

Forgotten F1 Teams – Eifeland

Welcome to the final episode in this Sidepodcast mini series – Forgotten F1 Teams. We've covered from the lows of Life to the highs of Arrows, and now it's time to check in with our final team – Eifeland.

In your travels, you may have come across a German caravan company called Eifeland Wohnwagenbau. In the 1970s, Eifeland owner Gunther Henerici started sponsoring a couple of teams in the lower formulas, plus German F1 driver Rolf Stommelen. In 1972, Henerici decided that he'd set up his own team for Stommelen and enter the world of F1 constructors. He bought a March 721 chassis, and commissioned Luigi Colani to redesign it. This is where the fun starts.

Colani had good credentials, having designed several successful sportscars, but he didn't necessarily have all the knowledge required to create a Formula 1 car. Either that, or he was just having a laugh. The rear wing on his design was simply an extension of the bodywork, curving upwards, with no gaps for the air to squeeze through. The front wing was just as odd, and then Colani went and installed an airbox ahead of the driver for good measure. The best bit of the car, though, was the lack of wing mirrors. Colani decided the best way for a driver to see whether he was about to be lapped was by means of a periscope mirror, starting directly in the driver's line of vision, and extending upwards. With a V8 Cosworth engine and some Goodyear tyres, the Eifeland car was launched.

During testing, it seemed as if Colani's idea might work, as some fast times were recorded, but the car lacked downforce, and the unusual wings were causing heating problems. The bodywork was swiftly redesigned to include a more conventional rear wing. In fact, Colani's designs were gradually eroded from the car as more standard parts were integrated to the chassis. In the hands of Stommelen, the Eifeland only entered 8 races in Formula 1, but was respectable throughout.

The first round at South Africa saw a 13th place finish, and in Monaco, Stommelen was 10th. The car was to go no higher than 10th in its participation but recorded that finishing position again at the 6th round in Britain. It wasn't until Germany, the next race, that the Eifeland suffered its first mechanical retirement, due to some electrical problems. This is pretty impressive for a brand new rookie car trying to recover from some bizarre initial designs. Notably, at several opportunities, the Eifeland showed up the works March team, proving that whatever was going on with their aerodynamics wasn't that bad.

Unfortunately, by this time, Henerici was beginning to have doubts about the financial benefits of being involved in the sport, and he sold the caravan business to window manufacturer's Meeth. The team turned up to Austria, racing under the name Team Stommelen. They were running in 15th before the engine gave out and Stommelen had to retire. Eifeland's new boss wasn't interested in racing at all, and pulled the team out before the end of the season. The team assets were sold to Hexagon Racing, who took part in some non-championship events, and also never made their mark on motorsport.

That's it for this show, and this series of Forgotten F1 Teams. I hope you've enjoyed the trip down memory lane, and I'd love to hear your feedback on the blog sidepodcast.com or via voicemail 0121 28 87225.