



Viscount John Downe, Viscountess Diana Downe, Richard Williams and Mike Salmon with Project 212 in the mid-1970s

The world's foremost Aston Martin specialist, authority and Group C team manager, and long-time doyen of the Aston historic racing world, renowned for his incredible attention to detail, Richard Stewart Williams has died aged 76 following a short illness.

Born on 10 June 1945 in Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey and brought up in nearby New Malden, Richard left comprehensive school in Long Ditton at 16-years-old to serve an apprenticeship with Aston Martin (he also applied to Thames Ditton-based AC Cars but, fortuitously for the future Aston

world, the latter offered him a place first) at its Feltham factory under the eagle eye and directly for legendary race team manager John Wyer (alongside fellow recruit, future Aston specialist Ian Mason). Having accordingly learnt his trade meticulously, Richard left Feltham 4 years later to work for actor and comedian Peter Sellers, a serial Aston owner, car enthusiast and regular visitor to the factory, looking after both his road and race cars (while living above the garage of Seller's home in neighbouring Elstead). Richard ran the latter under the nascent Peter Sellers Racing Team banner, acting as team manager, race-preparing Lotus 23s, Formula 3 Lotus 35s and Mini Cooper Ss. In 1968, with £1000 from mother Ivy (who managed the accounts) and helped by Sellers recommending his services to other Aston owners, and still only 23-years-old, he set up Richard Stewart Williams Limited (RSW) under railway arches in Coldharbour Lane, Brixton, London.

Applying his expertise to all things Aston, Richard and his company's reputation burgeoned over the next decade and by 1971, 2 years before marrying Carol (much of their courtship involved driving around London and placing business cards on the windscreens of any Astons they spotted), who became co-director and company

secretary (including taking over the accounts). His customers included future AMOC president Viscount John Downe, for whom RSW ran first Project 212 – Carol recalls only too well DP212 being kept in a lock-up garage on Kingston Hill and having to be jump started down the road as she sat on the battery box – and from 1977 Ford GT40 P/1026. This was followed from the early 1980s by the first of RSW's dominant DB4 Lightweights and DBR1/1, each piloted with great success by Mike Salmon, including in the latter outright victory in the 1982 Lloyds & Scottish Historic Car Championship.

The first forays to Le Mans came in 1978 and 1979 running Alan de Cadenet's De Cadenet-Lola LM78-Ford. Which was followed in 1981 by Simon Phillips's Ferrari 513 BB/LM. When in 1982 the Aston-powered, semi-works Nimrod-Aston Martin run by Nimrod Racing Automobiles, enthusiastically backed by Aston marque saviours Victor Gauntlett and Peter Livanos and entered into the inaugural year of Group C in the C1 class of the newly renamed World Endurance Championship (WEC). Lord Downe's private, ultra-reliable Nimrod, NRAC2/004 (purchased in part exchange for the GT40) was run on a shoestring budget by RSW – Richard told me some time later

Richard Stewart Williams

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by Paul Chudecki



Mike Salmon fastens his helmet and mechanic Neil Thompson looks on as Richard makes final checks to DBR1/1 at a 1982 Silverstone test session



Behind the pits in the early hours of Sunday at Le Mans 1989, Carlos Los, after a stint in AMR1/02, is debriefed by Works-Aston Martin team manager, Richard



Richard and Victor, the early stages of Le Mans 1983. Seated behind are Viscountess Downe and Sue Mallock; standing next to Diana, Mike and Jean Salmon

this was smaller than the Rothmans Porsche team's catering budget! Yet, its results alone placed Nimrod-Aston Martin 3rd in the WEC standings behind Porsche and Rondeau, despite the 'works' car's retirement in every race; a feat the Downe car would repeat the following year, this time behind Porsche and Lancia. After the dreadful Le Mans crash that eliminated the two Downe car entries (NRAC2/004 and NRAC2/005, both with 'evolution' bodywork) in 1984 ended Nimrod's future in Europe. Even then Richard remained the unflappable and efficient team manager – from 1985 to 1987 RSW joined forces with Hugh McCaig's Ecurie Ecosse team to run its C285 and C286 Group C2 'junior' class cars, with Ecurie Ecosse winning the C2 WEC title in 1986.

With such an impressive record, it came as little surprise when post-Le Mans 1987 Victor and Peter asked Richard, in conjunction with Ecurie Ecosse and former Downe Nimrod and Ecosse driver Ray Mallock, to develop and run Aston's all-new AMR1, an all-factory inhouse project which came to fruition in 1989 for the now renamed World Sports-Prototype Championship. As a result RSW vacated the larger railway arches it had occupied in Brixton's Padfield Road since 1977, with Aston Martin financially covering RSW's transition to a dormant company (apart from the supply of parts from the Williams's Cobham home). Richard, as both the project's development manager and race manager, and a team of his staff thereafter worked at the newly formed Proteus Technology headquarters in Milton Keynes. Richard thus returned to the Aston factory fold 26 years after starting his apprenticeship – albeit, as he pointed out at the time, at a somewhat increased salary! However, after a best place of 4th in the Brands Hatch 1000 km, and before an improved AMR2 could be realised, recently incumbent majority Aston Martin owner Ford pulled the programme plug, with RSW reopening late in 1989 in the much larger, discretely hidden Protech House in the otherwise residential Copse Road, Cobham.

RSW has continued from where it left off, as has Aston's store in its abilities, including commissioning its AMR1-derived 6.3-litre V8 road engine upgrade in 1990, suspension and engine development of Project 2155 in 1991, build of the four Sanction II DB4GT Zagatos in 1996 and being engineering partners for the DB4GT, DB4GT Zagato and Bond DB5 continuation cars. Combined with his uncompromising attention to detail, instilled in every employee, Richard's long held belief in providing every possible need of Aston owners has ensured RSW's ongoing success; race preparation and development of sympathetic, but always reversible, engine and chassis upgrades for DB six cylinder and



Team manager Richard Williams signals the Downe Nimrod-Aston, NRAC2/004, to leave its pit after a fuel stop at Le Mans 1982



Works-Aston team manager Richard Williams issues instructions during a mid-race stop for AMR1/04 at the 1989 Brands Hatch 1000 km

V8 models running alongside restorations, servicing and selling Astons. Most recently it regularly ran DBR1/1 at Goodwood's Revival with Brian Redman at the wheel, and a N24/GT4 in which Michael Mallock finished runner-up in the 2011 European GT4 Championship; it also prepared a DB5 for two Peking-Paris Rallies. Such remains

RSW's reputation and distinguished – but rarely revealed clientele – that it was charged with converting H.R.H. the Prince of Wales's DB6 Volante to run on bio-fuel (of which Richard was extremely proud), including fettling it on the eve of The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge's wedding day in 2011 – and with the world's eyes watching, Richard confided he couldn't relax for a moment until their drive from

Buckingham Palace to Clarence House was completed without mishap (bar The Duke not disengaging the handbrake!).

Having somewhat reluctantly retired in 2015 from the day-to-day running of the company he moulded for over half a century, celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2018, Richard Williams died on 12 August 2021. Such was his standing that some 300 people attended his funeral on 10 September. Always affable and kindhearted by nature, he leaves Carol and daughters Jaqueline (RSW's account manager), Helen, Elizabeth and Susan. 🕯️



Driver David Leslie takes a relaxing breath while Victor, Richard and Ray Mallock are all delighted with AMR1/04's 4th place at Brands Hatch, 1989