

THE JOCHEN RINDT SHOW by Historian Erich Walitsch

I would like to dedicate a large chapter to the Jochen Rindt Show. Since the 1950's, there were already some significant Automobile Exhibitions, notably Paris and Geneva. They were committed to introducing street and luxury cars as well as tuning cars of the most reputable manufacturers. The only exhibition worth mentioning which also dealt with motorsport was in London. Where else if not in the home country of motorsport?

In 1965, Jochen Rindt was only 23 years old but he had already participated in his fifth racing season in different categories, like touring cars, Formula Junior, Formula 2, Prototypes, etc. He won the 24hrs of Le Mans that year and obtained a 3-year contract as a factory driver for the English Cooper Formula 1 team. He had achieved his goal to become a Formula One driver in a very short period of time.

It is then fascinating to wonder how Jochen Rindt started his own Racing Car Exhibition? He had no clue of what he was getting into, no knowledge of how to organize such an event and probably was not aware of the financial implications involved.

No doubt Jochen's legendary carefree attitude contributed to his decision as well as his very distinctive business sense. He had also been inspired by a racing car exhibition in Finland.

The "Wiener Automobilsportclub RRC 13" were willing to host the first Jochen Rindt Show even though they also had no experience in hosting such major events but they certainly had much enthusiasm! The "Wiener Messepalast" - which today is part of the "Wiener Museum-Quartier" - was chosen as the location for the Show. When Jochen inaugurated the first Jochen Rindt Show on 18 November 1965, he was joined by Alfred Neubauer, the legendary race director of Mercedes.

In no time at all, the hall at the "Messepalast" was packed with people, all keen to see the exhibits. To control this huge crowd of racing enthusiasts, they only let in as many people through the entrance as left. This meant that thousands of people had to be very patient before they could enter the exhibition. Many of them gave up exasperated and went home. What nobody was able to predict became very clear, the first Jochen Rindt Show made a vast impact and was a massive success by the attendance and huge media attention.

The daily radio show "Autofahrer unterwegs" was broadcasted live from the event. At the cinemas the "Wochenschau" (newsreel) showed bulletins from the show. The mid November date was perfectly chosen for this extraordinary Racing Car Show. The European racing season was over, the racing cars were available and the racing fraternity were already in a pre-Christmas mood. For most of the people, this was the first opportunity to see a racing car at close range. It was a relief for many of the racing fans, finally there was something they could look forward to during the off season. It was not only people who were interested in fast cars that went to the Show but many of the visitors only wanted to see him, THEIR Jochen Rindt.

Women, men, families, grandparents with their grandchildren and entire school classes flocked to the show. There were competitions for children and Jochen gave away Bank savings books to "SOS Children's Village". This was a truly memorable experience for all the participants! Jochen had a strong presence and was open to his audience, which was obviously a considerable part of his success. People had the chance to share a few words with him. Then they went home excited by the fact that they had had a chat with Mr. Rindt.

The fact that they addressed him as Mr. Rindt, only showed their respect. Respect for a man who was able to make his world accessible to many thousands of people. A world of speed, elegance and glamour which was unknown to his audience. In the post Rindt era, people started to become amicable with the racing drivers: "Hey Niki" and "Hi Gerhard". But back then, Jochen Rindt made them happy and therefore they well and truly took their hats off to him.

Jochen was very proud of his show and he had every reason to be. He knew how to keep public interest, especially the media. He presented the exhibits himself to the public and the TV cameras. He explained the technical details of the cars and introduced a guest star every day at the Show. Autograph sessions were arranged and well advertised. People came in huge numbers to wait patiently for an autograph. Some of the Stars included J.M. Fangio, Jack Brabham, Denny Hulme, Graham Hill, Joakim Bonnier and Jackie Stewart, just to name a few. They were generally on site and available for a whole day. If you were lucky, you could even speak briefly to them.

Nowadays the "Stars of Formula 1" have to be talked into signing autographs, and are then surrounded by bodyguards, a spokesperson and the manager, who make sure they don't say anything wrong or act against their own (business)-interests.

The Show became everyone's favourite and Jochen loved it. After his driving, it became his second most important source of income and he admitted that he could make a living from it. He quickly recognized what a prospective tool he had in hands to increase his current value. Countless manufacturing companies, tuning companies and equipment dealers sought after an exhibition space and were willing to pay a high price. After the first few Shows which took place at the "Wiener Messepalast", the Show went on tour. First it went to Graz and then to Germany, München and Essen also served as exhibition locations.

Jochen's business sense could be seen everywhere. For example, he put a sticker on his racing car "Treffpunkt Jochen-Rindt-Show" to advertise during the racing season for his exhibition in the upcoming autumn.

After Jochen Rindt's death in September 1970 everyone involved in the Show was shocked and unsure how this would affect the Exhibition in November. All the contracts with companies, suppliers and racing team owners were already signed. Nina Rindt wanted by no means to cancel the Show and courageously appeared at the opening. Standing by her was movie star Steve McQueen who's new racing driver movie "Le Mans" was introduced and very quickly became a cult movie. Nina announced that she would continue the Show in the coming years. Despite her personal memories of him, the Show was the only legacy of him and worth continuing, not least because of the many thousand Jochen Rindt fans.

In no time, Nina became a very proficient and successful host of the Jochen Rindt Shows. She made a point of keeping the high standards, anything less wouldn't have met her requirements.

The last Jochen Rindt Show (JRS) in Vienna took place in 1975, the last JRS in Austria took place in Linz in 1976. A new Austrian Formula 1 World Champion had entered the stage. His name was Niki Lauda. Niki Lauda and the promoters who used to work at Nina's side, didn't hesitate to inform Nina of the accomplished fact that the Jochen Rindt Show in Vienna was to become the Niki Lauda Show as of 1976. But his shows never compared in popularity to the Jochen Rindt Shows. They didn't touch the hearts of the people who loved the Jochen Rindt Shows. The public changed and the Niki Lauda Shows soon became "beer-tent festival". Lauda was not available to the public because he always hated people "pestering" him.

Nevertheless, Nina continued to host the Jochen Rindt Shows in Essen, Germany and the Shows were later renamed to "Essen Motor Show" in the mid 1980s.