

## LIFE STORY

# 'I WANT TO BE THE FIRST WOMAN TO WIN FORMULA ONE'

**ALICE POWELL, 26, IS A RACING DRIVER AND LIVES IN OXFORDSHIRE WITH HER FIANCÉ JAMES, 36, A DEPUTY GOLF COURSE MANAGER.**

"Adrenalin pumping, I flew round the go-kart track at breakneck speed. Just nine years old, I was determined to win after I'd overheard a man say to his son that he couldn't be beaten by a girl. As soon as the flag had been waved, I'd put my foot down and left the boy for dust. No one was getting in the way of my dream to make it as a racing driver - even if I was 'just a girl'.

From the age of three I'd be glued to the TV screen if motor racing was on. My grandad Jim, now 78, used to go and watch Formula One and my parents joked that if I looked hard enough I might see him in the crowd. It didn't take long before I'd forgotten all about spotting Grandad and was instead mesmerised by the racing.

I was a tomboy - much more so than my younger sisters Ellie, now 22, and Grace, 20 - and loved playing tag rugby, football and Scalextric. I made my own racetrack in the garden and would speed round on my bike wearing a red driver's suit and helmet.

By eight I'd started go-kart racing. My dad and grandad used to sling my kart in the back of the car and off we'd go. Thankfully, I only had one crash, when I was 14 and ended up in hospital after a kart landed on me. I'd hurt my neck, but there was no serious damage, and it didn't put me off driving for a second.

After entering the Michelin Ginetta Junior Championship series, I soon progressed from karts to racing in 110mph sports cars, and before long I was winning prizes. When I was 17, I became the first woman and youngest driver ever to win the Formula Renault Race in the UK in a single-seater 2L car at speeds up to 140mph.

That same year I passed my driving test after just two lessons, and following my GCSEs and AS levels I left school to focus on racing. I still needed to earn money though, so I joined my dad's building firm, as well as coaching other young drivers, which I still do today.

Although I began to beat the odds as a successful female driver, finding sponsorship was hard. Initially, I'd had help from my grandad and anonymous backers, but money ran out in 2015. Racing has been the sport of privileged billionaires for years and with a single season in a race car costing over £600,000, I discovered it was impossible for women to get backing. Despite writing hundreds of letters to companies and F1 team bosses, I was told that they knew I was good but they weren't prepared to sponsor a woman. It made me feel dejected, but determined not to give up.

In March this year, I was at work with my dad, unblocking a urinal in a building we were renovating, when I received a call from a new female-only F3 race



Clockwise from top: on the track; winning her first karting race; with fiancé James; Alice competes in the all-female W Series



**BTW**  
Lella Lombardi is the only woman to score points in F1.

Just 5% of Motorsport UK's competition licence holders are female.

For info on ending gender bias in motor sport, visit [Daretothedifferent.org](http://Daretothedifferent.org).

team called the W Series, which I'd applied to join a few months earlier. Backed by former F1 star David Coulthard and privately funded, its aim is to help put the first female driver on the Formula One podium by creating a six-race series through Europe to give them as much experience as possible and showcase their talents. I couldn't believe it when they said I'd been chosen with 17 other female drivers from across the globe.

Our first race was in Germany in May, where I came second. Then a few weeks later, I earned another place on the podium in Belgium, when I came third. We've now got just three more races before the championship finale in August at Brands Hatch in Kent. With a £1.14million prize fund up for grabs, the heat is really on!

Whatever the outcome, all our drivers are winners as they've become the role models for young girls coming up the ranks. There's also more camaraderie between us than men on the circuit. During a recent race in Italy, another driver collided with me and flipped my car into the air, putting me out of the race. Afterwards, we talked

about it and she apologised - which rarely happens in men's races.

I've been with my fiancé James for five years and he's totally cool about my racing. We don't know if we'll have kids yet, but if we do there's no way being a mum would stop me competing. What is funny is that at home James is usually the one driving our VW Golf because he says I'm way too impatient. I suppose it's the ultimate compliment really. On the track I don't hang around, and that won't change until I step on to an F1 podium." **F**