



F1 People – Eddie Irvine

Welcome to Sidepodcast, this is the fourth episode in our latest mini-series F1 People, a series featuring seven important people in the world of Formula 1. So far we've looked at Colin Chapman, Niki Lauda, and Murray Walker. Today we're focusing on Eddie Irvine.

Edmund Irvine Jr was born on the 10th November 1965 in County Down, Northern Ireland. His family were involved in motor racing, which got Irvine interested from a young age. He began in Formula Ford, and spent several years in the mid-field, with the occasional lucky podium. In his fourth year, he signed with a better team and started winning championships, meaning he was noticed by the WSR Formula Three team. He outperformed a car that couldn't win by finishing on the podium 8 times.

Irvine worked through F3000 and the Japanese Formula Nippon series, and as he progressed, he was noticed. Eventually, F1 came calling, with a debut in 1993 for Jordan at the Japanese Grand Prix.

Having finally found his way into Formula 1, Irvine was determined to make the most of it. Despite being in a car that was often at the back of the grid, he would regularly try and push forward at the start, perhaps a little too hard. He started making a name for himself as a wild driver, one who could often cause early exits from races for both himself and the drivers around him. Some collisions actually led to him being banned for multiple races.

One particular incident involved Ayrton Senna, where Irvine allowed himself to be lapped, but then was frustrated when Senna didn't move on to lap Damon Hill in front of him. Irvine took the initiative, unlapped himself and overtook Damon Hill. After the race, Irvine said Senna had simply been driving too slowly, so Senna walked into the Jordan Motorhome and punched Irvine in the face.

In 1996, Irvine was snapped up by Ferrari to team with Michael Schumacher, and played second fiddle to the champion's number one status. During the first few years, Irvine couldn't hold a candle to Schumacher's performance, but he continued to fight hard and tamed his driving style. When Schumacher broke his leg in 1999, Eddie stepped up and took on the lead driver role, and he found himself fighting for the championship. Schumacher returned after six races away, and became the supportive second driver. In Malaysia that year, Schumacher allowed Irvine past him and held up Mika Hakkinen in the McLaren. There was a fiasco with McLaren accusing Ferrari of having illegal barge boards for that race – but that's a story for another day. Ferrari were first disqualified, and then their points were reinstated, and it all came down to the last race that year. Unfortunately, Irvine did not manage to capture the title.

With Michael back to fighting fitness, Irvine decided he'd had enough of being second best, and left to join the fledgling Jaguar team. From 2000 to 2002, Irvine worked hard with the team, shared his knowledge, and developed the car but all he got in return was a slow and unreliable car. In 2003, the team's financial problems began and Irvine announced his retirement from F1.

Since leaving the sport, Irvine has played himself in the 2004 film *The Prince and Me*, he's been in talks to buy out or invest in several teams, and he's built up a property portfolio worth millions. More recently, he's been involved in television reality shows such as *Soccer Aid* on ITV and *The Race* on Sky One.

Although he started out being seen as a reckless individual, both on the racetrack and off it, as the F1 world became more corporate and bland, Irvine began to stand out as a real personality and someone who made the sport a little



bit more fun. He spoke his mind, he raced as hard as he could, and whether you loved him or hated him, he added some colour to Formula 1.

That's all for today's episode of F1 People. Stay tuned as we have three more VIPs coming up this series, and until then you can leave your thoughts on Eddie at Sidepodcast.com.

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