



SCOTT SPEED

Formula One Racer Puts the Brakes on Colitis

“I’m glad I found something I was fast at. Otherwise, I would have spent all my time in school trying to explain why I wasn’t the fastest guy on the track,” says Scott Speed, who is slated to compete in the 2006 Formula One international motor-race competition and whose birth name really *is* “Speed.” There hasn’t been a Formula One driver from the United States since Michael Andretti was at the wheel more than a decade ago. Speed is quick to note this will soon change.



"My dream is to become the Formula One world champion, and to start out in a Formula One champion race is incredible," adds Speed, who begins competing in the open-wheel races in mid-March on Red Bull's new Scuderia Toro Rosso team.

The Big League

Speed's father, who has won national karting competitions, bought him a go-kart when he was ten years old. "I was good at it right from the start," shares Speed, adding, "I gave up junior pee-wee league football and little league baseball to concentrate on racing. I've always been really, really competitive, and I knew this was for me." Speed secured his first national karting title at age 12 when he decided to focus all of his attention on Formula One because, as he puts it, "it's the pinnacle of motor sports."

Formula One fascinated Speed early on. "Ever since I can remember, my father and I would wake up in the middle of the night to watch the Formula One races in Europe and Asia. My whole family is really excited about my competing," says Speed, whose younger brother is an accomplished go-kart racer.

When asked what it's like to cruise along at 220 miles and then make sharp turns and sudden stops, Speed replies: "It's like riding a really intense roller coaster that's completely in your control. You make it stop and go. You have to react to things coming at you at amazing speed while looking out for 20 other people right next to you. What drives me is the adrenaline rush and the feeling I get from winning. I thrive on it."

When stopping a Formula One car, Speed says he experiences over five Gs of force. "That's five times the force of gravity. The speed is awesome, but braking is the real thrill," adds Speed.

For the fun of it, he'll try just about anything once. "I was recently in Vegas where I went on every ride at the Stratosphere. I'm not sure if I would do that again," comments Speed.

However, he quickly acclimated to the motor-racing scene. "I'll never forget the first time I drove a Formula One car. I was intimidated and nervous. There were 15 people working on the car just to get it out of the garage and onto the circuit. It's one of my greatest memories

because I was under tremendous pressure, and that's when I perform my best. It went so well that I was offered a lot of other opportunities from that day on."

The Human Touch

In 2003, Speed headed to England to continue his career. At 20 years old, he felt invincible. However, he soon learned that no one is exempt from life's obstacle course.

Prior to his departure, Speed noticed blood in his stool but didn't give it much thought. About two months later, he broke his hand while testing cars and returned to the United States for treatment. He told the doctor about his bleeding and a colonoscopy revealed that Speed had ulcerative colitis. "I was prescribed prednisone and Asacol, and I didn't think twice about it. I said my good-byes and went back to England."

Although Speed played the tough guy, he was scared. "Hearing this news right before going back to Europe was difficult. I wouldn't have my family to take care of me, and I was going to be alone in a foreign country. That was really frightening."



“Six months later,” says Speed, who was still living in England at the time, “I was on my couch, barely able to leave the house. I had no control over my bowels, and I was severely anemic. I knew I was in big trouble. It was debilitating, and I didn’t know where to turn.” Given his health status, he wasn’t making much headway on the racing scene and he decided to go back home to Manteca, California where his parents could care for him.

Says Speed: “I realized my health was more important than a potential racing career. I spent a lot of time researching my condition because I was getting conflicting information from doctors. I started taking matters into my own hands.”

After three months of treatment in the United States, his condition improved only marginally. However, he was given another chance to race, this time in Austria. It was an offer he couldn’t refuse.

Now Speed was on his way to becoming a superstar, winning races and making a name for himself. He was on a roll. Although his condition was getting progressively worse, his career was his sole focus and he raced through the pain. “I didn’t

want to go home for treatment this time because my career was going so well. I decided to tough it out and ignore my body—a big mistake,” he says.

In the Nick of Time

The summer of 2004 was a turning point. Says Speed: “I had reached a personal low where I was so anemic I was told I needed a blood transfusion, and there was also discussion about taking out my colon.” In a last ditch effort to turn around the situation, a doctor from Vienna prescribed Pentasa®, an oral delayed release 5-ASA preparation — which put an end to Speed’s bleeding. “My symptoms disappeared. It was like a miracle had occurred,” adds Speed, who continues to take Pentasa.

During this time, he also learned the iron pill he was taking for anemia was exacerbating the symptoms of his ulcerative colitis. The problem was resolved with a two-week regimen of iron infusions. A colonoscopy last December revealed that Speed’s ulcerative colitis was in remission. “They didn’t even find any scar tissue,” he says with great relief.

Fortunately, Speed learned an important lesson from this trying

experience. “You have to take your body seriously because it will be with you for the rest of your life. I was so focused on my career that I ignored my own body. I got lucky. The consequences could have been a lot worse.”

He embraces the concept of self-acceptance. “Battling colitis has taught me about humility, and it has also made me a better person. I walked around for over a year wearing a diaper. That’s when I really grasped the importance of having self-respect under all circumstances.”

He is grateful to be able to help others through his Web site at www.scottspeed.com. “I get a great deal of correspondence from people with colitis, and I respond to as many of them as possible. I want to offer my encouragement and support, and I feel fortunate that I can use my fame to help others.”

The number of people who suffer from colitis surprised Speed. “I have a very good friend from my hometown who was diagnosed with colitis way before I was. I never even knew he had it. So many people have this disease.”

Continued on p9

“Never give up hope and never stop seeking solutions.”

It Pays to Persevere

He urges anyone struggling with IBD to hang tough. “Never give up hope and never stop seeking solutions. I searched for answers and kept learning more and more about my condition. I finally found something that worked for me. Everyone is different, but you can’t give up on yourself,” advises Speed.

Colitis is no longer a factor in determining his diet, which consists of balanced high-performance meals including carbohydrates and protein. His training regimen, which he says most closely resembles that of a Tour de France cyclist, is back on schedule. During the off-season, he trains for three hours a day at a facility in Scottsdale, Arizona. Unlike most other athletes, Speed does a lot of neck-strengthening exercises. “It’s important to have a strong neck in this business,” explains Speed, “You’re holding up five times the weight of your head and helmet when you’re cornering.”

Although he currently spends most of his time racing in Austria, he feels most comfortable in the United States where he can kick back and relax. “Being in Europe is much different for me because people recognize me wherever I go. For now, at least, Formula One is not as well known in America as it is in other parts of the world. It’s nice to be in a place where people look at me like they do anyone else.”

Given his celebrity status overseas, he is aware of his every move. “When I say something, I might not just be talking to the person seated across from me. I might potentially be saying it to a worldwide audience.

So far, I haven’t said or done anything bad enough to get me into trouble. I’m sure that’ll happen someday. When it does, I just hope I can get myself out of it,” Speed says with a chuckle. To circumvent potential communication mishaps, he takes media-training classes to learn how to conduct interviews. “You start to realize how much your body language says about you,” adds Speed.

One of the benefits of achieving star status is the chance to mingle with other big names. “Meeting a lot of celebrities over the years has brought new light to how I see the world. I’ve met some really genuine and down-to-earth people. Bono, Edge, and the rest of the guys from the U2 band come to mind. They’re great.”

Although Speed works hard at his craft, he doesn’t underestimate the power of good luck. “I have little lucky charms I take along on races. I had a small stuffed sheep that clipped onto the straw of my water bottle. The sheep did well for me. Unfortunately, it was lost so I have to come up with something else for the new season.”

He also attributes much of his success to the people closest to him. “I have the best family in the world. They’ve supported me through my health problems and in my career. I’m very lucky for that,” adds Speed, who relishes the holiday season when he’s back in California where he likes to surf, golf, and catch up with old friends.

Perseverance remains a key theme in Speed’s life. “As a kid, a lot of people laughed when I said I wanted to be

a Formula One driver. This was an unlikely scenario for a kid who wasn’t born into a big family who could financially support what sounded to some like an unrealistic goal. But if you put your best efforts into your dreams, you can achieve them.” ■

Annette Racond

The author is a freelance writer living in New York City whose work has appeared in numerous publications, including The New York Times, Newsday, Business Week, and Travel & Leisure.

