

= Gilles Villeneuve =

Joseph Gilles Henri Villeneuve (French pronunciation : ? [?il viln?v] ; January 18 , 1950 ? May 8 , 1982) , known as Gilles Villeneuve , was a Canadian racing driver . Villeneuve spent six years in Grand Prix racing with Ferrari , winning six races and widespread acclaim for his performances .

An enthusiast of cars and fast driving from an early age , Villeneuve started his professional career in snowmobile racing in his native province of Quebec . He moved into single seaters , winning the US and Canadian Formula Atlantic championships in 1976 , before being offered a drive in Formula One with the McLaren team at the 1977 British Grand Prix . He was taken on by reigning world champions Ferrari for the end of the season and from 1978 to his death in 1982 drove for the Italian team . He won six Grand Prix races in a short career at the highest level . In 1979 , he finished second by four points in the championship to teammate Jody Scheckter .

Villeneuve died in a 140 mph (225 km / h) crash caused by a collision with the March of Jochen Mass during qualifying for the 1982 Belgian Grand Prix at Zolder . The accident came less than two weeks after an intense argument with his teammate , Didier Pironi , over Pironi 's move to pass Villeneuve at the preceding San Marino Grand Prix . At the time of his death , Villeneuve was extremely popular with fans and has since become an iconic figure in the history of the sport . His son , Jacques Villeneuve , became Formula One world champion in 1997 and , to date , the only Canadian to win the Formula One World Championship .

= = Personal and early life = =

Villeneuve was born in Richelieu , a small town just outside Montreal , in the largely French @-@ speaking province of Quebec in Canada and grew up in Berthierville . In 1970 , he married Joann Barthe , with whom he had two children , Jacques and Mélanie . During his early career Villeneuve took his family on the road with him in a motorhome during the racing season , a habit which he continued to some extent during his Formula One career . He often claimed to have been born in 1952 . By the time he got his break in Formula One , he was already 27 years old and took two years off his age to avoid being considered too old to make it at the highest level of motorsports .

Niki Lauda said of him : " He was the craziest devil I ever came across in Formula 1 ... The fact that , for all this , he was a sensitive and lovable character rather than an out @-@ and @-@ out hell @-@ raiser made him such a unique human being " .

His younger brother Jacques also had a successful racing career in Formula Atlantic , Can Am and CART . Gilles ' son , also named Jacques , won the Indianapolis 500 and CART championships in 1995 and became Formula One World Champion in 1997 .

= = Early career = =

Villeneuve started competitive driving in local drag @-@ racing events , entering his road car , a modified 1967 Ford Mustang . He was soon bored by this and entered the Jim Russell Racing School at Le Circuit Mont Tremblant to gain a racing licence . He then had a very successful season in Quebec regional Formula Ford , running his own two @-@ year @-@ old car and winning seven of the ten races he entered . The next year he progressed to Formula Atlantic , competing there for four years , running his own car again for one of those seasons . He won his first Atlantic race in 1975 at Gimli Motorsport Park in heavy rain . In 1976 , teamed with Chris Harrison 's Ecurie Canada and factory March race engineer Ray Wardell , he dominated the season by winning all but one of the races and taking the US and Canadian titles . He won the Canadian championship again in 1977 .

Money was very tight in Villeneuve 's early career . He was a professional racing driver from his late teens , with no other income . In the first few years the bulk of his income actually came from snowmobile racing , where he was extremely successful . He could demand appearance money as well as race money , especially after winning the 1974 World Championship Snowmobile Derby . His second season in Formula Atlantic was part @-@ sponsored by his snowmobile manufacturer ,

Skiroule . He credited some of his success to his snowmobiling days : " Every winter , you would reckon on three or four big spills ? and I 'm talking about being thrown on to the ice at 100 miles per hour . Those things used to slide a lot , which taught me a great deal about control . And the visibility was terrible ! Unless you were leading , you could see nothing , with all the snow blowing about . Good for the reactions ? and it stopped me having any worries about racing in the rain . "

= = Formula One career = =

After Villeneuve impressed James Hunt by beating him and several other Grand Prix stars in a non @-@ championship Formula Atlantic race at Trois @-@ Rivières in 1976 , Hunt 's McLaren team offered Villeneuve a Formula One deal for up to five races in a third car during the 1977 season . Villeneuve made his debut at the 1977 British Grand Prix , where he qualified 9th in McLaren 's old M23 , splitting the regular drivers Hunt and Jochen Mass who were driving newer M26s . In the race he set fifth fastest lap and finished 11th after being delayed for two laps by a faulty temperature gauge . The British press coverage of Villeneuve 's performance was generally complimentary , including John Blunsden 's comment in The Times that " Anyone seeking a future World Champion need look no further than this quietly assured young man . "

Despite this , shortly after the British race McLaren 's experienced team manager Teddy Mayer decided not to continue with Villeneuve for the following year . His explanation was that Villeneuve " was looking as though he might be a bit expensive " and that Patrick Tambay , the team 's eventual choice for 1978 , was showing similar promise . Villeneuve was left with no solid options for 1978 , although Canadian Walter Wolf , for whom Villeneuve had driven in Can @-@ Am racing , considered giving him a drive at Wolf Racing and also recommended him to the Ferrari team 's founder , Enzo Ferrari . Rumours circulated that Villeneuve was one of several drivers in whom the Italian team was interested , and in August 1977 he flew to Italy to meet Ferrari , who was immediately reminded of the pre @-@ war European champion Tazio Nuvolari : " When they presented me with this ' piccolo Canadese ' (little Canadian) , this minuscule bundle of nerves , I immediately recognised in him the physique of Nuvolari and said to myself , let 's give him a try . " Ferrari was satisfied with Villeneuve 's promise after a session at Ferrari 's Fiorano test track , despite the Canadian making many mistakes and setting relatively slow times , and Villeneuve signed to drive for Ferrari in the last two races of the 1977 season and the 1978 season . Villeneuve later remarked that : " If someone said to me that you can have three wishes , my first would have been to get into racing , my second to be in Formula 1 , my third to drive for Ferrari ... "

Villeneuve 's arrival was prompted by Ferrari driver Niki Lauda quitting the team at the penultimate race of the 1977 season , the Canadian Grand Prix at Mosport Park near Toronto , having already clinched his second championship with the Italian team . Villeneuve retired from his home race after sliding off the track on another competitor 's oil . He also raced in the last race of that season , the Japanese Grand Prix at the Fuji Speedway near Tokyo but retired on lap five when he tried to outbrake the Tyrrell P34 of Ronnie Peterson . The pair banged wheels causing Villeneuve 's Ferrari to become airborne . It landed on a group of spectators watching the race from a prohibited area , killing one spectator and a race marshal and injuring ten people . After an investigation into the incident no blame was apportioned and , although he was " terribly sad " at the deaths , Villeneuve did not feel responsible for them .

The 1978 season saw a succession of retirements for Villeneuve , often after problems with the new Michelin radial tyres . Early in the season , he started on the front row at the United States Grand Prix West , but crashed out of the lead on lap 39 . Despite calls in the Italian press for him to be replaced , Ferrari persisted with him . Towards the end of the season , Villeneuve 's results improved . He finished second on the road at the Italian Grand Prix , although he was penalised a minute for jumping the start , and ran second at the United States Grand Prix before his engine failed . Finally at the season @-@ ending Canadian Grand Prix , this time at the Circuit Île Notre @-@ Dame in Montreal (a circuit that was eventually named after him) Villeneuve scored his first Grand Prix win after Jean @-@ Pierre Jarier 's Lotus stopped with engine trouble . To date , he remains the only Canadian to win his home race .

Villeneuve was joined by Jody Scheckter in 1979 after Carlos Reutemann moved to Lotus . Villeneuve won three races during the year . The 1979 French Grand Prix is remembered for Villeneuve 's wheel @-@ banging duel with René Arnoux in the last laps of the race . Arnoux passed Villeneuve for second place with three laps to go , but Villeneuve re @-@ passed him on the next lap . On the final lap Arnoux attempted to pass Villeneuve again , and the pair ran side @-@ by @-@ side through the first few corners of the lap , making contact several times . Arnoux took the position but Villeneuve attempted an outside pass one corner later . The cars bumped hard , Villeneuve slid wide but then passed Arnoux on the inside at a hairpin turn and held him off for the last half of the lap to secure second place . Villeneuve commented afterwards , " I tell you , that was really fun ! I thought for sure we were going to get on our heads , you know , because when you start interlocking wheels it 's very easy for one car to climb over another . " At the Dutch Grand Prix a slow puncture collapsed Villeneuve 's left rear tyre and put him off the track . He returned to the circuit and limped back to the pits on three wheels , losing the damaged wheel on the way . On his return to the pits Villeneuve insisted that the team replace the missing wheel , and had to be persuaded that the car was beyond repair . Villeneuve might have won the World Championship by ignoring team orders to beat Scheckter at the Italian Grand Prix , but chose to finish behind him , ending his own championship challenge . The pair finished first and second in the championship , with Scheckter beating Villeneuve by just four points . During the extremely wet Friday practice session for the season @-@ ending United States Grand Prix , Villeneuve set a time variously reported to be either 9 or 11 seconds faster than any other driver . His teammate Jody Scheckter , who was second fastest , recalled that " I scared myself rigid that day . I thought I had to be quickest . Then I saw Gilles 's time and ? I still don 't really understand how it was possible . Eleven seconds ! "

The 1980 season was a complete disaster for Ferrari . Villeneuve had been considered favourite for the drivers championship by UK bookmakers , but only scored six points in the whole campaign in the 312T5 which had only partial ground effects . Scheckter scored only two points and retired at the end of the season .

For the 1981 season , Ferrari introduced their first turbo engined F1 car , the 126C , which produced tremendous power but was let down by its poor handling . Villeneuve was partnered with Didier Pironi who noted that Villeneuve " had a little family [at Ferrari] but he made me welcome and made me feel at home overnight ... [He] treated me as an equal in every way . " Villeneuve won two races during the season . At the Spanish Grand Prix Villeneuve kept five quicker cars behind him for most of the race using the superior straight @-@ line speed of his car . After an hour and 46 minutes of racing Villeneuve led second @-@ placed Jacques Laffite by only 0 @.@ 22 seconds . Fifth @-@ placed Elio de Angelis was only just over a second further back . Harvey Postlethwaite , who was hired by Ferrari to design the follow @-@ on and much more successful 126C2 that won the Constructors ' Championship in 1982 , later commented on the 126C : " That car ... had literally one quarter of the downforce that , say Williams or Brabham had . It had a power advantage over the Cosworths for sure , but it also had massive throttle lag at that time . In terms of sheer ability I think Gilles was on a different plane to the other drivers . To win those races , the 1981 GPs at Monaco and Jarama ? on tight circuits ? was quite out of this world . I know how bad that car was . " At the 1981 Canadian Grand Prix Villeneuve damaged the front wing of his Ferrari and drove for most of the race in heavy rain with the wing obscuring his view ahead . There was a risk of being black flagged but eventually the wing became detached and Villeneuve drove on to finish third with the nose section of his car missing .

The first few races of the 1982 season were promising . Villeneuve led in Brazil in the new 126C2 , before spinning into retirement , and finished third at the United States Grand Prix West although he was later disqualified for a technical infringement . The Ferraris were handed an unexpected advantage at the San Marino Grand Prix as an escalation of the FISA @-@ FOCA war saw the FOCA teams boycott the race , effectively leaving Renault as Ferrari 's only serious opposition . With Renault driver Prost retiring from fourth place on lap 7 followed by his teammate Arnoux on the 44th lap Ferrari seemed to have the win guaranteed . In order to conserve fuel and ensure the cars finished the Ferrari team ordered both drivers to slow down . Villeneuve believed that the order also

meant that the drivers were to maintain position but Pironi passed Villeneuve . A few laps later Villeneuve re @-@ passed Pironi and slowed down again , believing that Pironi was simply trying to entertain the Italian crowd . On the last lap Pironi passed and aggressively chopped across the front of Gilles in Villeneuve corner and took the win . Villeneuve was irate as he believed that Pironi had disobeyed the order to hold position . Meanwhile , Pironi claimed that he had done nothing wrong as the team had only ordered the cars to slow down , not maintain position . Villeneuve stated after the race " I think it is well known that if I want someone to stay behind me and I am faster , then he stays behind me . " Feeling betrayed and angry Villeneuve vowed never to speak to Pironi again .

In 2007 , former Marlboro marketer John Hogan disputed the claim that Pironi had gone back on a prior arrangement with Villeneuve . He said : " Neither of them would ever have agreed to what effectively was throwing a race . I think Gilles was stunned somebody had out @-@ driven him and that it just caught him so much by surprise . " Hogan 's company sponsored Pironi while he was at Ferrari . A comparison of the lap times of the two drivers showed that Villeneuve lapped far slower when he was in the lead , suggesting that he had indeed been trying to save fuel .

= = Death = =

On May 8 , 1982 , Villeneuve died after an accident during the final qualifying session for the Belgian Grand Prix at Zolder . At the time of the crash , Pironi had set a time 0.1s faster than Villeneuve for sixth place . Villeneuve was using his final set of qualifying tyres ; some say he was attempting to improve his time on his final lap , while others suggest he was specifically aiming to beat Pironi . However , Villeneuve 's biographer Gerald Donaldson quotes Ferrari race engineer Mauro Forghieri as saying that the Canadian , although pressing on in his usual fashion , was returning to the pits when the accident occurred . If so , he would not have set a time on that lap .

With eight minutes of the session left , Villeneuve came over the rise after the first chicane and caught Jochen Mass travelling much more slowly through Butte , the left @-@ handed bend before the Terlamenbocht double right @-@ hand section . Mass saw Villeneuve approaching at high speed and moved to the right to let him through on the racing line . At the same instant Villeneuve also moved right to pass the slower car . The Ferrari hit the back of Mass ' car and was launched into the air at a speed estimated at 200 ? 225 km / h (120 ? 140 mph) . It was airborne for more than 100 m before nosediving into the ground and disintegrating as it somersaulted along the edge of the track . Villeneuve , still strapped to his seat , but without his helmet , was thrown a further 50 m from the wreckage into the catch fencing on the outside edge of the Terlamenbocht corner .

Several drivers stopped and rushed to the scene . John Watson and Derek Warwick pulled Villeneuve , his face blue , from the catch fence . The first doctor arrived within 35 seconds to find that Villeneuve was not breathing , although his pulse continued ; he was intubated and ventilated before being transferred to the circuit medical centre and then by helicopter to University St Raphael Hospital where a fatal fracture of the neck was diagnosed . Villeneuve was kept alive on life support while his wife travelled to the hospital and the doctors consulted specialists worldwide . He died at 21 : 12 CEST (UTC + 2) .

= = Legacy = =

At the funeral in Berthierville former teammate Jody Scheckter delivered a simple eulogy : " I will miss Gilles for two reasons . First , he was the most genuine man I have ever known . Second , he was the fastest driver in the history of motor racing . But he has not gone . The memory of what he has done , what he achieved , will always be there . "

Villeneuve is still remembered at Grand Prix races , especially those in Italy . At the Autodromo Enzo e Dino Ferrari , the venue of the San Marino Grand Prix , a corner was named after him and a Canadian flag is painted on the third slot on the starting grid , from which he started his last race . There is also a bronze bust of him at the entrance to the Ferrari test track at Fiorano . At Zolder the corner where Villeneuve died has been turned into a chicane and named after him .

The racetrack on Île Notre @-@ Dame , Montreal , host to the Formula One Canadian Grand Prix ,

was named Circuit Gilles Villeneuve in his honour at the Canadian Grand Prix of 1982 . His homeland has continued to honour him : In Berthierville a museum was opened in 1992 and a lifelike statue stands in a nearby park which was also named in his honour . Villeneuve was inducted into the Canadian Motorsport Hall of Fame at their inaugural induction ceremony at the Four Seasons Hotel , Toronto , Ontario on August 19 , 1993 . He was also inducted into Canada 's Sports Hall of Fame in 1983 . In June 1997 Canada issued a postage stamp in his honour .

There is still a huge demand for Villeneuve memorabilia at the race @-@ track shops and several books have been written about him . The number 27 , the number of his Ferrari in 1981 and 1982 , is still closely associated with him by fans . Jean Alesi , whose aggression and speed in the wet were compared to Villeneuve 's , also used the number at Ferrari . Villeneuve 's son , Jacques , drove the # 27 during his IndyCar and Indianapolis 500 winning season with Barry Green and has also used the number for occasional drives in NASCAR and the Speedcar Series . Canadian driver and 2011 IndyCar Rookie of the Year James Hinchcliffe adopted the number 27 for the 2012 season .

A film based on the biography by Gerald Donaldson was announced in 2005 , intended for release in 2007 , but as of 2014 has not emerged .

= = In popular culture = =

The popular French comics series Michel Vaillant by Jean Graton is set in the world of motor racing and , although largely fictional , often includes real @-@ life figures including drivers , officials and journalists . Villeneuve appears in a number of stories , and in Steve Warson contre Michel Vaillant (fr : " Steve Warson versus Michel Vaillant ") becomes the 1980 World Champion (though in the 1981 season , covered in Rififi en F1 (" F1 in Chaos ") , Graton acknowledges Alan Jones as the real Champion) and Quebec prog @-@ rock / pop group The Box based their 1984 song " Live on TV " inspired by Villeneuve 's televised death .

= = Helmet = =

Villeneuve 's helmet carried a stylised ' V ' in red on either side ? an effect he devised with his wife Joann . The base colour was black . His son , Jacques , used the same basic design , but like his contemporary , Christian Fittipaldi , he has changed the colours . British driver Perry McCarthy also used this design and color scheme on his helmet , but with the design in reverse .

= = Complete Formula One World Championship results = =

(key) (Races in bold indicate pole position ; races in italics indicate fastest lap)

= = = Books = = =

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Fearnley , Paul (May 2007) . " It 's war . Absolutely war . " . Motor Sport (Haymarket) . pp. 52 ? 61 .

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All Formula One race and championship results are taken from :

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Donaldson (2003) pp. 310 ? 315