
MOSS, STIRLING, WITH DOUG NYE. *Fangio: A Pirelli Album*. London: Pavilion Books, 1991. Pp. 168. Tables, illustrations. ISBN 1-85145-672-4.

When Juan Manuel Fangio died (on July 17, 1995) after a period of declining health, the prestigious daily *Clarín* referred to him as “the greatest Argentine sportsman of all times,” an unofficial label previously awarded him by, among others, Pedro Valdes in his *Libro de oro del deporte argentino* (1980) and echoed by

the popular sports magazine *El Grafico*. A 1941 tango song, revived as late as the 1980s, had likewise labeled Fangio “the king of the steering wheel” and “the champion of champions.” Former tennis star Guillermo Vilas recalled in 1995 that everyone in his generation “dreamed of being him,” while golfer Roberto De Vincenzo classified Fangio a “born winner” and his personal idol. Recognized author Ernesto Sabato, who shared Fangio’s birthday (June 24, 1911), admired in the deceased race-car driver the courage, tenacity, intuition, and power of observation that made him a great champion and excellent person.

The respected English-language *Buenos Aires Herald* similarly concluded that Fangio “was a master of aggressive driving in the cockpit but a true gentlemen off the track who was adored by friends and rivals alike.” For the same reason, three-time Formula One world champion Niki Lauda predicted that “it will be difficult to beat his record and difficult for a driver to be born with his personality.” Such also were the words of Stirling Moss who, attending Fangio’s funeral in his native city of Balcarce, 400 kilometers northwest of Buenos Aires, declared that Fangio “was a gentleman not of birth, but of being a marvelous person, in everything he did, not just in sport but in everything with everyone.” In the United States, *Sports Illustrated* joined the chorus: “Fangio was the standard by which all Grand Prix drivers measure themselves. Yet he somehow never lost the unassuming sensibilities of the common man.”

Such expressions are consistent with the images one derives from the book tracing Fangio’s superb career that Moss had coauthored four years earlier. The son of a stonemason from a large family of Italian immigrants, Fangio, as a teenage soccer player, received the lifetime nickname “el Chueco” because his slightly bandy legs reminded others of a jockey. While working as a mechanic in a shop he partially owned, he drove in unsanctioned races beginning in 1936, then inaugurated his official career in 1938, winning for the first time in 1940. Many of those early races were across the Argentine flatlands, or into the neighboring Andes, covering enormous distances over dirt roads normally used only by bullock carts. Except for four years during World War II, he raced continuously: open road, dirt track, and Grand Prix, joining the European circuit in 1948. He retired after finishing fourth in the French Grand Prix in 1958. Overall he won 102 of 186 international races he entered, 24 of 51 linked to the Driver World Championship, a competition he captured five times (1951, 1954-1957). Accused by some of being too cooperative with Juan and Evita Peron, he nonetheless avoided persecution after Juan Peron’s fall from power in 1955 and retained both the affection and status of hero among his countrymen due to his driving skills and personal warmth. Juan Manuel Fangio opened the Centro Tecnológico-Cultural and Museo del Automovilismo in Balcarce in 1986, a monument to his achievements and to his contributions to society.

The Moss-Nye volume tells us much about Fangio and is especially rich in detail about his racing accomplishments. The photographs of Fangio, his friends, and vehicles are informative and often aesthetically pleasing. Lacking is detail on his personal life, his business arrangements, his connections with Argentine political and economic elite, and more documented evidence of his popular image.

But the book takes another step toward an understanding of the importance of auto racing in several Latin American countries and of the status of drivers, such as the Argentines Fangio and Oscar Galvez; the Brazilians Ayrton Senna, Emerson Fittipaldi, and Nelson Piquet, and the Colombian Roberto Guerrero.

Over the years several writers have attempted to convey the image and importance of Fangio, but with the possible exception of the biography/autobiography that Fangio coauthored with Roberto Carozzo in 1986 (*Fangio: cuando el hombre es mas que el mito*), they offer less than this volume. And they all reach the same general conclusions: that Fangio was an exceptional talent, a fierce and fearless competitor, a true gentleman, and a national hero who boosted Argentine identity and pride. (When my late wife, a native of Buenos Aires, came to the United States and belatedly began the process of acquiring her first driving permit, she instinctively promised that she would become “another Fangio,” and I didn’t yet know who Fangio was.)

The Sunday following Fangio’s death, Mercedes-Benz, one of the companies for which Fangio had driven in the 1950s, sponsored a full-page ‘homage’ to the late hero in *La Nacion*, a very traditional Buenos Aires newspaper. It shows a sky of gathering black clouds, broken and contrasted by bright sunlight. In small letters the message advises the reader: “Should you happen to hear thunder, don’t think it is going to rain; It’s Fangio testing a car.” That appears to say it all for Fangio’s admiring countrymen.

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