

F1: F1's last link to glory days is wheeled off into the sunset

In the old days, with the exception of Lotus, the name on the front of the cars was the name of the man that built them. But no more: Frank Williams has left the pit lane.

The story of Formula One is, largely, written in the characters that built it. And whilst the organisation of the sport has been in the hands of Bernie Ecclestone, the teams were once garage enterprises, living from hand to mouth, driven by the ambitions of one man.

Bruce McLaren formed the team that later became the Ron Dennis empire but still bears the name of its founder

Ferrari is the family name, as were Hesketh, Tolman and many others. Indeed, it was Colin Chapman who, unusually, did not put his name on his cars choosing, instead, the calming influence of Lotus.

But Frank Williams remained, until this week, the only one of the old guard - the people who had their name on the front of their cars. Ross Brawn managed it for a year; Williams since 1977.

Williams' Chief Executive Adam Parr is taking over as the Chairman of Williams Grand Prix Engineering. 68 year old Williams says this is not a sign of "impending retirement" but in truth it's the next step in a slow withdrawal.

The Williams team has not had a win for more than five years; it's sponsorship will run out at the end of this year when the RBS money dries up and its car development is not keeping pace with the front runners. The team that once led the pack is now firmly amongst the mid-field and, for reasons of long-history, is the first scalp Lotus aim to pick up.

For despite the fact that this is, technically, the first season for "new Lotus," no one really sees it like that. Fans and team alike are aching for the green and yellow cars to get into mix it with their old rivals. And of those, only McLaren, Ferrari and Williams remain. Attacking

McLaren and Ferrari is at present and probably for the rest of this season, a pipedream. But to finish ahead of a Williams is looking increasingly likely.