

F1 People – Jackie Stewart

Welcome to F1 People, a short series from Sidepodcast presenting a biography of the names you need to know. In this fifth episode, we're looking at Jackie Stewart.

John Young Stewart, better known as Jackie, was born on June 11th 1939 in Dumbartonshire, Scotland. He was immersed into the world of cars and motorsport from the very beginning. The family business was a Jaguar dealership, where Jackie apprenticed as a mechanic. His father had raced motorcycles in his spare time, and his brother Jimmy was becoming a renowned local racing driver. After an accident at Le Mans saw Jimmy injured, their parents discouraged any interest in the sport. Jackie took up shooting, instead, and just missed out on a place in the 1960 Olympics.

Despite the disapproval from his parents, Jackie accepted an offer from a customer of the garage to test cars at Oulton Park. He entered many races and won a lot of them but the most important win was probably at Goodwood. He impressed everyone present and Ken Tyrell, then running the Formula Junior team for Cooper, heard of this new rising talent and made some calls. Jackie tested a new Formula 3 car against Bruce McLaren, and outshone him, resulting in an offer from Tyrell right there and then.

He made his debut for Tyrell in Formula Three in 1964. His debut race saw him gain a lead of over 20 seconds after just two laps, extended to over 40 seconds by the end of the race. On the strength of this, he was offered a Formula 1 driver with Cooper, but he chose to remain at Tyrell and get some experience. He lost just two races and became the F3 champion.

The next year he impressed Colin Chapman at a Formula 1 test for Lotus, but again declined the drive and chose Formula Two instead.

1965 saw his first full season as an F1 driver for BRM, and he continued his impressive form. Through his career he drove for Tyrell, for March, and Matra, winning 27 races and three world championships. He is one of the few drivers to choose to leave the sport at the top rather than see his performance drop off. He retired in 1973.

During the 1966 Belgian Grand Prix, it rained considerably and there were many crashes. Jackie Stewart found himself upside down, trapped in his car by the steering wheel, with fuel pouring around him, for 25 minutes. Two other drivers had to free him using tools from a spectator. Thankfully, he emerged relatively unscathed, but the incident wakened Stewart's senses to the need for improved safety considerations. There were no crews to extricate drivers from damaged cars, and there were no medical facilities on track. His wait for an ambulance was unpleasant and long. Racing conditions were dangerous and unnecessarily so. During a period of ten years, Stewart knew over 50 friends and colleagues that died during races – the chances of a fatal accident during that time were two out of there.

Stewart teamed up with his BRM boss Louis Stanley to campaign for better safety provisions at races. Safety barriers were a rarity until Jackie called attention to it. He hired a private doctor to attend races, until the medical situation could be improved. Seat belts, helmets, fireproof clothes, all of these are down to Stewart's unwillingness to give in. He rallied track owners to sort out their facilities, and he called on the drivers to boycott races if they were not up to scratch.



After his retirement from Formula 1, Stewart became a consultant for Ford, and a commentator for NASCAR, and even returned to the sport with his own Stewart Grand Prix racing team. He set up the team with his son Paul, and they worked on it together until 2000, when Jackie retired. The team had then become Jaguar Racing. Both his son Paul, one of two, along with Mark, and Jackie's wife Helen were diagnosed with cancer, and in 2002, Stewart himself had an operation to remove a tumour from his cheek. He continues to be an active spokesman for safety, and is currently having an argument through the media (and through lawyers) with FIA President Max Mosley. His autobiography has just been released.

But his most important post-racing activities were the amazing safety improvements he almost single-handedly brought about. Of course, he upset many people along the way, but in his eyes, safety is more important than popularity, and in 2001, the knighthood that made him Sir Jackie Stewart, proves just that.

That's all for this episode. Tomorrow we will be looking at another important person from Formula 1, so please, join me then.

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