

FERD LEWIS

STAFF COLUMNIST

Maybe it was all Prix-tend

It was with an appropriate dose of irony that the Hawaiian Super Prix faxed news of its demise due to a lack of funds yesterday on letterhead that still billed itself as "The World's Richest Auto Race."

For here was an event that right up until the bitter end continued to make promises that reality said it had little chance of living up to.

A race that had, in the grandiose pronouncement of one of the founders, "relegated (the Indianapolis 500) to second place," never even



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made it to the Nov. 11 starting line at Kalaeloa.

A race that the same co-founder, Richard Rutherford, said he had "full intentions of holding" here for "10

years," never got started before Championship Auto Racing Teams (CART) canceled its contract for inability to meet financial obligations.

The fact that, less than a month before race day, the Hawaiian Super Prix had sold only an estimated 7,000 tickets underlines the skepticism that correctly surrounded this venture since its February chest-thumping boast to become the "Super Bowl of the sport."

The relative lack of surprise that accompanied the folding of its tent suggests this was widely viewed as a long shot at best.

If the owners of this venture deluded anybody in a \$20 million venture that officials said came up more than \$10 million short of getting off the ground, it was mostly themselves.

Anybody who has followed the comings and goings — mostly goings — of a long list of big-time sports schemes over the years had to be skeptical. Nobody who witnessed the ballyhooed promises and quiet exits of the International Football League, among others, could give this more than a wait-and-see attitude in view of the huge numbers being tossed around like hubcaps.

A \$10 million purse? A crowd of 70,000-100,000? Dreaming big was one thing. Losing sight of reality in a narrow time frame was another.

That's why early on the experts — including a director of marketing for another stop on the CART FedEx Championship Series — said they were "dumbfounded" by the record size of the purse promoters were intent on offering.

Promoters with experience staging major shows here cautioned that 8½ months was too quick a turnaround to pull off an event of this magnitude.

Give the staff here in Honolulu credit for an exhaustive try at making the Hawaiian Super Prix work.

It is too bad that the owners made this a race against time and money they couldn't win.

Ferd Lewis has been writing about sports in Hawaii for 25 years. You can write him at The Honolulu Advertiser, P.O. Box 3110, Honolulu, HI 96802.