

F1 People – Jean Alesi

Welcome to the fifth entry in a series of short shows brought to you by Sidepodcast, called F1 People. So far this series we've looked at Colin Chapman and Murray Walker, now it's time to look at Jean Alesi.

Giovanni Alesi was born on June 11th, 1964 to Italian parents in France. His early racing career was in rallying, which he preferred to the single seater style series, but he worked his way to take part in the Renault 5 championship. He took part in French Formula 3, winning a title, and International F3000, again taking the title. His Formula 1 debut was in 1989 at the French Grand Prix with the Tyrrel-Cosworth team. He finished fourth, after running second for a portion of the race, and he decided to drive in both the Formula 1 and F3000 series in the same year. He was successful and claimed another F3000 title.

The next year, 1990, he took up F1 full time, still with Tyrrell. At the US GP that year, he made his name, by leading the race in an underperforming car, and battling with Senna along the way. Eventually, he had to concede the lead to Senna but his popularity soared. Several teams wanted his services and by mid-season, Tyrrell, Williams and Ferrari all claimed that they had signed Alesi for their own for the following season. Williams had also signed Nigel Mansell, and Alesi decided his best bet was to go with Ferrari. They were the dominant force at the time, and teamed with Alain Prost, Alesi assumed he would be learning from the best in the best team. It was also a popular decision with Italian's, given Alesi's heritage.

However, 1991 saw a downturn in Ferrari's fortunes, and it was Williams who took five of the next seven titles. Prost abandoned the team at the end of 1991, replaced by Gerhard Berger. Alesi remained with the team until 1996, by which time he had gained a massive following from the Ferrari fans, but only one win. It was an emotional victory at Canada 1995, on his 31st birthday. Technically, the lead was inherited from other teams unreliability but no one could deny that Alesi had paid his dues. Michael Schumacher even celebrated with Alesi by giving him a lift back to the pit lane, when his car ran out of fuel on the celebration lap.

When Schumacher came to the red team from Benetton, Alesi went the other way, taking Gerhard Berger with him. The relationship between Alesi and Ferrari had deteriorated somewhat, with the driver desperate to win and the team trying their best. In 1996, Benetton were defending the championship, but once again, Alesi made the wrong move. Schumacher made Ferrari a force to be reckoned with, whilst Benetton declined slowly.

He moved on to Sauber, and then joined team Prost, owned by his former Ferrari teammate. With this team, Alesi finished every single race, consistently, but after the British Grand Prix, an argument saw Alesi walk out. His last F1 year was in 2001 with Jordan.

After Formula 1, Jean Alesi tried his hand in DTM, with some moderate success. Over five years he had three wins, but never got higher than fifth in the championship. He took a few years away from racing, but returned to take part in the Far & Middle Eastern Speedcar Series this year, with a few other notable ex-F1 drivers.

He has also been heavily involved in the Direxiv team – a potential F1 outfit that took part in the bidding for the final grid place in 2008. They would have been a McLaren B team, but were beaten by Prodrive. It's assumed that Direxiv wouldn't have been able to participate, just as Prodrive couldn't.



Jean Alesi's career is notable more for its longevity than the results he achieved. Whilst plenty of drivers have beaten his Grand Prix starts record, working for so long with various teams and only achieving one win is a true testament to a driver's motivation.

That's all for today, please join me tomorrow when we'll look at another name in Formula 1. Until then, send me your feedback on the people we have covered so far – let me know your thoughts on the blog at Sidepodcast.com, via Voicemail on 0121 28 87225, or email me Christine at sidepodcast.com. See you tomorrow.

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