

WILLIAMS HERITAGE

When Frank Williams and Patrick Head first met over dinner in 1976, little did they know that they were about to start one of the most successful and enduring partnerships in Formula One history. They founded Williams Grand Prix Engineering the following year, since when the team – now known simply as ‘Williams’ – has never looked back.

The team used an off-the-shelf March chassis during 1977, with Patrick Head designing the first bespoke Williams chassis, the FW06, for the 1978 campaign. Alan Jones finished 11th in the drivers’ championship and his podium at the US Grand Prix proved to be the springboard to a two-car entry in ’79, when Clay Regazzoni lined up alongside Jones.

‘Rega’ claimed the team’s first Grand Prix victory at the ’79 British Grand Prix, in what was to be the start of a highly successful period. Jones claimed the first of Williams’ seven drivers’ titles in 1980, with the team claiming the first of its nine constructors’ titles the same year.

“There was a mixture of relief and satisfaction at the end of 1980,” says Frank Williams. “It was a phenomenal season for the team because it launched us as a front-running operation.”

A second constructors’ title followed in ’81 and by the time Keke Rosberg claimed the team’s second drivers’ title in ’82 – during which he won only one race – it was clear that Williams needed a turbo engine to compete with the manufacturer teams. Frank and Patrick looked east and signed a long-term deal with Honda.

The partnership was immediately successful when Rosberg won the Dallas Grand Prix in 1984. Greater reliability the following year resulted in the team finishing third in the Constructors’ Championship, with the team taking overall spoils in ’86 after an immensely difficult season.

In 1986 new signing Nelson Piquet won the season-opening race in Brazil and both he and Nigel Mansell stayed in contention for the drivers’ title until the final race of the season.

Piquet won the championship in ’87, but the relationship with Honda finished at the same time and the team sought a new long term partner in Renault. The first Renault-powered Williams rolled out of the team’s Didcot factory in 1989, the car winning its fourth race. An updated version of the FW13 won a couple of races in 1990, at the end of which the team lured Nigel Mansell out of retirement for the ’91 season.

Mansell finished second in the championship on his return to Williams, before going one better in ’92. He won the opening five races of the year en route to his only world title and the team’s first constructors’ success for five years.

More wins and titles followed in ’93, with Alain Prost and Damon Hill taking over driving duties, and by the time Renault withdrew from F1 at the end of ’97, Williams had knocked up more than 100 wins in just 20 seasons of F1 competition.

Williams struck up a new partnership with BMW in 2000, but it was to prove less fruitful than the previous manufacturer collaborations with Honda and Renault. During six seasons together Williams and BMW took 17 poles and 10 wins, with 2003 being the height of its success, when Juan Pablo Montoya finished third in the drivers’ standings and the team came second in the Constructors’ Championship.

Following recent stints with Cosworth, Toyota and Renault, with whom the team scored its most recent victory in 2012, Williams has joined forces with Mercedes Benz HPP in 2014. The aim is to write another successful chapter in the team’s history.