



Forgotten F1 Teams – Life

Welcome to Forgotten F1 Teams, a mini series from Sidepodcast that takes a closer look at those teams who have gone down in history without a trace. So far we've discussed Simtek, Arrows, and Onyx but today we're going to look at Life Racing Engines.

The story of the Life F1 team is a short one. They were only in the sport for one year, and came out with nothing to show for it. The team boss was Ernesto Vita, who came from Modena in Italy. In 1989, he saw the potential of making a quick profit by selling engines to F1 teams. He snapped up the designs for an unusual engine, built by an ex-Ferrari engineer Franco Rocchi. Their W12 was quite special as it was designed with three rows of four cylinders instead of two rows of six. The theory was that the engine could be as small as a V8 but kick out enough power to match a V12. The high concept engine was ready to be sold but now Vita had to get the technology out there. He couldn't find a partner within the sport, so decided to go it alone. Thus, the Life entry to Formula 1 was born, specifically engineered to attract a buyer for the engines.

This brings us on to the 1990 F1 season. Vita wanted to enter his engines in the competition, so he picked up the old FIRST team chassis for his debut season. The small problem of that chassis having actually failed the FIA crash test, and been refused entry to the 1989 season didn't faze Vita, and some modifications saw the Life entry complete. Vita had signed up Gary Brabham, bolted on some Goodyear tyres, and fitted his new engine design into the car. The new chassis featured some strange designs, including additional airboxes, and very low cockpit sides. Despite being just as bad, if not worse, than the original FIRST chassis, the FIA approved entry to Life, and their season began.

At the first race, Brabham failed to qualify pretty spectacularly. The engine misfired, and the eventual laptime was 38 seconds off pole position. At the second event in Brazil, Brabham barely got out of the pitlane before the car ground to a halt. He branded the entire organisation of the team as a joke, and left. Life managed to persuade Italian driver Bruno Giacomelli to step in, taking him from his duties as test driver for Leyton House. The next few races saw Giacomelli continue the tradition of not being able to qualify, with one race seeing him over 7 minutes off the eventual pole position time.

After 12 disastrous attempts at pre-qualifying, the team got rid of their W12 engine and brought in a standard Judd V8 instead. Unfortunately, the modifications made to allow for the original unusual design meant the engine cover wouldn't fit over their new equipment. The car couldn't even take part in the Portuguese pre-qualifying, and the team moved on to Spain. By this time, the engine hassles were sorted out, but they were still 20 woeful seconds off the pace, and it was obvious that they weren't going to be able to pull things together, so they decided to ditch their F1 efforts two races before the end of the season.

Vita managed to find a buyer for a majority shareholding, but within months, the team had completely disappeared.

That's it for this Forgotten F1 Team. Don't forget to visit Sidepodcast.com to leave your comments on the disaster that was Life Racing Engines, and I will be back tomorrow with the final forgotten team.