

BIOGRAPHY OF JEAN RÉDÉLÉ

BY JEAN-LUC FOURNIER, AUTHOR OF *JEAN RÉDÉLÉ, MONSIEUR ALPINE*

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Great automobile brands are often founded by great men, creating instantaneous associations. Like Lotus and Colin Chapman, Alpine is immediately linked to Jean Rédélé, both of whom are inextricably associated with their automobile creations. Independently from the quality of their cars, this internal strength is undoubtedly one of the components of their success - but also a limitation - of their company.

FROM DIEPPE TO HEC

Jean Rédélé was an astonishing character. Born in Dieppe in 1922, he had other aspirations than to take over the reins of the Renault dealership from his father Emile, a man from the north of France who had proved to be a good enough mechanic to be hired by none other than Louis Renault. For a period of time, Emile was the Billancourt industrial mogul's driver before joining the competition workshop, which led him to Dieppe during the 1907 ACF Grand Prix. After the World War I, he returned to the Northern French seaside town to open a small garage and start a bus company. With the help of his wife Madeleine Prieur's dowry - daughter of the creator of the Compagnie des Fiacles on Avenue Foch in Paris, whom Emile married in 1920 - he opened a more expansive garage at 33 Rue Thiers, which he named "Les Grands Garages de Normandie". A few months later, on 17 May 1922, Madeleine gave birth to their first child, Jean. The couple had two more sons, Pierre and Claude.

Unfortunately, the World War II broke out, and the garage was bombed in 1941. Emile and Madeleine took in their orphaned nephews, Jacques and Roger Prieur. The family now had five boys, with the eldest Jean looking after his brothers and cousins.

After his high school years in Dieppe, Jean Rédélé attended the HEC business school in Paris in November 1945 to undergo a crash course. He graduated in October 1946 with an excellent 16/20 grade for his dissertation on his vision of business and the management of Renault dealerships. He sent his thesis to Pierre Dreyfus. Renault's second in command took note of it and appreciated it so much that he awarded the Renault dealership in Dieppe to Jean Rédélé instead of his father Emile! At twenty-

four years of age, he became the youngest car dealer in France. In addition to the 4 CVs produced in Billancourt, Jean began to develop a business of salvaging and reselling military equipment surpluses, which honed his sales skills and provided a lucrative income. He thereby demonstrated his astounding aptitude for adapting to situations.

GIFTED RACECAR DRIVER

Rather than buying a beautiful American luxury car or an Italian sports car - which he never did - he preferred to race a modest 4 CV, first in the 1950 Monte Carlo Rally and then in the Dieppe Rally, where he won. This performance enabled him to apply for the purchase of a 4 CV 1063 dedicated to competition. Initially only twenty were produced, thirteen of which were for "sportscar dealers". Behind the wheel of this car, he finished first in class in the Dax Rally and the Tour of Belgium, second in the Dieppe Rally, and third in both the Tour de France Automobile and Liège-Rome-Liège in 1951. However, his greatest victory came in the 1952 Milla Miglia, driven by his friend Louis Pons, a Renault dealer in Etampes and future godfather of Marie Rédélé, Jean's eldest daughter and also the future uncle of the late motorcycle champion Patrick Pons. Michelle Rédélé described the relationship between the two as "a silent friendship". That is a fitting description of these introverted personalities who only spoke when necessary and therefore knew how to understand each other without having to spell things out, cultivating elegance and discretion, which was a constant in Jean Rédélé's life and in his relations with his collaborators such as Etienne Desjardins, Jacques Cheinisse and Bernard Pierangeli. It is worth noting that, despite their close relationship, they were never on a first-name basis, preferring to maintain the customary polite tone and distance.

The 1063 was very quick but expensive and rare. Jean Rédélé, therefore, decided to build a more suitable car. "I had the most fun driving my 4 CV through the Alps. I discovered the pleasure of driving on mountain roads". This statement would be decisive when Jean Rédélé chose the name of his car brand.

In 1952, in addition to his fourth place in the (- 750 cc) category in the 24 Hours of Le Mans with the official 4 CV 1063 and associated with Guy Lapchin, Jean Rédélé - who was thirty years old - made two new important decisions. First, with financial help from his friend Louis Pons, he acquired the patents registered by André-Georges Claude, son of Georges Claude, who developed the neon tube, krypton lamps and the industrial liquefaction process marketed under the name of Air Liquide.

The patents of interest to Rédélé and Pons are a five-speed gearbox. Built by the Satecmo company, it completely transformed the 4 CV's handling. Enjoyable on the upshift and efficient on the downshift, it was very fragile for those who mistreated it,

but provided a decisive plus for those who mastered it. Jean Rédélé went so far as to say that "you can change gears without the passengers noticing as if it were an automatic gearbox" (dixit). Jean Vinatier, who drove Renault cars fitted with this gearbox for a long time, remembers its unique handling and says: "It was fantastic but fragile. There wasn't enough room in the original housing because it was designed to accommodate three gears instead of five. The additional components were inevitably under-sized, and since the steel of the time was not as good as today's, it sometimes ended up being quite a handful for the clumsier. It was also more expensive because, in addition to the inevitable discontinuation, it was necessary to face its cost: 1,500 francs and an original gearbox to receive, in return, a "box 5", that is to say approximately a third of the price of a standard new 4CV!"

This patent purchase is a significant illustration of Jean Rédélé's philosophy. Rather than acquiring components that increase the engine's power, such as the cylinder head or camshaft, Jean Rédélé opted for those that enhance handling. This attitude and this type of choice would remain a constant at Alpine.

THE ELEGANT AND EFFICIENT "RENAULT SPECIALES" BY GIOVANNI MICHELOTTI

The other milestone event that year was Jean Rédélé's meeting with Giovanni Michelotti, a young designer born in Turin in 1921, who was trained at the "Stabilimenti Farina" by Giovanni Farina, brother of Batista "Pinin" Farina, before setting up his own design studio in 1949. Jean and Giovanni shared the same taste for elegance and efficiency, so Jean Rédélé commissioned him to design a sports car using the components, platform and mechanics, of the Renault 4 CV, but obviously sleeker and especially lighter. The bodywork was made of aluminium by the Allemanno workshops and the car weighed only 550 kg, i.e., 60 kg less than the small Renault sedan made of steel.

Jean Rédélé married Michelle Escoffier in December 1952 and a fortnight later the couple left for Italy on their honeymoon and returned with a car that contained the DNA of the future Alpine. For the time being, it bore neither this name nor that of Rédélé. It was simply called the "Renault Spéciale", further proof of Jean Rédélé's discretion and his fondness for the Renault brand. He immediately modified it very slightly and entered this Berlinette - that is the definition of this type of bodywork with two doors, two seats and four side windows - in the 4th Rallye de Dieppe. Together, they took a fantastic victory in the general classification at home, ahead of more powerful cars, a feat that was repeated a few weeks later on the Rouen les Essarts circuit, and then at the end of the year on the Lisbon circuit! Jean Rédélé was now recognized both as a driver and as a neo-constructor. He asked Michelotti to design a second car for him to confirm this twofold status, while he devoted 1954 to running

four major events, all of them full of history, aboard the 4 CV 1063. Always accompanied by his friend Louis Pons, they were nearly unbeatable, winning in the Milla Miglia, Coupe des Alpes, the "Critérium des Alpes", "Liège-Rome-Liège" and second in the Tour de France Automobile (category - 750 cm³).

THE PREDICAMENTS OF THE "COACH"

In 1954, his father-in-law, Charles Escoffier, and brother-in-law, Gérard Escoffier, came upon a "coach" designed by Jean Gessalin and produced by his uncles, the Chappes. They were the initiators of "plastic bodywork" (dixit) in France and holders of the "Chappe fabric" process successfully marketed by the Chaumarat company to numerous automotive, nautical and industrial applicators. In this predicament - where the Escoffier's insisted that Jean Rédélé market the Gessalin coach and at the same time, at the insistence of Pierre Lefauchaux, CEO of Renault, Jean Rédélé offered to deliver moulds and tooling for his "Renault Spéciale", to have it produced in the United States as "Le Marquis" - Jean Rédélé demonstrated his ability to seize upon opportunities and work in his interest while avoiding conflict with his partners. Aware that these projects were not feasible and also aware that his future as a manufacturer depended on financial independence, if not technical freedom, he commissioned a "Rédélé Spéciale" derived from the "Renault Spéciale" from Michelotti and Allemano.

The car was magnificent and efficient. But Jean Rédélé clashed with his father-in-law, who had ordered twenty-five coach cars from the Chappe et Gessalin coachbuilder and who wanted his son-in-law to market them, as his son, Gérard Escoffier, preferred to work on boats. Torn and somewhat angry but polite, he gave in to the demands of his father-in-law. He sold the "Rédélé Spéciale", which he never raced, to his friend Jean-Claude Galtier, a Renault dealer in Grenoble and a "happy few" with whom he skied regularly on the slopes of Megève. Galtier made good use of the "Rédélé Spéciale" equipped with components refined by Pierre Ferry with lightweight connecting rods, forged pistons, a specific camshaft, etc. He finished on the podium at the Rallye Neige et Glace and Rallye Lyon-Charbonnières before winning the 1955 Milla Miglia, ahead of Jean Rédélé, who was driving the coach financed by his stepfather.

In the end, Rédélé agreed to use the coach imposed by Charles Escoffier. The bodies were produced by Chappe Frères in St Maur des Fossés. The mechanical components were assembled in the Paris garage on rue Forest, which became the headquarters of the "SARL des Automobiles Alpine" upon its creation on July 6, 1955. Pierre Dreyfus, the new CEO of Renault after Pierre Lefauchaux's fatal accident, decided to help Rédélé by agreeing to receive the "Coach Alpine" in July opposite the prestigious Building X in Renault's prestigious courtyard in Billancourt. Jean

Rédélé responded favourably by bringing three cars, one blue, one white and one red. Everything was understood without being said.

A DIFFICULT COHABITATION

He was an ardent worker and somewhat of a recluse. His office was on the second floor of the "Grands Garages de Clichy" on rue Forest, owned by Charles Escoffier with whom he did not speak with very much. The two men avoid each other, but each had his internal emissaries bringing them information about "Monsieur Jean" or "Monsieur Charles". They didn't understand one another - and above all - didn't communicate much at all. But their relationship remained cordial but distant. "Chappe Frères" moved their workshop from St Maur des Fossés to Brie Comte Robert in the Seine et Marne. Charles Escoffier believed in his son-in-law, creating an "Escobrie" facility where the mechanical components would be assembled in his Renault dealership. In Brie-Comte-Robert, and to drive the point home, the father-in-law ordered a cabriolet from the Brie coachbuilder to be exhibited at the Paris Motor Show in October 1956. Jean Rédélé was furious, but he kept everything close to his vest as best he could. But he did criticize the coach that he considered not sensual enough ("it has a flat backside", he said). He feared that the cabriolet delivered by Chappe would age very quickly because it had too many American gimmicks, such as the prominent rear fenders and was too unbalanced in its overall design. Jean Rédélé already knew that a car should not be set in its design, but he also knew how expensive profound modifications were. He preferred discreet and ongoing change, a sort of continuous adaptation. He knew he couldn't afford to produce much, so he had to build for a longer lifespan. He ordered a third model from Michelotti. It would be a convertible in response to the one proposed by Chappe and Gessalin. At the end of December 1956, Michelle and Jean Rédélé went to see the prototype in Turin, and the car was delivered to Dieppe in January 1957.

This "Cabriolet A 106" - of which the initial production would be limited to two examples - had the genes of the future Berlinette. This led to the design of the A 108, and from there would come Alpine's iconic A110 Berlinette. Rédélé succeeded in what he set out to do. He was an independent manufacturer and asserted himself as a manager with a clear market vision. He managed to escape the role that his father-in-law reserved for him. He did not want to be the Escoffier Group Sales Director. He was the CEO of Automobiles Alpine and devoted 365 days of the year to this role. He was not socially inclined and left this to his art lover wife. (Editor's note: she was a freelancer for the magazine "Connaissance des Arts"), nor was he a doting father to his children, whose education and development he observed from a distance.

THE WISE CHOICE OF HIS CLOSEST COLLABORATORS

As a manager, he also left the reins to his close collaborators such as Jacques Prieur, his cousin, to run the Renault dealership in Dieppe or to Etienne Desjardins for the administrative management of Société Alpine. He knew that only racing would bring notoriety to his brand. He trusted his team of racing mechanics led by Gilbert Harivel, to whom he gave complete freedom of choice in recruitment, to the point that his devoted companions affectionately called him "juicy". And to manage the team of drivers and the competition budget, he called upon José Rosinski and then Jacques Cheinisse, who accumulated this function with that of Sales Director before handing over that job to Bernard Pierangeli.

He trusted his childhood friend, Jacque Bataille, to manage the Epinay sur Seine dealership, created in 1967. When he opened the Thiron Gardais factory in 1968, he called on Daniel Vue, one of Alpine's longest-standing collaborators (editor's note: he is number 18 in the Alpine personnel register), since he joined Dieppe at the age of fourteen and a half. Later, when he took an interest in aviation and specifically in developing a Renault Diesel engine for lightweight aircraft, he did so with his HEC classmate, Bernard Frager, assisted by Jean-François Gallo, a man with much more common sense than diplomas. It was the same for the yachting business with his friend Pierre Duclert. The list was long of friends that would become collaborators. And what was most extraordinary is that there were very few betrayals. Each of the men chosen by Jean Rédélé remained faithful to him. "He had an incredible charm, and he knew it. He was seductive, and he used it," said Michelle, his wife. An idea echoed by the late José Rosinski, who liked to say, "Jean Rédélé was the only man with whom one could not refuse a dinner invitation nor an event even if one knew that one did not have a chance in ten to take up the challenge. And the worst of all, we managed to get it done".

A WIDE RANGE OF ACTIVITIES

The 1973 oil crisis, the introduction of speed limits, the difficulties in developing the A 310 and the technical, union and financial problems linked to the new factory in Dieppe, avenue de Bréauté, cost Jean Rédélé dearly. He had no choice but to sell the majority of his business to Renault in the same year, in which he won the World Rally Championship in 1973! The sale was completed in 1975, even though 1974 had once again brought Alpine Renault a title: European Prototype Champion (2000 cc)!

From that point on, Jean Rédélé looked after his six Renault dealerships. And companies he inherited: like Roseraie Guerin in Servon (77), or created, such as Scomarine, or bought out, such as Scoma in La Loupe (28), which manufactured ball joints, steering rods and a range of specific parts for the automobile and aviation industries, or Novocar which, from its depot in St Ouen l'Aumône (95), supplied

agents and retailers with spare parts for transport, agriculture and industrial machinery. He also bought the "Grands Garages Souterrains" on Boulevard Gouvion and devoted himself to ocean sailing and caring for his Lhasa dogs whilst remaining quite solitary. He was hardly ever seen at public events.

He was the victim of two physical attacks in 2002 and 2003. Weakened by these events and by illness, he accepted, despite everything, to participate in the event organised by the "Association des Anciens d'Alpine" in Dieppe in 2003. It was his last public appearance. He died in 2007, twelve years after Renault discontinued the Alpine brand and ten years before a new Alpine was introduced to the public.

Hubert d'Artemare, former Marketing Director of Renault, shared this with me as I wrote the biography, "Jean Rédélé, Monsieur Alpine". "Jean Rédélé was a fascinating person because of his elegance, masked by an apparent casualness, which gave him the appearance of a detached gentleman whereas he was a formidable condottiere determined in his choices and actions".

Yes, the man Rédélé was impressive. Like his Berlinettes, he was skilful and captivating. He and they are unforgettable and perhaps irreplaceable.

Annex 1: Chronology of Jean Rédélé

Annex 2: Results Jean Rédélé, Driver

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CHRONOLOGY OF JEAN RÉDELÉ

1922: Jean Rédélé was born in Dieppe, on 17 May
1946: Graduates from HEC (Promotion 1946.A)
1950: Motor racing debut as a driver
1952: Marries Michelle Escoffier
1952: Michelotti Coupé
1953: Wins Rallye de Dieppe in a Michelotti Coupé
1954: "Rédélé Spéciale"
1955: Birth of his first daughter, Marie
1955: Société Alpine foundation date

1955: Presentation of the A106
 1956: Birth of his second daughter, Zoé
 1957: End of his racing career as a driver
 1957: Creation of RDL
 1958: Introduction of the A108
 1960: Creation of Alpine Engineering
 1961: Production in Brazil (Interlagos)
 1962: Introduction of the A110
 1962: Birth of his first son, Jean-Charles
 1963: First participation at Le Mans
 1963: Production in Spain (Fasa)
 1964: Production in Mexico (Dinalpin)
 1964: First F2 and F3 single-seaters: first title in the French Formula 3 Championship
 1967: Production in Bulgaria (Bulgaralpine)
 1967: Agreements with Renault
 1967: Thiron-Gardais factory
 1967: Opening of Epinay -sur-Seine
 1968: Purchase of Scoma in La Loupe
 1968: 1st title in the French Rally Championship for Alpine
 1968: Decorated Officer of the National Order of Merit
 1969: New Dieppe factory, Avenue de Bréauté
 1969: Death of Mr. Charles Escoffier, his father-in-law
 1971: Final acquisition of rue Forest
 1971: Decorated Knight of the Legion of Honour
 1971: Alpine wins International Championship for Manufacturers
 1971: Introduction of the A310
 1972: Alpine, European F3 Champion
 1973: Beginning of transfer to Renault
 1973: Alpine-Renault, World Rally Champion
 1974: Alpine-Renault, European Manufacturer's Champion (2-litre prototype)
 1975: Sale to Renault
 1978: Renault Alpine, winner of the 24 Hours of Le Mans
 1980: Creation of Scomarine
 1981: Creation of Scoma Energie
 1995: Last Alpine built (A610)
 1999: Relaunch of Novocar
 2001: Inauguration of rue Rédélé in Martin-Eglise
 2007: Death of Jean Rédélé, on 10 August
 2008: Tribute on the Champs-Élysées
 2008: Inauguration of the statue of Jean Rédélé in Dieppe

JEAN RÉDELÉ DRIVER STATS

1950

20 th Monte Carlo Rally	4 CV 1062	Michel DELFORGE	Out of time
1 st Rallye de Dieppe	4C V 1062		1 st

1951

21 st Monte Carlo Rally	1063/13	SCOTT	4 th (750)
2 nd Rallye de Dieppe	1063/13		2 nd (750)
2 nd Rallye de Dax	1063/13		1 st (750)
3 rd Rallye du Dauphiné	1063/13	François BERTEAUX	2 nd (750)
5 th Rallye Evian Mont Blanc	1063/13		18 th overall
Liège – Rome- Liège	1063/13	BOUCHARD	3 rd (1000)
1 st Tour de France Automobile	1063/13	HAMMERSLEY	3 rd (750)
3 rd Tour of Belgium	1063/13	NAVEZ	1 st (750)

1952

19 th Mille Miglia	1063/44	Louis PONS	1 st (750 Sport)
3 rd Rallye de Dieppe	1063/13		6 th (750)
24 Hours of Le Mans	1063/17	Guy LAPCHIN	4 th (750)
2 nd Tour de France Automobile	1063/13	Paul MOSER	3 rd overall

1953

23 rd Rallye Monte Carlo	1063/44	Louis PONS	250 th
20 th Mille Miglia	1062 kitée	Louis PONS	1 st (750 Sport)
4 th Rallye de Dieppe	Renault Spéciale		1 st overall
24 Hours of Le Mans	Barquette 1066	Louis PONS	Retired
Circuit de Rouen	Renault Spéciale		1 st (750)
12 Hours of Reims	Barquette 1066	Louis PONS	Retired
Lisbon Cup	Renault Spéciale		1 st (1000)
3 rd Tour de France Automobile	1062 kitée	Paul MOSER	2 st production car

1954

21 st Mille Miglia	1063/17	Louis PONS	1 st (750 Tourisme spécial)
17 th Critérium des Alpes	1063/66	Louis PONS	Coupe des Alpes
Liège – Rome- Liège	1063/66	Louis PONS	1 st (750)
4 th Tour de France Automobile	1063/66	Louis PONS	2 nd (750)

1

1955

12 Hours of Sebring (USA)	1063	Louis PONS	Retired
6 th Rallye de Dieppe	Renault Spéciale	Louis PONS	23 rd
22 nd Mille Miglia	Coach Alpine	Louis PONS	1 st (750 Tourisme spécial)
Coupe des Dolomites	Coach Alpine	Louis PONS	2 st (750)
7 th Tour de Belgique	Coach Alpine		Retired

1956

23 rd Mille Miglia	Dauphine Renault		Retired
5 th Tour de France Automobile	Coach Alpine	Louis PONS	Retired

1957

24 nd Mille Miglia	Coach Alpine		Retired
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About Alpine

Founded in 1955 by Jean Rédélé, the brand has set itself apart with its French-style sports cars. In 2018, the brand presents the new A110, a sports car faithful to Alpine's timeless principles of compactness, lightness, agility and driving pleasure. In 2021, the Alpine Business Unit is created. It thus becomes the brand dedicated to innovative, authentic, exclusive sportscars of Renault Group, benefiting from the heritage and craftsmanship of its historic plant in Dieppe, as well as the engineering mastery from Alpine Racing and Alpine Cars teams.