

Jo Siffert – the naturally talented Swiss

Swiss-born racer Joseph Siffert began his career on two wheels before switching from motorbikes to racing cars in 1960. As a member of the Porsche team between 1966 and 1971, he was one of the best racing drivers around.

Jo Siffert played a major role in helping Porsche win the International Championship for Makes in 1969, 1970 and 1971, recording six of seven victories in 1969 alone. Most of these triumphs came in the Porsche 908 and were shared with his teammate Brian Redman. In August 1969, he and his partner Kurt Ahrens took first place at the Austrian 1000 km Zeltweg – the first win for the new Porsche 917.

‘We loved Jo Siffert,’ said Porsche head engineer Peter Falk. ‘He was a truly affable and easy-going character.’ The only time Jo Siffert got slightly worked up was prior to the start of a race, but this tension always subsided once he was in the cockpit. Peter Falk: ‘Siffert was a natural talent who demonstrated blistering pace in every car he drove and was usually happy with the set-up, only rarely requesting alterations.’

Siffert was a man with a modest background who shared his father’s passion for motor sport. In an effort to break into the world of racing, he took on a whole host of occasional jobs and adopted an extremely frugal lifestyle. Porsche race director Huschke von Hanstein spotted Siffert in the mid-1960s, recruiting him to the team and frequently pairing him with Hans Herrmann in 1967 and 1968. ‘He was a wonderful chap, not to mention incredibly quick!’ recalled von Hanstein.

In addition to his successful entries with the Porsche works team, Jo Siffert also made it into Formula One and won two Grands Prix for Lotus and BRM. On 24 October 1971, Siffert started on pole in a non-championship Formula One race at Brands Hatch. A broken wheel suspension caused his BRM to come off the track, roll over and burst into flames. This accident claimed the life of the Swiss driver, whose funeral in Fribourg was attended by 50,000 mourners.