

THE SEMPILL THINGS

Book review: How to Build a Car

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I just finished Adrian Newey's book *How to Build a Car*. I must say it was an interesting one, and Adrian himself is quite the peculiar type. The book goes through all of his racing cars, from IndyCar to Formula 1 with a bit of personal history in there.

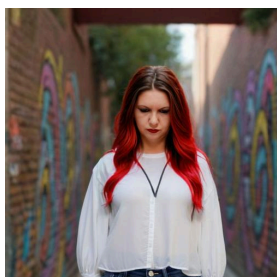
He is obviously some sort of genius – you can't build cars the way he does without having some kind of talent. He's a Brit, born in 1958 and made his way up the motorsports ladder through Formula 2, then over to the States and finally to Formula 1.

Cars he has designed have won races basically everywhere, or at least seriously pushed their respective teams forwards. An interesting aspect he brings up in the book is the fine line between speed and safety; do we compromise here to gain there? As it seems, that mind-set was a factor in the tragic death of Ayrton Senna. He was killed in one of Adrian Newey's cars. For years after his death followed a lengthy court process. It wouldn't end until 2004. Adrian goes through the whole process, also mentioning what Ayrton asked of the car technically; which perhaps was a factor in his fatal crash in San Marino in 1994.

Ayrton wanted the steering wheel lowered. The only way to achieve that was to reduce the diameter of the steering column locally by four millimetres, making it weaker in the process; and perhaps not strong enough for the cornering loads on a Formula 1 car. This is all explained in the book. Adrian himself mentions that Ayrton's death haunts him till this day, and that the ultimate feeling was of sheer waste.

"Very quickly, the question became two-tiered: what caused Ayrton to leave the track in the first place, and, given that he was such an able driver, why was he unable to control it?"

That episode does take up a lot of space in the book, and it's clear he is very affected by it. But we will never truly know what actually happened that Sunday afternoon in 1994.



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It's fascinating reading about how he turned the small Leyton House team around, and how he managed to get their car to spring a few surprises. After that, he was brought into the Williams team in the early 90's. He mentions how similar the Leyton House car from 1990 is to the Williams FW14; very interesting stuff if you are a Formula 1 geek! He also set many of the modern standards that are still canon in F1 today.

Adrian Newey is one of the only few that could get a job at any team in Formula 1 – as long as the team could pay him enough. Ferrari came close. Adrian was invited over for a meeting in Italy and a very generous offer was made, an offer he almost accepted. In the end though, he decided to stick with the Red Bull F1 team. Where he still is today.

This book is a definitive read for racing fans, aerodynamicists, F1 fans (obviously) and anyone else looking for a quick and interesting book about someone good at what they do. I was, however, disturbed by the amount of spelling mistakes in the book. It really does feel pretty rushed in places, which slightly disturbs the reading process. To compliment his stories there are a lot of blueprints and original drawings of his race cars – it gives a better picture. As it were.

Definitely worth the read!

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