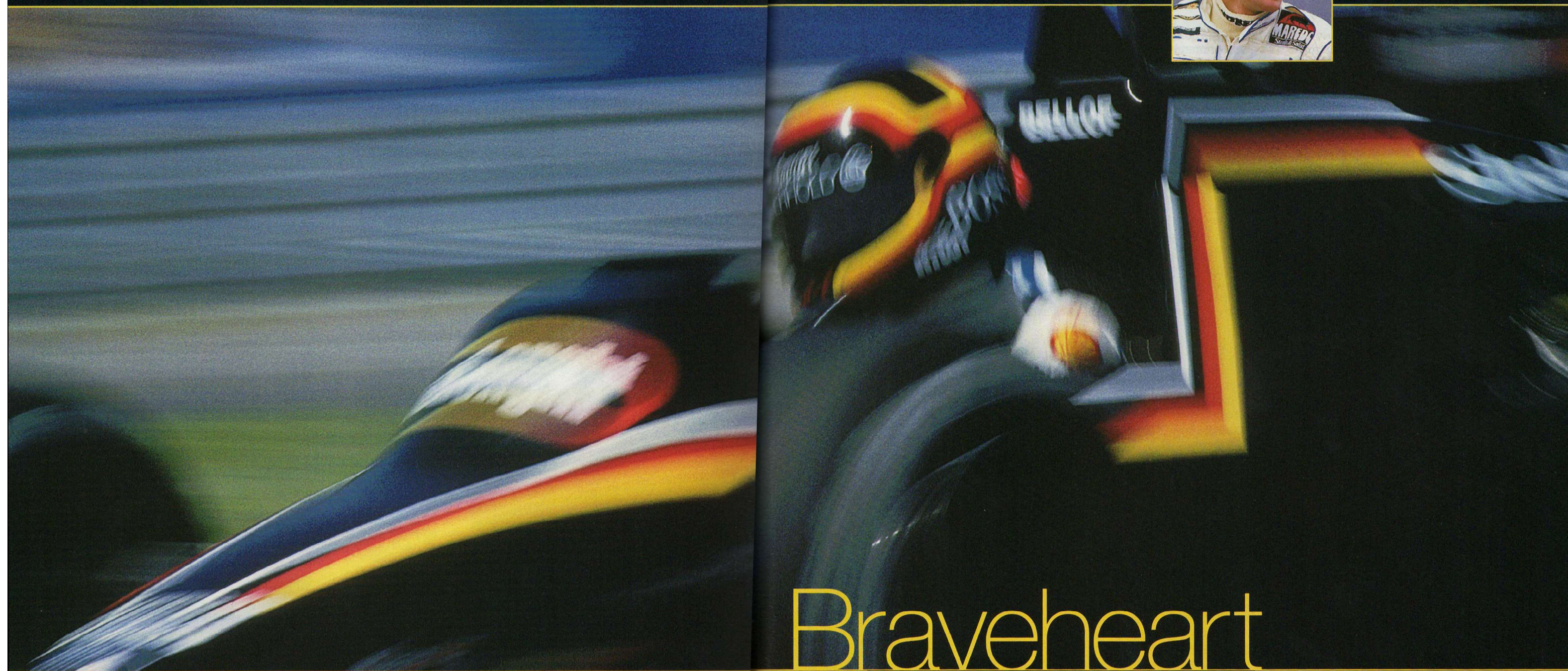


Stefan Bellof was fearless in a racing car and was en route to becoming one of the all-time greats. But in Spa 1985, the gutsy youngster's career was cut short. Martin Brundle, team-mate at Tyrrell, talks about the German



Braveheart

Anyone who knew Stefan Bellof would remember his laugh. It was double the decibels of anyone else I've ever heard, but always so powerful, genuine and heartfelt. He was into having a seriously good time. Not in a boozy, out-of-hand way, but he was always up for a laugh. One thing for sure; if you went into a restaurant, you'd know if Stefan was around.

The first time I really spoke to him was at Paul Ricard in France. It was 1984, we'd both signed for Tyrrell and were testing the new car, the 012. Although we had met once before, I didn't really know him at all.

On the track, he was very aggressive with the car. He certainly wasn't a smooth driver in the same mould as Alain Prost, but one thing was obvious ►

to me right from the start – he was a blindingly fast driver.

Our relationship was definitely a bit cool to begin with. After all, we were both young guys about to start our Formula 1 careers – I was 25, Stefan was 27 – and both of us were a bit stand-offish. You know the way it is, up-front politeness but guarded behind the scenes. Lots of cross glances which said, 'Where's he coming from? How am I going to get one over on him?'

Of course, going into that season we were in a difficult situation. The turbo engines were coming on strong but we had a normally-aspirated Cosworth V8. Mind you, we could snap at the ankles of the big boys at certain tracks on certain days and we lapped that up. At Monaco in particular, Stefan was awesome.

It had been dry all through qualifying. Unfortunately, I tipped my car into the barrier on Saturday, destroying it, and I didn't make the race. Stefan just made it on to the back of the grid, but was almost four seconds off Prost's pole time.

Sunday was different. It was one of those dismal days they have lots of in Monaco but never mention in the brochures, and it poured with rain. They say normally-aspirated cars are more driveable than the turbos when it's wet, but we must have been more than 200bhp adrift of the competition. If you had that situation now, you'd just laugh.

You've really got to attack a street circuit, while never letting the car get more than a couple of centimetres off-line. Stefan was always particularly good on them, which tells you a lot about his natural skill and bravery. Despite the power disadvantage he had that day, Stefan had a fantastic drive. He was overtaking people into the left-hander before the swimming pool section at Tabac, into Loews hairpin, and he even took René Arnoux on the pavement at Mirabeau. There wasn't enough room but he did it anyway. It was incredible. He seemed to be absolutely fearless.

On lap 32, the conditions got so bad that the chequered flag came out, with Prost still in the lead. By that time, Ayrton Senna's Toleman had caught Prost's McLaren, but Bellof was catching both of them. If the race hadn't been stopped, and most people didn't know why it was, Stefan could have won that day. You can't take anything away from him. It was unquestionably brilliant.

However, a talent like his is often hard to harness. At Zolder we had been running nose to tail when Stefan picked off a turbo car in front, then he picked off someone else with another amazing move. Then another. I was sitting there thinking, 'Come on Martin, get on with it, he's getting away'. So I'd push like

crazy and then all of a sudden he's behind me. He's tried something and it hasn't come off. But that was him. That was his character.

After Monaco, Ken Tyrrell got it into his head that Bellof was going to be quicker than me at Detroit, the next street race. He convinced himself. And although the situation between me and Stefan had relaxed a bit, there was still a bit of tension – mainly because I was faster than he thought. I outqualified and outran him nearly all weekend.

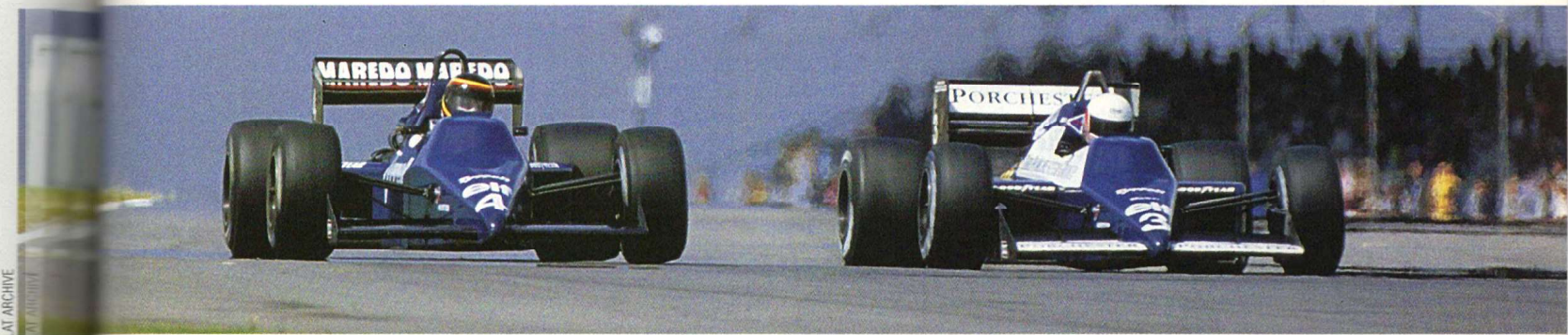
Unfortunately for me, Ken had this system whereby if one of us felt the other was holding him up, we were to put our arm up coming past the pits. Stefan was no fool, so when he was close behind me, he launched his arm out of the cockpit. We were both flat out at that point and he wasn't going anywhere, but I got called in for a pitstop. Bellof hit the wall on the next lap and was out of the race. I finished second and probably would have done better than finish eight-tenths behind Piquet if I hadn't stopped.

After that it all got a bit tense. Stefan had a fairly powerful manager, Willy Maurer, and could be fairly political, although not in a malicious way or a way you could complain about. That's just how it is in this sport and you're never going to change that.

In 1985, relations were further strained by a bizarre situation within the team. We started out with a Cosworth-powered car, then Ken did a deal for a Renault turbo engine but it was only for one car per race. It was very well organised mind you. I had the turbo for the British Grand Prix and he had it for his home race in Germany. The difference between the two cars was incredible. It was like swapping between a Morris Minor and an E-type. I was really looking forward to the race at Silverstone but then the wretched thing wouldn't fire up on the grid. I had to start right at the back alongside Stefan in the Morris Minor. I was really fed up, but he thought it was funny.

Our rivalry continued into sportscar racing. We had this kind of respect, but it was still intense. Stefan had won the world sportscar championship in 1984 with Porsche and in 1985, my first year of sportscars, he switched to Walter Brun's team, again driving Porsches.

Ken wanted Bellof to forget sportscars and concentrate on F1, but Stefan felt that it was important for his career. Besides, he was always very special in a sportscar, there's no doubt about it. He had that same bravado that he showed in F1. Once he flipped the Porsche at Pflanzgarten on the old Nürburgring. Legend has it that the team warned him not to go flat over there because air was



Top left: Brundle and Bellof. Top right: the battling Tyrrells at Silverstone '85 when Brundle should have had the turbo advantage. Main and inset: the mesmeric intensity of Stefan

Stefan even took René Arnoux on the pavement at Mirabeau. There wasn't enough room but he did it anyway. He was absolutely fearless

getting under the car, but Stefan didn't listen. (He took some Tyrrell mechanics and Goodyear people around the 'Ring in road cars and when they came back, the car was wreathed in clouds of clutch, brake and tyre smoke. They said Stefan was in a class of his own.)

Sportscars that year was a bit like May 1994 in Formula 1. At Mosport in Canada, Manfred Winkelhock crashed his Porsche at 130mph. He died from his injuries. Less than four weeks later, Jonathan Palmer had a massive shunt at the double left-hander, Pouhon, on his last lap of Friday practice before the Spa-Francorchamps 1000, which he was lucky to survive. Then on the Sunday at Spa, there was Stefan.

He was doing one of his unbelievably brave moves, trying to go around what was effectively the outside of Eau Rouge to pass Jacky Ickx in the works Porsche; to make a statement basically. You can get away with it a thousand times but come one thousand and one, you don't.

Eau Rouge is a corner for real men in a sportscar. I mean, one of those Porsches hurtling down that hill at 140mph practically pushes the barrier back with just the wind pressure. They were absolutely awesome through there.

Mind you, Stefan was unlucky. Those

956s weren't good cars to crash. The driver's head was very near the roll cage, they were made of aluminium and he hit part of a grandstand that was fairly immovable. I was in the pitlane on the run down to Eau Rouge, waiting to get into my Jaguar for the next stint. I stood there and just watched the whole thing happen in front of me.

As the cars arrived at the bottom of the hill, Bellof's front wheels were just ahead of Ickx's rears. There was nowhere for Ickx to go: a collision was inevitable.

I saw Stefan go head-on into the wall. I didn't know how he was but I heard that he wasn't very well. Before the end of the race, news came that he was dead. That really hit me hard, especially after Winkelhock. My first reaction was that we shouldn't get back in the car, as a mark of respect – I really didn't want to. But I sat and thought about it for half an

hour and knew that, as a racing driver, I had to just get on with it. So I did.

I wouldn't want to call it an accident; it wasn't so much a manoeuvre either. He just ended up going side-by-side into the corner and wouldn't lift. But that was him – Stefan didn't lift.

My wife and I went to his funeral with Ken and Norah Tyrrell. It was horrific. His family and particularly his girlfriend Angelica were totally distraught. They were virtually unaware of what was going on around them, just beside themselves with grief. Everyone was lost as to know what to do. It was just awful.

Perhaps Stefan was just that little bit too brave for his own good. I admired his sheer courage, but always worried about it. Of course, it would still have been talked about today if he'd managed to pass Ickx around the outside of Eau Rouge that day. But he didn't. ❶

Main: Monaco provided the extremes, third in '84 and DNQ in '85. **Right:** Bellof also excelled in sportscars. **Inset:** enjoying the pitwall view with Ken Tyrrell



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