

STEVE BROOKS

IN THIS MASTERS SPECIAL FEATURE, we find out how Steve started his journey in historics and also about his passion for adventures!



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MEET STEVE BROOKS



Steve Brooks has quickly developed into one of Masters' most prolific drivers, having raced a Lola-Chevrolet T70 Mk3B in Masters Sports Car Legends and an Essex-liveried Lotus 81, as well as a JPS-liveried Lotus 91 in Masters Racing Legends for several seasons now. More recently, he broke into the Masters Endurance Legends series, where he now drives a pukka Peugeot 90X diesel-engined LMP1 machine, having previously campaigned the ex-Dyson Racing Lola-Mazda B12/60 that used to be Steve Tandy's. At Spa last October, the two Steve's shared the 90X, and both won their race – for Steve Brooks, this meant a debut win in the Peugeot. We spoke to Steve ahead of the 2022 Algarve Classic Festival to find out more about his historic motorsports journey.

How did you get into historic motor racing?

"I can tell you how I got into Formula One! When I was 25, I was asked if there was one thing I could do in the world, what would that be? And I said I would like to drive a Formula One race car, but of course, I wasn't able to do that at the time. And then, when I was 55, someone said, "would you like to buy a Lotus 81?" and I said "why?". They replied "Well, so you could race it!" – I said "No way!"





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But in the end you said yes.

“I’ve been very lucky, I’ve done a lot of adventures. I’ve flown Spitfires, crossed the Bering Strait, flew a helicopter to the North Pole, spent a night there and then flew off south, all the way until I reached the South Pole, to also spend the night there. I was the first person to do that, flying directly from pole to pole in a helicopter. And still Formula One beats that – oh yes! I love adventures, I am a Spitfire pilot, a helicopter pilot, but flying is the opposite of racing – flying is looking to come away from the edge, whereas in Formula One, to win a race the whole point is to be on the edge.”

It didn’t start with Formula One, though.

“No, I started with an Aston Martin DB3S, did several races in the Woodcote Trophy and fell in love with it. Then Julian Majzub said that real men drive front-engined cars. So I bought a Lister ‘Flat Iron’ and raced that in the Stirling Moss Trophy. I was doing Le Mans in it when I bumped into Martin O’Connell who said that I needed a Chevron B8. Martin subsequently took me away from the world of Goodwood to a whole new world of Lola T70s, Formula One cars and now a modern LMP1 car! It’s been a tremendously exciting journey.”



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Your first-ever Masters event?

“That was taking the Lotus 81 to Magny-Cours for the 2017 French Historic Grand Prix – the incredibly wet edition! I sat there on the first lap of the race, in the pouring rain, and I hadn’t adjusted my brake balance for the wet because I didn’t know about such things. So I went under the bridge, slammed on the brakes, and did a full 180 spin... I thought that I had completely lost it, but then I realised, hang on, I’m still in control of this thing! These cars have such balance - it’s incredible. So I did another 180, carried on, and thought, oh, I’m going to love this...”

In it to win it or just for fun?

“The DNA of racing is to win, it doesn’t matter if you finish 16th. I’m not upset if I don’t win, but I’m here to win. That’s what racing is. You know, racing is really healthy, so native to life. We’re told in the modern world that we need to be careful, so there are few places in life where you actually see life operating. And you have to understand how life operates because if you don’t at 180mph, it bites. Being timid at 180mph is no good – you’ve got to hold life and dance with it. Also in racing, the attitude toward things going wrong is so positive. In the real world, they would ask who did something wrong. In motorsport, you know you were wrong and get on with it. The same applies to the mechanics – it’s about the team and their spirit. The team is actually the most exciting part of motorsport. I’ve seen mechanics working into the night, and when I ask them why they say, ‘We’re living the dream!’ So we’re all living the dream – it’s not just the drivers but the entire team.”





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Your best day in motor racing?

“Actually, that was at Spa last year – my first race in the Peugeot 90X. I won the race, however, just ten minutes before the race, I was debating if I should race at all, having never driven the car in the wet before!! But I won, and that’s pretty exciting! Also, I met Nic Minassian, who was one of the original drivers of the car. Listening to his stories, knowing what they did in period – that was all breathtakingly exciting to hear.”

Your worst day?

“That was the unfortunate accident with Katsu Kubota into Druids at Brands in 2018. I hadn’t been in Formula One for a long time, and that went wrong very quickly. But the car wasn’t badly damaged, we fixed it, and got it back onto the track. Which is what you do in these circumstances – don’t look back.”



“IT’S LIKE JUMPING FROM A MINI INTO A RANGE ROVER!”



The best car you ever drove?

“That would have to be the 90X. I used to drive a customer car in Masters Endurance Legends, a Lola-Mazda B12/60, and this is a manufacturer’s car. The difference is night and day. The attention to detail is staggering and that transfers to calmness in the cockpit. It’s so gentle and measured, you need to squeeze it just the right amount. The background noise dies down – it’s like jumping from a Mini into a Range Rover. The level of sophistication is incredible.”

And the worst?

“I had a Bizzarrini once, which I felt I could develop, as in motor racing I love the engineering side of it – working out how to improve a car to make it go faster. With the Bizzarrini, I soon realised how wrong I was. It’s a fabulous car but it’s a Bizzarrini! It’s wonderful if you drive it like a bit of Detroit iron – it has a mind of its own that dictates how it wants to be driven. The amount of work I put in, and it was all useless. That was my toughest experience.”

Your favourite circuit?

“I love Estoril. The circuit drives so well because the camber is brilliantly set up, corner after corner. Also, the Portuguese are a friendly bunch of people, and have an attitude to motor racing that is very historic.”



“WE DO SOMETHING THAT IS INCREDIBLY FORTUITOUS AND PRIVILEGED”

Why doesn't Masters go to...?

“This is very interesting. We do something that is incredibly fortuitous and privileged. It's beyond belief in terms of excitement, and a life well lived should include this as one of the things you must do. Unfortunately, it's not a cheap sport, so if we spend a fortune, we should continue to go to the amazing places in the world instead of going to any other race track in order to save money. So for me, in Europe, that means Spain, Portugal, and especially Italy – Mugello, Imola... Imola in 2018 was an amazing event. To be in town and hear the cars racing, that's something special.”

The rival you fear and respect the most?

“Jamie Constable is an amazing driver, and Mike Cantillon has achieved so much in the past few years. Driving standards have come a long way, but I'm in two minds about the professionals out there. On the one hand, they are a hard-nut to crack. On the other hand, it's about seeing the cars out there driven as they should.”

Your best mate in the paddock?

“Martin O'Connell, because that man has so much understanding of what racing is, and I find being around him enables me to learn so quickly. In my opinion, he's the real deal – a brilliant mechanic, a brilliant driver, and he can teach.”

