



F1 People – Bernie Ecclestone

Welcome to F1 People, a Sidepodcast series giving you an insight into the names that have shaped Formula 1. This is by no means a definitive list. In this first series, we'll feature seven significant figures, starting with Bernard Charles Ecclestone.

Bernie Ecclestone was born on October 28th 1930, in a small village in Suffolk, and brought up in Bexleyheath, Kent. He left school at 16 to work in the local gasworks as an assistant, so he could pursue his passion of motorcycles. After the end of World War II, Ecclestone began to trade motorcycle parts, and formed a dealership with Fred Compton.

He had a go at racing, taking part in the Formula 3 500cc series, but a couple of accidents made him rethink his plans, and he returned to the business world. He bought out Compton, and turned the motorcycle business into a growing emporium, including auctions, loans and property deals.

In 1957, Ecclestone became the manager of Stuart Lewis-Evans, a racing driver from Wales. Ecclestone bought the F1 team Connaught to give Lewis-Evans a drive, along with a couple of other promising drivers. He even had a go himself at the 1958 Monaco Grand Prix but did not get past qualifying. Bernie left the sport again, but returned in 1968 and 69 to manage Jochen Rindt in the Lotus. In 1972, he bought the Brabham team and put all his efforts into making it a winning constructor. The team cost him £100,000.

He gradually made Brabham more and more competitive through the 1970s and well into the 1980s, but by then, other concerns were taking up his attention. Ecclestone founded the FOCA, the Formula One Constructors Association in 1974, which he became chief executive of in 1978. His right hand man and legal advisor, was Max Mosley. The FOCA's main purpose was to negotiate better terms for the teams than the FISA (the then motorsport division of the FIA) were offering. After furious battles were fought throughout the decade, for a different entry system, TV rights, and prize money, Ecclestone eventually won and gained control with the first Concorde Agreement. TV revenue would be split three ways, 47% to the teams, 30% to the FIA and 23% to FOPA – being Formula One Promotions and Administration, another invention of Bernie's.

When the new Concorde Agreement came into force in 1997, Ecclestone had shuffled his companies around to create Formula One Management, FOM, and had secured a deal with the FIA to gather all commercial rights to the sport, and then dish out the prizes. The teams were initially upset at this, losing out on their rights, and some refused to sign the Agreement. McLaren, Williams and Tyrrell held out and eventually the deal was shortened to only ten years rather than 15.

In 1999, Bernie underwent heart surgery, but continued to do business, buying and selling shares in his companies, and he was soon fit again.

He is married to Slavica Ecclestone, and they have two daughters Tamara and Petra. Tamara Ecclestone has made inroads into a media career, working for an F1 magazine, and presenting the Red Bull Air Race for Channel 4. Despite living in a house full of women, Bernie stirred up controversy in 2005 by making disparaging comments about women in the sport, specifically Champ Car's Danica Patrick, intimating their place should be in the kitchen. This was only days before the US Grand Prix spectacle of that year, and was thus a particularly low moment for both Bernie and the sport.



Ecclestone's interests don't lie purely in motorsport though. In September this year, it was announced that he had teamed with Flavio Briatore to purchase football team Queens Park Rangers. We have yet to see whether they will be able to turn the team's fortunes around.

Bernie is 77 years old now, worth £2,250 million, in charge of one of the richest and most global sports today and nothing seems to be slowing him down.

Our first biography is complete. Join me tomorrow when we'll look at our next significant individual.

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