

# THE PRICELESS VALUE OF SAFETY

**O**n 15 October 2013, professional racing driver Sean Edwards tragically died at a circuit in eastern Australia. Edwards – who had back-to-back Dubai 24-hour wins and a Nürburgring 24-hour victory to his name, and was on the cusp of claiming the Porsche Supercup championship – was coaching a rookie driver from the passenger seat when the car left the track and careered into a concrete wall. The driver sustained serious injuries, but 26-year-old Edwards lost his life.

Determined to ensure her son's death wasn't in vain, Sean's mother Daphne established the Sean Edwards Foundation in the hope that his death will be a catalyst to improve safety conditions and awareness in all levels of motorsport.

Growing up as the son of former Formula 1 driver Guy Edwards, Sean was naturally attracted to motor racing, while Daphne was also

**RISK IS AN INHERENT PART OF MOTORSPORT – RISK OF MAKING A MISTAKE, RISK OF A MECHANICAL FAILURE, RISK OF HAVING AN ACCIDENT ON TRACK – BUT SEVERAL HIGH PROFILE INCIDENTS HAVE SERVED TO HIGHLIGHT THE FACT THAT RACING DRIVERS ARE ALSO RISKING THEIR LIVES. DAPHNE MCKINLEY, WHO LOST HER SON IN AN ON-TRACK ACCIDENT IN 2013, IS CARRYING THE TORCH IN THE BATTLE TO MAKE MOTORSPORT SAFER AT ALL LEVELS.**

heavily involved in the sport. The associated dangers were plainly apparent, though, and the deaths of Jo Gartner in the 1986 24 Hours of Le Mans and Ayrton Senna at the 1994 San Marino Grand Prix provided unwelcome reminders of the risks drivers face on track.

"I suppose at the back of my mind I was always asking 'why?'" Daphne explains. "Why are there so many deaths and why are we not progressing? When Ayrton Senna was killed we were very close friends with Sid Watkins (former Formula 1 Safety and Medical Head) and I'll never forget we had

dinner in London and Sid sat there shaking his head and said: 'This has to stop – I can't sit back and let this continue'. And of course, he really championed that whole change in F1 for 20 years. Where I'm coming from, that's fantastic for Formula 1, but the majority of motorsport is outside of F1."

The objective of the Sean Edwards Foundation is to minimise the risks outside of drivers' control by targeting six key areas: promoting critical issue awareness; creating safety education programmes; providing professional mentorship opportunities; advocating for



The son of former Formula 1 driver Guy Edwards, Sean was keen to help others improve on track by offering tuition to novice drivers.

needed changes or regulations; implementing standardised safety assessment tools; and lobbying stakeholders to create mutually beneficial solutions.

Daphne is all too aware that an overnight fix is not feasible. "We have to change the attitude of the industry to think outside of F1," she says. One of the things the Foundation is keen to see changed are the rules around the use of open face helmets, like the one Sean was wearing when he was killed.

At the inquest into Sean's death, Daphne put forward some recommendations on open face helmets to the coroner in the hope that he will present them to the government. "It's a learning process," she says, "but if I can get the coroner to recommend changes to the government, then we can springboard from that into other countries and start to change on a wider platform."

Daphne and the Foundation have recommended that open face helmets are not used during track days and are lobbying the FIA (Federation Internationale de l'Automobile) on this front, but this addresses just one of many issues. "There are a number of reasons why Sean was killed," she explains, "but the main reason was the car had no brake pads. Secondly, the track was not up to FIA standards and CAMS (Confederation of Australian Motor Sport) standards and there was

not properly raked gravel. And the third thing is if you go straight into a brick wall with tyres and there is only two layers of tyres the sensible thing to do is have a full face helmet, which is 100% covered, not just 30%. That's how we approach it – please don't use an open face helmet. Sean was wearing one as he liked to speak to the person he was instructing, but there is no reason to in my view. The driver is still alive, although his life is probably ruined both emotionally and physically after this, but he had a closed face helmet."

Improving car checks on track days is also an important area of focus for the Foundation. The day before the crash, Sean had told mechanics at the circuit that the brakes were soft and something wasn't quite right. "The mechanic rolled the car into the garage and it was too hot to work on, so he went off and the next day the car went out back on track with nothing done, as the mechanic had been pulled off to work on another car," Daphne explains. "So the boys went out on track and nothing had been done."

To make sure lessons are learned from this, the Foundation is pushing for track day procedures to be altered. "I think we need to go back to simple procedures," Daphne states. "On a track day, look at the history of the car, look at whether the brakes have been checked, and if the oil has been changed, and so on – everything that should make the car safe for the day. Whether it's the driver or the instructor, someone is given that logbook and ticks everything off."

Daphne brought this up at the inquest into Sean's death, but the cost of implementing such a procedure emerged as a potential stumbling block. She tells MSD: "Yes, it's a cost, but there is no quantifi-

able cost to a person's life and the family left behind. If it is a matter of adding on a few pounds to ensure people's safety, it's worth it."

Throughout 2016 and further ahead, the Sean Edwards Foundation will continue to lobby the relevant authorities as it continues its mission to make motorsport safer at all levels. In partnership with key insurance providers, the Foundation is currently developing a framework that will reward drivers, teams and tracks with reduced premiums for implementing industry-leading safety measures.

The Sean Edwards Test, which aims to improve safety among drivers by ensuring they have the necessary understanding of racing procedures, is also gaining traction. "The Sean Edwards Test will go to the USA in 2016, which will be a big thing, as we want to try and bring it into other series," Daphne explains. "It was in Malaysia in 2015 and the Spanish Motorsport Federation is very keen to bring it in." Education and creating opportunities for disadvantaged youths are other areas of focus for the Foundation.

The number one priority, however, is to make motorsport as safe as possible, and to ensure another life is not lost in an avoidable accident on track. To quote the mission statement of the Sean Edwards Foundation: "We want drivers to live to race another day".



Sean Edwards lost his life at a circuit in eastern Australia. Following the tragic accident, it emerged that the track was not up to FIA or CAMS standards.