



Sidepodchat – Women in Motorsport

Mr C: For a university project, Alex Downing interviewed our very own Christine on the subject of Women in Motorsport, a subject close to both of their hearts. Alex kindly allowed us to record the conversation for Sidepodcast, here is how it went down.

Alex: So my first question to you is, when did you start watching Formula One?

Christine: My first race was way back in 2003, which actually surprisingly, it surprises me that that is over a decade ago now. It's just flown. The first one I watched was the Brazilian Grand Prix, so that was part way through the season, and I've been watching ever since!

Alex: Can you remember why you started watching?

Christine: Well, I definitely started because my husband, then my boyfriend, was watching and I wanted to know what he was so engrossed in on a Sunday afternoon. And then as soon as I started watching, I was asking him questions all the time, what's this, what are they doing, why are they going into the pits and stuff. And then, soon, I was more interested in it than he was.

Alex: Excellent. What is the part of Formula One that interests you the most?

Christine: I think the most interesting thing for me is the stories that come out of the drivers, you know, their movements through the teams, what they do, how they react to the things that happen. I mean, Formula One gets a lot of criticism for how good the racing is or isn't, so for me, the interesting things are what happens in the paddock before and after the races, and the stories that come out of that.

Alex: Yea, okay. Do you think that men and women can compete against each other in Formula One?

Christine: It's a really tricky question because we haven't seen a lot of it to know. There's only been a handful of female racers trying their hand at it. I mean, I think there shouldn't be a physical reason why they can't because a lot of the power obviously comes from the car, and it's more of an endurance thing and how fit you are. And obviously, the regulations are going the way of smaller, lighter people, so actually female racers might have an advantage there. But having said that, a lot of sports, almost all of them, they separate out men's and women's competition, so it might be that they would have to try that in Formula One first.

Alex: Okay, interesting. In Formula One as a whole, not just looking at the drivers, do you think that there is an under-representation of women?

Christine: There definitely is. It's really a sad fact that it was so exciting when Monisha Kaltenborn got the team principal role at Sauber, and obviously Williams are doing quite a good job with Claire Williams there and Suzie being the development driver, but that's just three names out of a paddock of hundreds of people. Every time there's a female name, it's really exciting, and it shouldn't be because it should just be, you know, another name.

Alex: In terms of the women that we do see in Formula One, what do you think of the grid girls in the sport?



Christine: Yea, well, the grid girls are, I have mixed feelings about them, but at least they have something of a purpose. The ones that really upset me are the ones that line the corridor up to the podium, literally just standing there and clapping. They have no reason to be there, they're just like wallpaper.

Alex: For female drivers, what do you think the biggest issue is for them, just in terms of being in the sport or trying to get into Formula One?

Christine: Breaking into it is the hardest thing, I think particularly at the moment where getting a drive is all about money and sponsorship. It seems like female racers don't have the same opportunities to talk to the sponsors or get meetings with the people. I mean, I haven't looked into it extensively, it just seems like the opportunities aren't there for the women in the first place. And obviously, the majority of drivers in the junior series are all men, so with only 22 seats available in Formula One, by the time they filter through, it's going to be men, or boys sometimes. There needs to be an effort to get girls karting and in the junior categories, so that filters through to the top, otherwise it's just going to be a token female in a race seat for a single season.

Alex: Yea, okay. Do you think one of the issues of the lack of women in Formula One might be anything to do with the people that run it at all?

Christine: I think Formula One has been very, well, it's all been a group of older men sort of set in their ways, but I think it is starting to change. We've got younger team principals coming in, and obviously like I said, Monisha is coming in and starting to... I think the tide is starting to change a little bit. But it doesn't help when you've had Bernie Ecclestone at the top, who has clearly said some very sexist things in the past, and he leads the whole sport. So that's not good, but he may be stepping aside any time soon so that might help.

Alex: And do you think the media has an impact on women in Formula One? And do you think the media could have an impact in helping the sport towards more women in the sport?

Christine: The media tends to play a huge role in covering women in any sport. I don't know that they have a huge role in Formula One because there just aren't the women there for them to cover in the first place. But I did read an interesting statistic a couple of days that was something like 5% of all sporting coverage is on women. Just 5%, which is just not good enough.

Alex: No. And really, if there's anything else you, any other opinions that you have on Formula One and women as a whole?

Christine: My main opinion on females getting into Formula One is that it just shouldn't be an issue. It's sad and disappointing that it is. Like I said, it may be that there needs to be a separate championship for women, like there is a separate championship for females in tennis. The males and females don't play each other, but yea, it shouldn't be an issue, there shouldn't be a situation where we have one development driver throughout the whole of the... it's supposed to be the pinnacle of motorsport and that's the only representation we have.

Alex: Yea, it should be more really.

Christine: Yea.