

Spells of magic

Sir Jackie Stewart's autobiography helped changed the life of Home Office Disability Support (HODS) network National Executive Committee member, Ross Duncan, when he read about their shared struggle with dyslexia. So when the opportunity for Ross to interview Sir Jackie came along it was too good an opportunity to miss.



It was a dream come true: the opportunity to interview my hero, Sir Jackie Stewart, OBE. Sir Jackie's courage and charisma on the track fuelled my enthusiasm for motor sport. Indeed, when I was younger, I even became a race marshal at Scottish motor racing circuits.

But there was another reason why I was so happy to speak with my idol. Ever since I had read 'Winning Is Not Enough', Sir Jackie's autobiography, I realised we shared a common bond. Just like Sir Jackie, I too had faced many years of difficulties because of undiagnosed dyslexia. I knew how it felt to underachieve at school and had faced the same negative reactions of people assuming I was slow-witted because of poor spelling.

When the opportunity arose to interview Sir Jackie, I jumped at the chance. The Scottish former racing driver, nicknamed the 'Flying Scot', competed in Formula One between 1965 and 1973, winning three World Drivers' Championships. His achievements on the racetrack – as a driver, commentator, team owner and racing safety advocate – are phenomenal.

But it is for his achievements off the track that make Sir Jackie my hero. At school, he did not fulfil his academic potential, just like me. Instead, Sir Jackie found a different route to success, one that meant he had to 'think outside the box.'

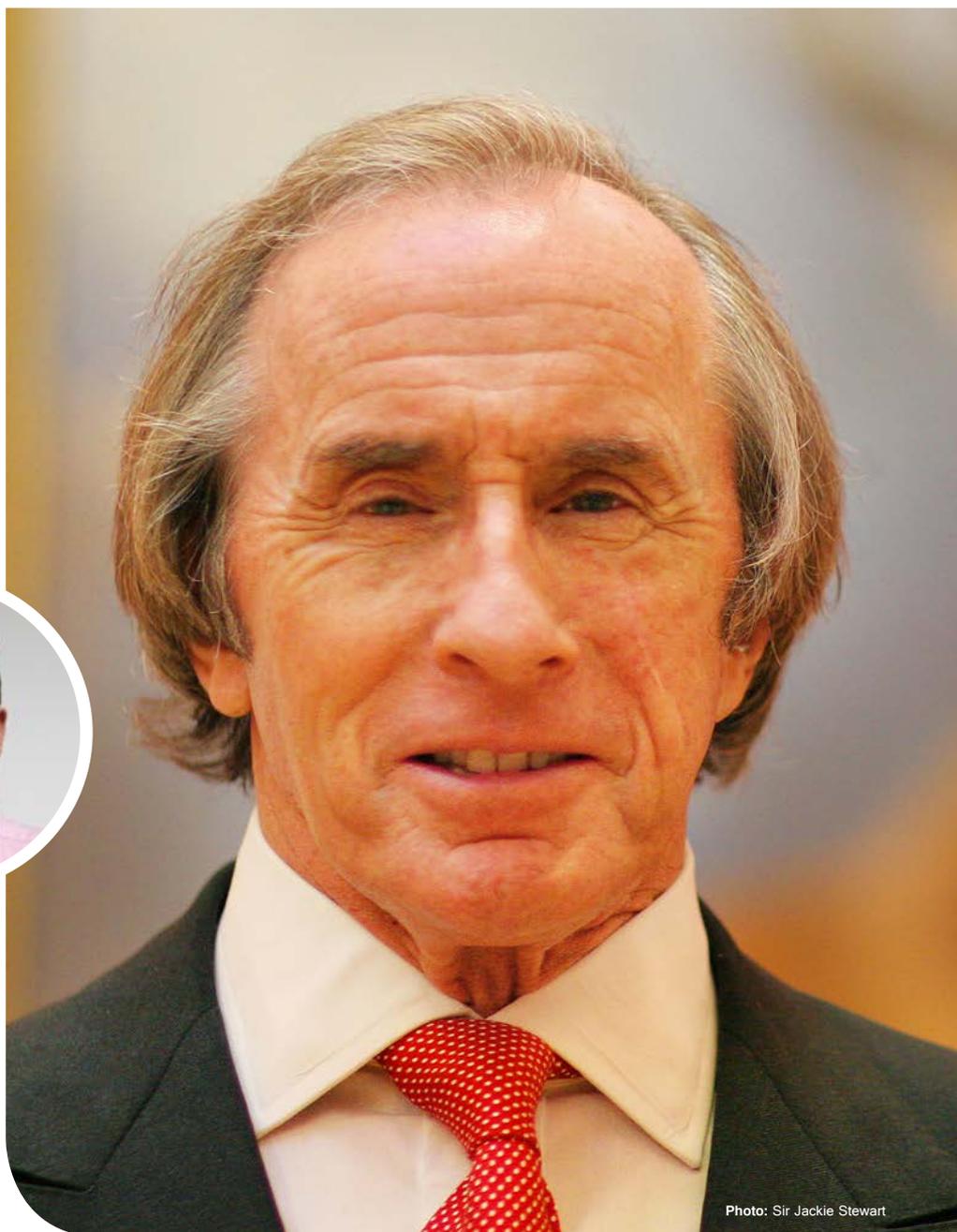


Photo: Sir Jackie Stewart

"All clever people think the same," Sir Jackie says, "but people with dyslexia break the mould and think differently, often more creatively. Having dyslexia has meant that I have had to find other ways of achieving things in my life."

At school the focus and attention is on academics; the area where people with dyslexia can be at their weakest. But while the glittering academic prizes may have eluded him, nobody could accuse Sir Jackie of being an underachiever. He is one of the world's most successful and recognisable faces of Formula One.

Sir Jackie is testament to the fact that dyslexia need not stand in the way of achievement. Many well-known people including Tom Cruise, Steven Spielberg and Keira Knightley now admit to having dyslexia. By being open about dyslexia they are helping to educate and dispel ignorance.

"Having dyslexia has meant that I have had to find other ways of achieving things in my life."

And foremost among these high-profile celebrities is Sir Jackie, who champions the cause whenever he can. He told me: "Typical strengths associated with the condition include, empathy, intuitiveness, problem solving, creativeness and original thinking.

"Take pride in having dyslexia – it is nothing to be ashamed of."

Spelling may not be Sir Jackie's strong point, but his words weave spells of magic to all those affected by dyslexia.

Ross Duncan
Postal Examination, Belfast