


VILLENEUVE


DOB: 9-Apr-1971

BORN:
St.Jean-sur-Richelieu,
Quebec, Canada

LIVES: Monte Carlo

STATUS: Engaged to Elly

HEIGHT: 1.68 m

WEIGHT: 67 kg



[Driver Website] [2005 In Pictures]

Biography

Jacques Villeneuve was just 24 when he became the youngest ever Indy 500 winner and CART champion. Two years later and he was F1 World Champion.

Son of the late, great, Gilles Villeneuve, the French Canadian quickly went about creating a legend of his very own. He went first to Italy, then Japan to get his racing education, before returning home to impress in the Formula Atlantic category. The logical next step for 1994 was Indycars, and Jacques won his first race at Road America en route to being named Rookie of the Year.

The following year saw Jacques dominate CART as he became champion with five victories including a famous Indianapolis win, but a summer test for Williams hinted at where his future lay. Within weeks, it became clear that he would emulate his father by moving to the pinnacle of the sport, the world stage of F1.

He certainly entered F1 with a bang - pole position in his first grand prix at Melbourne confirmed that he would successfully bridge the CART/F1 divide like no one before. He won his first GP in just his fourth race at the Nurburgring.

Three more grand prix wins came in 1996, and Jacques even managed to push teammate and eventual champion Damon Hill to the final race of the year in Japan.

The following year, Jacques became the undisputed number one at Williams, and he enjoyed a titanic struggle with Michael Schumacher for the world championship.

A controversial collision with the Ferrari driver at Jerez saw Jacques crowned World Champion, and he remained with Williams for 1998.

The defence of his title was fraught with difficulty, as Renault's F1 exit left Williams lagging behind McLaren and Ferrari. Long before the season was over, Jacques had quit Williams to rejoin his former Indycar boss Craig Pollock at the start of a brand new F1 venture - BAR.

1999 was not an easy year for either BAR or Jacques as the team struggled with reliability, but the constant development began to pay off in 2000 as Jacques started to be a regular points-scorer, ending the season in seventh place.

2001 proved to be a tough year for JV, which began in the worst possible way when

he was involved in a horrific accident in Melbourne. Despite struggling with his car, and receiving criticism from his team at various points in the season, Villeneuve did put in some strong performances which culminated in BAR's first podium finishes in Spain and Germany.

On the eve of the 2002 launch BAR team boss, and Jacques close friend, Craig Pollock was dropped in favour of Prodrive boss David Richards. Right from the outset it was clear that the relationship between the Canadian and Richards would be 'strained'. To fuel to the mix, Pollock was still his manager and retained a stake in the team.

Unreliability was a major factor in 2002 and though Jacques wasn't affected quite as badly as team-mate Olivier Panis, he didn't score his first points until Silverstone, round ten of the championship.

Although Jacques seemed to perform better in the latter part of the season, at a time when his future with the team was under close scrutiny, the Honda simply wasn't reliable enough.

2003 was always going to be difficult. In the summer of 2002, Richards had signed Jenson Button, a driver with whom the BAR boss enjoyed a long friendship going all the way back to the English youngster's karting days.

Already aware that there his role within the team was being undermined, the arrival of Button was the further bad news for Jacques, who felt he was slowly losing *his* team.

Sadly, Jacques reacted in the worst possible way, launching a string of verbal attacks on Button, who to be fair hit back whenever he got the opportunity.

Although Jacques had dismissed Button as a 'boy band', as the season progressed, and Button performed, the Canadian's attitude gradually changed.

However, dreadful reliability was taking its toll, that and behind the scenes chicanery aimed at unsettling the Canadian. In late summer, there were strong rumours of Villeneuve being dropped by the team and replaced by Takuma Sato. Furthermore, Richards didn't appear eager to sign a new deal with the former champion.

It is well documented that at the time Villeneuve was the second highest paid driver in F1, yet he finished the season with 6 points compared to Button's 17. However, let's not forget that the Canadian's car only finished on 7 occasions.

The long roller-coaster ride with the Brackley team finally came to an end in late 2003 when Jacques opted to miss the Japanese GP and was replaced by Takuma Sato, who ironically scored 3 points.

The 1997 world champion was linked with a number of teams during the off-season, but in reality all the best seats were taken. As a result, when the cars lined up in Melbourne, Villeneuve was thousands of miles away, leaving F1 with just one active world champion.

Over the next few months there were many rumours - usually starting out on Internet message boards - linking the Canadian with a return to the grid. Then, in mid-September, Jacques made a little bit of F1 history when he signed two contracts within 24 hours.

First off, he signed a deal to replace Jarno Trulli at Renault for the last three races of the season. Then headed off to Switzerland to sign a contract which would see him race for Sauber in 2005.

The Renault drives were inconclusive the Canadian wasn't 100% fit and was also unused to the 2004 cars. Furthermore, in the latter stages of the season the French outfit had clearly lost its way... just a little.

Looking ahead to 2005, Villeneuve's legion of fans clearly believed that this might be the beginning of the greatest come-back in the history of motorsport. The truth is, that after just a handful of races, it seemed as though the Canadian might not retain his drive for the remainder of the season.

Ignoring Jacques' grid position in Australia, which (like many) was the result of the lottery that was the new format, the first few races were a nightmare, with the former World Champion well off the pace, certainly compared with his teammate.

However, this wasn't entirely due to the Canadian. The C24 was not a good car, furthermore there were major set-up issues, and it wasn't until JV was given free reign regarding set-up that his performance improved.

While Villeneuve, in the early races, struggled, teammate, Felipe Massa, looked far more comfortable. However, a determined drive at San Marino, kick-started the former champion's season, and from thereon he got closer and closer to the Brazilian's pace.

The Imola result was much needed, for days earlier, team boss, Peter Sauber, a man not known for making waves, described his relationship with his driver as "strained".

Much of the 'animosity' appeared to be media led, with the first blow taking place a month earlier, when British magazine Autosport claimed that the Swiss team had already held talks with Anthony Davidson, a claim the team subsequently denied.

Villeneuve subsequently took the unprecedented step of issuing a personal statement regarding his general feeling regarding the lack of progress the team was making, whilst also taking a swipe at the media, admitting that the situation would "fire a new set of rumours".

The Imola result appeared to make all the bad things go away, and it wasn't long before attention turned to 2006. Even before BMW had purchased the Swiss team, there were media claims that Villeneuve's time in F1 was at an end. However, the Canadian insisted that he had a valid contract for 2006.

He continued saying this even once BMW had purchased the Hinwil-based team, leading many within the paddock to suggest that the former World Champion was in for a rude awakening.

However, on December 1, the day BMW officially took control of Sauber, the announcement was made, Villeneuve would partner Nick Heidfeld in the German team's debut season.

This will be the Canadian's eleventh season in F1, and contract or no contract he is going to have to work hard if he is to remain in F1 for a twelfth season.

His many fans will be delighted to see him on the grid this season, and remain convinced that he can still add to his tally of wins.

The same cannot be said of former boss David Richards, who in a season review for a British F1 magazine wrote that the Canadian is long "past his sell by date".

If that's not enough motivation for JV, we don't know what is.

Statistics - Prior to 2006 Season

Drivers' Titles: 1
Seasons in F1: 10
Grand Prix: 152
Wins: 11
Points: 228
Poles: 13

Fastest Laps: 9

Best result in 2005: 4th (San Marino)

Best qualifying 2005: 4th (Australia)

Worst qualifying 2005: 18th (Turkey)

Average grid position: 12.3

2005: Out-qualified Felipe Massa 6 times

2005: Completed: 1033 out of 1107 laps (93.32%)

2005: Finished 15 times from 18 starts (83%)