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MAIN OF THE HOUR

In an exclusive interview with *Aficionado*, Formula One driver and IWC Schaffhausen brand ambassador, Lewis Hamilton, talks about the reality of the sport, his watch collection and bond with the number 44.

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“AS A FORMULA ONE DRIVER YOU HAVE TO RESPECT TIME, SO THERE IS A GREAT LINK WITH WATCHES”

The 2014 Formula One season gets into first gear with the Australian Grand Prix this March, and with new rules, radical cars and changes in races, this time around, it finally is anyone's game. Lewis Hamilton greets me with an air of casual confidence and a welcoming smile, and immediately I understand why the world champions him.

Hamilton recently made headlines when he chose the number 44 on his Mercedes W05. It's the same number he shot to fame with in the Champions of the Future series, and one that might lead to a repeat of his 2008 victory. But not many people realise that it all links back to his father.

Hamilton has always said he admired the great Brazilian driver Ayrton Senna, but admits that "my dad was probably my main role model. I was always with him, all the time, and he was the guy that I really looked up to and wanted to be like". And the number 44 is, in a way, a tribute to him.

"I am not really superstitious, but as a kid, my dad always said that [44] is our lucky number. It was the first number I used on my car, and I think that I have started to believe it, because now I do not notice any other numbers. You drive up the road and all of a sudden you see a number 44 on a house, and then 44 on the back of a truck, and then on a book, the first page number that you notice is 44..." Hamilton tells *Aficionada*. "When they told me that the number we are going to have now will be ours for the rest of our career, I knew 100 per cent that it was going to be the number I won my first championship with, and

the number that was significant for me and for my family when we had nothing. It has huge importance to me." The soft-spoken English driver is nothing short of a gentleman and the ideal ambassador for IWC Schaffhausen. The relationship, however, is one he's genuinely passionate about and a natural fit considering his profession. "As a Formula One driver you have to respect time, so there is a great link with watches. Time is an important thing – when you are on the track, you always look at the screen to find out your times, and when you're travelling, you're looking at your watch to make sure you're on time for an event. A watch is part of your life," Hamilton says.

"IWC is such a prestigious brand. They always come out with really beautiful and innovative designs, and the technology and materials they use is very similar to what we have in Formula One. Personally, I am pretty interested in all the insides... I went to the factory and got to see all the hundreds of pieces that got into. I don't think most people realise just how much work goes into making a single watch." Perhaps the same way that people think that there's not much to getting behind the wheel and tearing down a track. Hamilton laughs, and admits that Formula One is indeed very different from other sports, such as tennis or golf, where it's the man's performance that is solely responsible for either success or failure.

"In Formula One, you can train your whole life, work harder than ever and have your mind in the best place, but it's a team effort. If one thing does not work



'I love watches and I am hoping to do special editions in the future,' reveals Formula One driver and IWC Schaffhausen ambassador, Lewis Hamilton

– [say] the wheels aren't proper, or the engine fails, that one mistake will see you lose the championship. There are so many unknowns, and you never know. You really have to be in the right place at the right time. I was lucky enough to get that once; let's hope I get another one," Hamilton adds.

The new Formula One season has already brought with it its share of controversy and surprises, but Hamilton doesn't seem the least bit fazed.

"Last year, I was just starting with Mercedes and trying not to think too much about it, because it was a new team and I did not know how it would go. And I had a great year. This year, I am just trying to enjoy the days. I am enjoying every moment," he adds. "You really just have to keep a clear mind – the clearer my mind is, the easier it is to deal with all the different situations that come up".

When he takes to the grid at Monaco in May, he will be racing on adopted home turf, having recently settled in the city and his off-again on-again girlfriend Nicole Scherzinger said to be considering shifting from London to his luxury home in Monaco to be closer to him.

"I love Monaco and so that [track] is possibly my favourite. But I like street circuits as it is the most demanding and challenging – you have one shot at winning it," he tells *Aficionada*, adding that he also has a soft spot for Abu Dhabi.

"Abu Dhabi is a beautiful Grand Prix. When you go through the list of Grand Prix, there are a few that are really special and that you would want to invite your family and friends to. Without any doubt, the Abu Dhabi track is by far the best

one we have on the calendar, in terms of the surrounding, the layout, the lighting, and everything else," he adds.

It's surprising to find out that Hamilton is a true watch aficionado, admitting that it is one of only two things he never leaves home without (the other being his phone), which obviously lays weight to his ambassadorial role for IWC Schaffhausen. And he isn't the least bit pretentious about it.

"I come from a small town called Stevenage and my first watch was from this really cheap place, and is probably just a piece of plastic," he adds with a laugh. "Now, I have probably about 40 watches and I am probably on my seventh IWC watch, and I am slowly building my collection. I feel kind of naked without a watch on my arm. . ."

His fans no doubt hope Hamilton will enjoy a long future in Formula One, but there's more to the man behind the wheel than he often lets on – he works closely with UNICEF and Save the Children, and because of his love for animals, he hopes to support an organisation that defends animal rights and cruelty in the future as well. And there are no plans for after he retires from the sport.

"I have a lot of things that I want to do, and beyond Formula One, there is so much to do – I just have to make a list. I do now have just one achievement in life", he says. So there are a lot of things that I would like to be involved in," he says convincingly. "I love watches and I am hoping to do special editions in the future." Now, that would be a collector's dream. . . though we can guess No. 44 will be reserved for the boy with drive from Stevenage. ■

