

## Keith Duckworth: Obituary

Cosworth is sorry to record that its founder, Keith Duckworth, died on Monday, 19 December 2005. He was 72 years old. Along with his life-long colleague and friend, Mike Costin, he had set up Cosworth Engineering in 1958, and guided it to world –wide fame in the field of high-performance automotive engineering. It was Keith who personally designed the legendary Cosworth DFV V8 Formula One engine which, with 155 GP victories, is the most successful engine ever to be used in the sport.



David Keith Duckworth was born in Blackburn, Lancashire, on 10 August 1933, into a family with roots in the cotton weaving industry. Having spent eight years at Giggleswick School, he then studied engineering at London's Imperial College where, as he always cheerfully admitted :

‘I just scraped through with a pass. No way was I going to get honours....’

After completing his studies in 1957, and already known as a deep and analytical thinker, he accepted a development post at Lotus to work on their new gearbox, where he met Mike Costin, and forged a life-long friendship with the man who was to become his partner.

After only one year, and determined to work for himself, he moved out of Lotus. Along with Costin, they then set up Cosworth Engineering, which originally had an authorised capital of just £100. Working alone at first (Costin's contract at Lotus could not be broken until 1962), and using borrowed premises in Kensington, he set out on a career defined by a famous assumption that:



‘It must be possible to make an interesting living, messing about with racing cars and engines ....’

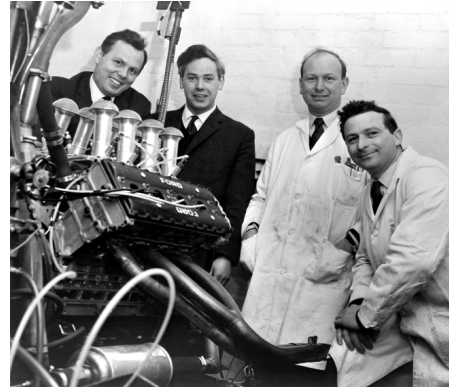
After moving to the Railway Tavern, Friern Barnet, in 1959, and taking on his first staff, Keith developed Cosworth's first Ford-based Formula Junior engine, which soon set new high standards, and won hundreds of races. After that, Cosworth's expansion was swift, which necessitated a move to Edmonton in 1962, and finally to setting up a factory on a green-field site at St James Mill Road, in Northampton, in 1964. Persistently expanded, and modernised, over the years, the Northampton premises has been the company's headquarters ever since.

By this time, Mike Costin had joined him to become the chief development engineer, which allowed Keith to concentrate on the design of a series of fine race-car engines, including the one-litre SCA F2 power unit. Then, in 1965, came the famous-link-up with Ford, which resulted in the birth of two outstanding power units – the four-cylinder FVA F2 engine, and the 3-litre DFV V8 F1 engine. Having spent months, cloistered at his

home, on these projects, Keith perfected the use of the narrow angle/four-valves-per-cylinder/twin-overhead-camshaft cylinder head layout which the rest of the industry made haste to copy.

Keith's dedicated devotion to these projects almost cost him a health breakdown, for he suffered serious eye strain and:

'I deliberately went on a diet, which seemed to consist largely of steak and cabbage, and as a result I lost 40 lb ....'



Although Keith always protested that Cosworth expanded without any encouragement from him, this was due to the brilliance of the new products which poured out of the company in the 1960s and 1970s, and the customer demand which followed. If not actually designed by Keith himself, these were always influenced by his thinking, his discussion of all features, and by his constant attention to detail.

Once described as: 'Multi-talented, super-confident, deep-thinking, forthright, stubborn, often combative, dismissive of fools, gregarious in company, but dangerous in argument ....a one-off in every respect', he was an unforgettable character.

Of Keith, it was often said, affectionately, that one was never wise to set out on a brief discussion or phone conversation, as these were simply not possible. Every problem, and every opportunity, would be argued over in great detail: it was not until he was totally satisfied that any meeting would be brought to a close.



Although Keith was not only the founder, major shareholder and chief engineer of Cosworth, he never truly enjoyed the management of the business itself. From 1980, therefore, he sold his company to United Engineering Industries, though he remained as chairman. It was in the 1980s, therefore, that Cosworth became a major supplier of high-performance road-car engines – to Ford, Mercedes-Benz and General Motors – and when Keith inspired the birth of the turbocharged 120-deg V6 1½-litre Ford F1 engine: this eventually produced 1,000bhp which was, and still is, the most powerful engine ever produced by Cosworth.

Later in the 1980s, the Cosworth business had grown so large that Keith could no longer control its engineering as closely as he would have liked, so in August 1988 (when he was still only 55 years old); he stepped down from the chair in favour of Mike Costin. After Carlton Communications took over UEI in 1989, then laid plans to sell off Cosworth to the Vickers Group, Keith tired of business, handed over his remaining engineering responsibilities, and retired to his hill-top house, close to Northampton.

Having been chairman and chief engineer for so many years, he stayed closely in touch with the company for years after that, regularly attending re-unions and the launch of new

products. He never lost his interest in new engines, and new engineering in general, and could always be relied upon to upset an otherwise tranquil discussion with one incisive comment.

Even during the 1960s, when Keith had little time to relax, he made the most of it, by buying a small helicopter, and learned to fly it himself. Other helicopters followed in later years, and it was not until doctors warned him off after a heart scare that he reluctantly hired a pilot to chauffeur him around the country.

Keith's first marriage, to Ursula, ended in divorce: there were two children, Roger and Patricia. His second marriage, to Gill, came in 1987. Both wives, and his children, survive him. To them, and all his family, everyone at Cosworth sends its deepest sympathy.

- ENDS -