

F1 legend Niki Lauda dies at 70

The life and times of Niki Lauda, who has died at the age of 70:



Picture taken on 1975 at Silverstone showing Austrian Formula One World Champion Niki Lauda

1973: Takes another loan to buy his way into BRM team

1974: Gets a huge break when former BRM teammate Clay Regazzoni recommends him to Ferrari. Lauda finishes second in Argentina on Ferrari debut

1974: Enjoys his first grand prix victory in Spain on April 28 in his fourth race for Ferrari

1975: Emerges as Formula One's star driver as he becomes world champion for the first time, winning five of 14 grands prix and taking nine pole positions

1976: Suffers horrific burns and lung damage in a fiery crash at the Nuerburgring and is read the last rites in hospital. Miraculously misses only two races and is piped to the title by James Hunt

1977: Wins his second world championship with Ferrari with consistent podium finishes and victories in South Africa and the Netherlands

1978: Joins the Bernie Ecclestone-owned Brabham team for a reported \$1 million salary.

1979: Retires from the sport during practice for the Canadian Grand Prix in September, saying he "no longer wishes to drive round in circles" for the struggling Brabham outfit.



Niki Lauda is pictured ahead of the British Formula One Grand Prix at Silverstone



French Formula One driver Alain Prost (L) poses with A Niki Lauda on the McLaren car



Mercedes non-executive chairman and former world champion Niki Lauda (L) and F1 supremo Bernie Ecclestone share a joke



Lauda and his wife Birgit attend the world premiere of Rush in central London



Lauda poses with his trophy in the category Lifetime Achievement at the Laureus World Sports 2016



1979: Founds Lauda Air, his first foray into the aviation industry

1982: Returns to racing with McLaren

1984: Becomes world champion for a third time by the smallest of margins -- half a point over teammate Alain Prost

1985: Records the last of 25 grand prix wins in the Netherlands and retires for good



1949: Andreas Nikolaus Lauda born on February 22 in Vienna, Austria

1968: Without telling his parents, who disapprove of motor racing, Lauda wins his first race in a Mini

1971: Takes out a loan to buy a seat in the new March team in Formula Two

1971: Promoted to March Formula One team. Makes grand prix debut in Austria on August 15

1991: Lauda Air Boeing 767 crashes in Thailand on May 26 killing all 223 people aboard

1993: Returns to Formula One as a consultant for Ferrari

2001-02: Appointed team principal for Jaguar

2002: Sells Lauda Air to Austrian Airlines

2004: Creates low-cost carrier Niki, which he sells to Air Berlin in 2011

2012: Appointed non-executive chairman of Mercedes F1 and is instrumental in bringing in Lewis Hamilton to spark a run of five consecutive world championships

2018: Has emergency lung transplant in August

2019: Dies peacefully in his sleep on May 20

Vienna, Austria

Legendary Formula One driver Niki Lauda has died at the age of 70, his family said yesterday, triggering an outpouring of praise for a man whose track victories and comeback from a horrific crash enthralled race fans worldwide.

Lauda died at the University Hospital Zurich in Switzerland on Monday night surrounded by his closest family members, a spokesperson told AFP.

His death comes eight months after he underwent a lung transplant. The family said in a statement that Lauda died peacefully.

"His unique achievements as an athlete and entrepreneur are and will remain unforgettable, his tireless zest for action, his straightforwardness and his courage remain," it said.

"A role model and a benchmark for all of us, he was a loving and caring husband, father and grandfather away from the public, and he will be missed."

Lauda won the Formula One drivers' world championship three times, in 1975 and 1977 for Ferrari and in 1984 with McLaren, despite a terrible race crash in 1976.

An Austrian news report said Lauda -- who has kidney transplants -- was hospitalised for a dialysis earlier this month in

Switzerland.

"Everyone at Ferrari is deeply saddened at the news of the death of our dear friend Niki Lauda," Ferrari said on its Twitter account.

"Niki will forever be in our hearts and enshrined in our history. #RIPNiki," his former team McLaren tweeted on their account.

Lauda had been non-executive chairman at Mercedes F1 since 2012 and he was instrumental in bringing in British driver Lewis Hamilton to spark a run of success that has brought five consecutive world drivers' and constructors' championships.

"A legend has left us. Rest in peace Niki #nikilauda," tweeted 2009 world champion and former McLaren driver Jenson Button as social media exploded with the news of his death.

"Forever carried in our hearts, forever immortalised in our history. The motorsport community today mourns the devastating loss of a true legend," Formula 1 said on Twitter.

'Very, very special man'

Lauda was born as Andreas Nikolaus on February 22, 1949, in Vienna into an upper middle-class family, who did not share his passion for cars.

In 1968, without telling his parents, Lauda won his first

race with a Mini Racer he had bought with his grandmother's help.

During his driving career, Lauda suffered horrific injuries on August 1, 1976 when, having already won five races that season, his vehicle burst into flames on the Nuerburgring in Germany.

He had severe burns to his face and hands, and inhaled toxic fumes which damaged his lungs.

Despite being given the last rites in hospital he made an almost miraculous recovery to race again just six weeks later still bandaged and in intense pain.

He missed only two races that season but was unable to hold off the challenge of Britain's James Hunt, who went on to claim his only world title.

The rivalry between the two men -- which demonstrated the Austrian's extraordinary courage and fighting spirit -- was portrayed in the 2013 film "Rush" by American director Ron Howard.

The next season, in 1977, Lauda went on to win his second Formula One world championship with Ferrari.

Former motorcycling world champion Casey Stoner said on Twitter: "RIP Niki Lauda, a true Icon and Motorsport legend. Thoughts are with his family

and loved ones at this time."

Former F1 driver Johnny Herbert, describing Lauda as "courageous, chatty, and extremely funny", added on Twitter: "I am going to miss you being around the @F1 paddock but the legend of Niki Lauda will live on, because you were a very very special man."

One of Austria's greatest

Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz said Lauda "fought himself back into life multiple times".

"With Niki Lauda, Austria loses one of its greatest personalities... He is a role model for courage, discipline and directness," he said on Twitter.

Lauda quit Formula One at the end of 1979 to pursue his second passion, civil aviation.

But he came back to the race circuit in 1982, this time with McLaren, and won his last world championship with them in 1984.

"A highly accomplished athlete and entrepreneur, Niki is an inspiration to many both on and off the racetrack, pushing everyone on his team to always strive for the best," Colin Syn, deputy chairman of the Singapore Grand Prix, said in a statement.

Off the racetrack, Lauda -- recognised by his trademark red cap hiding scars from his