
Derek Bell - Memories of my Dino-days

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"I started racing in 1964 and it never crossed my mind that I might be summoned to Maranello one day..." So begins a fascinating interview with legendary sports car and Formula 2 driver Derek Bell, specifically on his experiences with the delightful V6 'Dino' F2 cars, as told to Austrian enthusiast Rudolf Schraml.

"I started racing in 1964 and it never crossed my mind that I might be summoned to Maranello one day. I raced quite successfully through Formula 3 and then onto Formula 2 with our own Brabham, the perfect car for a privateer to do battle in Europe. The 1968 racing season was to cost us £10,000 to set up; then running costs on top. This was financed by my stepfather, the 'Colonel' as he was affectionately known to all in the Paddock. In my first race in Europe at Hockenheim my idol, Jim Clark, was tragically killed. So suddenly my enthusiasm for racing was somewhat subdued.

"Nonetheless at the Crystal Palace F2 race in June, I was contacted by Keith Ballisat of Shell, who

asked me to do a test drive for Ferrari immediately following that race with the Dino F2 car that Jacky Ickx was driving.

“Jacky damaged the car so the test-drive was off, and I thought ‘Oh well that’s the Bell luck, it won’t happen again’ But I received another call this time to go to Italy, a ticket was arranged by Shell and I duly arrived at Monza.



“I had raced there several times before in F3 in great slipstreaming battles that were won by the bravest driver on the last corner of the last lap.

“There were about a dozen drivers there and we all made some laps. I do not believe we knew who was the fastest but I was the only one to be invited to Maranello that evening! I stayed at the Real Fini in Modena, a magnificent hotel, the food was exquisite and I sampled Tortellini a la Panna, something the like of which I have never tasted to this day. Then I enjoyed an espresso in the bar and met a fine Italian lady whose name escapes me, and I really cannot remember what happened after that.

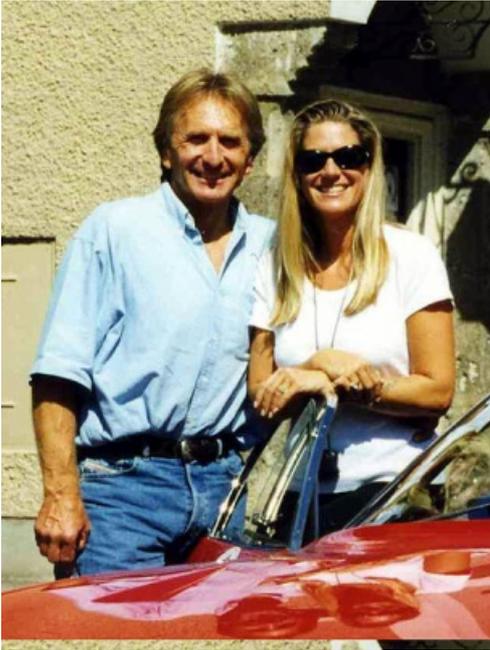


Racing driver Derek Bell

“Next morning I went to the factory and had a tour of the entire place. I asked the guide why there was no one working and he explained it was a national holiday but I was soon to learn that meant a strike.

“As we were walking through the car assembly shop Enzo Ferrari walked into view with a somewhat smaller man next to him. What an amazing vision to see this legendary figure walking through with his beautiful road cars on the assembly line at shoulder-height. Something I will cherish and never forget for the rest of my life.

"We all went to the lunch at the Cavallino, and speaking in French to one another I got to know 'Il Commendatore'.



"I could tell so many stories of my brief time there but I must tell you about the Dino! I had not signed a contract when I went to my first race at Monza in late June as I was still nervous about the Ferrari pressure, and after all I had no manager and was only in my fourth season and rather naïve. Much to my amazement I got on pole in qualifying ahead of three team cars and forty others. Can you imagine how I felt, on pole in my first race for Ferrari at Monza?

(Photo Right: Derek and Misty Bell)

"The Dino was a superb high-speed car if you could carry the velocity into the corner, but in traffic it did not have the torque to accelerate that well which was my disadvantage in the race, as it was impossible to break away in front and then use the Dino's straight line advantage. Somewhere around half distance something broke at the Parabolica (or I was touched) and I spun round eliminating three Ferraris and my own Brabham!! Unfortunately Jean Pierre Jausaud was also involved, his car flew through the air, he fell out, the car exploded and burnt to the ground. Fortunately he only received a broken leg...

"Following that disaster I left for England assuming that I would not be hearing from Ferrari again...as I had not signed. Later that week I was summoned to Maranello to sign my contract. I was down there like a shot, if they wanted me that badly then I was their man.

"As I walked into the office anticipating a dressing down from Ing. Gozzi, I was greeted with 'Congratulations for your fine pole-position, here is \$1,000 - we were most happy with you!'...After all I had only destroyed two new cars!!!

"The next race was at an airfield circuit, Langenlebarn in Austria. Amon and Ickx drove Dinosaurs too, but the circuit did not suit us.



“We took the Dino to Zandvoort, where I was on pole, won my heat and was leading the final by some margin when another tragedy struck when Chris Lambert had an accident and subsequently died.

“At the restart I began to have gear selection problems and I dropped out. A sad race and one to forget.

“The gearbox gremlins struck me again in my first F1 drive at Oulton Park later this month. It appears I would shift the gears too fast and I would select 2 gears at once.

(Photo Left: Ferrari Dino F2, Langenlebar 1968)

“Phil Hill had a similar problem, I was told - but my F1 experiences are another story. Our next programme was to be the Tasman series, four races in New Zealand and three in Australia on consecutive weekends from January 1st.

“I was to drive alongside Chris Amon in the Dino, not the 1,600cc motor but 2,400cc; much more torque. I collected the cars from Maranello on a double-deck trailer with my British mechanic, and brought them to England where they were shipped to Auckland. That was some journey with our valuable cargo. We had 4 engines for the series of 7 races; it wasn't enough.

“Jochen Rindt and Graham Hill were in Lotus Cosworth 2,500cc cars, as was Piers Courage in Frank Williams' Brabham Cosworth. Frank Gardner and many other talents from the Antipodes drove slightly less powerful cars.

“A wonderful series to be invited to and we were treated like royalty, the racing was almost incidental. The Dino was very competitive and we had some great races, unfortunately my engine fell apart at the second race at Levin, where in the heats I actually beat Rindt for the only time of my life.



"So with that in mind and 5 races remaining I had to conserve the revs and mileage, which no doubt reduced my potential, but Chris and I finished first and second at the 'Australian GP' on Mr Ferrari's 70th Birthday. The handling of the Dino in the wet also gave me a second to Rindt at Warwick Farm, Sydney.

"Chris won the Championship, and the cars came home undamaged. I learnt and gained valuable experience.

(Photo Right: Chris Amon, co-driver in 1968)

"One thing that amazed me from this point on was that while we were in the Tasman Series Ferrari sent two F2 Dinors to Argentina for the Temporada. Five races, I believe, for Andrea de Adamich and Tino Brambilla. These two won the series by trouncing everybody. All the usual F2 teams were there and could not believe the domination. Yet when we went to Thruxton in April for the first European round, Regazzoni, Brambilla and myself were all at the back of the grid. I have never understood how the same cars could be so dominant in Argentina yet totally uncompetitive on their return.

"However because of this lack of competitiveness we only did a few races, and the cars were not seen again - which from a driver's point of view is a major letdown.

"At this time Ferrari were building the 1970 flat-12 312B F1 car and I suppose one has to admit that it took their attention away from developing the Dino further. We also did a heavily reduced F1 programme in this season of 1969. Since those days I have been reunited with my Tasman Dino on many events which evoke wonderful memories of an extremely privileged part of my life."



Derek Bell - Motorsporting legend

Born 31st October 1941

1964	Begins his motor racing career in a Lotus 7 and wins his first race - at Goodwood
1965	Racing in Formula 3 (Lotus Ford), many victories from '65 - '67
1968	First Formula 2 season with a Brabham-Ford Test-drive for Ferrari - pole position in first race for Ferrari (Monza)
1968/1969	Works driver for Ferrari in F2, Tasman Series and a single F1 race
1969-1974	Varied F1 drives - specially for McLaren, Brabham, Surtees, Tecno and works driver for Ferrari and Porsche in the World Sports Car Championship
1975	Winner - 24 Hours of Le Mans (Mirage-Ford)
1981	Winner - 24 Hours of Le Mans (Porsche 936)
1982	Winner - 24 Hours of Le Mans (Porsche 956)
1985	FIA - World Sports Car Champion
1986	FIA - World Sports Car Champion / Winner - 24 Hours of Le Mans (Porsche 962)
1987	Winner - 24 Hours of Le Mans (Porsche 962) / Winner - Daytona 24 Hours (Porsche 962)
1989	Winner - Daytona 24 Hours (Porsche 962)
1995	Last Le Mans Success: 3rd place, partnered by his son, Justin (McLaren F1)
1998	Awarded the title "Greatest Sportscar Driver in the last 50 years"
Present-day	Now commentator and broadcaster for races in the USA (Audi S4, Volvo), F1 commentator for Foxsport (USA), Consultant and test-driver for Bentley, regular participant to the Ennstal Classic in Austria.

Text & Photos: Dipl. Ing. R. Schraml

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