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AC: I'm told that you had an interesting to-do with race officials during the 1996 season, which ultimately resulted in a rules modification?

Alex: Ah, indeed. Steven has always been a devious sort, and one evening as we were having a pint in celebration of the past season, he tossed out a concept that he'd been mulling around. The idea was that by adding material to the top surface of the piston, you could easily bump the output of the engine as a result of the increased compression. Pretty rudimentary stuff, but of course the series rules don't permit much leeway in these matters.

AC: The stuff of a thousand post-race discussions, of course.

Alex: Right, well, we all knew that no such thing could be done, as you're stuck using only factory parts in the Formula Ford series. But after a few more bitters things started seeming to make sense. We figured on a plan to somehow fix an aluminum disc to fill in the dished area of the piston, when Alan chimed in and said "might as well just glue a few quid to the bugger and be on." And that was when we knew that we had to try it.

AC: You're loony, you know that?

Alex: (chuckles) Well, I had some loose coin jingling about from a recent trip to the states, and I figured that we've got an essentially American engine to start with, it ought to be American money. So we dragged out the engine which we'd just recently torn down and used some double-component epoxy and affixed a couple of half-dollars to the top of each piston.

When we re-assembled the engine and got it to ticking over, we were all a little beside ourselves that it ran, and ran pretty well in fact.

AC: And so you just put it in the car?

Alex: As simple as that, really. Steven did some quick maths and figured that we'd gained about seven percent compression, which the indicator verified. And so the next spring, we just went out and ran that motor. And what a difference! While I'd love to take credit, the fact is that in the space of one off season we went from being merely competitive to pretty consistently finishing on the podium at every event we campaigned.

AC: But you were found out, eventually.

Alex: We took first place in four of our first seven races, and the Pascalli team finally lodged a protest. When we tore down the engine for the officials, well, it's a tragedy that nobody thought to have a camera on hand for the event. The look on their faces was truly priceless. What shocked all of us, frankly, is that the modification had actually held up remarkably well- no sign of damage whatever to the coins or the epoxy. Fortunately, we'd already re-built the other engine and so we were able to continue the season, but while they updated the piston rule, they couldn't quite prove that we'd actually cheated and allowed us to hold on to our victories.

AC: Absolutely bonkers. Let me shift gears for a moment and ask you about your career off the track. You come from a background in geology, and yet I understand that you've made quite a

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