

**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW**

by Joe Downes



**T**HE list of Formula One dynasties includes many of the greatest names in the sport's history. Think Senna, Piquet, Hill, Schumacher and Rosberg. But only one family — the Fittipaldis — has had three of its members start F1 races.

Now Britain's Palmers are well on the way to joining them. Jonathan, 60, started 83 Grands Prix between 1983 and 1989, while eldest son Jolyon, 26, is about to begin his second season. Following in their footsteps is youngest son Will.

The Formula Renault driver, 19, won the McLaren Autosport British Racing Drivers' Club Award in 2015 and tested an F1 car as part of the prize. The annual award is handed to the most promising young driver with the likes of David Coulthard and Jenson Button on the roll of honour.

Ahead of the new season, *Sportsmail* went to meet the extraordinary family.

**Who was behind the wheel this morning?**

**Jonathan:** I came in the helicopter. I've got a busy day with MSV (MotorSport Vision, the company he is CEO of which manages six UK circuits). I was at the office in West Sussex this morning and had to get up to Brands Hatch for this. I'm at our Bedford site after lunch and have a meeting in Bristol later so I have to travel quickly.

**Will:** I drove myself and Jo from Sussex.

**Jolyon:** I hate driving on the road, it's tedious. I passed my test when I was 17 at the third attempt. It was a nightmare. I got cocky because I was already racing. I had a couple of lessons and thought I could wing it but failed miserably. I got a lot of stick from Will but he got it back six years later, didn't you?

**Will:** Yes, it was fourth time for me! I did my test two weeks after my 17th birthday and nearly passed but in the final few minutes when a motorbike came out of nowhere, I had to slam on the handbrake. I'll never live that down.

**Winning the BRDC young driver award must have made up for it?**

**Will:** It put me on the map. The McLaren test was the best experience of my life. It was incredible at my stage to do that. I knew it would be a massive step up but the cars are so refined they give you confidence.

**Jolyon:** I didn't drive an F1 car until I was 24, or win the award, so Will's on a good track.

**Jonathan:** I was 25 at my first F1 test so they both beat me but I passed my driver's test first time! They've got far more natural racing ability than I had.

**How early did the boys display their racing talents?**

**Jonathan:** I brought an old kart home when Jolyon was little and moved the seat forward for a three-year-old. Within a day he was ragging it around the garden so we knew he had natural ability.

**Jolyon:** There were pictures, helmets and overalls from Dad's career around the house so it was obvious racing was a big part of our family. I always loved it and watched F1 races when I was young, but didn't decide to really give it a go until I was 13. From then I was completely absorbed. It has been bloody hard and taken a lot of perseverance, but we've never wanted to do anything else.

**Will:** I went karting at friends' parties but hadn't got into it. When Jo was racing in Formula Two in 2009 I went to watch and got hooked and was suddenly the biggest fan in the world, watching all the old F1 footage.

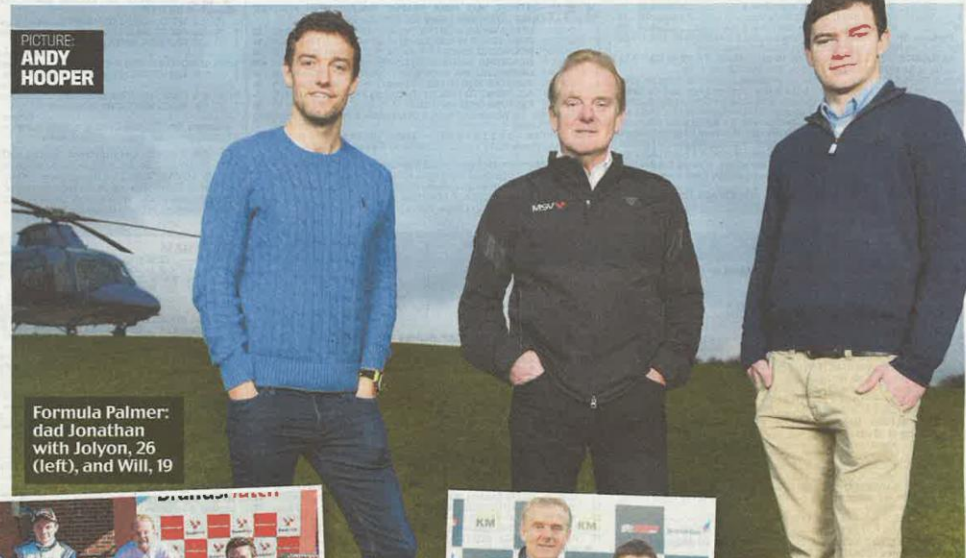
**Jonathan:** They obviously inherited the genes, not only from me, but also from their mum, Gill. When I was in F1 we had the drivers' wives kart races and she was always at the front.

**It was a very sporty household.**

**Jonathan:** It has always been the boys doing motorsport and the girls showjumping. Gill's always been into horses. Emily, my eldest daughter, is too. But my younger daughter, Alice, is seriously into showjumping. She has six horses she trains and rides competitively.

# It took me three goes to pass my driving test... but you needed four!

## Meet the Palmers, Britain's latest F1 dynasty



PICTURE: ANDY HOOPER

Formula Palmer: dad Jonathan with Jolyon, 26 (left), and Will, 19



Trophy time: Will on his way to the F4 title in 2015 (left) and Jolyon after his first T Car win in 2006 (right)



**Will:** We liked to be out doing things rather than sitting around. I remember lots of muddy footwear and wet clothes in the house.

**Jolyon:** We had a big group of friends who lived close and there was an open-door policy. I played county level football so we were either having a kick-about or quad-biking. Me and Will still kart, play tennis and run. We did five kilometres yesterday and he beat me.

**Will:** We go to the gym and really push each other. Jo's stronger because he's in F1 but it's great for me to see that level of training.

**How much have you relied on each other's support?**

**Jonathan:** I manage the boys so get to as many races as possible. F1 takes priority, but I'll fit both in if they're in Europe. These two are

so supportive of each other. Before a GP2 race in 2013, Jo texted Will to ask what tyres he should use and won from seventh on the grid. Will called the winning strategy from the sofa!

**Will:** I don't have quite the same influence now...

**Jonathan:** I'm the worst spectator, screaming when he puts a wheel on the grass. Jo is so calm and has a chat with Will before he starts. His understanding is so much better than mine and he's very quick to spot when Will should be braking later or whatever.

**Jonathan:** When I was in China last April it was Will's first race of the season. I watched it in the garage on YouTube.

**It's a time-consuming and intense sport. How do you escape?**

**Jolyon:** I like going to the pub, watching sport and seeing mates. If I do something stupid they take

the p\*\*\* out of me and vice-versa. We've always gone to Corfu during the summer. Great fun.

**Jonathan:** We keep this boat down there and rent a villa. The boys bring a few friends and mess around on the water. Relaxing is important. When we're all in the UK we see each other every week for dinner or something.

**What are the short and long-term goals?**

**Jonathan:** I just want them to make the best of the opportunity. Maybe both in a British Grand Prix at one of our circuits? That's a thought. Wow, a double home race! It's not impossible.

**Jolyon:** It would be very cool. Will's six years younger so we've never raced against each other. I've got to be successful to still be around and he's got to make it, so it's kind of a double dream but it would be awesome. Maybe not in

**2017 F1 CALENDAR**

March 26	Australia
April 9	China
April 16	Bahrain
April 30	Russia
May 14	Spain
May 28	Monaco
June 11	Canada
June 25	Azerbaijan
July 9	Austria
July 16	Britain
July 30	Hungary
August 27	Belgium
September 3	Italy
September 17	Singapore
October 1	Malaysia
October 8	Japan
October 22	USA
October 29	Mexico
November 12	Brazil
November 26	Abu Dhabi

the same team, though. We'd have some fallings out.

**Will:** I'll be in Formula Renault again next season. Lots of current F1 drivers have been through it so it's good preparation. The goal is to win the championship, go on to GP3, GP2 and then F1. And having Jo there would be extra special. I want to give him a race!

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