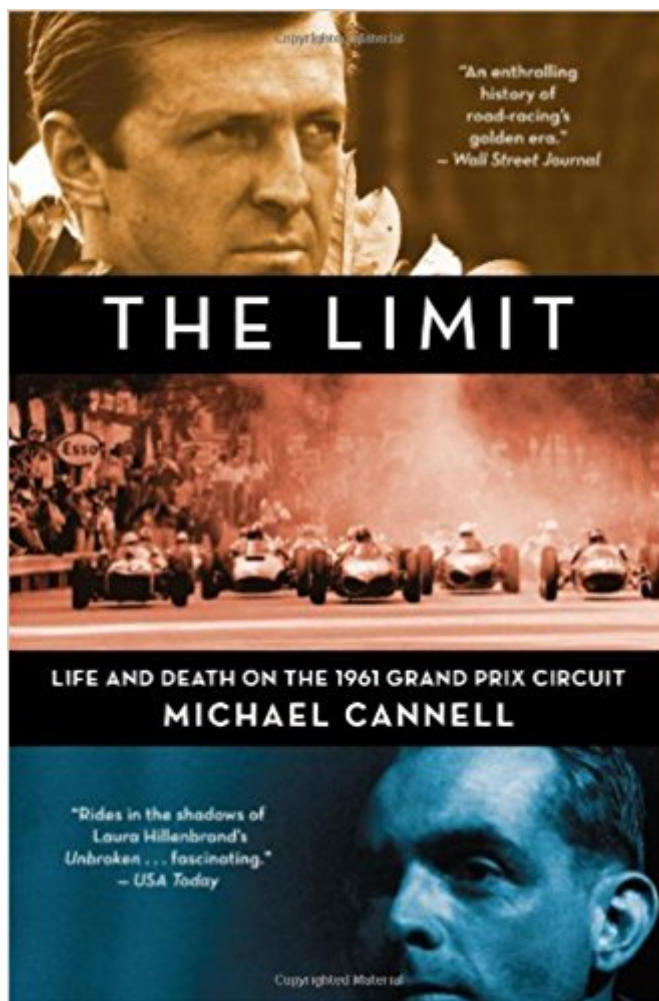


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# The Limit: Life And Death On The 1961 Grand Prix Circuit



## Synopsis

In *THE LIMIT*, Michael Cannell tells the enthralling story of Phil Hill—a lowly California mechanic who would become the first American-born driver to win the Grand Prix—and, on the fiftieth anniversary of his triumph, brings to life a vanished world of glamour, valor, and daring. With the pacing and vivid description of a novel, *THE LIMIT* charts the journey that brought Hill from dusty California lots racing midget cars into the ranks of a singular breed of men, competing with daredevils for glory on Grand Prix tracks across Europe. Facing death at every turn, these men rounded circuits at well over 150 mph in an era before seat belts or roll bars—an era when drivers were "crushed, burned, and beheaded with unnerving regularity." From the stink of grease-smothered pits to the long anxious nights in lonely European hotels, from the tense camaraderie of teammates to the trembling suspense of photo finishes, *THE LIMIT* captures the 1961 season that would mark the high point of Hill's career. It brings readers up close to the remarkable men who surrounded Hill on the circuit—men like Hill's teammate and rival, the soigné and cool-headed German count Wolfgang Von Trips (nicknamed "Count Von Crash"), and Enzo Ferrari, the reclusive and monomaniacal padrone of the Ferrari racing empire. Race by race, *THE LIMIT* carries readers to its riveting and startling climax—the final contest that would decide it all, one of the deadliest in Grand Prix history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Photos from *The Limit* (Click on Images to Enlarge) Phil Hill and Wolfgang von Trips share the laurel wreath after von Trips finished first and Hill second at the 1961 Dutch Grand Prix. (Credit: Associated Press) The 156 Sharknose was Ferrari's answer to the nimble British cars of the

late 1950s. Built in secret with the flared nostrils of a predator, the Sharknose returned Ferrari to dominance. (Credit: Klemantaski Collection) Phil Hill leads a procession of Ferraris on the notorious banking at Monza, site of the 1961 Italian Grand Prix. "This was a duel in the sun," a correspondent wrote, "and the pace was too hot to last." (Credit: Cahier Archive) At the 1955 running of Le Mans, Pierre Levegh's Mercedes spun into the grandstand, killing 83 spectators. For Phil Hill, it was a barbarous introduction to the European circuit. (Credit: Credit: Getty Images)

Cannell opens this exciting account of auto-racing history with a sobering statistic. Between 1957 and 1961, 20 Grand Prix drivers were killed during races. The battle for Grand Prix supremacy in 1961 was between American Phil Hill and German Count Wolfgang Von Trips. Of course, the press framed the competition as one between a blue collar and a blue blood, but labels don't do the competitors justice. Cannell, working from secondary sources, provides fascinating biographies of both, interspersed among accounts of their careers leading up to the 1961 season. He also includes a context for the deadly appeal of the sport. Drivers did not wear seatbelts, and the cars had no roll bars. Essentially, they had no protection at all. Sadly, in the final race of the season, the Italian Grand Prix, with Von Trips needing only a third-place finish to win the championship, he crashed on the second lap and died along with a number of spectators. Oh, and the limit? Go too slow and you lose. Too fast and you die. A fascinating history of an almost-forgotten auto-racing era.

--Wes Lukowsky --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Well told and exciting to read. Good research and detail. My husband has been a racing fan for years and it gave us something new to talk about. The drivers were good looking men, too!

This book was a total revelation. I never gave much thought to Phil Hill as a world champion but I guess it was due to the absolute low profile of the man. What a terrific, heart-breaking story this book covers. It's great that the author is not a passionate follower of the sport because it allows him to detach himself and tell the story in a rather more objective manner. Some great characters fill the pages of these books with great stories. A must read for any follower of the sport, it's a sad tale though, full of loss, great talents snuffed out but that's what made those men great, driving little torpedoes with no regards to safety at 190 mph not knowing if they will make it through the bend. It has a lot of detailed story telling, fills in the gaps with life between races, beyond the track, although I think it ends a little abruptly and all too quickly. You couldn't dream up a world this interesting.

This is accurate, entertaining history. This is the way histories should be told because they draw the reader in instead of counting on his or her sense of "duty" to plow through the information.

Engaging, colorful, insightful I especially enjoyed the narrative because it recounts the "under-told" careers of two men who because of circumstance as much or more than because of their skills briefly sat atop the pinnacle of international motorsport. I am an aficionado of the sport and while I knew the headlines I was unaware of the details and the nuance. The other looming personality was Enzo Ferrari who is masterfully returned to living flesh. The ever-morphing F1 and sports car racing community is captured as well - complete with death's revolving door. If you enjoy auto racing or even if you just treasure a compelling, even-handed read of exceptional personalities who strive to achieve this one will not disappoint.

I loved the book and found it very hard to put down. This book reminded me of how racing really was in those days before money took control. I will not attempt to rewrite parts of it here but instead just judge the story the book tells. I think it could have perhaps been better titled because the reference to the 1961 season led me astray in my expectations a little bit but if anything, I would say it was even better than I expected! It is impossible to compare today's racing and drivers to that of the 50's and 60's! Until this book, I don't think I ever fully appreciated Phil Hill or his accomplishments. Because of circumstances, he certainly never received his due, unless you could say that just surviving Formula One in those times was enough! I have never understood why Americans don't appreciate Formula One racing more. Driving at speed through left hand and right hand turns of various degrees and camber as well as up hill and down hill certainly requires more finesse than around and around a steeply banked oval! If you want to relive those days of "Life and Death on the Grand Prix Circuit" you will love this book!

I had the pleasure of living in Germany in 196 and seeing Phil race in Spa and the Ring. He has always been a hero of mine. The book is an excellent review of his life. Like many non Motorsport authors it overemphasizes risk and death. Phil Hill was not washed up by 1964, he raced well with Jim Hall's Chaparral team, and won important races.

For racing nuts and fans of John Frankenheimer's movie "Grand Prix" this is a good read (and I am both). It offers very insightful profiles into the personalities who lived this incredibly dangerous life, and the risks they faced. It is well written and tells a very compelling story, with both good guys and villains. It is also very factual with good documentation and appropriate citations.

I found 'The Limit' to be a fine psychological study of the two protagonists and their contemporaries. It tells a good story of the rivalries of the F1 circuit of the time, and what it was like to be a driver before driver safety became important. Starting with short biographies of Hill and Von Trips, the bulk of the book concentrates on the elite racing circuit of the 50's and early 60's. The author does a good job of painting a picture of what it might have been like to be a driver in those times, and the emotional toll it took to compete at that level. In his afterward the author unapologetically describes his lack of car knowledge, but this is the book's main downfall. Auto development was a part of what made the racing what it was, and made the environment in which these men drove. To gloss over the technology involved is to tell 1/2 the story, even if one's focus is on the drivers. But the drivers' stories are well-told, and 'The Limit' is definitely worth a read. The few B&W photos help, but more photos and color photos would have improved my enjoyment.

Some inaccuracies in details but overall well written and highly interesting. A good resource if you want to read about the time when Grand Prix racing was truly a blood sport. On some infamous racing accidents during the "golden era" (and there were lots of them) you've only heard or read tidbits about, you can read the details here including human drama elements involving the wives, fellow drivers, team heads, etc. For instance I never knew Mike Hawthorne crashed and died while street racing his new Jaguar against Rob Walker's gullwing Mercedes, just months after retiring as World Champion. It was just a chance encounter on the streets by 2 ex-GP racers. The book revolves principally around Scuderia Ferrari teammates Phil Hill and the count Wolfgang Von Tripps, two very diverse characters whose only commonality was in their youth, none could have known either one was headed for a life of racing glamour and eternal fame.

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