

## An Obituary For Stirling Moss



Universally known to all, the subject of numerous books and magazine articles for nearly 70 years, Sir Stirling Craufurd Moss passed away on 12<sup>th</sup> April, Easter Sunday , 2020.

We knew him primarily for his early life in 500's and his shared ownership and involvement with Kieft Racing Cars Ltd, being a joint shareholding Director. He, amongst many others, really put the cars in the International limelight and always had a soft spot for them.

He was content to be known, he often said, as the man who never won the World Championship: we knew him better as 'Mr Goodwood'. It was always a thrill to see him walking around, with Lady Moss, Susie, at his side, an even greater thrill to talk to him. The sight of Sir Stirling, in his later decades, entering the paddock, never failed to draw shoals of fans, photographers and journalists all still keen to hear his opinion on the latest F1 controversy.

Sportsmanship had become part of his appeal, along with the devil-may-care charisma associated with a bygone age. He lived in Shepherd St, Mayfair in a kind of bachelor-pad splendour amid a panoply of hi-tech gadgets, a house bought as a bomb site and built to his outline

Before his retirement as a professional driver in 1962 he had competed in 529 races, not counting hundreds of other un-recorded rallies, hill climbs and record attempts. He won 212 of them, an extraordinary 40% success rate. Of the 66 world championship grands prix he entered between 1951 and 1961, he won 16.

He was born to parents who had met at Brooklands. His father, Alfred, was a descendant of a family of Ashkenazi Jews known, until the end of the 19th century, as Moses. A successful dentist, Alfred Moss also possessed a passion for motor sport, and competed at Brooklands in the 1920s; while studying in the US, he entered the Indianapolis 500, finishing 16th. His wife, Aileen (nee Craufurd),

was the great-great-niece of “Black Bob” Craufurd, a hero of the Peninsular war in the early 19th century; an equestrian, she also entered races and rallies in her own three-wheeled Morgan.

When their son Stirling was born, they were living in Thames Ditton. Two years later, after the birth of a daughter, Pat, they moved to a large house in Bray, Berkshire, called Long White Cloud. Both children rode horses competitively from an early age (Pat was to become a champion horsewoman and rally driver). Stirling, educated at Clewer Manor prep school and Haileybury, Hertfordshire, neither enjoyed nor excelled at academic work. It was at Haileybury that he was subjected to antisemitic bullying for the first time, and he reportedly still ate quickly as a result.

He was nine when his father bought him an old Austin Seven, which he drove in the fields surrounding Long White Cloud. At 15 he obtained his first driving licence and, with £50 from his equestrian winnings plus the proceeds from the sale of the Austin, bought his own Morgan. It was followed by an MG and then, in the winter of 1947-48, by a pre-war BMW 328.

Resistant to the lure of dentistry, he worked briefly as a trainee waiter at various London establishments. But motor racing was where his heart lay, and for his 18th birthday his father bought him a Cooper-JAP, with which to compete in the new Formula Three series. After being turned away from an entry to Shelsley and a good performance at Prescott, he entered and won his first single-seater race on the Brough aerodrome circuit in east Yorkshire on 7 April 1948.



Ruled out of National Service by bouts of illness, including nephritis, Moss was soon a regular winner against fierce competition and before long he was making occasional trips to races in Italy and France. In May 1950, when a race was held in support of the Monaco Grand Prix, he set the best practice time, won his heat and then won the final.

As his reputation grew, he was approached in 1951 by Enzo Ferrari, who offered him a car for a Formula Two race at Bari, as the prelude to a full contract for the following season. Moss and his father made the long journey down to Puglia, only to discover that the only Ferrari was reserved for another driver, the veteran Piero Tarufi. No explanation was offered and Moss's fury at such

treatment led to a lasting rift and a special sense of satisfaction whenever he managed to beat the Italian team, particularly in a British car.

A victory in the 1954 Sebring 12-hours, sharing the wheel of an OSCA sports car with the American driver Bill Lloyd, opened the season in which he made his international breakthrough. Deciding to take the plunge into Formula One, he and his manager, Ken Gregory, first offered his services to Mercedes-Benz, then on the brink of a return to grand prix racing. When the German team politely indicated that they thought he needed more experience, Gregory and his father negotiated the purchase of a Maserati 250F, the new model from Ferrari's local rivals.

No racing driver can have invested £5,500 more wisely. Moss and the 250F bonded instantly, and he was soon winning the Aintree 200, his maiden Formula One victory. By the time he entered the car for the German Grand Prix, he was being supported by the official Maserati team, which had recognised his world-beating potential. At Monza that September he was leading the Italian Grand Prix and looking a certainty for his first win in a round of the world championship when an oil pipe broke with 10 laps to go.

Mercedes had taken note, however, and signed him up for 1955, as No 2 to the world champion, Fangio. Although neither spoke the other's language, a warm respect grew between them. At Aintree, having won three of the season's first four races and assured himself of a third world title, Fangio took his turn to sit in the slipstream as Moss became the first Briton to win his home grand prix.

In 1955, too, Moss won the Mille Miglia, the gruelling time trial around 1,000 miles of Italian public roads, in a Mercedes 300SLR sports car. During two reconnaissance runs his co-driver, journalist Denis Jenkinson, famously prepared a set of pace notes that were inscribed on a roll of paper, held on a spindle inside a small aluminium box. As they charged from Brescia to Rome and back, Jenkinson scrolled through the notes and shouted instructions to the driver. They completed the course in 10 hours and seven minutes, at an average speed of 97.95mph – a record that stands in perpetuity, since the race was abandoned after several spectators were killed two years later.

When Mercedes bowed out of Formula One at the end of 1955, Moss returned to Maserati while Fangio went to Ferrari. Moss won at Monaco and Monza, finishing runner-up to Fangio in the championship for the second time in a row. However, he had always hoped to win grands prix in a British car, and for 1957 he was happy to accept an invitation to drive a Vanwall, a Formula One car built by the industrialist Tony Vandervell at his factory in Acton, west London.

Vanwall did not attend the first race of the year, in Buenos Aires, he was allowed to drive a little two-litre Cooper-Climax entered by his friend Rob Walker and, through a clever bluff involving pit stops, managed to beat the Ferraris. Back in the Vanwall, he won the Dutch, Portuguese and Moroccan grands prix, but was again condemned to second place in the final standings, this time behind Hawthorn.

Vandervell was so distressed by the death of Stuart Lewis-Evans, the team's third driver, in Morocco at the end of the season that he withdrew his cars during the winter, leaving Moss without a drive for 1959. The solution was to form an alliance with Rob Walker, the heir to a whisky fortune, whose Cooper-Climax would be looked after by Moss's faithful mechanic, Alf Francis, a wartime refugee from Poland. The dark blue car suffered from unreliability until late summer, when Moss took it to victories in Portugal and Italy.

Moss and Walker remained in partnership for 1960, but a fine victory in Monaco with a new Lotus-Climax was followed at Spa by a bad crash during a practice session, the car losing a wheel at around 140mph and hitting a bank with such force that the driver suffered two broken legs, three crushed vertebrae and a broken nose. To general astonishment he was back at the wheel inside two months, winning his comeback race in a Lotus sports car.

In 1961 his virtuosity overcame the limitations of Walker's ageing Lotus and its four-cylinder engine. Twice he outran the V6 Ferraris of Wolfgang von Trips, Phil Hill and Richie Ginther, first in a mad chase at Monaco and then, on a wet track, at the 14-mile Nürburgring. He was at the height of his powers and the only problem was to find cars good enough to match his brilliance.

Before the start of the 1962 season Enzo Ferrari offered to supply his latest car, to be run in Walker's colours. Old resentments were cast aside and Moss accepted this rare invitation. But an accident at Goodwood, at the wheel of a Lotus, meant that it was never put to the test.

No conclusive evidence has ever emerged to explain why, his car went straight on at St Mary's, a fast righthander, and hit an earth bank. It took 40 minutes to cut his unconscious body out of the crumpled wreckage.

The outward signs of physical damage – severe facial wounds, a crushed left cheekbone, a displaced eye socket, a broken arm, a double fracture of the leg at knee and ankle, and many bad cuts – were less significant than the deep bruising to the right side of his brain, which put him in a coma for a month and left him paralysed in the left side for six months, with his survival a matter of national concern.

After lengthy treatment, convalescence and corrective surgery, he started driving on the road again. And in May 1963, a year and a week after the accident, he returned to Goodwood, lapping in a Lotus sports car for half an hour on a damp track. When he returned to the pits, it was with bad news. The old reflexes, he believed, had been dulled, and without that sharpness he could only be an ex-racing driver. In the fullness of time, he came to regret the decision, many others at the time saying he had returned too early. Had he postponed it a further two or three years, he felt, his recovery would have been complete and, at 35, he might have had several seasons at the top ahead of him.

Instead he occupied himself with his property company. There was also the well remunerated business of being Stirling Moss, constantly in demand for commercial and ceremonial events. He participated in races for historic cars, taking advantage of a special dispensation that allowed him, and him alone of all the world's racing drivers, to ignore modern safety regulations by competing in his old helmet and overalls and doing without seat-belts.

He celebrated his 81st birthday by racing at the Goodwood Revival; a few months earlier he had fallen 30ft down the lift shaft at his Mayfair home, breaking both his ankles. Towards the end of 2016, however, he fell ill during a trip to the far east. After several weeks in hospital in Singapore he was flown home to London and his withdrawal from public life was announced.

Appointed OBE in the 1959 new year's honours list, and named BBC sports personality of the year in 1961, he was knighted in 2000.

He is survived by Susie and his children.