

Gazette Sport

The Daly show

As the Formula 1 world championship draws to a close, STEPHEN FINDLATER speaks to Derek Daly, Dundrum's original grand prix hero, about a life in the fast lane, and whether Lewis Hamilton is a shining new hope for the sport

FOR the second year running, the Formula One season went down to the wire with Lewis Hamilton and Felipe Massa in a titanic tussle for the title in Brazil last weekend.

This year, Hamilton just succeeded where he famously lost out last year. Already the hype and plaudits have come pouring in, with Michael Schumacher suggesting his record of seven world titles could be under threat.

But is it too early to proclaim Hamilton a true sporting great?

Dundrum-born Derek Daly is one man who would probably know more than most. He has made it his business in recent years to analyse what makes a great racing champion, and what it takes to stay at the top.

Daly is a former racing driver who, among many other things, holds the record for the fastest transition between Formula Ford racing and Formula One. He has written a bible for up-and-coming racing drivers, *Race To Win*, and he was keen to share his understanding of

Formula One's youngest-ever winner when he spoke to the Gazette recently.

"Hamilton is one of these guys who is hard to read because he was immediately with one of the best teams. Very seldom has anything been written about Hamilton's technical ability. As the car develops, is it him or is it the engineering skills of the team?"

Theory test

Daly has developed in his book a framework to help aspiring drivers to reach the ir full potential. It has drawn rave reviews from legends like Mario Andretti and Paul Tracy.

Daly's theories came about after many years involved in motorsport at various different levels – as a racer, a course-designer, a driving school instructor and, now, as father to an up-and-coming racer.

While he never won a Formula One world championship, Daly feels that his journey, and what happened along the way, is what lends the book credibility.

"I was very lucky that I came from Dundrum and got to race in Formula One, but I made all the mistakes you could make. I had no coach, no manager, I was pure instinct-reflex. All the mistakes that I made became the foundation of the book."

Humble start

Daly grew up with the smell of petrol in the air, his father owning a corner grocery store on Wyckham Park in the old village, which had a few pumps out the front.

He was fascinated with cars from an early age, especially after a visit to his first race in Dunboyne with his father.

"I was 12. I remember the sounds and the sights and the smells, I remember it like a video in my mind, as if it happened a month ago. That's when I decided [motor racing] was what I wanted to do.

"I didn't understand what it really meant, but I was fascinated by racing cars. At that time, Formula 1 wasn't on television. You could hardly get a report. I would ring the Evening Press on a Sunday night to see if

there was any reports from wherever the grand prix was, because they would hardly even print the results."

He started racing stock cars in Santry when he was 16, in events akin to demolition derbies, making ends meet with his day-job in Larry Byrne's garage on Woodbine Terrace. His time was spent "crashing, bashing and fixing" as he saved to buy a Formula Ford.

He competed in that class for the first time in 1974 on a bank loan, and then, in 1975, bought his first car – from Eddie Jordan.

To make ends meet, he had to come up with some unique fund-raising schemes, one of which brought him to Australia.

"My girlfriend at the time had a brother just back from Australia, a labourer in the iron ore mines, who'd made £5,000 in six months. Ten days later, I was there. I worked over the winter to get enough money to get a Formula Ford, came back, went to Mondello in 1975, and won the championship in my second year."

Any means necessary

He subsequently moved to England in 1976 with a championship-winning car to his name, but not much else. Selling the car would have funded living costs but make racing difficult, so he bought a beat-up school bus big enough to transport the car, a toolbox and a place for a sleeping bag.

"I drove from track-to-track and won 23 races. At the festival at the end of the year, I met Derek McMahon who said he'd help me get into F3. I won that championship, too, and, 13 months after I won the Formula Ford festival at Brands Hatch, I was testing a Formula 1 car at Goodwood."

It secured him a move to the struggling Hesketh team in 1978, before Daly moved to Ensign, gaining his first championship point.

The next four years saw him move from Ensign to Tyrrell to March and, finally, to Williams, where he drove the second car to Keke Rosberg, who claimed the overall title.

'I was 12 years old. I remember the sights and sounds and smells. That's when I decided I wanted to be involved in motor racing'

Derek Daly on his first experience of motor sports in Dunboyne

During those years, though, Daly tasted the difficulties young drivers face, having one particularly famous crash in Monaco in 1980, and describing the move to Williams as "a good move at the wrong time".

He decided to turn his back on Formula 1 and moved to America, taking part in the Indy series, and subsequently settling there as a commentator and broadcaster, while setting up his track-design and driver-school businesses.

Having to analyse every part of a driver's make-up with his involvement in the driving school sewed the seeds for capturing his thoughts on paper.

"When I realised that [what makes a great racing driver] was so individual, the idea of

capturing it in a book began. It took me three or four years to get started, and it took me another five years to write it.

"In researching for my TV work, I realised that there's such a small number of people who ultimately became super-successful. I asked a very simple question: Why?"

"Asking that question to a Mario Andretti, or to a Michael Schumacher, led me to understanding the make-up of successful people."

Assessing the champion

So, what about his theories on Hamilton's potential greatness?

Daly believes the young Englishman to be a so-called "instinct-reflex" driver – one who likes to drive a car to within an inch of its capabilities.

Daly adds a proviso for the future, though, suggesting Hamilton may need to work on other sides of his make-up, but he believes some adjustments could see sustained success.

"Technically, he's not as accurate as he needs to be yet. That's a little tip-off that he might be the instinct-reflex side. If you're instant-reflex like Kimi Raikkonen or Juan Montoya; those guys who are brilliant at winning but don't really know what's going on in the car while they're doing it.

"The most valuable stream of information is the driver feeding information to his team. The magic is to develop both sides of your game. Michael Schumacher has both. Alonso has both, Prost had both, Senna had both. That's where you become the champion.

"The guy who has the instinct-reflexes, like Hamilton, I want him to read in this book about the other side, so they can have sustained greatness."



Flying tonight: Derek in acrobatic action at the Zandvoort circuit in 1980. He escaped unhurt