Book Review – Racing Colours (Motor racing compositions 1908-2009).

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Reviewed by Kieron Fennelly.

Title: Racing Colours (Motor racing compositions 1908-2009).

Author: Simon Owen

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188 pages; hardback

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Musician and artist, Simon Owen's penchant for painting racing cars dates from childhood. Some years ago he noticed how F1 cars, probably at the behest of their commercial sponsors for whom this was prime advertising space, no longer bore racing numbers. Elimination of numbers ended a vital link with the past and in their memory he painted a series of tableaux of famous competition car numbers, the best example of which is probably the 722 of Moss's Mille Miglia-winning Mercedes SLR. Facing each tableau is a quotation from the driver, team manager or an individual otherwise involved at the time. The effect is original and sometimes startling: Opposite the Ferrari GTO No. 12 that Parkes drove at Goodwood in 1963 is a quotation from his fellow engineer and Imp designer Tim Fry:

"Mike had everything I thought I wanted – a smart flat in Modena, an airplane, a Bentley, a Ferrari, a Cooper S and a hot Imp. But he went upstairs, looked wistfully at the children in bed, came down and said, good heavens you have done well, Tim".

On page 140 is the no.12 of Denny Hulme's McLaren M19C in South Africa in 1972, while its driver reflects:

"I'd like the new generation to know who the first McLaren was. Like Enzo Ferrari. People know who Enzo was yet we see McLaren winning so often without Bruce's image anywhere in sight".

Apposite, sometimes pithy, always brilliant, the author has chosen these quotations variously from Motor Sport interviews, biographies and the French magazines, Auto Hebdo and Auto Passion. Racing Colours is the kind of book you pick up casually and find you can't stop reading, so absorbing is it. The preface to the work, written by the author's father, complicit in his son's racing car interest since that first Scalextric set, is especially poignant… Simon Owen died aged 48 just before the book went to print.

VERDICT

A terrific read.