

Fold

THE RATCHET



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FLIGHT

& FIGHT

In the maelstrom of catastrophe, Niki Lauda found a determination beyond the profound. When 223 people 'didn't arrive', this is how he responded

Words: Maurice Hamilton [@MauriceHamilton](#)

At 16.02 on Sunday 26th May 1991, Lauda Air flight 004 took off from Bangkok, bound for Vienna. All was routine as the Boeing 767-300 ER, with 213 passengers and 10 crew, gained height and headed north-west

from Don Mueang airport.

Niki Lauda was at home in Vienna. At 21.50 local time, he received a telephone call from a TV news channel, asking about a reported crash involving one of his aircraft. Lauda said he was unaware of this, but

One year after the 'Ring, but Lauda was yet to face his biggest fight

TED TROTT

Stitch or staple

Stitch or staple



"It was a scene which I will never, ever forget"

DESPITE BELIEVING IT MUST BE SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE THRUST REVERSER, FOR EIGHT MONTHS IT WAS LAUDA AIR'S FAULT THAT THESE PEOPLE GOT KILLED.

would check. The aircraft had disappeared from air traffic radar at 16.17 hours local time. Fearing the worst, Lauda called together his management team and quickly decided he needed to go straight to Bangkok. When he arrived, Lauda was flown by helicopter to a mountainous region in the Dan Chang District, approximately 94 nautical miles north-west of Bangkok. Lauda said: "We landed, took a car and drove into the jungle. Suddenly, I saw some white stuff on the ground and wondered what this was. Then I realised they were napkins with Lauda Air on them. It's a big shock when you suddenly see this in the middle of a jungle. The closer we got, the bigger the pieces of the aeroplane. It was spread over five kilometres. I've never in my

life seen a disaster like this. I'd never seen dead people without heads, without arms, with the local people stealing rings and watches from the remains of these people. There was luggage all over the place; I saw handbags of cabin attendants who I knew. It was the worst experience you can possibly imagine; it was a scene which I will never, ever forget. I was flying these planes myself as a pilot and I had to find out why this aeroplane had come down. "I noticed on one engine, the thrust reverse was deployed. On the other engine, which was two kilometres away, the thrust reverse was not deployed. "We went back to Austria. In these days I was crying with tears, many times. But never with other people, only when I was alone. But something kept

me going, because I was always asking myself: 'Why, why, why?' I was very proactive. "The problem was the flight data recorder was completely destroyed; the aluminium tape had been so badly burnt, we could get nothing from it. "Despite believing it must be something to do with the thrust reverser, for eight months it was Lauda Air's fault that these people got killed. This was the worst thing for me. I didn't care whose fault it was; it could have been mine; it could have been somebody else's; I just wanted to know. I was pushing and pushing and pushing to get the truth. It was really annoying because all our aeroplanes were still flying worldwide. There was a huge fight between me and Boeing to get this thing resolved."

The turning point came when Lauda attended a mass burial for 23 unidentified victims in Bangkok. Niki said: "I went there to pay my respects. All the friends and loved ones of these poor people were there, looking at me, and no one could tell them why this had happened. There was one little kid and he threw some marbles into the grave. There was a huge noise when they fell so far down and hit the top of the coffins. I asked the grandmother about this and she said these were the marbles that the parents had bought this child on their last holiday together. They were both dead. "This was a very difficult moment. I decided immediately to fly straight to Seattle [Boeing's headquarters] and have this dealt with properly. At

first they did not want to let me fly the simulator. I said: 'Listen, this was my fucking aeroplane, my name, my damage... so let me do it.' They eventually agreed. I tried several times to recover the aircraft, but it was impossible. It was absolutely clear why the plane had crashed. As soon as the thrust reverser comes out, the aeroplane turns over. You can do whatever you want, but you cannot control it. "I asked Boeing to issue a statement. They said they couldn't because it would have to be checked by lawyers and it would take another couple of months. I said: 'Do we know the cause?' Yes, they said, we know the cause but we have to make sure there is no risk in getting sued – and this and that. I said: 'I cannot wait another three months'.

"Okay,' I told them. 'This is what we'll do. Tomorrow, I will hold a press conference and say we are going to take a 767, load it up like it was with my two pilots, deploy the thrust reverser in the air and everything will be okay. I'll be on board and you can show me that it works. Simple. I will ask you to do that for the sake of all the victims. That's the most important thing.' I went back to my hotel – and they were waiting for me when I got there. They issued the statement.

"The whole thing was the worst experience of my life; my accident [at the Nürburgring in 1976] was nothing compared to this. The crash in the Ferrari was a different issue because I decided to take a chance of maybe killing myself: this was my decision. If I kill myself this is my own problem and nobody else's. But to run an airline and 223 people want to go from A to B and they don't arrive, that's a different responsibility."



Maurice Hamilton knew Niki Lauda for over 40 years. His definitive biography is a tribute to the brave and talented star of Formula 1, based on interviews with friends, family, rival drivers and colleagues. Most local booksellers are still operating, but if you must there's Amazon.

SNAP / PICTUREDESK.COM

"An Avenger GT and two Alpines had made my dad a Rootes Group loyalist. I begged him to buy a Talbot-Matra Rancho, which six-year-old me thought was the coolest thing in the world, as his next car. 'The Rancho is daft,' he said. 'Only three doors and it's just pretending to be a 4x4'. He had a point. But then a glimmer of hope. Dad's head had been turned by the Talbot Tagora, the most impressive car ever to be styled with ruler. He was ready to place an

FAST FOOD

Gilles Villeneuve was never one to follow the herd

By Ghiga Ferrari (no relation) [@ghigaferrari](#)

Rigorously home-made pasta – that's the fuel in Emilia Romagna's motor valley where the cars are roaring and so are the appetites. From Enzo to Piero Ferrari, from Jean Todt to René Arnoux, from Michael Schumacher to Fernando Alonso, local tortellini are and were a favourite choice. In a golden capon broth, of course, as is traditionally served in Italy.

Were there exceptions to this hard-and-fast rule? Well, the unforgettable, unforgotten Gilles Villeneuve had a weakness for tortellini too, only with cream and Parmesan cheese instead. His son Jacques was yet another fan of the tortellini alla panna, and the same can be said for Gerhard

Berger. Raoul Bellentani of Vecchia Pirri Restaurant in old Modena serves some of the best tortellini, tightened by hand every morning. This is his unorthodox though delicious recipe favoured by Gilles:

You will need:
500g fresh tortellini
300ml heavy cream
40g unsalted butter
Salt/pepper to taste
100g grated Parmesan cheese,
plus extra for the table

Add the butter and cream to a large pan and season with salt and pepper. Simmer and cook until slightly thickened. Take off the heat. Bring a pot of salted water to a boil and add the tortellini. Cook until slightly underdone and drain. Place the pan with butter and cream back over medium heat. Add the tortellini and stir with the sauce. Add the cheese and stir gently until melted and tortellini coated. Enjoy!



Tortellini, not as Italian purists would have it



Visit for the vino, stay for the vista

QUICK DRINKS

The open-wheel legend and CART champion who turned chickens into wine

By Nick Trott [@NickTrott27](#)

OK, so alcohol consumption is up. Booze sales are outpacing groceries by 22% in Britain and a US data firm producing smartphone breathalyser devices (the robots are taking over!) has recorded a 42% increase in drinking in metropolitan California.

So let's be careful y'all.

order when he had the foresight to measure the garage and discover that the Tagora wouldn't fit. Instead we got a Solara GLS with the excitement of electric front windows."

Richard Porter [@sniffpetrol](#)

Share your family car stories with the hashtag #MyFathersCar

MUSIC FOR THE OPEN ROAD

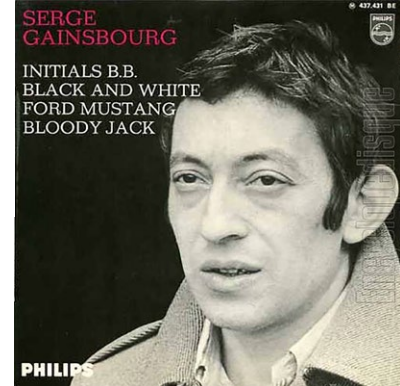
Serge Gainsbourg, 'Ford Mustang'

By Jason Barlow [@jasonbarlowuk](#)

Celebrated roué and unassailable French cultural hero, Serge Gainsbourg also wrote some great songs. Thousands of them. He was 40 when he recorded 1968's *Initials B.B.*, most of which was done in London during a period when his home city was convulsed with popular unrest. He may have raised a Château Lafite in its direction.

Rarely the most expressive of singers – that's kind of the point – this album nevertheless showcases his melodic flair and wit. It swings in places, sounds modishly baroque in others as strings swirl, while strolling through the ye-ye and chanson you'd expect. It's also funky: Gainsbourg would be an unlikely source of breakbeats for Wu Tang Clan and MC Solaar amongst others.

The album's title also signified a new muse: Brigitte Bardot. In late 1967, he'd been approached to write songs for her Christmas television special, *Le Bardot Show* and one thing led to



another. Bardot was married to Gunter Sachs at the time, scion of the Opel family, who had wooed her by flying over her home on the French Riviera in his helicopter and dropping roses. She asked Gainsbourg to write the most beautiful love song he could possibly think of, and he responded with the magnificent *Bonnie and Clyde* and the soon-to-be notorious *Je t'aime... moi non plus*. The pair recorded it – if that's the word – but Bardot begged Gainsbourg not to release it for fear of plunging her rickety marriage into total disarray. (His next muse, Jane Birkin, would do the honours, the result a global smash and moral uproar.)

A Rolls-Royce would play a central role in his 1971 masterpiece *Histoire de Melody Nelson*, but let's go with this album and the song *Ford Mustang*. The open road is the Rue de Rivoli, and it's 7am on a Sunday morning.

الصريق مغلق وخطر سوكة
 DANGER CLOSED ROAD

REMEMBRANCE
 OF THINGS PAST

The road between Petra and the Wadi Araba desert that borders Palestine and Israel — captured by Coldplay photographer Marcus Haney, who shot our Albert Hammond Jr feature in Issue Two.

"It was four years after its launch that I first drove a Porsche 928, but this very peculiar car still seemed what the Germans call "Zeitlose", or timeless. It existed then, as now, with scarcely any reference to what went before or came after. If you compare it with contemporary Porsches, the 928 becomes more curious still. The 911 of its day was a delicate machine, not the engorged barouche we know today. And the 924 had an engine shared with



MR. GERALD GUÉTAT

HIS LEGACY WILL RE- MAIN

Giorgio Nada: a life spent dedicated to stories of the car

By Marco Makaus [@marcomakaus](#)

When I met him in the 1970s, he was driving a Lancia Flaminia Touring and a Maserati Quattroporte S1 – but Giorgio Giacomo Nada was a quiet character who was good at keeping his life to himself.

Nada, who passed away on May 6th after fighting Covid-19, was born in the Langhe region of Piedmont, worked in London in the Swinging Sixties and later became a world-class automotive publisher.

In the mid-'70s he took over the "Libreria dell'Automobile" shop in central Milan, transforming its fortunes with a focus on mail order long before the internet was invented and –

crucially – making his shop the place for motoring enthusiasts, racing drivers, car designers or collectors to meet. It's the same today: under his son's management it's one of the few fashionable shops in the center of Milan not selling fashion.

He could judge people by the books they bought and was able to create a network of enthusiast experts (inexpensive authors!). This way he started "Giorgio Nada Editore" in 1988 and made it a successful publishing company. Friendly (well, most of the time) relationships with the Italian auto industry, the racing fraternity and classic car enthusiasts plus the vision to buy archives created numerous memorable books. In doing so, he saved many a story from oblivion. If you are reading this, chances are you have a Nada book on your shelf.

Cars are just a ton of metal; what makes my day is meeting the people who keep this hobby alive. With Giorgio Nada, saying 'his legacy will remain' has never been so true, as long as we can read his books.

MOVIES

Have we already seen the last true automotive action hero?

By Christopher Butt [@autodidaktblog](#)

Chase cars are the action heroes among automobiles used in the movies. As with their human counterparts, it's easier to relate to them if they act in remotely realistic fashion. For while we cheer the ridiculous bravado of *Commando's* John Matrix throwing a phone box, it's *Die Hard's* bruised and balding John McClane we truly relate to.

With much of today's fast and relentlessly furious car chasing fuelled by physics-bending CGI rather than unleaded, we may have already seen our last true automotive action hero. We can argue as to which it was – from Jason Bourne's 'unbreakable' little Mini to the Dodge Challenger SRT in Dan Gilroy's excellent *Nightcrawler* (an outlier, but justified in this context – realistically fast for scavenger-like stringer

Lou Bloom to chase police and criminals through a noir LA).

But John Frankenheimer's *Ronin* cannot be ignored. For a genre movie devised around spectacular chase sequences, the use of saloons rather than sports cars would appear odd. But realistic spies neither stay at presidential suites, nor do they drive exotic GTs. So fast saloons like a BMW M5 or Audi S8 were a logical choice for four-wheel slides on Parisian cobble streets.

Unlike the heavy, softly-sprung Mercedes 450 SEL 6.9 used later on – which may have been cast as a tribute to its use as camera vehicle in that most famous of real-life high-speed driving depictions, Claude Lelouch's *C'était un rendez-vous* (where the off-screen engine sound was dubbed with that of a Ferrari). That short film's ultimate commitment to realism is the one occasion when even *Ronin's* depiction of high speed driving appears staged – and to eventually give the car that did the driving its spot in the limelight somehow seems fair.

UNITED ARTISTS



the Volkswagen van. As you'll discover across 14 pages in Issue Four of *The Road Rat*, the 928 might be *Zeitlose*, but it also gives the lie to the idea of *Zeitgeist*."

Stephen Bayley [@GuruBayley](#)

FAST & LOOSE

When plans by Citroën for dominance in NASCAR were unfortunately put on ice

By Tom Arron [@norramot](#)

It's well known that during his Grand Prix sabbatical in 2011, Kimi Räikkönen drove in the World Rally Championship and flirted with NASCAR. However, much of what he was up to for the rest of the year is shrouded in mystery.

The fascinating truth is that Citroën, whose cars Räikkönen had been rallying, asked the Finn to lead its new, Red Bull-funded, NASCAR Sprint Cup programme as it aimed to gain a foothold in the American family saloon market with the C5. As he was exploring NASCAR options anyway, Räikkönen agreed with what one can only imagine was an unassuming shrug.

Top-secret testing took place at the Autodrome de Linas-Montlhéry in central France, and I'm told that Räikkönen would drive to the circuit from his hotel nearby Leuville-sur-Orge in a gorilla costume to hide his identity.

Intriguingly, technical drawings discovered in Citroën's archives suggest that its NASCAR challenger had all the hallmarks of a game-changer. Innovations

included an interconnected hydropneumatic suspension that maintained an even ride-height even on NASCAR's high-banked circuits.

As was widely reported that summer, Räikkönen tested Robby Gordon's Sprint Cup car at Sonoma. What failed to make the press was that Citroën's car was there too, but only briefly. A failed bearing on a barrel speedometer – fitted on the insistence of Jean-Pierre Ploué, Citroën's Head of Design at the time – caused a cabin fire at 200mph. Kimi, who was eating a Cornetto at the time, threw it at the dashboard in an attempt to extinguish the flames.

The Citroën project came to a sudden halt when Räikkönen announced his return to F1 in 2012. Like the disastrous BX 4TC Group B rally car before it, the project was disowned and the cars crushed.

I was lucky enough to run into Kimi at Silverstone a couple of years back and prodded him gently on the subject of Citroën and NASCAR. When I finally plucked up the courage to ask what he was really up to in 2011, he looked at me quizzically and said: "I was having a shit".



HOW DID IT GO ALL SO WRONG?

Sebastian Vettel is the Formula 1 driver the world needs right now but not the one that it wants

By Michael Harvey [@mikeyharvey](#)

We have, I fear, a disappointingly singular stereotype of an F1 driver and it's James Hunt; sexyAF, wearing their talent lightly, carefree in life off and on the track. There is a corollary of course and it's Ayrton Senna; sexyAF yes, but all too-aware of the burden of their talent and intense in life off and on the track. You can put Alonso in the same column. But it's Hunt we want all our drivers to be, even though he abruptly stopped racing over 40 years ago and left us 14 years after that. How else do you account for the continuing appeal of Kimi 'the Iceman' Raikkonen?

It also accounts for the reaction to Sebastian Vettel's effective retirement announcement this week, met with a mix of ambivalence ('I never really liked him') or malevolence ('he's



In Abu Dhabi in 2010, winning the first of four consecutive world titles

DARREN HEATH

was never all that'). Maybe he will race in 2021, but it's hard to see where. Surely not alongside Lewis, nor in Danny Ric's empty seat at Renault? At 'Aston Martin'? I kinda hope not.

And more's the pity because I suspect it is 'out' that Seb' really wants – and it's the only the relentless process of the family reputational abattoir off the Via Abetone that's stopped this. He deserves better; Vettel is both likeable and quite something behind the wheel of a race car.

Let's deal with that first. It's pretty much written in stone that when exceptional talent lands in F1 they demonstrate it early on by doing something nobody anticipated, something exceptional. Vettel did just that, coming home eighth and in the points at the 2007 US GP, after being called up to under-study Robert Kubica (convalescing from the mother of all accidents at the previous weekend's Canadian Grand Prix). Almost immediately, BMW-Sauber released the 20-year-old Vettel to Toro Rosso for the balance of the season and all of 2008.

Everyone remembers the win

in the wet at Monza in 2008, Vettel's first and to this date TR's only, but go back to 2007 and the immediate impact of Vettel's talent on the team is apparent. He was on the way to the podium in Japan before some (portentous) unpleasantness with Mark Webber. A week later he recorded a best-yet fourth place for the team in China. He started 17th.

Given the machinery, Vettel's achievements in 2007 get him a pass on the 'something exceptional' test. We all know what came after Toro Rosso; Runner-up – Champion – Champion – Champion. And here's where the haters chirp up and use Adrian Newey's innovation to pummel Vettel's driving. All I can say is the same argument can be used to belittle just about every World Champion going to back to Hunt in 1976, and there were extenuating circumstances that year. The fact Vettel won four-on-the-trot (like Fangio in another era and rather more like Michael Schumacher) speaks of the man's completeness; it's not just about getting the car



Squaring up: life has been harder for Vettel since moving to Ferrari

DARREN HEATH

VETTEL'S CAREER STATS TO DATE SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

to work, but about the whole machinery of the team.

Vettel's last year at Red Bull was not a happy one and his time at Ferrari has, predictably, not been straightforward. When it is not winning, Ferrari is rarely a happy place. By the time Leclerc arrived Vettel was yesterday's news, an easy excuse for the team's failure to recreate the Schumacher era. And Leclerc of course is another exceptional talent, although also arguably the exception that proves the rule – his 2018 season with Sauber was strong, but less so that many might have hoped.

Vettel's career stats to date speak for themselves, 240 starts, 120 podiums, 53 of them on the top. They need little interpretation. As for the man himself I simply don't understand why anyone might take a dislike. He's always struck me as comfortable in his skin as his hero Michael never quite did; that broad smile alights easily in way Schumacher's

Leclerc (and Verstappen and Hamilton) on it.

In a normal year we'd be settling down for the European season, not watching drivers swap seats for next year. I suspect the pandemic, and F1's focus on 2021, is why this has all happened now and what might well be a retirement by a four-time champion would have been very different, or at least to a different timetable. And I feel for the guy. Another racer, a three-time champion who happens to feature on the cover of this week's Ratchet also felt the pull of a life away from racing and parked his car, he thought then for good, after practice on a Friday morning. As of course had, four months earlier, the man Niki Lauda's rivalry with had defined the era. James Hunt; racing's James Bond, the man men want to be etc... decided it just wasn't worth it. Which for me was always the coolest thing Hunt ever did.

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