

The Strange Life and Stranger Death of Paul Brown: Is this a case of another smart guy doing a dumb thing, or something more sinister?

BY STEVEN COLE SMITH OCT 4, 2002

It might be melodramatic to suggest America's best hope for ending our nuclear waste problem died late one night in an illegal street race in Idaho.

Then again, it may not.

We know this: Paul Brown loved cars, especially his lumpy little 30-year-old Mazda RX-2, which he owned for 19 years. Most of that time was spent turning the two-door subcompact into an ultra-high-performance racer, years before the import drag racing boom began. And Brown loved racing, whether it was his Mazda or his Chevy Monte Carlo or his V8-powered motorcycle. When Brown raced at the World Streetnationals at Orlando Speed World Dragway in 2000, he qualified the Mazda at 174.21 mph, covering the quarter-mile from a standing start in less than eight seconds.

Brown came back to the same event last year, towing his Mazda all the way down from his home in Meridian, Idaho, near Boise. Speed World owner Carl Weisinger remembers him. "Very nice guy," Weisinger recalls. "I didn't have a clue he would ever get involved in doing what he did. This is a case of a smart man who did a stupid thing."

What Brown did was race his Mazda on the street, illegally. On the access road to Interstate 84 east of Boise, at 1:30 a.m. last April, racing against a hot-rodded Chevrolet Nova, Brown's Mazda went out of control and flipped, perhaps as many as eight times. Witnesses estimated his speed to be about 130 mph. "The car just all of a sudden veered to the right, then it veered to the left, and went off the road, and it just rolled and rolled," said Brown's wife, Jackie, in an interview with KTVB, an Idaho TV station. She was the first to reach him. "I tried to feel for a pulse, and I

couldn't feel anything. I felt that he was warm, so I held his head up to keep him from choking on his blood. But I think he was already dead.”

At this point, you are tempted to write this one off as a typical but tragic accident that occurred when, as Weisinger says, a smart man did a stupid thing. But it is at this point that Paul Brown's story becomes anything but typical.

Brown, 43, was the founder and chief executive officer of a company called Nuclear Solutions Inc. To quote from the Nuclear Solutions announcement of its founder's death: “Nuclear Solutions regretfully announces the death of Dr. Paul M. Brown. Dr. Brown was killed on April 7, 2002, in an automobile accident in Boise, Idaho. He developed the idea for the company's patented photoremediation technology for the remediation of nuclear waste that will now be his legacy. He is survived by his wife and two children.”

Paul Maurice Brown was a nuclear scientist. He was working on a way not only to dispose of nuclear waste, but to turn that waste into an energy source. To quote from a story in *Wired* magazine: “The U.S. Department of Energy predicts that we'll spend \$150 billion to dispose of radioactive leftovers generated during four decades of Cold War weapons production. Paul Brown, a physics Ph.D. from Boise, Idaho, says he can do it for less than a quarter of that price—without burying hazardous waste. How? Give the nukes a taste of their own medicine: Blast them with radiation.”

The story quotes Bob Park of the American Institute of Physics as saying Brown's idea is “not far-fetched.” John Schiffer, senior scientist and an experimental nuclear physicist at Argonne National Laboratories, told the magazine the idea had merit.

Clearly, Paul Brown was leading two lives. In one, he was a distinguished nuclear scientist. In the other, he was a gearhead of the first order, who lived and breath-ed fast cars, many built with the help of his best friend, Willie Lambert, a Boise truck broker.

Lambert recalls when Brown first got that Mazda RX-2. He junked the rotary engine—blown up, anyway—and dropped in a small-block Ford V8, then a small-block Chevy V8. It was, for two decades, a work in progress. “Paul could just look at

a problem and solve it,” Lambert says. “He loved to do things that people said couldn’t be done. Heads, camshaft grinds—he built one version of the rear suspension of that Mazda using trailing arms from a 1967 Chevy pickup truck. You wouldn’t believe how well that worked. Or how funny it looked.”

Brown, Lambert says, essentially introduced nitrous oxide to the racing scene. “There are people who, more than once, saw that Mazda popping wheelies in downtown Boise,” Lambert says.

When he crashed it, the Mazda had a 540-cubic-inch big-block with dual-stage nitrous injection. They guess at full wail, the horsepower approached 1400. They got it up to 197 mph on a dyno before they decided that was fast enough. It was Brown’s daily driver. More than once, he drove it to California and back, Lambert says.

At the races, “Nobody knew what Paul did for a living,” Lambert says. “Oh, they’d speculate—he was a flashy guy, with fast cars and a beautiful wife. Jackie drove a 2001 supercharged Trans Am—we were building a 454 for it when Paul died.” He was, Lambert says, “the best driver I’ve seen. I’d put him up against John Force any day.

“I called him ‘the dude with the ‘do,’” Lambert says, a reference to Brown’s combed-back preacher hair. “I’d tell him that style went out 25 years ago; he’d just laugh.” Going fast, Lambert says, “was Paul’s release. You can’t imagine the kind of pressure he was under. But he was one of those guys who had time for everybody’s problems but his own.”

From both sides of Paul Brown’s life—from people who barely knew the other existed—there is one thing they agree upon.

“Paul Brown was a genius,” says Lambert.

“Paul Brown was a genius,” says Thomas Valone, president of the Integrity Research Institute in Washington, D.C., which made Brown the first recipient of the Integrity in Research award, given at the Conference on Future Energy in 1999.

Until they could be proven, though, Brown’s theories remained just that. He formed Nuclear Solutions to raise money to build a facility to test them. The company

trades on NASDAQ as NSOL. The 52-week high is \$4.03 a share, the low is 30 cents a share. The stock seems to be hovering around 40 cents now.

You would think this fluctuation would be due to the death of the company founder, and you would be correct. In part. But trace the story of Nuclear Solutions' stock price, and the unusual story of Paul Brown accelerates into the bizarre.

It involves a 35-year-old Egyptian named Amr I. Elgindy, who financed his own love of fast cars and his San Diego-area mansion through a couple of Internet stock advisory sites, insidetruth.com and anthonypacific.com. Subscribers to his site would receive stock information based on Elgindy's contacts before the information became public, allowing his subscribers to buy or sell stock before that news affected stock prices. For this, they paid as much as \$7,000 a year.

Elgindy may indeed have had some valuable sources: In May, the U.S. Attorney's Office in New York indicted Elgindy on charges of manipulating stocks by using secret government information fed to him by an FBI agent, and a former FBI agent, who quit the agency to go to work for Elgindy full-time. The indictment inferred as many as six companies may have been victimized, but named only one—Nuclear Solutions. How did it work? Simple. Elgindy was a “short seller,” meaning he borrowed stock, promising to pay for it later. That is not uncommon. But Elgindy is charged with manipulating the stock's price. The idea: Borrow a share of stock that sells for, say, \$1, sell it, then sabotage it and replace the share of stock you borrowed by buying one when the price drops. If you replace a \$1 share of stock with a share you pay 50 cents for, in theory, you've doubled your money. Multiply that times millions.

The indictment charges that one of the FBI agents searched the FBI's confidential database, where he found information about Brown then passed it along to Elgindy, for money. Elgindy shorted the stock and distributed a report to his subscribers last December calling Brown “a convicted felon”—which, incidentally, is untrue. Years ago Brown was investigated for having chemicals that could be used in the manufacture of drugs, but he was able to prove the chemicals were being used in his scientific experimentation.

Regardless, “the stock of Nuclear Solutions fell sharply in the aftermath of Mr. Elgindy's report,” said the Dow Jones News Service. The indictment also charges

Elgindy with extorting stock or payments to stop the smear campaigns. Prosecutors are seeking Elgindy's \$2.2 million home, as well as his Ferrari, Bentley, Jaguar and Hummer.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Ken Breen initially alleged that Elgindy's source of inside information may have even deeper implications. Breen told a federal judge the Cairo-born financial analyst may have known about the terrorist attacks of September 2001; at Elgindy's detention hearing, Breen speculated, "Perhaps Mr. Elgindy had pre-knowledge of the Sept. 11 attacks. Instead of trying to report it, he tried to profit from it."

On Sept. 10, Breen says Elgindy called his broker and tried to liquidate a \$300,000 fund, because, he reportedly told the broker, the Dow Jones industrial average would soon collapse to 3000 points, at a time when it was 9000. Breen also said that in the months leading up to Sept. 11, Elgindy transferred \$700,000 to Lebanon, where he owns a home. Elgindy's attorneys deny any wrongdoing, and any connection to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Prosecutors and federal investigators have since dropped allegations linking Elgindy to Sept. 11.

Elgindy has had legal problems before. He was indicted on nine counts of fraud in 1999 in Texas, and pleaded guilty to one, serving four months in jail despite the testimony of character witnesses that he was a supporter of Mother Teresa's ministry. Elgindy was apparently not beloved by his Texas neighbors: One complained he would blast through the stop signs in his Fort Worth residential neighborhood in his Ferrari Testarossa. A report in the San Diego Union-Tribune quoted Elgindy's former attorney, Matthew Tyson, who sued his own client for libel and emotional distress and won a \$155,000 judgement. "He threaten-ed to hunt me down and somehow strike me with his shoes, with his foot, and made some threat about hanging me by [an anatomical part]," Tyson told the newspaper.

An investigation by the *Wall Street Journal* suggests Brown was working with the FBI on their case against Elgindy, also confirmed by a close business associate of Brown. When Elgindy finally goes to trial, assuming he does, it seems likely a star witness could have been Paul Brown, who could potentially have testified about what Elgindy's actions did to Brown's business, and his reputation.

But Paul Brown is dead.

A website called “Future Energy eNews” ran a lengthy obituary of Brown titled, “Remembering a Genius Energy Inventor.” The author had known Brown since 1983, when Brown was working on another invention, a nuclear-powered battery that would last 25 years. In 1988 and 1989, Brown was profiled in *Fortune* and *Business Week*, and mentioned in *The New York Times*.

But in 1991, Brown essentially “disappeared from the business world,” the website obit says, after distributing a letter to colleagues on Nov. 1 of that year. In part, the letter said: “I have been involved with alternate energy since 1978, while still a college student. Over the years I have heard many nightmare stories about people who developed something significant only to be persecuted, harassed and even killed. I was sure these stories were exaggerated, or possibly the result of the inventor’s own paranoia.”

His opinion changed. “In 1987, we decided it was time to let the world know what we were working on, and the results we were getting. It was a proud time for me. I thought we were doing the right thing. But this was the real beginning of the worst. Since that February 1987, I or my company have been persecuted by the State Department of Health; then the Idaho Department of Finance filed a complaint against the company and myself; my license for handling radioactive materials was suspended for six months; I began to receive threats (i.e., ‘We will bulldoze your home with your family in it’), then the investigation by the Oregon Department of Finance; then the tax man; then the Securities and Exchange Commission; my wife was assaulted; I lost control of my company; my home has been robbed three times and vandalized on four other occasions; twice now I have been accused of drug manufacturing; I lost my home; most recently my mother’s home was pipe-bombed.

“With each hardship I strive harder toward successful development of technologies under my endeavor. But it only seems to get worse. Someone once said, ‘Paranoia is only a heightened sense of awareness.’ He was right.”

Brown and his family went underground for four years, resurfacing when he thought it was safe.

It may not have been. Brown had a lengthy record as a consummate speeder in Idaho, and he was considered the king of the street racers. Racing his Mazda “was

his life, it's what he enjoyed doing. It was what he always wanted to do. He was just living his dream," Jackie told a Boise TV station. So how did he lose control of a car he had driven for years, at far greater speeds? "He knew that car like the back of his hand," says Lambert. "Some-thing doesn't add up. I've seen Paul drive that car out of situations I never would have imagined. Whatever went wrong out there, I know one thing for sure—it wasn't Paul." Something else that may not add up, but at this point can't be confirmed as anything more sinister than a simple mechanical problem, are reports from one source that bolts on the front suspension of a Brown family car were found loosen-ed shortly before Paul's death. That did not seem particularly significant then.

As for Nuclear Solutions, it survives, but it has been crippled without its found- er, president and CEO. The com-pany moved its offices from Idaho to Washing-ton, D.C. Understandably, though one of Brown's business associates says the company still has Brown's research and patents, and should turn things around, the momentum has stalled.

A month before Brown's death, the company announced an expansion into the decontamination of radioactive wastewater, using exclusive technology obtained from the Institute of Industrial Mathematics in Israel. Executive advisors of Nuclear Solutions mentioned in that press release include Dr. John Powers, former director of Research and Develop-ment Strategies for the Department of Energy; Dr. Don Hunsaker, president of the Environmental Trust and a professor of biology at San Diego State University; and Eric Lindeman, director of the Washington Nuclear Corp. Though multiple credible scientists say Brown's theory of handling nuclear waste is promising, others are less certain. Said Brown in a press release last November: "We have a technology whereby we can render nuclear waste no longer radioactive. We can make it stable. The real beauty of this process is it actually produces power, so we have a safe, clean, efficient method of generating power that just happens to burn nuclear waste" as fuel.

Not long after this technology was announced, a Ph.D. posted this on a scientists-only website: "Scientifically illiterate investors are lining up as you read this." Brown's friends admit his doctorate degree was honorary, but that Brown himself could not have cared less. "He was too busy inventing to worry about a degree," one said.

Regardless, plenty of people are convinced Brown was onto something important, and always has been. But important enough to pipe-bomb his mother's home? To have him arrested for making drugs? Even to sabotage his beloved Mazda? Conspiracy theorists, the line forms to the left. Don't forget Brown's company ties to Israel, his probable testimony in the Elgindy stock manipulation case, on top of Brown's suggestion that he may have, in part, solved not only the nuclear waste problem, but lessened our dependence on conventional energy sources.

The answer to these questions died in a 1972 Mazda, in the middle of the night, in Idaho.

One thing Paul Brown would want you to know, though: When his car crashed, he was winning the race.

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