

Forgotten F1 Teams – Vanwall

Welcome to the last in the current series of Forgotten F1 Teams, brought to you by Sidepodcast. We've been travelling through time and looking at teams from across the decades, examining their history and why they are no longer around. Our last team is Vanwall.

Tony Vandervell was a businessman, creator of the Thinwall bearings, and he was originally one of the sponsors of British Racing Motors, otherwise known as BRM, in the 1940s. He didn't like the way the team was run, with so many decision makers, and decided to form his own team. A decade later, he was ready to enter in the new Formula 1 championship, with the cars known as Vanwall Specials. The name Vanwall was a mixture of his own surname Vandervell and the Thinwall bearings he created. Designed by Owen Maddock, built by Cooper Cars, and with their own in-house engine, they made their first appearance in the 1954 season, at three races with Peter Collins behind the wheel. He only finished one with a seventh place.

In 1955, Vanwall Specials ran with Mike Hawthorn, Ken Wharton and Harry Schell, not all at once. They scored three ninth places out of eight starts, the rest were retirements. By the end of the year, it seemed clear that the engine was good but the chassis was holding them back. Vandervell decided to hire a designer to work some magic and it was none other than Colin Chapman.

Chapman teamed up with aerodynamicist Frank Costin, and engine designer Harry Weslake, and they prepared a new car for the 1956 season. Stirling Moss was brought in to race in a non-championship event, which he won. He was still contracted to drive for Maserati, but he was convinced to join Vanwall in 1957.

Tony Brooks and Stuart Lewis-Evans were also signed up, and that pre-empted a record breaking moment. At the British Grand Prix that year, Brooks and Moss shared the drive. They qualified third on the grid at Aintree, and successfully brought the Vanwall home in first place. It was Vanwall's first win, Brooks' first win, but also the first victory for a British driver (or two in this case) at the British Grand Prix with a British car. Brooks completed 26 laps and Moss 64, and they shared the eight championship points between them. Moss went on to win the Italy and Pescara GP and finished second in the driver's championship.

Ahead of the 1958 season, alcohol fuels were banned, which caused Vanwall some serious engine cooling issues. They had to redesign their engine, gearbox and brakes to sort this out, but they were successful. All three drivers had stayed with the team, and Moss and Brooks each won three championship races. Vanwall became the first ever Constructor's Champions as the title was introduced that year. The driver's title was a much closer battle, with Stirling Moss taking on Mike Hawthorn in the Ferrari. At the season closing race, Moss took the victory, one of his three wins that year, with Hawthorn a close second but Hawthorn won the championship by just one point. There was more bad news to come though, as Stuart Lewis-Evans was in a terrible accident. His car suffered an engine failure that saw him crash into the barriers and his car burst into flames. He was airlifted from Morocco back to the UK for treatment, but died six days later from burn injuries. Their constructors victory was overshadowed, and Vandervell was devastated.

He was also not in the best of health, with doctor's advising him to rest more. In January 1959, he decided to quit the team. Vanwall tried to continue, appearing at a few championship and non-championship races, but the results weren't good, and the enthusiasm seemed to have been lost. In 1961, Lotus tested out a Vanwall engine but aside from that, the name was gone from Formula 1.



John Surtees drove a Vanwall in the Intercontinental Formula series that year, but it was not a successful entry, and that soon folded as well. Tony Vandervell kept out of the public eye after leaving the team, and he died in March 1967.

That's all for this final episode of Forgotten F1 Teams. We've profiled seven teams, but if you've got suggestions for any future episodes, please let me know on the site sidepodcast.com or email me Christine at [sidepodcast dot com](mailto:sidepodcast.com). Thanks for listening.

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