

DAVID SEDGWICK

THE  
**POWER**  
AND THE  
**GLORY**



SENNA, PROST AND F1'S GOLDEN ERA

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## *Prologue*

# Last Tango in Bercy

**B**ERCY, Paris, December 1993. Usually it is the beat of a snare drum or the funky vibes from a bass guitar that raises the roof of the Palais Omnisport de Paris Bercy, aka simply 'Bercy'. Not today. More accustomed to hosting rock 'n' roll concerts, on this day it is the screech of petrol engines bringing down the house.

From rock temple to racing circuit, the go-karts are in town.

Like swarming insects, the little machines buzz around the makeshift track. A surprisingly large crowd watch the karts slide around the corners, dart along the short straights and, whenever the opportunity arises, attempt to slipstream one another. It is fast and furious. An enthusiastic crowd cheer the karters on. Flashbulbs at the ready, even the paparazzi have come out in force. *The paparazzi?*

The world's media are indeed in attendance. But then again, the men steering these little machines are no ordinary karters, this no ordinary kart race. Some of Europe's top professional motor racing talent is on display today. Current Formula 1 drivers Andrea de Cesaris and Johnny Herbert are here, suited and booted, reacquainting themselves with the delights of a sport where just a matter of inches separate pilot's rump from terra firma. Philippe Streiff's pro-celebrity charity karting event is proving to be a huge success.

A sell-out twice over, 12,000 fans are here lured by a most intriguing prospect: Bercy '93 will be the final chapter in a story that began a decade earlier, a story crammed with conflict and drama,

one that has raged across the globe from the plains of South Africa to the skyscrapers of Detroit and back again.

Bercy '93 will be the last encounter between two of motorsport's greats. Within this artificially lit stage, a stark, even gloomy interior, Alain Prost and Ayrton Senna will do battle one final time. Yes, it is really happening. Seven world championships between them and umpteen Grand Prix wins, a couple of Formula 1 giants are going to fight their final battle in go-karts! Imagine Messi and Ronaldo playing their final game of football down the local park. Bercy throngs with anticipation.

Karting is, after all, where it had all begun. Fittingly, it is where it will end too. Like many of their racing counterparts, once upon a time both men had cut their teeth on just these basic devices – a 100cc engine rigged up to four small wheels atop an aluminium frame. Compared to an F1 thoroughbred these machines are crude, but underestimate them at your peril. These things can bite. It is up close and personal, motorsport's equivalent of hand-to-hand combat, exhilarating for spectators and karters alike.

Intriguing idea, turn Bercy into a temporary racetrack, get a few pro karters to attend, maybe a smattering of junior French racing drivers from Formula Renault, and maybe, just maybe a motor racing legend or two ...

'Who's taking part?'

'Grouillard, de Cesaris, Herbert ...' The Bercy organisers are doing their best now to tempt Ayrton Senna to take part. What a coup that would be! Sao Paulo is, however, a long, long way from Paris. Luring the Brazilian away from his holidays will not be easy.

'Prost has also agreed to take part.'

'Prost ...?' The telephone line between Paris and Sao Paulo goes silent. The organisers hold their breath. 'I'll be there. Count me in.'

Closer to five than six foot, with shaggy hair and a bent-out-of-shape nose crying out for the attentions of a plumber, Alain Prost might have sprung directly from the pen of Victor Hugo. 'Alain has the kind of face only a mother could love,' an associate once said. Not true. Cartoonists and caricaturists adore him.

At first glance, the diminutive stature and sinewy physique might lead some to assume that his many victories would naturally be of the

four-legged variety on the fields of Longchamps or Chantilly. Not so. The only horses that interest Prost are those of the engine variety, the more the merrier. And *that* nose? A flyweight boxer perhaps? Wrong again. His natural habitat is in fact neither turf nor boxing ring. Today he is at the go-kart track, yesterday it was the racetracks of the world: Monte Carlo, Monza, Spa-Francorchamps. Prost has conquered them all. Bercy is a final fling.

*Schnellste rund; Giro piu veloce; volta mais rapida.* There was a time back in the mid-80s when the fastest laps of a Grand Prix race seemed to be the sole preserve of just one driver – the same driver who would invariably be found on the top step of the podium come race end, waving to the crowd with what could only be described as composed assurance. Nonchalance, some would call it. Winning came all too easily. Hockenheim, Monza, Estoril ... the same name flashed up on the television screen with monotonous regularity: Alain Prost. All through the 80s, the Frenchman had been right up at the very summit of his chosen profession, the man to beat.

It had been a smooth ascension too. Rivals such as Rosberg and Lauda had either been beaten – ground into submission – or, like those flamboyant Ferrari mavericks, Pironi and Villeneuve, had taken one risk too many and had paid the ultimate price. Not so Prost. The little Frenchman had navigated an astute path through the egos and the carnage of the eighties and ultimately had come out the winner. A consummate poker player, Prost played the long game: ‘I always come out on top – eventually.’ It might have sounded like a boast, but it wasn’t. It was a statement of fact. By the mid-80s the dauphin’s time had come. Formula 1 was the Frenchman’s domain.

Prost enters the arena. The cheering and applause of the capacity crowd builds to a crescendo. If any driver has earned the right to bask it is the French legend. The man himself beams at the fans and takes his place in the centre of the arena alongside Herbert, de Cesaris, Grouillard and co – an F1 guard of honour.

All but one competitor has been announced. An air of excitement descends inside the arena. Bercy prepares to salute the man who has stood toe to toe with the French ace, slugging it out in F1’s version of the heavyweight championship of the world, a battle that has raged for almost a decade.

Ayrton Senna is in town.

The Brazilian superstar enters the arena to a frenzy of flashbulbs. Bercy is electrified. Like a modern-day messiah, while not quite triggering hysteria, his appearance seems to trigger *something*.

For here is one who, to borrow from Shakespeare, 'steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth'. You do not need to be Einstein to realise that this is no ordinary racing driver. Dressed in plain white overalls, clutching his famous yellow helmet, the man himself seems unfazed, serene. Briefly he poses for the press, smiles that curiously crooked half-smile, a smile as enigmatic as any that stole forth from the lips of a Mona Lisa.

Profound, articulate, mystical, Senna is not your average racing driver; anyone can see that. A restless spirit, the Brazilian is a puzzle, as much to himself as to the world at large. At times, he is the most sensitive, humble, caring man you could ever wish to meet. Enigma, paradox, Senna is all these things and more because the man who will happily sign endless autographs for young fans and is more than happy to escort the elderly across the road, is also the same man who can be macho, insular and occasionally even callous. If he had been a baker, his cakes would have been the spongiest, the lightest, the fluffiest; if he had been a builder his walls would have been the straightest, the most precise, the most enduring. Perfection, life's quest.

Like Prost, he is older and wiser now. Unlike the Frenchman, who has always seemed comfortable in his own skin, Senna exudes a restlessness, a distinct impression that his mission on Earth far from nearing completion, has yet to crystallise.

For sure, the 1993 incarnation stands in marked contrast to the young protégé who took F1 by storm in the mid-80s. Back then he was a sinewy, bronzed teen-idol, the original metrosexual fresh from the hedonistic beaches of Brazil. Ten years ago he entered Formula 1 intent on utter domination, driven by a burning determination to go beyond his own limits, to discover a new plane of conscience.

Today he is mellower. At 33 years of age, he is at a stage of his life when he has become aware that perhaps his true purpose in life might start *after* F1.

As the flashlights go berserk and with the crowd's cheers ringing in his ears, Senna takes his place beside his old adversary in the centre



of the Bercy arena. Prost notes his rival's entrance. The reaction tells him what he has long known: France loves Senna. There is a brief moment of recognition between the two men, a perfunctory handshake, little else. No words. They might be perfect strangers meeting here in the middle of the Bercy arena.

Time to renew rivalries one last time.

Bercy proves to be a huge success. The 600-metre track has been configured in such a way to provide maximum excitement and entertainment. There is even a tunnel section *a la* Monaco! Although the event's somewhat convoluted format of individual time trials and team events involves a certain level of concentration on behalf of the spectator, it does mean plenty of on-track action.

Finland's Mikael Santavirta fires in a series of blisteringly quick laps. The young guns are out to prove a point. The young Finn, so sensational on this day, will go on to perform without much distinction in Formula Ford before dropping off the motor racing spectrum entirely. Super quickness in karts has never guaranteed success in single-seaters.

Unperturbed, Prost goes about his business in his usual methodical way: out for a few sighter laps and then back into the pit to make adjustments. Senna, meanwhile, is going for broke. Chalk and cheese. On one occasion he loses it completely. Tearing down one of the mini straights, the Brazilian's kart suddenly snaps out of control, going into a 360-degree spin. Thanks to a heavy landing, the pilot receives a hefty jarring. Shaken, he immediately resumes. Finding the limits can be a bruising business. It was then and it is now.

Amid the chaos of comings and goings from the pit, the old rivals meet all too fleetingly on track. It is a lottery out there. When the old foes do eventually lock horns, a couple of Hollywood legends coming together for their last scene, the others fade into the background.

When the Frenchman exits the pits just metres behind the kart of his old foe, the modest little track transforms into a classic Grand Prix arena: Spa, Monza, Suzuka. Sensing Prost breathing down his neck, the Brazilian stiffens.

Lacking even basic mirrors, Senna cranes his neck this way and that in an effort to catch sight of his French nemesis. In response, Prost jinks left, right. As karters will testify, the element of surprise

is one of their most potent weapons. Will the Frenchman get close enough to make a move?

Bercy holds its breath. The fight is on.

Until, that is, a mechanical problem forces Senna into the pits. The sigh around the arena is palpable. While it lasted, it had been good, very good.

If Bercy has not quite been the head-to-head the public had been hoping for, it has been a lot of fun. The fans have had a great day out. Winning the team event means Prost's career ends on a high. Senna can afford to smile. Not even he would begrudge the Frenchman a few hurrahs in front of his home crowd.

1994 is just around the corner.

Senna is already thinking of the year ahead, a year in which he will finally team up with Frank Williams. A match made in heaven. The future stretches out before him – endless victories and who knows how many more world championships? Two, three, four ... more? Anything seems possible ...

# PART ONE

## *One*

# Déjà vu

**T**HE boy awakes with a start, his heart beating fast. He stares into the darkness. Young Alain's eyes search for something familiar in the darkened room, but before him lies only blackness. Outside all is quiet, nothing stirs. The young boy holds his breath.

In an instant, he jumps up out of bed and, groping his way through the darkness, makes his way out of his bedroom into the hallway. His movements are quick and urgent. The young boy knows he has to get to his grandparents' room, fast. With a foreboding sense of danger overwhelming his tiny frame, he runs down the hallway. Something is wrong, very wrong.

Alain bursts into his grandparents' room.

A few moments later, the Prost household is in uproar. With his bemused father and grandparents looking on, the young boy clings to his grandmother's arms. Between sobs he tells the adults how he had been sure that the old lady had died and how he had woken, desperate to go to her aid.

'You were dreaming,' says Madame Prost soothingly. 'Everything is fine. Look, your grandmother is fine.'

The old woman hugs her grandson, eager to soothe his fears. Eventually the young Prost is persuaded to return to his bed. It has been an upsetting scene, but having seen his grandma with his own eyes, Alain appears to settle down.

The youngster climbs back into his own bed. His mother places a gentle kiss on the young boy's cheek: 'Don't worry, everything is fine. Go to sleep.'

The next night, Alain's grandmother dies.

Years later as a multiple Formula 1 world champion and international sporting superstar, Alain Prost would still rely on what might be termed 'gut' instinct. That is how it is in his part of the world. You read the signs; respect the subtle shifts in tone and shade. You learn to trust your instincts.

When Prost tells you he is going to win tomorrow's Grand Prix, you had better believe it.

Folk who call the Loire department of France home are not prone to idle boasts. Just the opposite. The land of Prost's birth is a byword for modesty. Ancestry can often be traced back through the centuries, to revolt, plague and beyond. Like the river from which the area takes its name, there is a sense of permanence that pervades everything. Roots run deep in these parts, deep enough for a young boy to grieve long and hard over the loss of a beloved grandmother.

A landscape of rustic villages, peppered with medieval churches and chateaux forever crumbling, the Loire district is a place steeped in folklore. Chivalric tales abound, wherein good ultimately prevails over evil, where virtue is its own reward. And winding through this fairy-tale landscape known to the Celts and Gauls, the vast, impregnable river from which the area takes its name. Metropolitan Paris with its fads and fashions is another world altogether.

Located on the eastern fringes of the district, if there is such a thing as typically French then the town of Saint Chamond is as good a place as any upon which to bestow such an epithet. Wander down La Rue de la Republique at the close of day and you might spy le boulanger and le boucher deep in conversation over a glass of Beaujolais and a plate of offal (they have a fondness for pigs in these parts – nothing – absolutely *nothing* goes to waste). Outsiders are treated if not with suspicion then with a good measure of circumspection. Sons follow fathers into honourable trades. Your word is your bond, your neighbour a friend for life. It has been this way for centuries.

Once in a while something happens around these parts, but it is by no means guaranteed.

However, in 1955, something does happen, of sorts.

Marie-Rose Prost and Andre Prost have a son, their second – one who will go on to leave his own indelible mark upon the sporting world. Not that this fact necessarily impresses the inhabitants of the Loire unduly. Even today, the name of ‘Alain Prost’ will bring but the merest flicker of recognition, a nod of the head perhaps, little more. It takes a lot more than international superstardom to impress the good folk of Saint Chamond. Yes, Prost is one of their own, a local boy who made good, but of far more interest are the issues relating to the refuse collection and local intrigue of the mayoral office. Anyone with ideas above their station will win few friends in these parts.

The birth of master Prost is not the only one of note in this remarkable year. Nineteen-fifty five sees the birth of fellow French luminaries Michel Platini and Nicolas Sarkozy, two men who would go on to make significant contributions within their own chosen spheres. With their short stature, swarthy complexions and thick, dark locks they could have been triplets these three, Alain, Michel and Nicolas. Actress Isabella Adjani, once dubbed the world’s most beautiful woman, also enters the world in 1955. Olivier Chandon, heir to the Moët champagne fortune, is also born in this year. Chandon’s own motor racing ambitions will end in disaster in 1983. Unable to free himself from the cockpit of his Ralt car, the unfortunate young man will drown after flying off track during a race in Florida.

On a June afternoon that same year 82 people die when the Mercedes-Benz driven by French veteran Pierre Levegh slices through the densely populated grandstands after becoming airborne during the Le Mans 24-hour race.

Quite a year for the French then, 1955, one way or another.

Notwithstanding Armenian heritage on the maternal side of the family, Alain and older brother Nicolas are born into a family of solidly French virtues: honesty, sincerity and politeness are the watchwords chez Prost. Madame Prost belongs to that class of French matriarchs in whom pragmatism oft outflanks tenderness. Monsieur Prost, meanwhile, works long hours in his carpentry workshop, one of thousands of similar small businesses helping to rebuild a country that is, some ten years after the devastation of the Second World War, still engaged in rebuilding its ravished infrastructure.

Pragmatism and artisanship underpinned by tradition, all the hallmarks of a classic bourgeoisie upbringing. The family is moving up in the world. Set back off a quiet road lined with the ubiquitous array of Citroens and Renaults, maison Prost is a classic French home: unassuming, hospitable, immutable.

Young Alain spends hours in the family workshop amid the lathes and saws. Fascinated, he watches as his father goes about his work, magically transforming raw materials into things of beauty. Precise and methodical, Andre Prost is a craftsman. Prost senior and junior are playing out a time-honoured ritual whereby knowledge is transmitted from one generation to the next, one in which tricks of the trade are picked up, techniques perfected, a way of life absorbed into the very soul. This calm, meticulous approach to work will serve Prost well; he will become a craftsman himself one day, only not within the confines of the modest workshop located on Rue Dugas Montbel. Prost junior will become a master craftsman on the racetracks of the world.

When not in the workshop, Alain is invariably found in the nearby park. There is just one thought at this stage of his life: football. Like countless boys before and after, the beautiful game casts its spell on this slightly built French kid.

Soccer, cars and women: Alain will develop a healthy (or depending on point of view, unhealthy) interest in each facet of this holy trinity of masculinity. He will certainly pass each discipline with some distinction ... For now, during the Lycee years (French secondary school) it's football, football, football.

Throughout his childhood and teenage years Alain is (and continues to be) a passionate supporter of 'Les Verts' (The Greens) from the nearby city of Saint-Etienne. The 1960s just happen to be the club's most successful ever period. The teenage Alain cheers his team on as they scoop five French league championships including two league and cup doubles (1968 and 1970).

Naturally, he dreams one day of pulling on the famous emerald green jersey himself. He might do just that. The little kid with the crooked nose is by all accounts a skilful right-sided midfielder, small but agile with it. While Jim Clark and Jackie Stewart are taking the laurels on the Formula 1 circuits, the teenage Prost dreams not of

Grand Prix glory, but of glory in the green shirt of Les Verts and maybe one day of even emulating the exploits of Hervé Revelli, the team's free-scoring centre-forward.

Excitement is sky high for the young kid when he finally manages to run out on to St Etienne's hallowed turf, one of many hopefuls eager to catch the club's eye. He is always in the mix, there or thereabouts. Undeniably gifted, it is just a case of channelling that talent.

What chance motorsport then? Formula 1 around this time is somewhat of a remote, exotic beast. In terms of precious television airtime, F1 is not a sport that can even begin to compete with football. Reports of the latest Grand Prix can be found in the newspapers, but you would have to search long and hard until coming across the standard single paragraph, buried deep within the pages of *Le Monde* or *Le Figaro*. Luckily for Alain and an entire generation of French racing talent all this is about to change.

Thanks largely to a major shift in government policy the 1970s will witness a spectacular resurgence within French motorsport: Matra, Talbot, Renault, Ligier – just some of the companies who will benefit from seemingly unlimited levels of state funding during this decade. France wishes to be at the forefront of technical progress and innovation. It is assumed that such endeavour will naturally push her into a position of pre-eminence not only in international motorsport, but also to the forefront of the automobile industry.

From the 1970s onwards a seemingly endless supply of francs pour into the sport. The investment pays off handsomely. A period of unprecedented French success in motorsport has begun.

It will not be the first nor will it be the last time that Prost finds himself in precisely the right place at the right time. However, we are jumping ahead of ourselves.

On the face of it Prost is set for a fairly uneventful life in rural France, perhaps playing football at a semi-professional level in between days spent amidst the wood shavings of his father's workshop, evenings perhaps spent at the local bistro, weekends cheering on Les Verts. There are worse lives.

If it had not been for a series of chance events in the summer of 1970, Prost might well have led a life spent in provincial French obscurity.



Sunday, 19 May 1970 is a typically humid afternoon on France's Mediterranean coast. The tiny principality of Monte Carlo is baking. As ever Grand Prix weekend has brought out the great and the good. Hollywood superstar Kirk Douglas is just one of thousands of spectators witnessing a nail-biting finale to the Grand Prix.

The race is entering its final lap and the car out in front is clearly on its last legs. Worse still, the red and gold Lotus is fast closing in. Can the leader make it to the chequered flag? The 1970 Monaco Grand Prix has the fans on the edge of their seats. Out front, veteran Jack Brabham has driven the kind of race that belies his 44 years, leading over 60 laps with all his old style. Coming up quickly on his tail though is the hottest property in F1 racing, Austria's Jochen Rindt. Brabham grits his teeth. Only a few hundred metres stands between the Australian and victory in the Monaco Grand Prix ...

Somewhere amongst the cheering crowds, packed into every nook and cranny of Monte Carlo's harbour and streets, a father and his two teenage sons watch spellbound. Andre, Alain and Nicolas Prost hold their breath as Black Jack is finally caught and passed by the flying Austrian within sight of the finishing line.

The principality erupts as Rindt swoops across the line to win the Monaco Grand Prix. Brabham, meanwhile, hobbles across the line in a fine second place. Rapturous applause greets the Australian. Leaping out of his cockpit, the old timer removes his helmet and beams at the fans, justly proud to have taught the young guns a thing or two on this most memorable of Riviera days. It has been quite a race.

All the drama of this exotic, high-octane world has literally unfolded just yards from where young Prost, brother Nicolas and father Andre sit.

Later that summer the Prosts are back again in Cannes. The days are long and hot with not much to occupy a couple of adolescent boys under the watchful eye of a mother whose watchword is moderation. Like any teenage boys, Alain and Daniel are looking for adventure. The brothers soon become bored with the golden beaches, boating and endless hours spent soaking up the Mediterranean sun.

The young Prost is a boy who prefers to be playing football, running, jumping, testing himself physically any way he can. About

to enter his final year at Lycee, he is starting to think seriously of a career as a gym instructor. It is a career that seems particularly well suited to the young man's energetic temperament.

With the French national football team sitting out the fabulous World Cup tournament held in Mexico, interest in the world's premier soccer tournament is that much lower than it might have been.

All told, summer 1970 looks like being an uneventful holiday.

Noting his sons' growing boredom, one day Andre decides to take the brothers for an afternoon at the nearby Siesta funfair. On such whims does history turn. The funfair just happens to have its own go-kart track, a compact little circuit popular with holidaymakers. Father and sons wander around the fairground. Sure enough Alain notices the fairground's go-kart track, noticing also that the kids piloting these nippy little machines seem to be having enormous fun. The brothers watch, intrigued. Perhaps a seed had been sown that hot May afternoon as Jochen Rindt had taken the chequered flag and victory at the Monaco Grand Prix.

Transfixed by what he calls their 'special aura', 15-year old Alain is simply itching to jump into one of these little machines.

Soon enough he is out on track, one of half a dozen kids enjoying a holiday treat. Despite one bandaged arm – the result of falling off the beam in the school gymnasium – Alain holds his own, sliding into corners, bumping wheels and even slipstreaming the other karts as they zip down the tiny straight. It all comes so naturally. To a kid yearning for a direction in life and with it perhaps a passport out of small town France, operating these basic devices has been a revelation, a glimpse of a future as yet unknown. The young boy is elated.

On this sultry Mediterranean afternoon, something has fallen into place, an idea, a notion the young man is unable to fully articulate.

Alain returns to the track many times during the rest of his holiday. Every spare franc courtesy of Mama and Papa Prost, Alain spends the same way: at the karting track.

That day on the Cote d'Azur, the thrill, the exhilaration will linger long after the Prosts have returned home. Something had drawn Alain and his father to the go-kart track that hazy afternoon. What exactly? Fate? Could Alain Prost always have been destined to

be a racing driver? What if Papa Prost had chosen to take his sons to the cinema instead that fateful afternoon? What if? What if?

The youngster certainly has the physical attributes required of a racing driver: short in height, light in weight – ‘compact’ springs readily to mind. You would hardly need to be Mr Universe to be able to pick up a Prost under each arm. In a sport where car designers agonise over extra grams in an effort to decrease the weight of their creations, Alain Prost is a godsend. There is nothing shabby about his reflexes either.

If you wished to create a blueprint of the ideal F1 specimen, you could do worse than use A. Prost as your template.

With no motor racing pedigree in the Prost lineage past or present, and furthermore little or no interest in the sport from the soccer-mad Alain, a career at the very pinnacle of motorsport would have seemed improbable at best. Football possibly. But *Formula 1? Ridicule! Fantaisie!* Nevertheless, a seed has definitely been sown. Those few fleeting laps at the holiday fairground track, chaotic, wild, but above all else fun, have had a profound effect.

From the moment he had lowered himself into that holiday kart, something had clicked into place. Intuition once again?

Although yet indistinct in the young kid’s mind, a path to some other place altogether presents itself: a new and exciting world beckons, an intoxicating brew of hot engine oils, exhaust fumes and smouldering rubber. Add in the adrenaline rush that comes with intense competition, and here is a world in which Alain instinctively feels he belongs.

In karting terms, having passed his 15th birthday Alain is a late starter. By the time some karters reach the same ripe old age, it is not uncommon for them to have ten years or more of experience under their belts. There is much to do and even more to learn. It matters not. Prost already senses his own worth.

As one potential career starts, another one ends. Soccer is over, at least in terms of participation. From now, it is karts and only karts. The aspiring racer saves every penny he can to scrape together the 700 francs (£1,200 in today’s money) he needs to buy a second-hand chassis and engine.

A motor racing career thus begins.

As might be expected, the little kid with the wonky nose is soon making waves. His first official kart race ends in victory. What else? He is soon a leading contender in the local karting scene exhibiting the same steady, inexorable approach that will become a hallmark of the mature Grand Prix racer. When it becomes apparent that his second-hand kart is falling behind the faster karts of his rivals, the solution is obvious: a new kart is required. Motorsport at any level is unique as a sport in that competitors are only as good as the equipment they use and so Alain wisely decides to borrow 1,400 francs to buy a Vacquand chassis, the karting equivalent of a Ferrari. For a lad fresh out of school and with just a hunch to go on, it is quite a gamble. This young fellow knows where he is going alright.

Karting is no longer a means to an end. While having fun might be the primary aim of the other kids, Prost's thoughts are of an entirely different order.

By day, the would-be karter is attending a local college, ostensibly with the aim of obtaining his gym instructor's qualification. By night, he immerses himself in the grime and grease of engines. This way the young man can persuade Madame and Monsieur Prost he is studying for an honourable profession, even if that is no longer the case.

Progress is smooth. By 1974, he has impressed enough people to earn a works ride. Alain is a professional karter! Karting contract firmly tucked into his jeans pocket, he is now able to convince a couple of highly sceptical parents that karting is no longer a hobby. It is now a vocation and most crucially of all – a paid vocation. After much discussion, the Prosts reluctantly agree to allow their son to leave his studies. Alain repays their faith by scooping both French and European karting championships of 1974. The karting salary is further augmented when he secures a dealership to sell karts and spare parts for his area of France.

The young karter is doing well, an upward curve that is starting to have the look and feel of inevitability. Propelled by an all-consuming sense of destiny, nothing it seems can halt his upward spiral – not even conscription into the French military at the end of this auspicious year.