



## F1 People – Niki Lauda

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This is the second episode of the second series of F1 People, a set of shows from Sidepodcast that chronicle the lives of the important people involved in the sport we love. Yesterday we looked at Colin Chapman, and today we're going to focus on Niki Lauda.

Andreas Nikolaus Lauda was born on 22nd February 1949 in Vienna, Austria. His family were not impressed with his desires to become a racing driver, but despite their disapproval, he took up the career. He started in the very low Formulas, and moved up the ranks to racing Porsche sports cars. Then his career hit a plateau, and to move onwards, Lauda took out a sizeable bank loan to buy an F2 drive with the then-new March team. He drove for them for one year in 1971, was promoted to F1 in 1972, and drove in both formulas that year. Lauda's skills were heralded by the March team, but they were not very successful at that time within F1. Lauda took out yet another bank loan to get into BRM the next year. Unfortunately, this was another team struggling, but when team mate Clay Regazzoni transferred to Ferrari, he spoke highly enough of Lauda that the red team signed him up as well.

The Ferrari team were on their way back up in 1974, and Lauda fitted in perfectly by taking the second step on the podium on his debut race. His first victory was three races later. 1975 saw his first World Championship, and 1976 appeared to be heading the same way. Lauda had finished either first or second in the first six races, but then it came to the German Grand Prix. The full Nurburgring circuit was used in those days, and on only the second lap of the race, Lauda ran off track, hit an embankment and flew back onto the track into the path of another driver. The Ferrari burst into flames, and Lauda was trapped inside. Four drivers pulled him free from the car, but he had already suffered severe burns and had been inhaling toxic gases. Lauda fell into a coma and even had the last rites read to him.

However, it took Lauda only six weeks to recover from his terrible injuries, and he was back in the car finishing fourth on his return. The championship had closed up by then, and it came down to the last race of the season. In torrential rain, Lauda decided to withdraw from the race after two laps, saying he felt the conditions were too dangerous. He therefore handed the championship to James Hunt.

This decision left his relationship with Ferrari in tatters, and after a troubled season in 1977, Lauda left the team. He raced for Brabham for just over a year, then retired mid season to start up an airline. In 1982, he returned to F1 with McLaren and took his third World Championship in 1984.

He retired again, the next year. The Lauda Air business was taking off, no pun intended, but in 1999 the company was sold to Austrian Airlines. Lauda has kept himself very busy however. When his old friend Luca di Montezemolo took over at Ferrari, he joined them as a consultant. He has also managed the Jaguar Formula 1 team for two years, started a new airline for which he sometimes acts as a pilot, commentated on F1 TV coverage and writes books.

The severe burns Lauda suffered from caused a lot of scarring, and he chose only to have enough surgery to allow his eyelids to function correctly. He has never felt the need to have further reconstructive work done. It makes him a recognisable figure in the world of motorsport, but the respect he commands comes from an entirely different source. He is considered brave, not only for returning to the cockpit so soon after his accident, but for trusting his instincts and withdrawing from a championship-deciding race.

Thanks for listening to today's F1 People. Share your thoughts in the comments on Sidepodcast.com or leave a voicemail on 0121 28 87225. I'll be back tomorrow with another VIP in the world of F1.