

CLASSIC DRIVER

Nobody stood a chance against Jim Clark and this Lotus 49

Lead

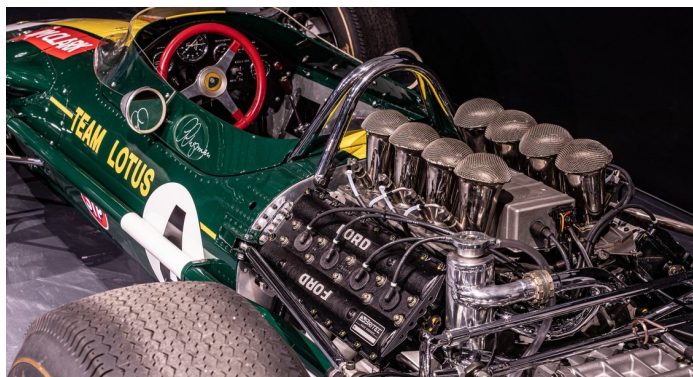
On New Year's Day in 1968, the motor racing sensation Jim Clark scored his final Grand Prix victory driving a Lotus 49 in South Africa. Now, 52 years later, that car is a testament to the great Scot's talent and the peerlessness of the pioneering Lotus in which he crushed the opposition that day...

"No-one could keep up with Clark; he put Lotus and Cosworth right on top at the beginning of what should be an exciting season." That's how *Motor Sport* magazine described Jim Clark's crushing victory in the 1968 South African Grand Prix, held at Kyalami on New Year's Day.



Piloting the mighty Lotus 49 – a brand new chassis, stamped R4, although largely unchanged from the previous year's revolutionary car – the Scottish sensation was untroubled all weekend, save for the very first lap, when his fellow countryman Jackie Stewart made a terrific start in the new Tyrrell-entered Matra. It was telling of not only Clark's revered talent, but also of the Cosworth-powered 49's superiority.

Arguably the most significant Grand Prix car of all time, Colin Chapman and Maurice Philippe's sensational Lotus 49 did more to shape modern-day Formula 1 than any other car. Not least because of its incredibly stiff monocoque construction, which utilised the engine and gearbox as fully stressed members, and revolutionary Cosworth DFV, a powerful, reliable and affordable powerplant that would go on to power virtually the entire grid in the years to come. Oh, it was also the first Formula 1 car to sprout aerodynamic wings. Need we say any more?



Tragically, the exciting 1968 season referenced by *Motor Sport* was also to be a tragic one. Just a few short months after his victory in South Africa, on 7 April, Clark was killed in a non-championship Formula 2 race at Hockenheim. It was a loss that shook the motor racing world to the core.

Little did Jo Siffert know when he first left the pits during practice for the Race of Champions at Brands Hatch in March that he was driving the final car in which Jim Clark would win a race. Shortly after the Kyalami victory, Colin Chapman sold chassis R4 to the respected British privateer Rob Walker, to be driven by Siffert. Alas, the likeable Swiss damaged the car in practice and it never took to the grid at Brands.



This is where the tale takes a dramatic turn. The Lotus was sent back to Walker's famous Pippbrook Garage in Dorking to be repaired, but as it was undergoing welding work, a fire broke out in the workshop and all but destroyed R4 and several other significant cars including a Cooper-Maserati and a Delage. It was game over for Siffert's 49... or so everybody thought.

Almost 20 years passed before Rob Walker gave his chief mechanic John Chisman permission to birth a phoenix from the ashes of chassis R4. When Chisman sadly died shortly after taking on the restoration project, and when his son Jim could not afford to carry on where his father left off, the founder of the Donington Grand Prix Collection museum Tom Wheatcroft took up the tale.



In 1995, with still no progress made on the resurrection of R4, the project was sold once again to a consortium led by David McLaughlin. The renowned Grand Prix car experts Hall and Fowler (now Hall and Hall) set about a painstaking effort to bring this ultra-significant Lotus back to life. Chassis' R3 and R7 were used as reference points, and although little was carried over from the destroyed original car, a period-correct early Cosworth DFV was sourced as well as an original ZF gearbox.

Although the revived R4 was not completed in time for the Belgian driver Jean 'Beurlys' Blaton to race it at the Grand Prix de Monaco Historique in 1997, as had been the plan, the car, resplendent in Rob Walker's signature shade of navy blue, made its second public debut at the Lotus 50th Anniversary Meeting in 1998. The event was fittingly held at Brands Hatch, the last place R4 turned a wheel in anger almost 30 years prior.



In the capable hands of Jackie Oliver at the Goodwood Revival the following year, the new R4's first competitive outing was marred when it had a 'coming together' with Jack Brabham's old McLaren M5A, driven by the man himself. Ah, the magic of Goodwood. When it was repaired once again, the decision was taken to repaint the car in R4's original Team Lotus colours, as Clark raced it in the 1968 season-opener in South Africa. And it was in this guise that R4 in its revived form was ogled by countless enthusiasts at events across Europe, right up until 2008 when it was sold to a private collector in Japan.



Now, this incredible resurrected Lotus 49 has returned to Europe and is [being offered for sale](#) by the Classic Driver dealer [ChromeCars](#) in Germany. It stands as a wonderful tribute to both Jim Clark, one of the finest talents motor racing has ever witnessed and whose legend will grow greater with every passing year, and the legendary Lotus 49, a truly landmark car to which modern Formula 1 owes so much.

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Gallery

