

Upending the notion that modern drivers have little technical or even artistic interest in their machinery, 1996 World F1 Champion Damon Hill is cited in Richard Williams' *Racers* as commenting: 'It's fascinating, the art of building cars. They're so beautifully made, some of them, and now with the computers, strangely enough, they're even more beautiful because the computer hones it down to the bare bones. The shape is exactly within the tolerances for the stresses it needs to bear, so you don't have any excess material there. That pure minimalist design is lovely.' Refreshing stuff in the era, as the author puts it, of 'corporate sponsorship packages and vertically integrated marketing campaigns'.

Of course today's cars are products of all the F1 designers and teams possessing what Patrick Head has described as the 'same measuring tools' in the form of wind-tunnels and computer interpretation. There is no longer a prospect of designing what individuals might 'think' is the best solution. Today's empirical and digital testing equipment comes up with the same answers – and hence the cars are so similar, at least in outward appearance.

Bob van Niekerk would have been Damon Hill's soul mate in aesthetic terms. But as a man of the old school, when a drawing board like its draughtsman ruled, when intuition and innovation went hand-in-hand and the only byte in the office was at lunch-time, Bob's passing represents the end of an era.

Bob van Niekerk is survived by his wife Laurette, four daughters Janin, Laura, Jaci, and Karen, and granddaughter Loulou.