

Life in the FAST LANE!

Words FOCUS talks to local racing driver Sarah Reader
Images Jeff Bloxham

WARWICKSHIRE-based Sarah Reader's office is a bit different to most and her career takes her all over Europe to compete in the SPEED EuroSeries, racing exotic and powerful cars.



WE caught up with Sarah as she gives more of an insight as to how she got to where she is today, what she does when she's not racing and her ambitions to compete in the Le Mans 24 Hours.

Sarah, how did your passion for motorsport come about?

"I have always been around cars ever since I can remember. When I was growing up, my Dad used to take me to pre-qualifying on the Friday before the *British Grand Prix* every year and I have great memories of the sounds and noise of the cars!"

When did you think that being a race driver was the career for you?

"I don't think there was ever a defining moment where I thought 'that's it, I want to be a race driver—it kind of came naturally. My Dad used to take me to an airfield and let me sit on his lap and steer while he did the pedals until I was tall enough to do both, I loved it'."

So how did you get into racing?

"It was a bit of an unconventional route really. Most racing drivers will say that they started in karting but when I was 14 I joined the 'Under 17 Car Club'. That's where I really got the bug for driving and where I learnt the foundations of skills that I still use on the track today, but also we had to learn things like parallel parking and hill starts!"

"For two weekends a month the courses would be held on airfields and you started at Grade 5 and worked towards Grade 1, and then beyond that was an 'X' which was a distinction. When you got to Grade 1 you could drive cars on your own and I remember asking the other parents if I could drive their BMW M3s and Subaru Imprezas when I must have only been about 15—and surprisingly some of them actually let me!"

"It was great fun but also a helpful and informative learning experience. Past members include the late rallying legend Richard Burns so I certainly wasn't the first person to come through and turn it into a profession".

How old were you when you finally got on the grid and how did your career develop?

"My first race was when I was 17 in the *Caterham Academy* at Cadwell Park. The cars had small engines and road tyres, but you could still get 100mph out of them. It was a great car and environment to learn about car control and at relatively low speeds".

"In 2001 and 2002 I took the next logical step and joined the *Caterham Graduates Club* before competing in the *British and European Caterham Roadsports Championship* in 2003. Over the next five seasons I raced in various *Caterham Championships* in Europe".

How did you get into racing the cars you race today?

"In 2008 I raced in *V de V UK*, where the cars are sports prototypes, like *Le Mans* cars, and finished 4th in the championship. *V de V UK* has since grown and turned into, what is now, the *SPEED EuroSeries* which I'm competing in this season. The calendar takes us to some of the best circuits in Europe, including Spa in Belgium, Imola in Italy and Catalunya in Spain".

What are your most memorable achievements to date?

"It would have to be finishing 3rd in the *European V de V race* at Magny-Cours in 2010. It was a 6-hour night

race and the conditions were horrific! It was the worst rain you could ever imagine driving in and you could literally see nothing in places. We were also running a Class B spec car and had qualified well down the order. I was so relieved when I crossed the line but it was a great race!"

"Also, more recently, the *British Women Racing Drivers' Club* awarded me with a Gold Star for the most successful woman of the 2011 season in January and then in March I received the *Overall Club Champions Award*. There was some tough competition so I was so surprised and proud to have won".

How is your season panning out this year?

"We've had some strong results and pace but there have been frustrations along the way. We got 3rd position at the first race of the season at Paul Ricard, France. Unfortunately we had to miss the second race because of a problem with the engine which set us back. Earlier in July we had my home race at Donington Park and came away with two P4's, which is definitely a positive step in the right direction, and I was also awarded the *Sunoco Driver of the Weekend*".

"Next up is the penultimate round of the season at Brno, in the Czech Republic, and hopefully we can make a strong finish to the season by getting on the podium".

What are your long-term career goals and objectives?

"I'm working towards competing in the *Le Mans Series* in the *LMP2* category, which is the next step up from the *SPEED EuroSeries*. My ultimate goal is to race in the *Le Mans 24 Hours*—it's the greatest, most historic and most challenging race in the world, and it would be a dream come true to be a part of it".

What do you do on a day off when you're not racing?

"Believe it or not, I rarely get days off! When I'm not racing I work as a driver coach for manufacturers like Caterham and Jaguar, as well as track day companies like *BookATrack.com*. I really enjoy my job but there's a lot of travelling involved and I'm away from home a lot".

"I think my friends think that my life is one big holiday! Admittedly I'm fortunate enough to have a career doing what I love but, although my racing and work takes me to some amazing places, mainly all I get to see is the airport, hotel and circuit!"

"When I do get a day off though, I usually use the opportunity to catch up with family and friends."

FOCUS wishes Sarah all the best with her career, and fingers crossed we will see her achieving her goal to race in the *Le Mans 24 Hour Race* in the not too distant future—watch this space!