

McLaren M9A

SCX 62050 McLaren-Ford Cosworth M9A - Derek Bell, British Grand Prix 1969.

By Holger "Slaasshh" Thor

Back in the late sixties Bruce McLaren was as convinced as Colin Chapman (Lotus) and Jean-Luc Legardère (Matra), that the future of motor sport racing and the winning laurels in Formula One were to be found within four wheel drive technology. So being as much an engineer as a race driver Bruce McLaren during the 1969 season not only developed his team's McLaren-Ford Cosworth M7C, but also revealed the four-wheel-drive M9A version. This development resulted in four such 4WD vehicles appearing for the British Grand Prix at Silverstone. Team Lotus arrived with two Lotus-Ford Cosworth 63 for Graham Hill and John Miles, Jean-Pierre Beltoise with a Matra-Ford Cosworth MS84/1 and the M9A with Derek Bell as driver. A fifth 4WD car was entered by Cosworth driven by Brian Redman, but it did not show up for the race.

Graham Hill was very unhappy with the performance of his Lotus 63 and very upset that there was no Lotus 49B available for him for the race. The end result was, that to please Hill Colin Chapman lent a private entered Lotus 49B from Joakim Bonnier, who then inherited the Lotus 63 from the official Lotus team.

Practise saw John Miles qualifying 14th on the grid, Derek Bell was 15th, Joakim Bonnier 16th and finally Jean-Pierre Beltoise on 17th spot.

Best result of a 4WD in the race was Jean-Pierre Beltoise in his Matra-Ford Cosworth MS84/1 finishing 9th 6 laps down the winner and team mate Jackie Stewart in his conventional 2WD Matra-Ford Cosworth MS80. Joakim Bonnier retired after just 6 laps with engine troubles and John Miles finished 10th driving the last nine laps stocked in third gear. Derek Bell retired after 5 laps, or only 7 minutes of race!

Development of the 4WD technology was draining the teams for money, and these results showed it was a dead end. In the McLaren team it was team manager Teddy Mayer who had to have a serious talk with his chief and team owner, to shut down the project after this single outing of the M9A.

The McLaren-Ford Cosworth M9A never again entered a Formula One race, within or outside the championship!



Derek Bell giving his McLaren-Ford Cosworth M9A #20 its sole race outing in the British Grand Prix on Silverstone July 19th 1969. Qualifying as number 15 on the grid, Bell had to retire on lap 5 with a puncture which lead to a spin followed by suspension problems. Derek Bell gave his Formula One debut at Monza in a Ferrari 312 in 1968. He drove again for Ferrari at the Silverstone International Trophy in 1969, until he got the chance in the M9A at the British Grand Prix. Over the next few years he drove briefly for Surtees, Frank Williams and Techno. In 1970 Derek Bell was runner up in the European Formula Two Championship driving a Brabham BT30 for Tom Wheatcroft. Participating in 16 Formula One races in his career, only 9 of them being championship Grand Prix's, Derek Bell never succeeded in becoming one of the established Formula One stars. Instead Bell build up a reputation as one of the finest sports car racers in the world. He won two world sports car titles, five victories in the 24hrs of Le Mans and three in the 24hrs of Daytona. Derek Bell now lives in the US of America and does commentary work on Formula One races.



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