

-11- COMING SOON TO F1: JOLYON PALMER

The 23-year-old is leading the GP2 Championship by a mile, and in talks for an F1 seat next season. FS wonders, what makes him tick?



EIGHT YEARS AGO, A YOUNG British driver dominated the GP2 World Championship from start to finish before landing himself a dream seat in a McLaren for the following season's Formula 1 World Championship. His name was Lewis Hamilton. This year, Jolyon Palmer, a 23-year-old from Horsham, is doing much the same thing as Hamilton did in 2006. He's the runaway GP2 leader and is already being touted as a future star of the F1 circuit. So, it was only natural that Forever Sports spoke to the Champagne-wasting wannabe to find out what all the fuss was about.

How did you get into racing?

When I was about three, I started driving a go-kart around at home and began karting competitively when I was 13. From there, I caught the bug.

Was it something you always wanted to do?

I always loved F1. I was exposed to motorsport at a young age through my dad [former F1 driver Jonathan] and watched races from as early as I can remember. When I was 13, everything just clicked and suddenly I had a real desire to give it a go.

Who did you look up to when you were younger?

Always the underdog, haha! I was a big fan of Juan Pablo Montoya. He was so entertaining to watch and he would put it all on the line. He pulled off some of the most ambitious overtakes I've ever seen. I also liked Giancarlo Fisichella and Fernando Alonso.

How do you feel being compared to drivers like Lewis Hamilton?

It's good. Fundamentally, it means I'm doing something right. Lewis was the last British driver to win ▶



GP2, and has since gone on to be a huge star. He's a tough driver to be compared with, though, because he's one of the fastest out there. But if I can achieve what he has, then I'll really be delighted.

Do you have to be in good shape to be a racing driver?

Yes. It's very physically demanding inside the car. Firstly, you have G-forces acting on you, which put a lot of strain on your neck and torso. Unlike F1, we don't have power steering. That means taking corners at high speed can be very hard on the arms. The other crucial thing is cardio, and we're driving flat-out for an hour or more, often in 35-degree heat, in places with high humidity such as Malaysia and Singapore. It's not easy to focus under those conditions. You have to be extremely fit because the moment fatigue creeps in, you aren't able to operate at your best.



Jolyon's dad is Brit F1 legend Jonathan Palmer (above), who took part in 88 F1 races between 1983 and 1989

So, what can you tell us about your fitness regime?

I run pretty much every day to keep on top of my cardio, doing a mix of long endurance runs and shorter 3k or 5k fast runs. I have to be careful doing strength work because at 6ft, I'm quite tall for a driver. I can't afford to put on too much muscle. If I'm overweight, I lose lap time. The field is so tight, you can't afford to give anything away.

What do you do in your spare time?

Racing can be stressful, so it's nice to be able to switch off. I spend a lot of time catching up with friends when I'm back in England. My brother Will races in F4, so I go and cheer him on and give him some tips if I'm around. I'm also a big sports fan, mainly football and tennis. Crawley Town are my local team, so I support them. They aren't doing badly for a small club. I've also supported Ipswich Town from a young age. With tennis, I'm a big fan of Roger Federer – he's such a classy guy and what he has achieved is unbelievable. The way the top tennis players handle themselves is impressive.

Do you get nervous before a race?

I've learned not to. It's an old cliché but I tell myself just to get out there and do my best. In an hour or so it will all be over and already history. I always go out, give it my all, and try to enjoy it.

Have you ever crashed?

Of course. Every driver has crashed at some point. Luckily, none has been too serious. Once, when I was 15, the steering column broke so I couldn't turn and went straight into the wall. I've had a few others in my time, but whatever happens, it's never our fault – it's always the other guy. That's how it generally goes in motorsport.

What's the scariest situation you've been in during a race?

It's hard to say. Usually, when a situation is potentially dangerous it's over so quickly, you don't even have time to be scared.

What does it feel like to finish first in a big race?

Amazing. This is the whole reason we do it. We love the sport, but more than that, we love winning.

What personal qualities do you need to be a successful racing driver?

You have to be mentally strong. Sometimes results, incidents, or stewards' decisions go against you and you have to bounce back. You also need bravery and commitment, because when you're racing wheel-to-wheel at high speeds, you can't afford to back out. Intelligence is important. Some drivers have proved me wrong, but there's a lot of analysis and strategy that goes into it behind the scenes. I think an intelligent driver has an advantage.

Tell us something about the life of a professional racing driver.

It's not as glamorous as it looks – it's actually very hard work. We travel a lot, which is nice, but we see a lot of airports and hotels and rarely have a day to relax and enjoy the place we're in. Also, we spend a lot of time training, doing events for sponsors and working with the engineers. But it's the amount of pressure around the sport and the hard work that goes into it that makes the holidays even more enjoyable.

What are the best and worst things about the sport for you?

The best part is racing around tracks all over the world in front of thousands of fans. In that respect, I'm living the dream. The worst part is the travelling. I like seeing different parts of the world, but I hate getting there. I'm not a good flyer, so I'm always happy to touch down.

What car do you drive in real life?

A Toyota GT86. It's awesome, and I reckon it's the perfect 'racer's' car for driving on the road.

Do you have to resist the temptation to drive really fast?

Yes. Coming back from a race weekend, I immediately drive fast without even realising it. I try not to, though. It's a lot more dangerous than on the track, and to be honest, nowhere near as exciting.

Ever been done for speeding?

Sadly, yes. Speed cameras are everywhere these days. 🚗

Keep up with Jolyon's news and latest results at www.jolyonpalmer.com

"IT'S PHYSICALLY DEMANDING INSIDE THE CAR. YOU HAVE THE G-FORCE AND, UNLIKE F1, WE DON'T HAVE POWER STEERING"

