

DRIVEN

Lewis Hamilton is collecting wins, on and off the track. **By Jackie Cooperman**



Photo by Raven B. Varona.

At just 38 years old, Formula 1 driver Sir Lewis Hamilton has accomplished enough to have lived multiple lives. Knighted by Prince Charles in 2021, Hamilton has won seven world drivers' championship titles (equal to the legendary German driver Michael Schumacher) and has the most wins, pole positions and podium finishes of any racer. But racing is far from the only area in which the multihyphenate excels. Hamilton is also a prominent philanthropist with his Mission 44 organization; an entrepreneur, whose Neat Burger chain of vegan restaurants has just opened its second Manhattan location; the founder of a film production company, Dawn Apollo Films, and a fashion line (a collaboration with Takashi Murakami is in the works); an activist dedicated to fighting racism and expanding opportunities for underserved youth; and part owner of the Denver Broncos.

Just a month ahead of the May 7 Formula 1 Crypto.com Miami Grand Prix 2023, the renaissance man talked to us about his passion for racing, his commitment to activism, what he loves about Miami and how he manages to balance his superhuman schedule.



IT'S VERY EXCITING THAT RACING'S BECOMING MORE POPULAR IN THE U.S. WHAT'S YOUR IMPRESSION OF MIAMI AS A RACING TOWN?

I've loved watching Formula 1 grow in the U.S. This country has held a really special place in my heart since I was a kid spending time on a U.S. Airbase with my mum's partner at the time, watching American films and learning about the culture. And motorsport has obviously been a huge part of my life since I was a kid, so it's been really satisfying to me to see those two worlds grow closer.

Miami is such a cool town. We're only in the second year of racing here, but it's already one of my favorite races on the calendar. The culture and the energy of the people is just incredible.

YOU'RE AN ACCOMPLISHED PHILANTHROPIST, PRODUCER, AND FOOD AND FASHION ENTREPRENEUR. WHAT ARE YOU MOST EXCITED ABOUT IN TERMS OF MIAMI'S CULTURAL SCENE? DO YOU HAVE ANY FAVORITE SPOTS FOR MUSIC, DESIGN, DINING?

Miami is a cultural hot spot. The energy of the city is electric, and the vibrancy of Latin American communities is inspiring; there's always something to do or see. I love running in South Beach, having dinner at Planta Miami and fresh juice from Pura Vida.

CAN YOU TELL ME ALSO ABOUT YOUR CLOTHING LINE +44? WHAT INSPIRED THE LOOKS, AND HOW EXTENSIVE WILL THE LINE BE?

I've always loved fashion and streetwear, and I've worked on collections before, but this is the first time I've been able to create something that's totally my vision. I've loved every element of bringing these collections to life, from the design stages to making sure the fabric is the best quality, and I'm really excited about some of the collaborations I've been able to do as part of the project. I partnered with a hero of mine, Takashi Murakami, before the Japanese Grand Prix, which is something I'd always wanted to make happen, but I just didn't have the right project for so long. There are more collaborations coming up too. +44 is like a blank canvas in that way — it's an opportunity to bring to life my exact vision, but also to partner with some of the coolest creatives working right now.

The response from fans has been incredible, and I still get really excited when I see someone wearing one of the pieces. We're doing our first pop-up store ever [race weekend] at Alchemist in the Miami Design District. It's amazing to bring the brand to the fans.



Photo by Timothy McGurr.



Hamilton and Takashi Murakami; photo by RK (IG: @rkrkrk).

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YOU HAVE FACED A LOT OF BARRIERS IN YOUR CAREER. TELL US HOW YOU STAYED MOTIVATED TO KEEP MOVING FORWARD AND GET TO WHERE YOU ARE TODAY.

Ultimately, the thing that keeps me motivated is never losing that belief in myself and always knowing what I'm capable of achieving. Growing up as a kid in motorsport — and especially as the only working-class Black kid at every race — you learn pretty quickly that not everyone wants you to succeed. My dad always told me to keep my head down and do my talking on the track, and that advice has stuck with me my whole career.

It's interesting ... you think once you've proved yourself that some of the critics might disappear, but you can be at the top of your game and there will still be people calling on you to retire. It's the same whether it's LeBron [James], Serena [Williams] or Tom Brady. The only thing you can do is tune out the noise and focus on your goals.

CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT BOTH THE HAMILTON COMMISSION AND MISSION 44: WHY YOU CREATED THEM, WHAT THEY DO, AND WHAT YOU'RE MOST PROUD OF?

By the time I set up The Hamilton Commission in 2020, I'd been thinking for years about what I needed to do to make my industry more reflective of society. I've been in Formula 1 since 2007, and I always hoped that, by being there as a Black driver, I could be the representation that might inspire more people to think this was an industry for them. But I remember looking at the Formula 1 team photos at the end of the 2019 season and realizing that, actually, 12 years later, that wasn't necessarily the case.

Then the world turned upside down in 2020, with the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement, and I chose not to wait and hope for change any longer. I decided I had to do something myself. I ended up partnering with the Royal Academy of Engineering in the UK to set up The Hamilton Commission, with the goal of exploring how we could improve the representation of Black people in motorsport in the UK. After months of hard work alongside some incredible people, we were able to present a report [of] our findings, alongside recommendations of what we as an industry needed to do to improve. I shared the findings with the wider industry, but I was also so determined that the report resulted in real action; that's why I set up Mission 44. The foundation was inspired by the findings of The Hamilton Commission, but with the much bigger goal of transforming the lives of young people that face disadvantage in education, employment, or broader society, and improving their outcomes.

Photo by Timothy McGurr.





PLEASE TELL ME ALSO ABOUT YOUR RECENTLY LAUNCHED FILM PRODUCTION COMPANY, DAWN APOLLO FILMS. WHAT STORIES ARE YOU MOST EXCITED TO TELL, AND WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR THE COMPANY?

I announced my production company, Dawn Apollo Films, last year and, honestly, it's been a long time coming! I've always been interested in the art of filmmaking, and now I hope through Dawn Apollo that I'm able to create a space for myself and others to share our stories with the world. For me, it's really all about the power of that storytelling. I want to tell stories that the audience can see themselves in.

My ultimate goal for Dawn Apollo Films is to create a platform for underrepresented voices in the industry. I want to provide opportunities for people who may not have had access to the resources or connections needed to break into the film industry, because if we don't give everyone the tools to tell their stories, we lose out on so much creative potential.

YOU ARE THE ULTIMATE MULTIHYPHENATE, WITH HUGE ACCOMPLISHMENTS NOT ONLY IN RACING, BUT ALSO AS AN ACTIVIST, AN ENTREPRENEUR AND EVEN AS A PART OWNER OF THE DENVER BRONCOS. WHAT'S THE SECRET TO ORGANIZING YOUR LIFE AND YOUR COMMITMENTS IN A WAY THAT ALLOWS YOU TO EXCEL IN SO MANY DIFFERENT DISCIPLINES?

Focus and a good routine! I have this need in me to make the most of my time on earth, and I try to take every single opportunity that comes my way — whether that's exploring a new industry or a new country. Racing always comes first, and I look after myself in the way I need to so that I can perform at my best on [the] track, but I find that having projects to focus on away from race week is what keeps me focused mentally.

It's not always easy to manage my time, and I would be lost without my incredible team, but they know I'm not someone who can have a lazy day in front of the TV. I always need to be doing something!

WHAT ARE YOUR PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN LIFE?

Every milestone I've hit in racing has meant a lot to me, but winning my first world championship in 2008 was one of the most significant moments of my life. My dad had been by my side from my early karting days, working multiple jobs to pay for travel and repairs, and sleeping on the sofa so I could follow my dream around Europe. So, to have him with me when I won that title, it was everything. That was his championship too. I also have to talk about the seventh world title, though. If you'd told that kid from a small town in England that one day he would have the same amount of world championships as the great Michael Schumacher, he wouldn't have believed it. I didn't dare to dream that big back then, but life has a way of opening up for you if you push what you think your limits are.

Photo by Sulay Kelly.



MISSION 44



WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR GREATEST OBSTACLES OR CHALLENGES?

There's a reason I'm the first Black driver in Formula 1. Being the first anything is often a lonely path, and I'm lucky I had my dad by my side, but it wasn't easy to get here. Coming through the ranks in motorsport isn't just about performance on the track; it's a constant battle for funding, for sponsors, for opportunities. It's something you'll hear Black people say time and time again, but I often felt I had to be twice as good as my white competitors, to prove myself more to get the same amount of funding. I had some really supportive people who fought for me and got me to where I am today, but it's a challenge I don't want any other kid to face because of their race, gender or anything else. That's why my work to improve diversity and inclusion in the industry is so important to me.

YOU ARE A ROLE MODEL FOR SO MANY, AND YOU ARE SO GENEROUS IN MEETING WITH FANS AND IN SUPPORTING PROGRESSIVE CHARITIES AND CAUSES. WHO ARE YOUR OWN ROLE MODELS?

My dad was and is my role model. He has always done everything he could to make sure I had the best chance of succeeding, even though it wasn't always easy. Then, when it comes to racing, [Ayrton] Senna. Watching him when I was a kid was magical. I wasn't anywhere near old enough to even apply for a driving license before I knew I wanted to be just like him. Being granted an honorary Brazilian citizenship last year, the country he loved so much, was one of the honors of my life.

HOW DO YOU HOPE THE PROFESSION OF RACING WILL EVOLVE IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS?

I really want to see motorsport become more diverse. That's what I'm working to achieve with Mission 44 and with my team. Hopefully, by removing some of those barriers to access, we'll see a more diverse sport that grants opportunities to those who have the most talent, not just the right background.

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