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## The Golden Years of Kyalami

19 April 2014 | Charis Whitcombe

*There was something very special about the original Kyalami circuit, used for Grands Prix from 1967 to 1985. Not that today's replacement track (built in the early 1990s) is disappointing, exactly, but those who've known both say it isn't a patch on the fast, sweeping and much longer circuit of old.*





Perhaps part of it is that the guys who raced there recall the off-track activities, and the particular attractions of the Kyalami Ranch where so many of the drivers would stay when racing in South Africa. Many chose to stay on afterwards, rather than sprinting off to the next country and the next race, charmed by the laid-back atmosphere (and, just maybe, by the bikini-clad air-hostesses so often referred to in the drivers' reminiscences). No wonder Emerson Fittipaldi, Niki Lauda, Jackie Stewart and the rest of them have such huge grins on their faces in our lead picture at the very top of the page, taken in 1973.

## High jinks, high speeds



There's no shortage of rumours regarding what the drivers got up to at the Ranch, from the rubber snakes that were used to scare the life out of Fittipaldi (who has a real phobia where snakes are concerned, apparently), to James Hunt running naked round the gardens, terrifying (or thrilling?) the female guests. Plus there's the story about covering Niki Lauda's rental car in honey or - on a very hot day - pouring milk into Jacky Ickx's bed.

But when it came to the Kyalami circuit and the very high speeds that Formula One cars could reach on the wide, sweeping curves and ultra-long straight, there was tragedy as well as laughter. Famously, the very promising young Welsh driver, Tom Pryce, was killed there in the 1977 South African Grand Prix, when he crested an undulation on that long, fast main straight and collided with a marshal crossing the track. They were both killed instantly - Pryce by the fire extinguisher that the marshal had been carrying.



But what race circuit doesn't have its own history of lost lives? Perhaps it's better to remember the sunnier side of Kyalami, as it was in the 1960s and '70s, which is so beautifully captured in these archive images.

Photos: Getty Images / Rex Features

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