



Forgotten F1 Teams – Pacific Grand Prix

You're listening to Sidepodcast and this is our latest mini series, Forgotten F1 Teams. It's all very well talking about BMW, Honda and Williams, but there are teams out there who are important to the history of F1, and yet are not very well known. Sidepodcast wants to address this problem. Yesterday we talked about Simtek, today it's the turn of Pacific Grand Prix.

Pacific had been around for a while, racing in some of the lower categories, and they'd done a pretty good job. Team boss Keith Wiggins had experience of racing and as a mechanic, and the moment he set up his team, he had acquired sponsorship from Marlboro, signed up a good Norwegian driver, and secured entry into the Formula Ford championships.

The progression was slow but steady, through F2, Formula Ford, F3, and F3000. Pacific's final year in F3000 saw familiar name David Coulthard driving for them, fighting for the title. He didn't manage it, however, and Wiggins set his sights on another, more exciting championship – Formula 1. The original aim was to participate in the 1993 championship, but a recession delayed the entry for a year. However, when 1994 arrived, it was full steam ahead. Engine supplier Ilmor were providing a pair of two year old engines, and Wiggins was using some of the leftovers of another failed F1 entry. Early testing signs were not good, the engine didn't seem to be able to cope, and the chassis had structural problems, but at the opening round in Brazil, Pacific out-qualified Simtek with one of their cars. They only managed three laps of the race before a collision, but this was progress.

The unusual events of the 1994 season keeping top teams and drivers out of the limelight, meant that Pacific did manage to qualify for some of the races, but their first racing achievement – if you can call 3 laps an achievement – was ridiculously short lived. Each time they did manage to get onto the grid that year, they never finished the race.

Roll on 1995, then, and Wiggins brought in a new design team, and partnered with the remains of the Lotus team. Some new aerodynamic devices, and well-known sponsors, and Pacific Racing was well on its way. The 1995 season saw several teams dropping out, which meant that with 26 spots available for each race, Pacific were guaranteed to get on the grid. Of course, they were generally at the back of the grid, and fought with Simtek and Fortis for the last few positions. Despite sponsors and pay-drivers, money was always an issue, and Wiggins would push for components to be run until breaking point. Gearboxes were a serious issue, with ten related retirements in the one season.

It wasn't always engineering problems that scuppered Pacific's chances for a result. At the 1995 European GP, both McLaren drivers were struggling in the wet, and the Pacific team took their opportunity getting both of their drivers past at least one McLaren. Things were looking good, until Pacific driver Montermini came into the pits, ran over his refueller thus breaking his leg, and of course, ran out of fuel.

There were rumours that Pacific would return in 1996, but in the end, Wiggins knew there was no more money. He withdrew from F1, and returned to F3000 for the next one and a bit years. Before 1997 drew to a close, Pacific withdrew from motorsport altogether and was never heard of again. Keith Wiggins continues to be involved in other forms of motorsport, having tried his hand at both CART and now Champ Car management.

That wraps up today's show on Pacific, I'll have another Forgotten F1 team for you tomorrow, so stay tuned.