

# Ayrton Senna

## Brazilian race-car driver

**Senna** is a 2010 British-French [documentary film](#) that depicts the life and death of [Brazilian](#) motor-racing champion [Ayrton Senna](#), directed by [Asif Kapadia](#).<sup>[3]</sup> The film was produced by [StudioCanal](#), [Working Title Films](#), and Midfield Films, and was distributed by the parent company of the latter two production companies, [Universal Pictures](#).

The film's narrative focuses on Senna's racing career in [Formula One](#), from his debut in the [1984 Brazilian Grand Prix](#) to his [death](#) in an accident at the [1994 San Marino Grand Prix](#), with particular emphasis on his rivalry with fellow driver [Alain Prost](#). It relies primarily on archive racetrack footage and home video clips provided by the Senna family, rather than retrospective video interviews, and has no formal commentary.

The film begins with Senna's arrival into [Formula One](#) during the [1984 season](#), briefly covering his time at [Toleman](#) and [Lotus](#) before concentrating on his time with the British team [McLaren](#) – the association that brought his rise to global fame – and becoming a [World Champion](#). The drama of this period of his career centers on his rivalry with his team mate [Alain Prost](#), and his political struggles with the then head of [FISA](#) [Jean-Marie Balestre](#), climaxing during the [1989](#) and [1990 seasons](#), when Senna and Prost were involved in controversial clashes which decided the drivers' world championship title, in 1989 for Prost and in 1990 for Senna.

The film portrays the increasingly complex dynamics and tumult that characterized Senna's years as world champion, his battle to improve his sport's safety, and his reactions as he witnesses accidents and eventually the death of Austrian fellow-driver [Roland Ratzenberger](#) the day before his own. We see and hear through Senna's point of view that innovative computerization led in these years to the technological domination of the [Williams](#) cars, with Prost joining Williams and, in a fallout with Senna, refusing to be on a team with Senna anymore. The documentary reaches its finale as Prost retires and Senna takes up a champion driver spot with Williams, the Grove-based team in [1994](#), just as Formula One rules change, disallowing computerization, and the Williams' cars undergo rapid reconfiguration that proves fatal. In the culminating weekend of his life, at [that year's San Marino Grand Prix](#), footage shows Senna under extreme stress, troubled as safety conditions reveal their weaknesses in one track accident after another over three consecutive days. [Rubens Barrichello](#) is injured in a crash during Friday qualifying, Ratzenberger is killed in an accident during final qualifying on 30 April, and at the start of the race [JJ Lehto](#) stalls and is hit at high speed by [Pedro Lamy](#). The [safety car](#) is brought out, and when racing resumes, Senna [crashes fatally](#) on lap 7. The film concludes with the Senna family and his close friends from Formula One mourning his loss at his funeral.

**Ayrton Senna**, Brazilian race-car driver (born March 21, 1960, [São Paulo](#), Brazil—died May 1, 1994, [Imola](#), Italy), was a fierce competitor who was renowned for his ruthless and risky maneuvers on the Grand Prix circuit and dominated the sport with 41 Grand Prix titles and 3 circuit world championships (1988, 1990, and 1991). Senna was revered as a national hero in [Brazil](#), and his death, from massive head injuries suffered when he smashed head-on into a concrete wall at some 300 km/h (186 mph) at the San Marino Grand Prix, plunged the country into mourning. At the age of four, Senna was already behind the wheel of a go-cart and demonstrating a determination to win. He joined the Formula One racing circuit in 1984 as one of the most promising new drivers, and he captured the

coveted pole position a record 65 times for having had the fastest race-qualifying times. An enigmatic figure who was deeply religious yet highly aggressive on the racetrack, Senna thrilled spectators and cowed competitors with his fearsome driving. He invited controversy over his long-standing rivalry with Frenchman Alain Prost, with 51 titles the most successful driver; the two collided during the penultimate race of both the 1989 season, when Prost emerged victorious, and the 1990 season, when Senna captured the world crown. He reportedly earned more than \$100 million during his career, which included an annual salary of some \$10 million. Senna's death came one day after Austrian rookie Roland Ratzenberger was killed in a similar accident during qualifying trials. Both deaths renewed concerns about recent rule changes. The Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile banned electronics and other drivers' aids from Formula One cars, a move that many believed made the sport more dangerous.