

Stefan Bellof – the super-fast golden boy

Stefan Bellof was the fastest man in the Porsche works team, taking the titles of World Champion and German Racing Champion. In 1985, Bellof crashed at Spa-Francorchamps.

Helmuth Bott, director of research and development at Porsche, was sceptical. Several experts had recommend a young racing driver called Stefan Bellof for the works team. ‘Young drivers might be a few tenths of a second faster than our regulars, but they also break a lot of things,’ said Bott. However, he was prepared to meet Bellof in the autumn of 1982. ‘Bott could not resist Stefan’s charm and cheerful charisma,’ says Porsche’s long-serving head of sports and PR, Manfred Jantke. Bellof received a works contract for Group C. His first race was at Silverstone in 1983. The main sponsor, Rothmans, insisted on the best lap time in training. Pictures of the starting line-up would appear all over the world. Some 15 minutes before the end of training, a private Porsche 956 driven by Stefan Johansson was in front. ‘Let the young lad have a go,’ said the team. Bellof was instantly two seconds faster than his fellow works drivers. He set a clear pole position and won the race with Derek Bell.

No racing driver has been faster than Bellof with the Porsche 956 and 962 C. His racing engineer identified a reason for this: ‘Stefan can cope with a very narrow limit range. That’s why we can make the suspension very tight, which makes us faster.’ In 1984, Bellof won the drivers’ title in the World Supercar Championship and became German Racing Champion. In Formula One, he took third place at the Monaco Grand Prix in a Tyrrell Ford despite the most difficult conditions.

In the 1985 season, Ken Tyrrell prevented his top driver from starting races in the works team during the World Supercar Championship. Bellof switched to the private Brun team. On 1 September, Bellof and the local Belgian hero Jacky Ickx each took over a Porsche from their teammates at Spa-Francorchamps. The works Porsche was ahead with Bellof slightly behind. Bellof, whose rivalry with Ickx was well known, tried to overtake along the dangerous Eau Rouge passage. The cars collided, and the Brun Porsche was completely destroyed when it struck a concrete post. Bellof had no chance of survival.