

History of F1 – 1960s

Welcome to Sidepodcast's History of F1. The last episode focused on the early years of the World Championship, and the emergence of some new champions. Now we're going to have a look at the 1960s, a decade that began to see the drivers taking attention away from the cars.

The 1960s in Formula 1 saw great changes afoot, both in developmental technologies and the teams that gained the benefits from them. Team Lotus was the dominating force of the decade, and Jim Clark was the driver of the early 1960s who really could get the most out of the car. Lotus were the first team to demonstrate the monocoque, which is the idea of the car being made up of one singular chassis, with the driver perched in the middle. When rear engines made their debut in the 60s, it was clear that F1 was a step ahead of other motorsports.

Jim Clark was not short on controversy, being involved in a fatal accident at Monza in 1961, that claimed the life of Wolfgang von Trips. The championship was handed to American Phil Hill, who was racing in the Ferrari. In 1962, Clark instigated a fierce battle with Graham Hill, but he eventually lost the championship, just barely, due to an oil leak early exit from the lead of the final race. Clark won the championship in 1963 and 1965, after taking maximum points throughout the championship for both seasons. He would quite often take the entire month of May off, and therefore miss the Monaco Grand Prix, preferring to head to the States and compete in the Indy 500. It was a good choice though, as he became the first British driver to win it.

In 1965, he led every lap of every race he completed – a stunning achievement – and he broke all manner of other records, including most career victories from Fangio. He took the record during the early races of the 1968 season, but his career was short-lived. A couple of months later, Clark took part in an F2 race at Hockenheim, and died after crashing into the trees. The accident is still rather mysterious and unexplained.

Graham Hill was more than happy to continue the British dominance after Clark's death, and he took the 1968 title in a Lotus, fitted with the new Ford-Cosworth engine. The car was also notable for having the first sponsorship and logos appear on the exterior – how different F1 would be without those!

But Hill himself was soon surpassed by Scotsman Jackie Stewart. He was something of a protégé of Jim Clark's, as it was he who arranged for Stewart's very first test drive. Jackie Stewart went on to break his mentor's career victories record and took three World Championships between 1969 and 1973.

Jackie Stewart's most memorable win was at Nurburgring, for the German Grand Prix. There was awful rain that day but Stewart kept his head and outpaced the second place driver by over four minutes. That's an incredible lead and you wouldn't find anything like that in modern F1.

That's it for the 1960s, in the next show we'll move on to the 1970s, a decade where safety concerns became paramount.