

Jochen Rindt –

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How do you become a racing driver?

Karl Jochen Rindt was born April 18th 1942 in Mainz and died on 5th September 1970 during practice for the Italian Grand Prix in Monza.

Rindt contested 60 Formula 1 Grand Prix races and won 6 of them. In 1970 he was announced posthumous World Champion. He is the only Formula 1 World Champion to be awarded this title. His mother Ilse was a very modern and open-minded woman for her time. She ignored all traditional behaviour. She was an elegant and fashionable lady as well as a smoker. She could be found on ski-slopes and preferred to drive cars herself instead of being ferried around by a chauffeur. It is believed that Jochen's cosmopolitan thinking came from his mother's side. When questioned about his origin, Jochen always answered "I am an European". This he said only a few years after the Berlin wall was built, he was ahead of his time by decades. His father Karl was a honest tradesman who managed the spice mill "Klein & Rindt" in Mainz as a stable business. From his father, he inherited his passion for numeracy as well as his business sense.

In 1943 Ilse and Karl Rindt lost their lives in a bombing raid in Hamburg, while inspecting the spice mills local branch. Their bodies were never found and hence the full facts about this dreadful night of bombing was never established. Jochen was brought to his grandparents in Graz and grew up in their apartment at Ruckerlberggürtel No. 16. There is now a commemorative plaque next to the entrance of this building honouring this time.

A carefree and untroubled childhood followed. In the midst of an upper middle class family, he enjoyed an anti-authoritarian upbringing. He was definitely pampered and spoiled by his grandmother and aunt. They anticipated and fulfilled all his wishes.

School in the postwar period meant bitter poverty for many of his fellow school pupils, who had insufficient clothes and walked to school barefoot in the summer and only with sandals in winter.

His former teacher at the "Nibelungenschule" Mrs. Zeller recounted that the teachers also had to fight

hunger and coldness. It happened more than once that she found a neatly packed sandwich on her desk, she knew that Jochen was the one who put it there. He of course pretended he knew nothing! This was "Jokl's" character, that's how she called Jochen. He was a nice boy, but most of the time he was very quiet, serious and an introvert.

One day Jochen arrived at school with a wooden scooter. As this was the postwar era, this is comparable to a primary-school pupil today flying to school in a helicopter. Mrs Zeller remembers that Jochen on his scooter used to slalom downhill at high speeds around people, accelerating strongly with one leg, but without knocking anyone over. Nevertheless she took him aside and asked him not to go so fast, he could endanger himself and others. His response was "But I didn't go fast at all!". His teacher is sure that he probably already had a good feeling for speed, as well as extraordinary reflexes. Otherwise this would not have turned out all right.

Jochen's character changed rapidly when he started high school, much to the distress of his grandparents. By then a switch must have been flicked. The serious boy became a rebel, an obstreperous and a pre-pubescent rascal who did not shy away from confrontation. His school performance was in decline. This behaviour also spread to his school friends.

Jochen and his friends from Graz destabilized the area close to his home at Ruckerlberggürtel. They arranged frantic chases through Graz with their tuned mopeds. Jochen owned a "Lohner Sissy". The police permanently paid visits to his grandparents. The local girls were not allowed to have contact with these wild boys. However, this only gave the youngsters an additional challenge. They enjoyed the thrill of the forbidden and tried to find ways to get in touch with the girls, without their parents knowing.

The result was that Jochen and his friends were sent to the notorious private boarding school of Bad Aussee, run by a former National Socialist. Here they flourished and developed socially.

Jochen broke his leg skiing and it had to be put into plaster. He was sent an old Volkswagen together with a chauffeur from the spice mill in Mainz. However, he sent the chauffeur home as he wanted to drive himself! With this old Volkswagen Beetle they made motorsport history. Jochen and his friends were good at inventing competitions where Jochen would always be the leader of the gang. For example, the one driving the car was allowed to drive until someone in the car found a mistake in his

driving. Their “rules” required them to shift gears at full speed as well as take every corner flat out. If the driver missed the braking point or one of the passengers spotted any kind of mistake, someone else got the opportunity to show off his driving skills! The reality was that only one in the group had a drivers license! He was supposed to sit behind the driver and so when the police appeared, he switched seats with the driver when the car was still moving. Hence, the one with the drivers license was in the drivers seat when the police stopped them.

Jochen passed his school leaving examination at his second attempt in 1961. He was the last one of his group to do so. He then registered at Vienna University to study world trade. But he never even attended a single lecture. As a present for passing his school examinations, his grandparents gave him a Simca-Monthlery.

Soon after that, Jochen and his friend Helmut Marko took the car to the German Grand Prix at the Nürburgring. Jochen forgot his money for the trip at home. So on the way, he stopped at his spice mill in Mainz and woke the night clerk to borrow some money. The night clerk refused to let “the foreigners” in. Jochen protested: “Listen, don’t be stupid, this factory is mine!” So they woke the secretary who helped him out with some money. After a 14 hour drive they arrived at the Nürburgring. Exhausted they went to sleep at the section of the track called “Schwalbenschwanz”. Next morning they woke up because of the noise of loud engines. As they were watching the Ferraris of Graf Berghe von Trips and Phil Hill, Jochen announced his spontaneous decision: “That’s exactly what I want, I want to become a racing driver!” Helmut Marko later interpreted this occasion as the spark for Jochen’s career as a racing driver.

Immediately after their return from the Nürburgring, Jochen joined a driver training at Köttingbrunn to prepare himself for his first Rally the “Steirische Berglandfahrt”. Ossi Vogl, a car dealer from Graz then tuned the Simca Monthlery and Jochen went to the Airfield Race in Innsbruck. Ossi Vogl personally announced Rindt for the race. He arrived wearing a purple shirt, a shoelace in one shoe and a string in the other one. As he didn’t have a racing license yet, he first had to convince the visibly irritated race director Udo Pöschmann to let him drive the race. He was issued a valid drivers license for that race in Innsbruck. But after a few laps, Udo Poschmann had to direct him out of the race to caution him for wild and unfair driving, which of course he took no notice of!

The foundation of his racing driver career was started here and what would be typical for his whole career was that he quickly raised the bar when needed.

1962 Ossi Vogl, who recognized Jochen's talent provided him with an Alfa Romeo Giulietta TI with which he won the prestigious touring car race in Vienna Aspern against the more powerful Jaguars. With this victory, public interest in Jochen Rindt began. As was typical of Jochen, he actually went to the press and asked "So, don't you want to write something about me?"

1963 he switched to a Formula Junior-Cooper Monoposto which he bought from the Viennese race driver Curd Barry and won the Formula Junior race of Cesenatico. In this year, a certain Mr Curt Lincoln was one of his competitors. He would of course later be his father-in-law.

1964 he bought a Formula 2 Brabham-Cosworth. He was third in Mallory Park and won the race in Crystal Palace one day later. There he beat the Formula 2 ace Graham Hill. Now the international world of motorsport had noticed him. Rob Walker provided him with a Brabham BT11 for the Austrian Grand Prix. Jochen did well but couldn't finish the race.

1965 Due to his good results, John Cooper offered Jochen a place in his F1-factory team as team-mate to Bruce McLaren. The Coopers were not really powerful but nonetheless Rindt was fourth at the German Grand Prix and sixth at the American Grand Prix. At that time, it was normal for Formula 1 drivers to also race in the Formula 2 series. Jochen had a long and very successful connection with the private Formula 2 team of Roy Winkelmann which lasted until the disappearance of the team in 1969. Jochen won in Reims and was third in Pau and Vallelunga. His way of driving was very relaxed, steady and very fast. In the same year, Rindt shared a Porsche with Jo Bonnier at the 100 Kilometer-Race at Nürburgring and they were third. At the 1965 Le Mans, Jochen teamed up with Masten Gregory won in a Ferrari 275LM, provided by NART. They won thanks to the failure of the whole Ford GT-40 armada and the factory team Ferraris. Bruce McLaren left Cooper at the end of the year to build his own car for the new 3 Litre Formula.

1966 Rindt was the number one at Cooper, until John Surtees switched from Ferrari to Cooper. The Cooper-Maseratis were heavy cars but compared to the competition, they were powerful. Rindt was second in Spa, second in America, third in Germany, fourth in France and Italy and fifth at the British race. He finished the year third in the final ranking of the world championship.

1967 In March, on one of the only race free week-ends of the year, he married Nina Lincoln. In formula One, his best result was two fourth positions at the Belgian and Italian Grand Prix . But in Formula 2, with the Winkelmann Brabham he achieved nine victories in eleven races. The motorsport press named him the “King of Formula 2”.

1968 Jochen switched to the Jack Brabham team, who built the world championship car for himself in 1966 and Denny Hulme in 1967. However, the enhancements of the Repco V-8 engine were not convincing, especially as the competition had the new and predominant Ford-Cosworth engine available.

1969 Rindt again switched to a world-champion team, Lotus, with title-holder Graham Hill by his side. He very quickly challenged Hill's number 1 position in the team. He asked his friend Bernie Ecclestone for advice with regard to joining Lotus. Ecclestone response was that he either dies with Lotus or becomes world champion. At the Spanish Grand Prix in Barcelona, both Lotus' crashed following the failure of the high wing. Jochen broke his nose and had a bad concussion. He recovered fast but had to fight against nausea whilst driving a race car. During his recovery, he demanded through the press that the wings on cars be banned as they were too dangerous for drivers and spectators.

After full recovery, he was quickly back on form and he had some exciting racing with Jackie Stewart, the next World Champion. At the end of the season at Watkins Glen, he won his first Formula 1 race. The race was overshadowed by the severe crash of his teammate Graham Hill who had bad leg injuries.

1970 Jochen was the undisputed number one at Lotus. After unsuccessful experiments with four wheel drive, Lotus built the revolutionary wedge-shaped Lotus 72 for the 1970 season. It did suffer from initial teething problems. Jochen therefore reverted back to the 49 model and had a spectacular victory in Monaco. At the Dutch Grand Prix, he won with the improved 72 model. This victory was overshadowed by the death of his close friend Piers Courage. Jochen was visibly appalled and for the first time was talking about quitting racing. Ecclestone said “if you want to quit, do it now, don't wait until the end of the season”. Jochen carried on and won the French, British and German Grands Prix. The German Grand Prix was transferred to Hockenheim after the GPDA boycotted the

Nürburgring due to serious safety deficiencies. For this, the British Press called Rindt and his lot "wimps".

His biggest opponent Jacky Ickx won his home race in Austria. The pressure on Rindt increased when he went to the Italian Grand Prix in Monza. He wanted to secure the long awaited world champion title. The training for the Grand Prix took place on Friday and Saturday the 4th and 5th of September 1970. After half an hour of practice on Saturday 5 September, Jochen's Lotus 72 drove into the guardrails whilst breaking at the Parabolica corner. Rindt was taken to hospital but died in the ambulance due to his severe injuries. The cause of the accident was a broken brake shaft. A long lasting juridical prosecution of Chapman ended in 1977 with a not guilty verdict.

The event triggered a shock, not only in the world of sports but it was comparable to the assassination of John F. Kennedy. People will be able to recall where they were and what they were doing when they heard about the news of Jochen Rindt's death.

Jacky Ickx had the possibility to catch Rindt up in the remaining races in the world championship but the new Lotus driver Emerson Fittipaldi won the American Grand Prix at Watkins Glen, where Jochen had celebrated his first victory a year earlier. Jochen was hence awarded the World Championship title posthumously. His widow Nina Rindt accepted the World Championship Trophy in Paris.