

Forgotten F1 Teams – Arrows

Welcome to Forgotten F1 Teams – a mini series from Sidepodcast chronicling the rise and fall of teams that couldn't stay the distance. This is the fourth show, we've already looked at Simtek, Pacific and Forti, but today we're talking about Arrows.

Arrows Grand Prix came to life in 1977, founded by previous Shadow employees, Franco Ambrosio, Alan Rees, Jackie Oliver, Dave Wass and Tony Southgate – the surnames of whom spell out Arrows... sort of. Based in Milton Keynes, their Formula 1 entry was a bit of a rush job, with their first ever car being produced in just 53 days. Riccardo Patrese was brought on board to steer the car and the early signs were promising. They finished tenth in their first race in '78, almost won their second, and picked up some points in their third Grand Prix.

Unfortunately, the team didn't have an easy start to life with some early controversies. Founder Franco Ambrosio had to leave the team after being found guilty of financial misconduct in Italy, and sent to prison. The team were then sued by Shadow for copyright on their chassis, which was upheld by the court. However, this didn't stop them, as while the decision was being made over the the copied chassis, Arrows had built a brand new car, which then took to the track without them having to miss a race.

Patrese was involved in a serious multi-car pile up at the Italian Grand Prix that year. Fellow driver Ronnie Peterson died after the accident, and James Hunt, who was also involved, led a successful campaign to get Patrese banned from racing at the next Grand Prix.

In 1984, Arrows partnered with BMW, who brought their turbo engines on board, and the team received sponsorship from Barclay – a cigarette company. Their championship efforts improved, from 9th up to 8th the following year. In 1987, when BMW split from the team, things got even better. 6th in the championship that year, and 4th the next.

At the beginning of the next decade, the Japanese Footwork corporation became a prominent sponsor, and in 1991, this became the new name of the team. They kept it until 1996, when the sponsor withdrew support, and they became Arrows again. To replace Footwork, a new investor, Tom Walkinshaw was brought on board, and he successfully signed up defending champion Damon Hill. At the 1997 Hungarian GP, the team so very nearly got their first win, albeit mostly due to luck, but that ran out when a throttle problem meant Hill had to crawl to the finish handing the lead to Villeneuve on the final lap.

Walkinshaw gradually bought out ownership of the entire team, but under his reign, engine partnerships changed at the drop of a hat, and drivers were also coming and going. By 2002, Jos Verstappen was suing the team for breach of contract, Arrows was unsuccessfully trying to sue Pedro Diniz for leaving them, and Heinz-Harald Frentzen was suing them for not having been paid yet. By the middle of the season, Arrows had no money left, and suspicions were beginning to mount about their ability to continue in the championship. At the French Grand Prix, both drivers failed to qualify, but it appeared that they could have had they tried just that little bit harder. The data showed that both drivers had been competitive in the first two sectors but not in the last. They were threatened with bringing the sport into disrepute, trying not to qualify because they couldn't afford to race. Before anything could be made of the situation though, the team had gone into liquidation.



A friend of Walkinshaw's bought up some of the team's assets to partner them with previously purchased Prost team assets, and enter Formula 1. The FIA disagreed. The rights for the chassis were picked up by Paul Stoddart of Minardi, and then by Super Aguri who ran a modified version in 2006.

Although compared to some of our Forgotten teams, lasting 15 years in the sport is a successful campaign, the team's greatest "achievement" is having participated in 382 races without a win.

That's it for this edition of Forgotten F1 Teams. Please let me know what you remember of the Arrows team on Sidepodcast.com or via the Voicemail – 0121 28 87225. I will be back tomorrow with our next Forgotten team.

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