



## TONY BROOKS

THE DRIVER WITH STYLE  
BY ARNAUD BLANFUNEY

Image Courtesy: The Klemantaski Collection

One of the first tests at the wheel of a Ferrari for the new recruit of the Scuderia, at the Modena Autodromo.

The fifties were an important decade in motor sports history, and possibly even the most beautiful, although it is never easy to make comparisons. The cars were magnificent and their drivers were real heroes. Among the aces at the wheel, Ascari, Fangio and Moss are regularly written about, but there also was the British driver Tony Brooks, a real artist at the wheel, endowed with a very elegant style, who ran only for pleasure, for the sport, and always with a respect for others. Enzo Ferrari engaged him for the 1959 season, with the highest hopes of success.

Charles Anthony Standish "Tony" Brooks was born in Dukinfield, Cheshire, England on February 25, 1932. Following in the steps of his father, who was a dental surgeon, he was planning to pursue, in his turn, the study of dentistry. But after having ridden some motorbikes, he learned to drive his mother's car. Taking a liking to driving, he committed quite naturally, at 20 years of age, to his first race on a Healey Silverstone during a

National Goodwood Handicap. The experience was pleasing, and he continued to engage in various club motor races until 1954, driving afterward for Frazer Nash.

His status in motorsports, however, was to grow in 1955. His good performances allowed him to be noticed by the famous team manager John Wyer, who engaged him for sports car races at the wheel of Aston Martins. He was also recruited by Connaught in Formula cars, and competed in his first race in F1 during the Syracuse Grand Prix in 1955, where, to universal surprise, he beat Maserati on their own ground. It had been for thirty one years that an English car and driver had to wait for this victory. In general, while British cars and drivers had been dominated up to now by other nations, Brooks would make a significant contribution to the eventual establishment of Britain as the leading motor racing force in the world.

In spite of a more crowded calendar of races, he still had

the desire and the capacity to pursue his studies as a dentist, for which he attended Mount St. Mary's College and Manchester University, and gained a dental degree (B.D.S. L.D.S) in 1956. He drove for BRM then but that season was going to be marked by his first large accident during his national G.P. Recruited by Vanwall in 1957, he won a magnificent victory shared with Stirling Moss at the British G.P. Brooks was at the top now, and Juan Fangio saw him as a future World Champion. In the Sports category, he obtained victories at the Spa G.P., the Belgium G.P. and at the 1000 km of the Nürburgring. But he had another important accident at Le Mans, from which he was able to learn a great deal. At the end of the season, he was entered, surprisingly, at the Venezuelan G.P. in a Maserati 450 S – a one-off situation at the request of the manufacturer – but the crash of his teammate prevented him from competing in the race.

During the next year, his prize list grew with wins at the

Belgian G.P., followed by the one in Germany – an outstanding victory, with a total control and where he showed his qualities as both a fighter and as a sound tactician – as well as the Italian G.P. Again, it was fascinating to underline the fact that many of these victories constituted a first one for a British driver at the wheel of a British car. Vanwall won the *Coupe des Constructeurs*, where Brooks won three of the team's six Grands Prix. In sports cars, the season ended with a victory in the Tourist Trophy.

On January 12, 1959, Tony Vandervell announced the withdrawal of the Vanwall team, for health reasons, and Brooks thus found himself without a ride. This situation was not evident to him as it was not in his character to propose his services. Moreover, he didn't see a good seat available in a British team in which to defend the Union Jack, so dear to his heart. But such a good driver cannot remain inactive,