



F1 People – Ayrton Senna

This is F1 People, the Sidepodcast series taking you behind the scenes of the lives of some of the important names in the sport. Our last show features Ayrton Senna.

Ayrton Senna da Silva was born on March 21st 1960 in Sao Paulo, Brazil. He was a creative child at school, doing well in gymnastics, art and chemistry, but struggling with maths and English. His father was a wealthy landowner and businessman and started Senna off with a small kart at a young age. Senna excelled inside the kart, it brought him out of himself and really made him happy. When he turned 13 and was legally allowed to, he entered and won the South American Championship. He went on to be a runner up in the World Championships a couple of times. He adopted his mother's maiden name Senna as a way to distinguish himself from the many da Silvas in Brazil.

In 1981, he entered the Formula Ford competition in Europe, and won it that year, and the next. In 1983, he moved to the British F3 championship, and won it. His natural ability meant four Formula 1 teams wanted him for a test – Williams, McLaren, Brabham and Toleman. He joined the latter in 1984. The Monaco Grand Prix of that debut year brought Senna the attention he deserved. He qualified a slow and difficult car in 13th and on a wet day, he passed everyone except the leader before the race was stopped because of the weather.

Senna broke his contract with Toleman to join Lotus in 1985, and he achieved his first pole position at the opening round in Brazil. He retired from that race, but the rest of the season was more successful, with two wins, four other podium finishes and fourth place in the championship.

A few more years of success but no world championships, led Senna to McLaren in 1988, where he partnered with double-world champion Alain Prost. A fierce rivalry emerged between the pair, and after McLaren won 15 out of 16 races that year, Senna finally got his first world championship. Even when they were not team mates in following years, the battle continued. The championships yo-yoed between the pair, and the controversial incidents began to stack up. At one point Senna's superlicence was suspended briefly for his conduct on track. However, he ended up with three world championships to his name, so it wasn't all bad.

The early 90s saw a drop off in performance for McLaren, and although Senna still kept winning, his championship prospects were suffering and he started to look around for alternatives to his current team. His discontent led him to Williams in 1994. He had tried to join the team in 93, but they had Alain Prost who had a clause in his contract to keep his rival away from the team. When Senna joined in 94, Prost retired.

His early 1994 performance was good, and he took pole position at Imola – the third race of the season. He was rattled by other accidents and a death that weekend, but decided to race. On the 7th lap, the car flew off track and hit a concrete wall. It took the medical team a long time to arrive at the scene, Senna was taken by helicopter to hospital and pronounced dead.

The Brazilian government declared three days of national mourning, and he was given a state funeral. It was discovered after his death that Senna had been donating millions of dollars of his own money to children's charities – something he had kept secret while he was alive. The gentler side of him was only just beginning to emerge from the ruthless and talented, competitive driver that the world had seen. But no matter how many controversial incidents he was involved in, his popularity never wavered.



Ayrton Senna was the last driver to be killed during a Formula 1 race and his death continues to haunt the sport even after more than a decade.

That's all for this episode, and this series of F1 People. Seven shows is not enough to do justice to everyone who deserves a biography, so look out for another series of F1 People in the future. Thanks for listening.

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