

ALAIN DE CADENET (K54-63)

Born in November 1945 in London. He is an on-air personality for the SPEED Channel. He has hosted many shows, including "Legends of Motorsport", as well as the network's coverage of the Goodwood Festival of Speed.

He made his reputation building and driving his own sports racing cars, taking on the full 'works' factory teams and, at times, even beating them. In 1976 he came third overall at Le Mans, which made his mark – and in 1980, won two rounds of the World Sports Car Championship (Monza 1000k and Silverstone 6-Hours). At that time, this was considered a major achievement in an era of increasing professionalism, when it was unheard of for a self-funded privateer to take-on the 'big boys' and win.



Alain is also one of the most respected and accomplished racers of classic and vintage cars – and, during the course of his driving career, has owned and raced some truly important machines, particular in the marque of Alfa Romeo. As the Host of six productions of the television show "Victory by Design" (which features Classic Marques of automobiles), it's probably safe to say that Alain has driven more different and important racing cars than any other person in history.

In addition to his passion for cars, Alain is also an avid collector of motorcycles and airplanes (including a WW2 Spitfire). For many years he was also a collector and authority on George V stamps, even advising the British Postal Service on their collection.

His daughter is the actress Amanda De Cadenet.

His amazing list of hobbies apparently include : Aviation (flies old biplanes and warbirds), stamp collecting, vintage cameras, wine, skiing, scuba diving, riding, tennis, squash, shooting, motorcycling, reading classic literature, collecting old cars and bikes, working on my lathe and mill, playing chess, collecting vintage films and posters, English landscape painting from the 19th century, good music from classic orchestra or individuals, 16th and 17th century architecture from Italy and France, studying the U.S. Airmail history and the great air races from the 1920's and '30's, cooking , working for SPEED etc etc

He was a presenter on "Goodwood Festival of Speed" on ITV on 3 October 2006.

You can view a couple of video clips of him (my thanks to **James Mehta (S67-75)** for spotting these) :-

- This first one is short but amusing <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=AmR-A-yJknw>
- This second one is an old interview with him <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=SS1Z-vYYoXo&feature=related>

Chris Keeble (S53-59) had a long chat with De Cad (as he seems to be known) in the Paddock at the Goodwood Revival Race meeting in September 2009. They chatted about cars, Brandeston and the College. He said he had hardly been in contact with any OFs and welcomed the chance to explain how Kittermaster had been a guiding figure in his early days. The following day he was out in race 12 (there's no race numbered 13!) in a 1962 Ferrari 250 GTO (the model immortalised in the Beach Boys hit single 'Little GTO'), in a one hour 2 driver race – see photo of the car.



Sadly Alain died on 2 July 2022 at the age of 75. Below is an obituary from The Times on 5 July 2022

Alain de Cadenet Obituary – The Times 5 July 2022

Racing driver known as 'the Cad' who once came third at Le Mans and found fame on television shows such as Channel 4's Ride On

Alain de Cadenet claimed to have taken up motor racing because "I thought it would be a good way of attracting gorgeous women". Speaking to the *News of the World* in 1996 he added: "I had a friend who was racing and it impressed me that you could do as well as he did with the women. So we formed a little team and yes, it worked."

He built his own cars, achieving a personal best of third in the Le Mans 24 Hours race in 1976 in his modified version of the Lola T380, one of 15 occasions when he took part in the event. "I'm compelled to keep trying until I win because I believe I can, and in a car built in a London mews," he said before the following year's race, in which he came fifth. While most competitors had multimillion-pound backing from manufacturers such as Porsche or Renault, de Cadenet remained a largely self-funded privateer, with only a few thousand pounds of sponsorship.

He found the racing circuit to be his natural home. "As soon as the flag goes down, the driver's testosterone pumps like a rocket and men set out to prove a sort of Darwinian survival of the fittest," explained the driver who, with dark floppy hair, a lean muscular body and mischievously twinkling eyes, was known to the tabloid press as a ladykiller and to others as simply "the Cad".

De Cadenet's first Le Mans was in 1971, when he came 20th. Over the next few years he flirted with Formula One, but saw how even Frank Williams, the multimillionaire founder of the Williams F1 team, "was having a nightmare keeping going . . . I didn't have his connections, or his determination". Instead, he remained with Le Mans, continuing to adapt his own cars, though he failed to make the start in 1974 after a bruising encounter with a taxi while riding his monkey bike near Paddington station left him with a broken collar bone.

There were other mishaps, such as in Sicily in 1971 when his car hit a brick wall at 170mph. "I came to a halt in front of a Sicilian soldier who fought with the Germans against the Russians in World War Two," he told *Classic Driver* magazine. "He jumped in and pulled me out — he saved my life." The impact was such that his eyes were jammed open, though he remembered little else. "I thought, I'm going upwards. I must be going to Heaven." In fact, he was being airlifted to hospital by helicopter.

In 1980 he won two rounds of the World Sportscar Championship, the Monza 1,000km and the Silverstone six-hours. On that occasion he was proud to have had as his co-driver Desiré Wilson, one of the few women in top-flight motor racing.

De Cadenet's last Le Mans in his own car was in 1981, though he did five more in other vehicles until "I was playing snooker with James Hunt one day, and he said, 'Alain, if you don't give up this Le Mans stuff, it's going to give you up'." Soon afterwards he witnessed Jo Gartner die in a crash during the 1986 race and "said to myself, De Cad, you're only a bloody amateur, what are you doing here?" Shortly afterwards "I took off my helmet, stuffed my gloves and balaclava into it, went back to the caravan and packed up my things. No regrets."

Alain Maxime de Cadenet was born in London in 1945, the son of Maxime-Jacques de Cadenet, a film technician in the French air force, and his English wife Valerie (née Braham), an actress; he claimed that his French ancestors had fought with Charlemagne in the 9th century. He was raised by his maternal grandparents. "I didn't have a particularly happy childhood," he recalled. "I never met my father . . . I think the last contact he had with me was when I was a baby." He learnt that his father had remarried and had two more sons, Patrick and Joel, whom he once met in Paris after they spotted him on television and made contact.



De Cadenet with a home-built car in 1977

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He was educated at Framlingham College, Suffolk, and in his early teens had a motorcycle that "really represented freedom to me . . . you didn't even have to wear a helmet". The first car he drove was his grandmother's Rover 14, which he started learning to drive in a car park, though with little success. "I then went to the British School of Motoring, and they had a thing called a Triumph Herald. That was, really, the first car that I drove with the intention to learn what to do in order to pass a test."

Before long de Cadenet had bought an old MG M-type: "The guy who owned it was an old army type and he said, 'Well my boy, now that you've bought the car, I'm going to show you something very special. Look here.' Down by your right leg was a switch. He said, 'When you've got your girl next to you and it's a bit nippy, you pull this switch here, you see, and the engine stops. Then she's got to give you a cuddle to keep warm.' Remember, it didn't have a roof or anything, this car was all open."

His professional life began in the City, where he intended to become a merchant banker, though it did not last. In something of a handbrake turn for his career he emerged as a "sort of photographer . . . specialising in rock'n'roll bands, album covers and general filth and squalor". While working as a studio photographer for Radio Caroline, the pirate station, he was invited by a friend to the races: "I said, 'Like horse racing?' 'No, no, no don't be silly. Car racing. Come see us, we've got a good event at Brands Hatch.' I had no idea where Brands Hatch was, I'd never been to a motor race in my life. I knew nothing about motor racing then."

By 1967 he was racing there in an AC Ace-Bristol, though, in his version of the story, he had still not passed his test: "There is a lovely old dear in there and she says, 'Well now, where's your licence, love?' I say, 'Oh, well, yes,' I sort of patted myself. She said, 'You've left it at home, haven't you?' I said, 'Well, yes, I have I think.' 'You're just like my boy, he forgets everything too . . . It's all right this time, but make sure you bring it next time'."

He later acquired a Porsche 904, which was also his regular car. Around this time he was living in the same Kensington mews as Douglas Bader, the Second World War flying ace. "If I was working on a race car late at night, he'd bring his dinner guests over to see me," he said. " 'What you need, old chap, is a bloody good war,' he'd say."

In 1970 he married Anna Gerrard, a model, though he blamed his devotion to motor racing for the failure of their marriage. He is survived by their children: Alexander, an artist known as Bruiser on account of his pugilistic tendencies in childhood; and Amanda, a 1990s "wild child" who became a television presenter and entrepreneur. His second marriage, in 2002, was to Alison Larmon, a Californian who worked in property development; they had met a decade earlier at a party on the Italian island of Elba. She also survives him with their son, Aidan, who works in finance, and who introduced his father to the more sedentary sport of fly fishing.

De Cadenet joined the Channel 4 show *Ride On* in 1996 and during the seven-part series drove vintage Cadillac taxis in Turkey and a motorbike lap of honour at the Isle of Man TT. Yet the crowning moment was flying a Second World War Spitfire. "It rates with anything else I've got my hands on," he said. On another occasion he was filming a piece to camera about the aircraft's role in the Second World War when a Supermarine Spitfire flew so low over his head that he was almost scalped.

For television he also tried speedboat racing, piloting a light aircraft designed for training Russian forces and test driving an armoured car in Sarajevo, though on that occasion he was arrested by the Bosnian army and had his passport confiscated for filming in a sensitive zone. He also presented *Victory by Design*, a series featuring classic marques that was described in *The New York Times* as "car pornography".

Away from adrenaline sports he was a committed philatelist, a hobby he had started at the age of three. In 1973 his collection of die proofs, plate proofs and colour trials of George V stamps won a gold medal in the Stanley Gibbons' stamp exhibition. He collected Leica cameras, enjoyed photography and until recently was still hosting racetrack promotional events for Credit Suisse and Cartier, the jewellery manufacturer.

De Cadenet once confessed that in his younger days he would test his fast cars on public roads, sometimes at speeds of more than 200mph, though he avoided detection because this was in the days before the widespread deployment of speed cameras. One afternoon he took his son Alexander, then aged 20, on such a run near

Woking, in Surrey, in a McLaren F1, though he later expressed his remorse. "It is inexcusable and I wouldn't recommend people to try it out."

Alain de Cadenet, racing driver and television presenter, was born on November 27, 1945. He died of bile duct cancer on July 1, 2022, aged 76



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