



History of F1 – 1990s

Welcome to Sidepodcast's History of F1. So far, the development of the Formula 1 World Championships has been pretty much about the cars, with a few squabbles between drivers along the way. The 1990s saw some real star talent emerging, with personalities both loveable and not so much.

The 1990s were a year of change, innovation, tragedy and triumph. Team Williams introduced the first car, designed by Patrick Head, to have a semi-automatic gearbox and traction control, but reliability was still a major problem. Eventually, Williams managed to conquer their mechanical troubles, and added more computer-control to the car, leading to success in the next couple of years. Williams took the championship in '92 and '93, with Nigel Mansell and then Alain Prost, who had just returned from a season off.

Michael Schumacher joined the Formula 1 circuit in 1991, qualifying 7th on his debut for Team Jordan, although he didn't get past the first lap. Just one race later, he defected to Benetton. With the major players of previous seasons now retired, Schumacher was the main rival for Ayrton Senna, but it was not going to be easy.

The points system changed in 1990 so that all Formula 1 races were included in the championship and a win would gain you 10 points rather than 9 points. The FIA also declared that the driver aids, such as traction control, were having a negative impact on the impression of F1. Where was the driver skill? So, the aids were banned, despite Formula 1 getting more and more exciting. With the rule changes having a huge impact on car specifications, it was always going to be a risky few years.

Ayrton Senna was in fine form in 1993, when he won the European GP at Donington Park, making up five places in the first lap, in the rain. But, the 1990's are not dominated by Ayrton Senna for his victories, but for his tragic death. The San Marino GP, 1994, saw too many accidents. First Roland Ratzenberger was killed - the first death for 12 years in the sport - and then Rubens Barrichello was hospitalised. Senna sat at Barrichello's bedside and decided to withdraw from qualifying. He did not want to race. But a racing driver lives to be out on the track, and Senna changed his mind. He took pole position and raced for seven laps, before his car missed the corner and struck the wall at more than 180mph. He was pulled from the wreckage, taken to hospital by helicopter, and later died from massive head injuries.

The accident shook the entire F1 community, but the racing did not stop. The FIA passed immediate rules to step up safety, including pit speed limits, and easier access to the cars. Damon Hill replaced Senna at Williams, but Michael Schumacher took his role as champion.

Nigel Mansell returned to McLaren after retiring and perhaps gaining a little weight. The car was redesigned so that he could fit, but it didn't make the impact they had hoped for. Jacques Villeneuve joined Williams, and hoped to continue the legacy of his father, Gilles. Schumacher transferred to Ferrari for the largest paycheck of the time and the team was rewarded with victory after victory.

Schumacher was not without controversy, being shown a black flag at Silverstone in 1994 for ignoring a penalty for overtaking on the parade lap. He also ignored the flag and gaining a two race ban. He was disqualified later in the season for an illegal car floor, but in all races he showed the twinkle of genius that would gain him many more driver titles.



The later seasons of the '90s were dominated by rivalries from a new David Coulthard, Villeneuve, Eddie Irvine and Mika Hakkinen. But really, it was all about Michael Schumacher, as he took win after win to lead him into the new century as one of the most successful drivers to ever race.

That's all for this episode of Sidepodcast's History of F1, and really that's all of the history. The next and last episode will be about the first few years of the 21st century and what can be expected in the future.

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