

Wheelspin

All the news you need from the world of cars

A Man for All Seasons

Racer, father, musician:
Jacques Villeneuve is always
up for a challenge **BY PAUL FERRISS**

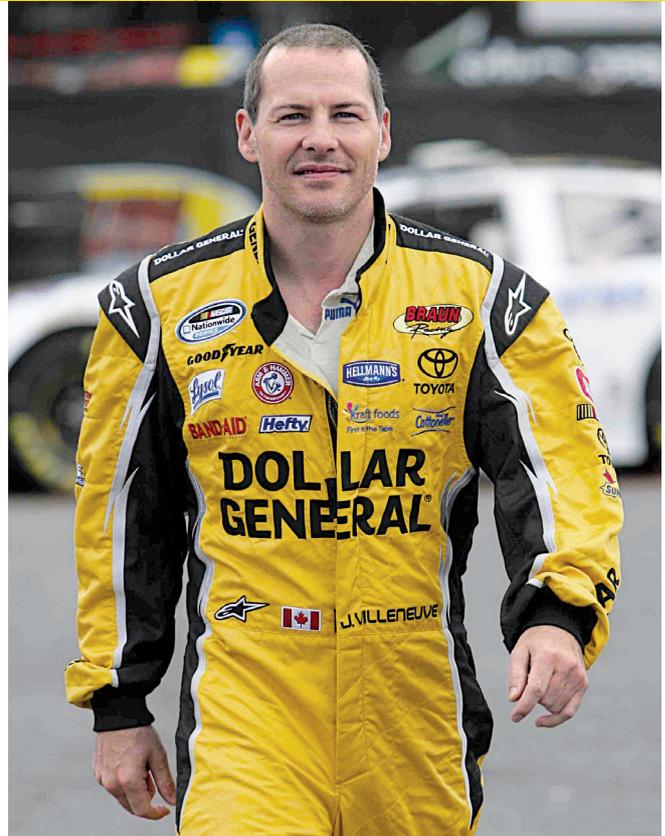
Jacques Villeneuve has never been just a race-car driver. Certainly, there was a time when he was Canada's best-known race-car driver—in 1995 when he became the first Canadian to win the Indianapolis 500 and the CART (now known as IndyCar) championship; and then in 1997 when he famously did battle with his on-track nemesis, Michael Schumacher, and became the first Canadian to win the Formula 1 World Championship.

And clearly his name is synonymous with all things fast. His late father, Gilles, is still revered by racing fans and drivers alike, and his uncle Jacques also carried on the family tradition of speed that began on the snowmobile tracks of Quebec.

But Villeneuve has spent a lot of time on other things—advocating for greater driver safety, building businesses, being a father (to two sons, ages 2 and 3) and playing and recording music. But racing and speed have been the defining elements of his life since he enrolled in the Jim Russell Racing School at Mont-Tremblant in Quebec when he was 15, and that's not about to change anytime soon.

While working on a return to Formula 1—as an owner/driver with Durango Automotive of Italy—the 39-year-old kept his driving abilities sharp by racing in the NASCAR Nationwide Series in the U.S.; by getting behind the wheel of sports cars for endurance races at famed places like Le Mans; and racing V8 Supercars in Australia. “F1 has the fastest cars on the planet, but NASCAR can be more fun,” he says. “It's very exciting—you can pull something out of the bag even if your car is not the best.”

The business side of racing is very different from its competitive side, but Villeneuve has embraced business before. He opened, and later sold, the Newtown restaurant in Montreal and runs the Jacques Villeneuve Academy at the ICAR circuit near Mirabel, Quebec, which teaches karting and high-performance driving. Any full-time involvement with the academy, he says, will need to wait until he retires from racing.



Music has also taken a back seat once again, at least the recording and performing part of it. In 2007, Villeneuve released a CD, “Private Paradise,” a 13-track album of roots rock that includes six songs he wrote. “I grew up with music. My father played, my sister studied music. I’ve always been very passionate about it,” he says. Although he’d like to record again and now dabbles in music when he has spare time, he was frustrated by some critics who dismissed his music because of his famous surname and racing pedigree. “It’s extremely hard to be accepted, but the reaction was more extreme than I had expected,” he says. “Some people will love it, some will hate it because of who you are.”

But Villeneuve also realizes that being who he is has presented him with a wealth of unusual opportunities. One such experience took place late last spring when he had the chance to try out Olympic skeleton with the help of then-future gold medalist Jon Montgomery. Villeneuve still vividly recalls how excited he was. “They didn’t want me to start from the highest [point of the track], but I pushed and pushed and by the end of the day that’s where I started from,” he says. “It’s not really like racing, because you have no brakes. Once you start sliding, that’s it—you’ll reach the bottom one way or another. I was pretty bruised from hitting the sides of the track. My goal was to reach 100 km/h—and I did it.”

What skeleton shares with racing, and why it appeals to

TAKING CONTROL

Race-car drivers Jacques Villeneuve and Michael Schumacher spoke in Montreal at a CAA event on the five vehicle technologies that drivers should have in their cars.

- 1 **ELECTRONIC STABILITY CONTROL (ESC)** can prevent an accident by significantly reducing the risk of your car going into a skid during a sudden emergency manoeuvre. ESC applies automatic braking to certain wheels, and it may temporarily cut engine power to help a driver maintain control.
- 2 **BLIND-SPOT MONITORING** helps you avoid a crash with a vehicle in another lane by continuously screening the blind spots on the sides of your vehicle.

- 3 **LANE SUPPORT SYSTEMS** monitor the position of your vehicle and can warn you when you unintentionally leave your lane or change lanes suddenly.

- 4 **WARNING AND EMERGENCY BRAKING SYSTEMS** detect the danger of your vehicle colliding with the vehicle in front of you. In the event of a potential collision, the systems warn you about the threat, and if you take no action, the technologies activate the brakes and can apply the seatbelt pretension device to avert or mitigate the severity of a collision.

- 5 **SPEED ALERT** can help you avoid speeding by alerting you through an audio or visual warning that you've exceeded the posted speed limit. This technology is widely available in Europe but is not yet available in North America.

Villeneuve, is that it's all about speed within a controlled environment. It's an idea that has carried over to his work with the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) and CAA to urge people to become better drivers. He says he "jumped at the opportunity" to appear in Montreal last summer to speak about the importance of several automotive safety systems (see "Taking Control" above).

"Having kids has made me more aware [of road safety]," he

says adding it's crucial that drivers be aware of the other cars around them on streets and highways and that they learn how to properly handle their vehicles in all conditions. "People forget that they're not alone on the road." **CAA**



For more automotive news and reviews, visit www.caamagazine.ca.

1/2 HORIZONTAL

7" X 4.5"