

TRASHED: FORMULA ONE NO LONGER MADE IN JAPAN

As you all might know, we here at Emptywheel are car people. And one annoying thread ran common as a persistent undercurrent through all of our auto and auto bailout coverage over the last year, and that was how pitiful and incompetent the American marques were, how much they deserved their fate and how awesome the Japanese brands, especially Toyota and Honda, were in comparison. This was incredibly disturbing because, as rudimentary as rolling iron seems on the surface, the automotive industry is incredibly complex and vertically integrated; it simply is not amenable to to simplisms and truisms that were bandied about in those tumultuous days.

Sadly, it is a meme that persists even today in spite of the fact that all manufacturers, very much including those in Japan, are sucking air and taking on water. And, no, their cars are not that much better either, they have quality and safety problems too.

For all of its ballyhooed efficiency, quality control and supposed relative superiority, the Japanese auto industry always was built on the shoulders and technology of the American manufacturers; they wanted the sales sector of the Americans and the aura of the Europeans. Since the Japanese marques first started their meteoric rise in prominence in the 70s, the holy grail for them was to compete and win on the highest stage in the world. Formula One. But the wake of the global financial meltdown has trashed their fortunes, and their goals, every bit as hard as it pounded the American car business. The pursuit of the holy grail is over, first for Honda last December, and now for Toyota:

Toyota announced Wednesday that it would

give up its prized Formula One racing team in an effort to slash costs, refocus the company on green cars and turn a profit amid continued weakness in the auto sector.

Toyota, the world's biggest automaker, joins a growing exodus of Japanese auto companies from racing, highlighting the woes facing the country's once cash-rich manufacturers. Honda pulled out of Formula One racing in December, while the tire-maker Bridgestone said this week that it would not renew its exclusive deal to supply tires to the series when its contract expires in 2010.

Subaru and Suzuki pulled out of the World Rally Championship before the season, citing concerns about the global crisis, while Kawasaki is quitting MotoGP, the top motorcycle competition.

"I hope you will understand that based on the current business environment we have no choice but to make this very painful decision," Akio Toyoda, the Toyota president, said at a news conference in Tokyo on Wednesday. "To all fans, I apologize from the bottom of my heart."

Akido Toyoda literally cried as he made the announcement. Make no mistake, there was cause; he, Toyota and Japan had all lost face with the withdrawal from Formula One. The Japanese do not take loss of face lightly; their auto business is truly hurting just like the Americans.

The dream may be over for Toyota, Honda and the Japanese for now, but F1 will live on. In fact, it is not all that huge of a surprise; there has been speculation since before the season started in March that Toyota would pull out if they did not have a breakthrough season this year, and they did not, even though many things were lined

up for them. Contrary to what Toyota said, it was not just the money, it was that they were not particularly competitive even in a year where they had their best equipment ever and the power teams Ferrari and McLaren were off their game and mediocre at best. In their eight years in the F1 Circus, Toyota never managed to win even one race. Still, it is a sad loss for motorsport, and F1 will be worse off for the wear. Here is hoping that Japanese, and American, auto manufacturing soon returns to form and profitability, and soon returns to the biggest sporting stage in the world, Formula One.

National Favre League: The Cardinals at Bears is an oddly interesting game. Both teams have been wildly inconsistent, one week world beaters, the next week goats. Kurt Warner was a huge goat last week with five interceptions; he had nothing. No Urlacher though, Warner will pick it up and the Cards get a close win. The Ravens visit the Bengals. Cincy won the first one this year, can they sweep Baltimore? You have to say no, but the Bengals have been pretty solid this year; I rate it a toss up. Houston at Indy could be a good tilt, but Peyton and Reggie Wayne are too much for the upstart Texans. The Fish at the Pats looks on paper like a game to watch, but Bill Bel is coming off a bye week, thus giving him two weeks to scheme revenge for what Miami did to the Pats last year in this game. Pats will obliterate the Fish this time. The Iggles host the 'Boys and will remind Dallas that it is a mediocre team. The Monday Night game is Steelers at Broncos. Denver plays tough, but gets its second loss in a row.

NCAA Football: It is a horrid slate of games on tap this weekend; completely unacceptable this far into November. Bleech. The only two games of interest I see are Ohio State at Penn State and the Oregon Quackers waddling into the Stanford Trees. I have no idea why, but I smell an upset by the Buckeyes over the JoePas. Oregon should take care of Stanford. Here at home I have the once mighty Trojans of USC rolling into Sun

Devil Stadium for a night game. USC may be down,
but they will kill the Devils.