

## F1 People – Colin Chapman

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Welcome to the second series of F1 People, seven short shows brought to you by Sidepodcast, chronicling the lives of important people in the world of F1. Last time round we looked at Michael Schumacher, Enzo Ferrari, Frank Williams and others. Obviously there are more than seven VIPs in F1, and we had several comments last time round suggesting people we may have missed. Thus, F1 People, series 2, is here to expand on our list, starting with Colin Chapman.

Anthony Colin Bruce Chapman was born on the 19th May 1928, in London, where he grew up and went to University to study mechanical engineering. While he was a student, he learnt to fly and joined the Royal Air Force when he was 20. He wasn't there for long, although the experience gave him a taste for aeronautical engineering that transferred to his love of cars. After leaving the RAF, Chapman became a member of the 750 Motor Club, a UK based racing club that specialises in Austin's.

The first car that Chapman built was based around a 1930 Austin Seven and he named it Lotus. The car was entered into some minor races and was so successful that more versions were built. At this point, Chapman was working at the British Aluminium Company, but his girlfriend lent him the money to start up the Lotus Engineering Company. He partnered with Michael Allen and in 1953, Frank Costin joined the company to help create the Lotus Mk 8. The success of this car allowed Chapman to leave his job and work for Lotus full time. Whilst building and producing road and race cars, Chapman's expertise was sought by Vanwall and BRM who both used him as a consultant to their racing teams.

In 1956, Chapman combined his experience with building cars, and working with the teams, to build his first single-seater, and two years later, he entered the car in its first Grand Prix at Monaco. Graham Hill and Cliff Allison were the first to drive the Lotus 12s in F1. A couple of iterations later, Chapman switched the engine from the front of the car to the rear, and in 1960, the Lotus 18 won its first race with Stirling Moss at the wheel. Team Lotus, however, didn't win until the next year, at the US GP.

The 1960s were a dominant period for Lotus. Jim Clark won seven races in 1963 with the Lotus 25 – the first chassis to feature a monocoque. This came from Chapman's aeronautical engineering background, and helped make the cars lighter and stronger. They were also much better for the driver in the event of a crash. Graham Hill was world champion in 1968 with the Lotus 49 – the first car to feature commercial sponsorship. Chapman's desire to have commercial backing was a key factor in building the big-business sport that F1 is today.

Also in 1968 came the death of Jim Clark. He and Colin Chapman had become close friends through their many races and wins together. Clark died after his Lotus veered off the road and crashed into some trees. Chapman was very publically devastated, saying he had lost his best friend. He ordered the green and yellow Lotus badge to be replaced on all Lotus cars to a black badge for a month after Clark's death.

The world championship wins continued into the 70s, and as the successes rolled in, the company began to grow, moving to Norfolk, and building up its sports car infrastructure. In the middle of the 1970s, Lotus began to look at ground-effects, successfully harnessing the innovative technology to help the Lotus 79 win the world championship with Mario Andretti at the wheel. Whilst ground effects were a major advancement in terms of the technology, they were also surrounded by controversy, and eventually banned in the 1980s.



In 1982, Chapman began work on active-suspension technologies, but this was never completed. He died of a heart attack in December that year, aged just 54 years.

After his death, a scandal emerged involving the DeLorean Motor Company. In 1992, Fred Bushell, a close colleague of Chapman's pleaded guilty to "conspiring with the late Colin Chapman and others to defraud the DeLorean Motor Company." He went to prison for four years, and it's assumed that had Chapman been alive, he also would have received sentencing.

None of that takes the edge off the fact that he was one of the great innovators of Formula 1. Without Chapman, and his Lotus team, several of the major stepping stones in F1 technology may never have been made. He remains the engineering mind that all others look up to.

Thanks for listening to this first episode of F1 People (series 2). Don't forget you can leave your thoughts on Colin Chapman on the blog, you can leave a voicemail on 0121 28 87225, or you can email me on [christine@sidepodcast.com](mailto:christine@sidepodcast.com). Join me tomorrow when we'll take a look at another important name in F1.

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