

EBEL

Hurtwood Park Polo Club
Season 2003



Damon Hill knows a thing or two...

As a former racing driver Damon Hill knows a thing or two about a sport that requires, skill, speed, co-ordination and bravery. That's why the 1996 Formula One world champion has nothing but admiration for anyone who decides to take to the saddle and compete on the polo field.

"The game is unbelievably impressive," claims Hill, who retired from racing after a glittering career. "It's very spectacular to watch, but I think I'd rather do that than play it. I'll leave that to the experts."

"My only real experience of being on a polo pony came when I did a thing for a magazine once. The idea was that I'd get some basic training and understanding of the game. I have to admit I didn't like being so high up. I used to race motorbikes and I compared it a bit to that, but you weren't 12ft. up in the air with them! I loved the acceleration you got from the pony, but the trouble is they don't have brakes. I think it pretty soon sussed me out, and knew that I was a complete rank amateur."

"It's a very competitive game and I had a few goes at trying to hit the ball while travelling at about 40m.p.h. A game like golf can seem impossible because the stick is too long and the ball is too small, but when you try to play polo there's an even longer stick, and you're on the back of a horse. It's a crazy idea but it provides a great sight. I have to admit that I felt safer in a racing car because I knew what I was doing - at least for most of the time."

Hill's skill and ability in a racing car are unquestioned and he is one of the most popular drivers this country has ever produced. His passion for racing first led to him competing on motorbikes, before switching to Formula Ford, Formula Three and then onto Formula One in the early 1990's.

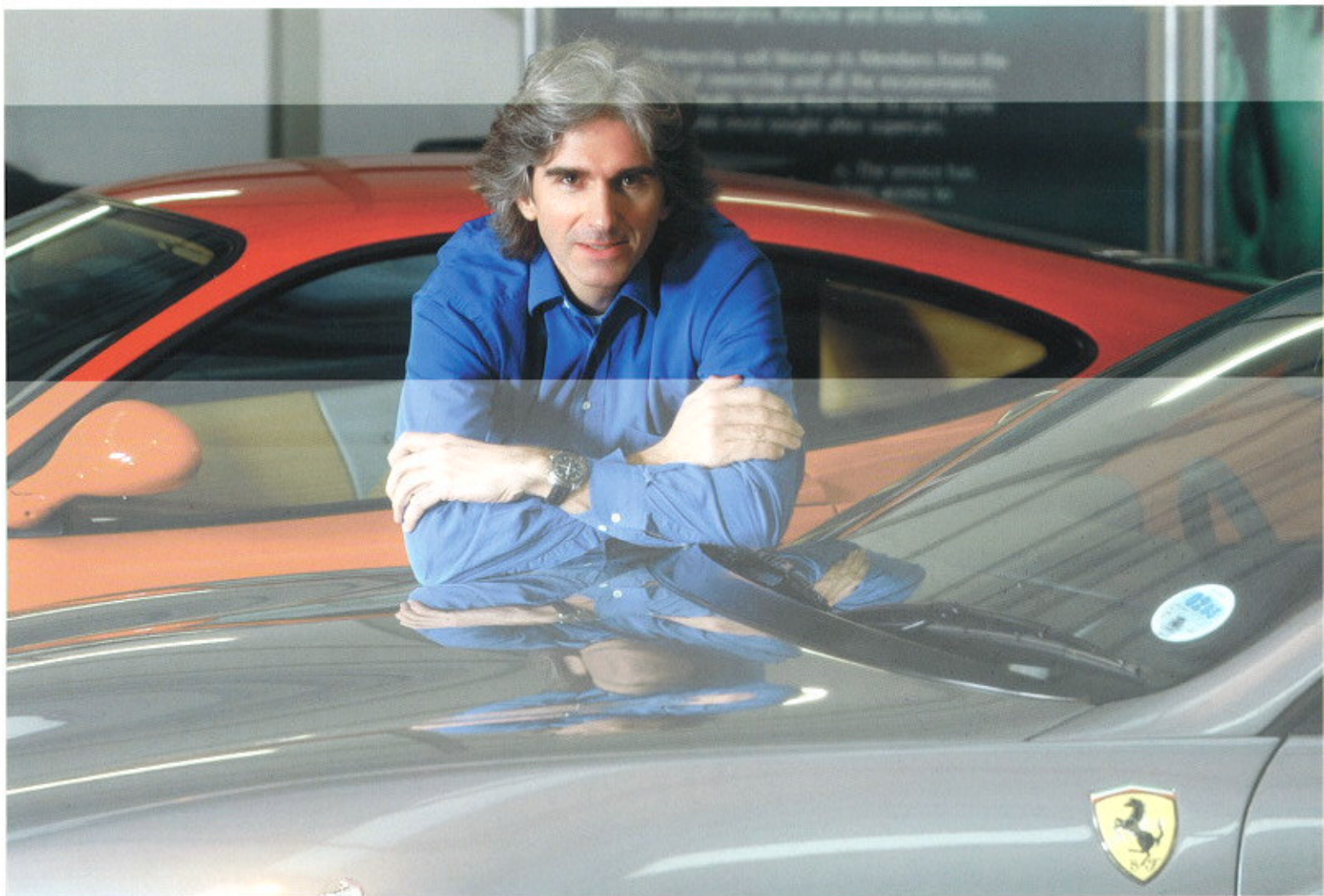
Since retiring as a driver in 1999 Damon has started a new phase in his life and as well as his business interests, he is also now able to devote more time to another great passion. "I've always loved music and started playing guitar when I was a kid," he explains. "I suppose like a lot of other youngsters I wanted to play in a

band, but instead I went off and became a racing driver. I was born in 1960 and loved a lot of stuff from the end of that decade, but when I was about 15-years-old Punk came along, and suddenly it seemed that there were people all over the place forming bands and playing".

"Before Punk I loved bands like the Faces and The Who and in many ways I think a lot of the kids in Punk bands had the same sort of excitement and spirit they had. When I was racing I never actually played in a band but I used to like playing my guitar whenever I could and since I've retired as well as having my band, I've been lucky enough to be invited to play alongside some brilliant musicians. I realise I'm very fortunate in that respect, because I know a lot of people go through their life not getting the same opportunity. But I'm not going to turn down the chance of playing with someone like Mike Rutherford or Kenney Jones, and when I'm up there with them on stage, people are just going to have to put up with my guitar playing I'm afraid!"

It was Mike Rutherford who introduced Damon to Kenney and he has since been a regular visitor to Hurtwood Park. "I got on well with Kenney straight away," says Damon. "He invited me to come down and play in one of the Kenney and The Coconuts gigs, which was the band he put together for some charity concerts. I loved doing it and it was great to play with him earlier this year in his new band, The Jones Gang."

Like all sportsmen who have reached the top in their field, Damon had to come to terms with retirement at a relatively young age. "I think it's a particular problem for sports people," he claims. "But there's a threshold, like it or not, where one day you've got to come to terms with what's happening. I could have carried on but I didn't just want to do it because I enjoy driving; it's too



dangerous, so I stopped. But I think I've coped with it pretty well. There's a lot to be said for normal life and eventually you want to do things like having a drink in the pub and spending time with your children."

Damon's racing days may be behind him, but his love of cars has led to a successful business involving some of the most sought-after vehicles in the world. "It's called P1 and it's basically a club which allows the members to drive some of the greatest super cars in the world," he explains. "We've pretty much got all the top-of-the-range cars around at the moment; Porsche, Ferrari, Lamborghini, Mercedes, Aston Martin and a lot more".

"Many people would love to buy a Ferrari or a sports car, but they can't justify it because they don't have somewhere to keep

it, they don't have time to drive it and the depreciation is too much. But with P1 it makes it more accessible for a lot of people. You join and use the cars when you need them. We also do trips to the Monaco Grand Prix, trackdays and stuff like that. You get 750 or 1,000 points and that works out at about 60 or 70 days driving each year. We want our members to enjoy driving the cars and having the use of them, but the nice thing for them is they don't have the problem of insurance, service or maintenance."

And why is the company called P1? "When I was racing and the pit-board showed P1 it meant I was ahead of the rest," explains Damon. It's clearly a position he intends to maintain away from the track as well. *Kevin Brennan*

* The annual cost of membership for P1 is £10,000 or £12,500 p.a. and there is a one-off payment of £2,500 to join. For more information you can call 01372 374400 or email; info@plinternational.com