Formula One. Internally at the time there was a momentum building for Formula One but I still thought it was going to happen."

"Tennis was a softer option but it's not very impactful and you need to have at

least three years to build the brand. At the time there was a window where we could get the title sponsorship for the Australian Open Grand Slam and two hours before we presented to ING we got a call that somebody had picked it up, so that was that. With tennis we said we would have to have two Grand Slams. I felt the culture in ING was too soft for Formula One although the more I worked there the more I felt they needed something like that."

De Haas recalls waiting for the verdict outside the boardroom and to his intense surprise, the decision was to investigate Formula One further. He recalls: "I had proposed a deal with a top-three team and estimated with some homework that we would spend €20 million with a team and do some trackside branding at six to eight races and one race title sponsorship. The homework was taking 10 countries where ING is – some developing, some existing – and interview our customers to find out."

His team also interviewed every one



of ING's 200 worldwide directors to gauge their mood. "I think 90 per cent were positive and agreed that ING needed a big project. Some of them disagreed with F1 but they said even if they didn't like it, they realised they could do something with it. With the customers, we found nobody who said they would walk away from ING if they did Formula One, which was surprising even to me."

De Haas immediately set his sights on the top three teams, Renault, Ferrari and McLaren. Intriguingly he reveals that there was a fourth option, although realistically it was never on: Prodrive, scheduled to enter the sport in 2008. "I know David Richards and he couldn't offer me much at the time, but I gave them the chance because if you are going for a smaller team where ING could dominate the car, it would have been a good one."

Throughout June, July and August the team researched the possibilities of Formula One sponsorship. It gave De Haas the opportunity to call on some old

friends such as McLaren's marketing supremo, Ekrem Sami, and Flavio Briatore. Needless to say Williams was not one of the teams he called. He says: "I actually had my first meeting with Flavio at the end of May. I asked for an audience with him and showed him a copy of ING's annual report and he didn't know ING. In June and July I went to the top three teams and said to each: 'This is my client, this is why they possibly want to be in F1, what can you do for €20m'. They all came back with proposals. One was a bit more, one was a bit less, but it was so interesting to go through three marketing teams in a sequence of three weeks."

De Haas admits that after years away from the frontline of Formula One he was very impressed with the professionalism of all three teams and each one offered something different: "McLaren offered ING a nice deal but they already had Vodafone and it was a black logo on a silver car. Ferrari was more difficult. Because of Phillip Morris they weren't

allowed to put anything on the car. One day before the board meeting in September I got a sticker on the car, but they had done a really great proposal which in other circumstances I would have said was ideal. They really wanted to make ING their finance and insurance partner for the whole group.

"I was very straight with all of them because I had nothing to offer them, other than an update, and I told them all I was approaching all three of them. Jean Todt said early on, 'Are you talking to any of the Japanese teams?' My first meeting at Ferrari was funny. I went with Reiner Miller from Schmidt Und Kaiser and we did the introductions and Jean Todt said 'What do ING want?'. I said 'We want an orange car'. And he looked at me and looked again and started to explain why that wasn't possible and I said 'Look, Jean, don't worry' and then it clicked that I was joking. Giulio Zambaletti came in and we spent an hour and a half with them, very interesting." De Haas also met with Renault executive Laurence Eckle in Geneva.

Unusually at this point De Haas and the other appointed agencies had been handling the negotiations themselves, without any involvement at all from ING executives. The plan was to use the Italian Grand Prix weekend in September to introduce ING executives to the three teams. De Haas explains: "We were planning to take the chairman, Michel Tilmant, but three weeks to go he cancelled. He said that he liked Formula One but didn't want to influence the decision by being there. That was very sensible. He sent a board member for ING Direct, one of the bigger divisions, and the CEO from Italy, five people in total."

Despite distancing himself from the process, ING's chairman stayed close to the negotiations. De Haas says: "The chairman understood very well. He gave me a very hard time when I gave him an update in August. He took me to pieces, challenging me on everything. Then once I'd convinced him he told me that they needed to get boarding as well as the car and explained that his background was marketing. That was a turning point, because I then knew that he knew what would be good for the brand."

The Monza weekend proved to be impeccable timing. The world's press was focused on Schumacher while the Dutch press contingent who would have been most likely to spot a group of ING executives wandering in and out of motorhomes, had eyes only for Spyker's buyout of Midland. De Haas could go about his business unmolested.

On Saturday morning at Monza, De Haas told each team they had an hour to make their final presentations to the board members, as he recalls: "We >

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ABOVE: The end of the deal that made Mick De Haas's name and upset him the most. Damon Hill and Alain Prost say goodbye to Canon at the Japanese Grand Prix, Suzuka on 24th October 1993.

BELOW: Michel Tilmant, chairman of the board of ING at the launch of the Renault R27 at The Factory, Amsterdam, Holland, 24th January 2007.



< started at 10 o'clock in the Renault unit. Flavio came in for the final five minutes. He sits there, takes it all in and then, bang, says exactly the right things. Then we went to McLaren next door, with Ekrem doing his thing and Ron came in and did his Ron stuff. Then to Ferrari where Jean Todt was dealing with all the Schumacher hype. They each had a completely different approach."

As he left the paddock at Monza he had the most crucial conversation of all: "I just briefly asked Laurence Eckle whether the title sponsorship was available, because I knew Mild Seven was

leaving. I said, 'I don't think it's on the cards, but do me an outline of what the title deal would do differently to what you've offered already and the price difference'."

Two weeks later De Haas and the ING agents presented their findings to the main ING board.

De Haas recommended Renault to the board simply because ING's colours could be on the car. He also presented the title sponsorship package offered. "I remember sitting outside thinking it would take half an hour and it took an hour and a half. At that point you think it's gone. When the meeting finished they told me it wasn't a pushover, that there really had been a discussion. They asked if I could get more boarding because they thought that was valuable and then added 'we've decided to do title.'" De Haas's eyes light up as he recounts the story. As he says: "In an agent's world that never happens. There is a year and a half of work in it but you can imagine the phone call to Renault. There was a sort of silence on the other end."

The next stage was finalising the contracts, a process De Haas says "I never want to go through again". He adds: "I sat in on two days of the talks – it was so draining but you had to stay on top of it. It's the best research we've done and I think the best contract, and the same with Paddy (McNally) and Allsport."

De Haas is staying involved with the sponsorship as a strategic consultant, reporting to the company's new head of communications Frank Koster. "I don't get involved in the day-to-day stuff, but if Isabelle (Conner), needs advice I am there." He adds: "Over the last few

months I've realised that they have to learn and go through it themselves. As long as they don't do silly things, and they don't, then this is the learning year and we can sit back in six months and work out what went wrong and right.

"Another part of my work with ING is working on a focused sponsorship policy for other areas of the group. If you look at RBS, they do more than one thing. We mapped out what they were doing: in India ING sponsors hockey, in Holland they sponsor football and they will continue doing that but we are setting some guidelines in terms of how you set the logos and do the contracts. We've just started that and we'll present the first outline to the board in two or three months. F1 doesn't cover the whole world, like the US. We're looking at other opportunities."

For now De Haas is able to sit back and reflect on a job well executed. It has been his return to the forefront of Formula One sponsorship, although he insists it does not mean that will remain the case. "If I take on another project, or another ING, it will not necessarily be in the Formula One business, because that's what I want to be as a consultant."

But he adds: "I guess I'm the blue-eyed boy of Formula One at the moment because I realised later on that the ING deal was very good timing for Formula One. I get approached by a lot of companies now because my story is a good story. It helps. I've always worked very low profile. I think the people who need to know, know me and we've worked with some very reputable companies at a high level.

"What's nice is I can be a little bit choosy now as to who I take on." **BF11**