

## KYLE TILLEY

F1 SC TC MEL

IN THIS SPECIAL FEATURE, we talk to Kyle Tilley, an experienced racer and preparer in both modern and historic racing circles. By coaching, preparing and driving cars, Kyle, has been a regular face at Masters events in the US and Europe for a number of years now. Most recently racing in the UK & European races in Masters Sports Car Legends with a Chevron B23 and a Lola T210, in Masters Racing Legends in a Tyrrell-011 and Ensign MN177, as well as Masters Pre-66 Touring Cars in his Cortina! Find out more about his racing story and what led him to Masters!

**“I SPENT ALL OF MY STUDENT LOAN ON A FORMULA FORD AND WAS QUITE SUCCESSFUL IN THAT”**



## INTRODUCING KYLE TILLEY

In 2019, American-domiciled Briton Kyle Tilley shot to prominence in historic motor racing when, at Zandvoort, he weathered the storm in James Hagan's Ensign N177 to record a stunning overall victory in the wet. At the time still primarily active in modern racing and as a driver coach, Tilley has now switched to historics full-time with several cars of his own. During the 2023 Historic Grand Prix at Zandvoort we talked to Kyle about his change of focus.

**“JUST GOING TO DO AN EVENT WHERE THERE’S HALF A MILLION PEOPLE AND THEY’RE ALL THERE JUST TO WATCH YOU GUYS RACE IS INSANE”**



### WHAT GOT YOU INTO MOTOR RACING?

“I started go-karting when I was about six years old before I ran out of money to do it properly. So, I took up cycling and spent five years in the GB cycling team between the ages of 16 and 21. Still eager to race, I spent all of my student loan on a Formula Ford and was quite successful in that. Through my driver coaching, I was fortunate enough to move into sportscars and Formula 3 and then stepped up into GTs. However, my career really took off after I went to the United States. Former Reynard commercial director and motorsport consultant Rick Gorne said I could do very well there. So I took out a loan and, just through driver coaching, managed to make a career out of it, culminating in racing an LMP2 car in IMSA, the ELMS and the Asian Le Mans Series, winning at Daytona and winning our class in the Asian Le Mans Series. Then I ended up driving a factory-backed Ford in NASCAR on the road courses, which was a ton of fun. Just going to do an event where there’s half a million people and they’re all there just to watch you guys race is insane. But then, after a couple of big accidents in NASCAR and a couple in the LMP2 car, I was struggling with the high-downforce cars due to concussions. So I opted to step away from driving professionally and focus on historic racing, which I’ve always loved – it’s the kind of genre of car which has always captivated me. My first glimpse of Masters and similar historic series was when I worked as a mechanic for Martin Stretton in 2009. So it’s kind of come full circle. And here we are now, not just running James Hagan and Chris Atkinson in the ORECA FLM09 LMPC car, but I’ve got my Lotus Cortina running in Masters Pre-66 Touring Cars. And I got myself a Formula 2, too, now!”



**“IT’S SUCH A BRILLIANT LITTLE CAR. AND WHEREVER IT IS NOW, THEY ARE VERY LUCKY TO HAVE IT.”**

### **YOUR FIRST-EVER MASTERS EVENT?**

“As a driver, that would have been the Silverstone Classic in 2019 with the Ensign. We were looking after James Hagan’s car in the US, the ORECA FLM09 LMPC car, which he now runs over here. I was doing some driver coaching work with Steve Hartley and his McLaren, and I happened to say in passing, ‘I’d love to drive one of these.’ And James said, ‘Well, I’ve got two sat there. Take your pick of which one you’d like to drive.’ And so I chose the Ensign. It’s still a car which I absolutely adore. I wish I’d had the money available when James sold it, because I would have bought it hands down. It’s such a brilliant little car. And wherever it is now, they are very lucky to have it. After Silverstone, I raced it here at Zandvoort, in the pouring rain, and we won on the Saturday. Unfortunately, we were hit from behind in the Sunday race which took us out of contention for the win, but we still finished second to Henry Fletcher. It’s fun to race against Henry, as we were teammates in Britcar back in 2010. And then we raced it again at Spa, the Six Hours weekend, again in the pouring rain. And we happened to win that race outright on the Sunday and beat all the ground-effect cars! So, yeah, I like the rain.”

### **IN IT TO WIN IT OR JUST FOR FUN?**

“I’ll tell you now it’s just for fun, but as soon as the helmet goes on, you want in it to win it. And one thing I’ll admit to is that it’s always more fun when you win.”

**“ANY TIME I GET TO DRIVE ANY OF THE HISTORIC STUFF OR ANYTHING FUN, IT’S A PRIVILEGE TO BE ABLE TO DRIVE ANY OF THE CARS I GET TO DRIVE.”**



#### **YOUR BEST DAY IN MOTOR RACING?**

“So I have two. Winning the Daytona 24 Hours LMP2 class in IMSA, that’s for modern racing. And then if we go for historic racing it’ll be winning outright in Spa – more luck than judgement but I’ve always enjoyed racing in the rain. I was very, very comfortable in the Ensign, and I think that showed I was just able to have fun. Although we were obviously going very quickly that was just one of the most fun drives I’ve ever had. When you get out of the car and your just all smile, that was one of those.”

#### **YOUR WORST DAY?**

“Err, it’s been a couple! So with the LMP2 car, it’ll be the Watkins Glen Six Hours in 2021. We were in contention for the win and we had an ECU failure in sight of the finish. And the other worst one would be fuel pump failure at the Silverstone Classic in 2019 after having the Ensign out on pole for the Sunday race. Yeah...”

#### **THE BEST CAR YOU EVER DROVE?**

“Honestly it’s probably the current LMP2. It’s so good, it does everything you want it to do, when you want it to do it. It’s just lovely. I’m not going to say it’s the perfect race car, but it’s about as close as you can get to the perfect race car. And if I had to choose a historic car, it would be Steve Hartley’s McLaren MP4-1. It’s just brilliant and to me so far ahead of the other F1s of that period. That thing is next level. I was fortunate enough to drive it in Donington on a test day when we were there with Steve. Just an absolutely stunning car to drive.”

#### **AND THE WORST?**

“I’m not sure there’s such a thing as a worst car. Any time I get to drive any of the historic stuff or anything fun, it’s a privilege to be able to drive any of the cars I get to drive. Or any of the cars which I now own. So, I actually enjoy the challenge of driving a bad car and then working on it to make it good. But if I had to choose a worst car, it would be anything front-wheel drive. I’m sure all the Mini racers are going to be up in arms about that comment but if anybody wants to let me drive their Mini so that they can prove me wrong, I will happily give it a go!”



**“JUST THE LEVEL OF COMMITMENT TO GET A LAP TIME OUT OF A CAR AROUND THRUXTON AND BEING FULLY COMMITTED — I REALLY ENJOY THE CHALLENGE OF IT.”**

#### **YOUR FAVOURITE CIRCUIT?**

“That’s easy. It’s either Spa or Thruxton. Yeah, I love Thruxton! Just the level of commitment to get a lap time out of a car around Thruxton and being fully committed – I really enjoy the challenge of it. It’s so fast! Although I did recently go to Dijon and that’s a beautiful track as well. But if you made me pick one, it’s Spa or Thruxton.”

#### **WHY DOESN’T MASTERS GO TO...?**

“Dijon! Absolutely Dijon. There’s so much more elevation than you get to see on a video or in the simulator, it’s fast, it’s flowing, the curves are beautiful to use. It has a real mix of everything. And not only that, it’s a beautiful area, very pretty, with fantastic restaurants. It just kind of ticks all the boxes of where you would want to go racing. So Ron, if you read this...”

#### **THE RIVAL YOU FEAR OR RESPECT THE MOST?**

“Martin Stretton. I have massive respect for Martin. From when I worked for him as a 15-year-old to now, that’s still the kind of guy that if I was battling with him I would need to be fully on my A-game. Even though he’s an old man these days...”

#### **YOUR BEST MATE IN THE PADDOCK?**

“Probably James Hagan. Because he’s just fun to be around. And I know that if ever there’s anything that we’re struggling with personally I can always call up James. And he will make fun of me for it, but in between making fun of me for it he’ll also give me some pretty solid advice. So yeah, it would be James Hagan. I just never ever want to go drinking with him. Because I can’t keep up, he’s a seasoned professional!”