



Racing Families – The Villeneuves

Hello and welcome, this is Racing Families, the latest mini series brought to you by Sidepodcast. Across seven short shows we're taking a look at the motorsport personalities who are keeping it in the family. We've covered five so far, and today we're moving on to another high-profile racing father and son - the Villeneuves.

We've talked a lot about famous racing drivers having to live in the shadow of their father's previous Formula One performance and for Jacques Villeneuve that shadow must have been incredibly long. Jacques is the son of the Canadian racing driver Gilles Villeneuve, an incredibly popular and well-respected racer who never quite got to the championship.

Gilles made his F1 debut in 1977 after an unusual journey to racing cars, via snowmobile racing in Canada. His first race was in Britain with McLaren, where he impressed despite mechanical troubles pushing him out of the points. McLaren opted not to sign him up for a full season, so Villeneuve moved to Ferrari, where he raced the final two events of the 1977 season.

The following year began with a string of retirements, but gradually the results came to Gilles and Ferrari, and he secured his first victory at his season-closing home race in Canada. 1979 was the real year of success for him, with three victories, and four second places that allowed him to fight for the championship. Villeneuve continued to impress with hard fights, incredibly fast pace, and an unshakeable attitude, but he missed out on the title that year by four points.

That was the peak of his career, as 1980 saw the Ferrari team scraping to finish in the points. He took two more victories the following season, but then began 1982 with two retirements and a disqualification. Tensions were high both in Formula One as a whole, due to governing body politics, and within Ferrari, as Villeneuve did not get on with his teammate Didier Pironi, but the entire F1 world came together in shock when Gilles was killed at the fourth round of the 1982 season. Thrown from the car during qualifying for the Belgian Grand Prix, Gilles died in hospital.

His eleven-year-old son Jacques took up karting and was quick enough to raise eyebrows and earn himself a place at a driver school. Jacques Villeneuve was named after his uncle, brother of Gilles, who himself had participated in three Formula One weekends, although never getting through the qualifying stages to take part in a race. Jacques Senior was more successful in the CART series, winning a race in the middle of the 1985 season, and he also tried his hand at several other single seater series', as well as becoming a champion in the Snowmobile Derby.

With a father and uncle so competitive in motorsport, it was no surprise to find Jacques Villeneuve Junior take to the wheel with success. His Formula One debut came with Williams, and he was instantly in the championship fight, finishing his first race second, and taking his first victory on his fourth weekend. It was his second season with Williams that saw the most success, however, with seven victories and a championship.

Jacques took a gamble on switching to the British American Racing team, one that had been built around him, but he secured a rather legendary 11 retirements in a row at the start of the 1999 season. There were no more victories in his F1 future, although the BAR did get faster and in 2001, Jacques was back on the podium for a third place in Spain and Germany.

He sat out much of the 2004 season with no contract, but made a brief comeback with Renault, and then Sauber for the following two years. With little in the way of results, 2006 was the final year for Villeneuve in Formula One and he retired, moving to NASCAR, Le Mans and most recently, V8 Supercars. He also made an album.



Despite achieving more in the way of statistics and results than his father, Jacques Villeneuve can never live up to the legend of Gilles, but he can visit the Canadian Grand Prix weekend with pride - as the Montreal circuit, previously known as Circuit Île Notre-Dame, was renamed Circuit Gilles Villeneuve in tribute to the late racer.

That's all for this episode of Racing Families, thank you for listening. There's just one more episode to come in this series, so I hope you will tune in for the final show, in which we find out the last of our Racing Families.

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