

## Paul Frère

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Paul Frère died in 2008 aged 91 and this is the first posthumous work on one of the world's foremost autojournalists to appear. Still professionally active until his last months, the Belgian was a top flight racing driver in the 1950s and after winning Le Mans at the fourth attempt, retired to concentrate on journalism. Already well known as a race reporter, he became the doyen of motoring writers, his insatiable curiosity about all things automotive and mastery of detail making his copy amongst the most authoritative anywhere. Never a formally trained engineer, he could nonetheless grasp technical concepts and convey them and his ability to do this in English and German as well as his native French gave him international visibility. Author of several works on driving and racing, the way he could communicate exactly how a car was behaving meant that his skills as a consultant were always in demand; long a privileged insider at Porsche, he was also much appreciated in Japan where he struck up enduring friendships. For Mazda and Honda in particular, his assessments helped them build a European flavour into their cars.

An exceptionally modest and unassuming individual, he always appeared surprised at the reverence he inspired and the charismatic Frère always managed to make his interlocutor feel special. Now his life is celebrated in this compilation by Serge Dubois of his early life,



racing career, and his activity as a journalist and adviser. The format of the book is landscape and the work is primarily pictorial. The author has had access to family and personal archives and the result is numerous previously unpublished photographs. The bulk of the text comprises reports of Frère's races, mostly his own accounts turned into the third person; a substantial section is given over to tributes from individuals who knew and worked with him.

Promoted by the Fondation Roi Baudoin, Paul Frère is a celebration of effectively a national hero. Frère's professional and human qualities undoubtedly justify this, but from the knowledgeable enthusiast's point of view, there is little new material here and Frère's autobiography, *My Life Full of Cars*, published in 2000, is much more informative. Areas such as his relationships with Jean Daninos -Frère was closely involved with the abortive Monica, or Ferry Porsche, where he effectively became the company historian, are not explored and the author has not conducted any interviews or seemingly pursued any deeper research.

Paul Frère is a wonderfully illustrated tribute, but the position of Frère biographer remains vacant.

Kieron Fennelly