



# Will Palmer

Dad competed in F1 and brother Jolyon is on the cusp: the dynasty's youngster spoke to Simon Arron about his goals...

**I**T FEELS ODD WHEN A DRIVER TELLS YOU he was a little too old to start karting, aged 13, but such is the way of modern motor racing. Will Palmer, now 19, is youngest son of former Grand Prix driver Jonathan and brother to 2016 Renault F1 recruit Jolyon. Last year, in his second full single-seater campaign, he dominated BRDC Formula 4 and scooped the main McLaren *Autosport* BRDC Award, which earned him a £100,000 cheque and his maiden F1 test – most likely in the autumn.

He has come a long way in a relatively short time.

“Dad was careful not to pressurise Jolyon or I into racing,” Will says. “We both started relatively late. I was watching Jo race in Formula Palmer Audi when I thought, ‘I fancy having a go.’ I did a few weekends of club karting – not enough to get rid of my novice cross – and then moved to Ginetta Juniors, because at that stage we felt it would be better to learn about racecraft in a car.

“It was a massive challenge, because the level in Ginetta Juniors is very high and I had such limited experience. I did three races at the end of 2011, a full learning year in 2012 and aimed for the title in 2013, when I finished third and took my first win, at Rockingham.”

Sticking with HHC Motorsport, for whom he'd driven since 2012, Palmer then switched to single-seaters and proved immediately competitive in the BRDC F4 Winter Championship, taking one podium in his first race weekend and a victory from pole during his second.

His 2014 campaign began brightly – he was joint second in the BRDC F4 standings by mid-season – but then came Silverstone. “I qualified on the front row and was leading until my fuel pump failed,” he says, “which meant starting towards the back in the next two races. Subsequently I

think I tried too hard and got involved in a few incidents. With hindsight, I should have been calmer about losing those points at Silverstone. That derailed things a bit.”

He subsequently won the F4 Winter title, however, and added the main BRDC F4 Championship during a 2015 season that yielded 12 victories. Has he tapped into the family's racing heritage for assistance?

“Not as much as I used to,” he says, “because in 2015 the others were often away so it was mostly just me working with the team and driver coach Duncan Tappy. Sometimes Jo would watch my onboard footage and offer advice. He's well known for his fantastic racecraft and I couldn't wish for a better tutor.”

Next stop will be Formula Renault 2.0 with crack French team ART, with whom he showed well in a one-off appearance at Silverstone last season. This is viewed as a chance to gain experience on international circuits before stepping up another rung. He starts the campaign buoyed by his award success, something that took him by surprise. “All the finalists had been saying, ‘Oh, you don't want to be Club Driver of the Year’ because that means you probably won't win the main award. It was a standing joke, then on the night I won the club award and thought,

‘OK, I'm out of this now.’ Emotions were mixed, because it was amazing to walk onto the main stage but I thought I'd lost a shot at the best prize in junior racing. By the end of the evening I'd made peace with the fact I wasn't going to win, so it was a real shock when my name was read out.”

The long-term goal is F1, but he's keeping his options open and will shortly commence an economics degree at the University of Bath. “I'll do all I can to reach F1,” he says, “but relatively few drivers become professionals. It would be madness not to have a back-up plan.”



## CAREER IN BRIEF

**Born:** 15/02/97, East Grinstead, England  
**2010-11** Six kart meetings **2011** Ginetta Junior Championship, selected races **2012** Ginetta Juniors, 12th **2013** Ginetta Juniors, 3rd; BRDC F4 Winter Championship, 5th **2014** BRDC F4, 6th; BRDC F4 Winter Championship, 1st **2015** BRDC F4, 1st (12 wins); McLaren Autosport BRDC Award winner