

Forgotten F1 Teams – Simtek Grand Prix

You're listening to Sidepodcast, and this is the latest mini-series: Forgotten F1 Teams. I think it's probably self explanatory but this is a series dedicated to profiling some of the forgotten teams. Forget about your Ferrari's and your McLaren's, what about those who didn't make such an impact on the sport, but still have a story to tell? Those are the ones you'll hear today. Thanks should go to Scott Woodwiss for suggesting the topic, and the teams, and we'll dive right in with Simtek Grand Prix.

Simtek Grand Prix was born from Simtek Research Ltd, the name standing for Simulation Technology. The company founders were Nick Wirth and Max Mosley, both of whom had serious pedigree within motorsport. Mosley had been a team owner before with March, and Wirth was a mechanical engineering student who was snapped up by March as an aerodynamicist, working underneath Adrian Newey. When March was sold to Leyton House, Mosley and Wirth both decided to leave, and joined forces to create Simtek. Originally, the company had a single office in Wirth's house, but it was soon obvious they needed a bigger, more wind-tunnel shaped base, which they built in Oxfordshire.

Mosley had the connections that meant racing teams from all over the globe were interested in using their research technologies, but while keeping the clients satisfied, Simtek began designing an F1 car for BMW in secret. The plan never came to fruition, however, and BMW delayed entry to the sport.

When Mosley became the president of the FIA, he sold his share of the company to Wirth. Another relatively unknown team Andrea Moda bought the unused and now out of date F1 cars originally meant for BMW, but there was absolutely no success in store for them. Simtek went on to design a car for another team, but that also fell by the wayside, leaving Wirth frustrated. He decided to enter his own F1 team, Simtek Grand Prix. Jack Brabham came on board with some financing, and in 1993, the team was announced with David Brabham as one of the drivers. They ran Ford engines, but immediately got it wrong. The first design was based around active suspension technologies, which were suddenly banned, so they changed to an earlier design, which was overweight. Without sponsorship, Simtek searched for a pay driver and signed Roland Ratzenberger, for the first five races. They eventually found backing from MTV as well.

However, it was only the third race in when disaster struck and Ratzenberger was killed. This was the same race weekend in 1994 when Ayrton Senna lost his life, and the tragedy rocked the rookie team. Tradition dictated that Brabham should pull out of the race, but he decided to continue with the weekend, which helped pull his colleagues together, and they decided to honour Ratzenberger by completing the entire season. The rest of the year saw two more serious injuries for Simtek but the team kept on keeping on. Money was tight, and sometimes they would only run one car, but towards the end of the season, things became more even. They scored an impressive, and best, 9th at one race, albeit a weekend with many retirees.

After the season was over, MTV decided to minimise their sponsorship deal, and David Brabham, the hero of the team so far, decided to move to British Touring Cars. Wirth was undeterred and started 1995 with a new chassis, and a new driver in Jos Verstappen. Verstappen managed to equal the best ever 9th position for Simtek in an impressive race at Argentina, but other than that, there were only three finishes from two drivers over five races.

The debts were mounting, as well, as deals were made and broken, and funding couldn't be found. Simtek auctioned off some of their property, but it couldn't make a dent in the millions that were owed. The team had to close mid-



season. Wirth tried to apply his engineering skills to Benetton in 1997, but after a couple of bad seasons, he left F1 and took up a career in robotics.

That sums up our first forgotten F1 team. Let me know your thoughts either on the team, or this series, perhaps a team that you'd like to hear about. Leave your comments on the blog at Sidepodcast.com, call our voicemail on 0121 28 87225, or email me Christine @ sidepodcast.com. I'll be back tomorrow with the story of another forgotten team.

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