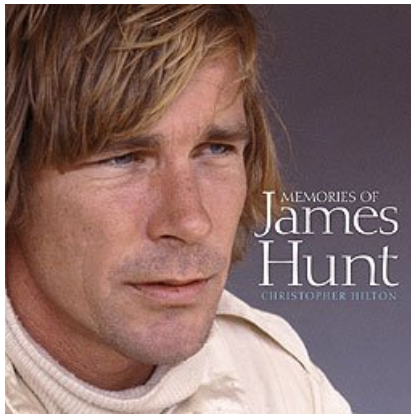


CLASSIC DRIVER

Book Review - 'Memories of James Hunt'



Thirty years ago, Britain was in the grip of Formula One fever as each weekend's racing brought a new twist to a championship battle between the clinical driver from Austria and the public school educated James Hunt, whose excursions off the track often surpassed those on it. These are the memories of friends and competitors asked the question, 'What's your strongest memory of James?'

The answer usually proved that the old Wellingtonian was one of those extraordinary human beings that comes along once in a while to entertain and infuriate us in equal measures.

Hunt was on a mission to go motor racing from a visit (with a girlfriend...) to Brands Hatch one Boxing Day. That he won the World Championship

less than 10 years later, against a Ferrari team bankrolled by FIAT and personally run by Luca de Montezemolo, having 1974 champion Lauda as its leading driver, is extraordinary. The story of his rise through the junior ranks to racing for Lord Hesketh in 1974 and 1975 is chronicled in the book via interviews rather than race-by-race analysis so for those seeking the ultimate book about Hunt the racing driver then look elsewhere.

But for those who knew a little of the life of Hunt the man, yet wanted to learn more, this is the volume for you. Behind the casual public school 'let's not be seen to make too much effort' persona of both himself and the Hesketh team, lay a fantastically in-shape (country-level tennis and squash player, as well as an accomplished runner and tremendously strong all-rounder) athlete in the days before fitness was an issue in motor racing, with a nervous energy and mercurial driving talent that got it all together in '76.



It has been suggested, and the book sort of reinforces the fact, that Hunt was the forerunner of today's drivers who are athletes first and passionate about motor sport second. His purpose in life was to win the driver's crown and that achieved he found it difficult to concentrate on a life outside motor racing.

The women, the booze, the budgies (James was a fanatical breeder of budgerigars), the Mercedes 450SEL 6.9 on bricks outside his Wimbledon home when he could no longer afford to run it and the Austin A35 van are all there; stories told by contemporary racers like Patrick Tambay and John Watson, as well as girlfriends, journalists and the TV producers and directors who had to cope with a somewhat difficult 'expert' to assist the ever-professional Murray Walker in 1980s BBC TV Grand Prix coverage.

His life hit many lows, and there are many in the book less than complimentary about his often boorish behaviour and unprofessional actions at interviews or promotions. There are also some wonderful photos of the man in all his golden-haired, bare-chested pomp looking more like a 1970s rock star than athlete.

It's moving story of a man who, in the words of his mother, 'crammed more into 45 years than most people do in an entire lifetime' – and thoroughly recommended.

Hardback, 250 x 250mm, 160 pages, including 100 colour and 60 b&w illustrations, 'Memories of James Hunt', by Christopher Hilton, is published by Haynes and can be ordered direct at the special internet price of £19.99 if you [CLICK HERE](#).

Text - Steve Wakefield

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