

What drove Formula One champion Nico Rosberg to sustainable investing?

During a "myfirstminute" webinar Ex-Formula One driver Nico Rosberg shared how he is carving out a second career for himself as a sustainable entrepreneur and investor, with projects in everything from air taxiing to electrical vehicle racing.

Nico Rosberg's story of sporting success is classically familiar—it feels like something out of a film. Son of a Formula One champion, Nico followed his father's tyre tracks into competitive driving. He made his Formula One debut in 2006. But it was eleven years, including a bitter public rivalry with Mercedes teammate Lewis Hamilton, until the Finnish-German would taste the ultimate success at the Yas Marina circuit in Abu Dhabi, clinching his first Formula One World Championship in 2016.

It was what he did in the days following that took everyone by surprise. He retired.

Nico reflects on this ultimate 'mic drop' moment at the peak of his career. "I had no clue what I wanted to do really," Nico explained, during a webinar hosted by venture capital seed fund [firstminute capital](#) called "[myfirstminute](#)".

To outsiders looking in, however, Nico has seemed to have it all planned out. In the years since his retirement, he has made a name for himself as a prominent

tech investor, particularly in the field of sustainability. In 2019, he hosted the inaugural GREENTECH Festival in Berlin, bringing together speakers, entrepreneurs, and consumers from across the world to discuss the next steps of sustainable innovation.

Getting into tech investing

When Nico announced his retirement from driving at the age of 31, he didn't hesitate to sit and ponder what his next steps would be. While he didn't know exactly where he wanted to end up, he had a good idea about the kind of space where he wanted to spend his energy and investment—sustainability and innovation.

"I spoke to as many people as possible in order to get inspired," Nico remembers. One of these people was the tech pioneer and personal hero of Nico's, Elon Musk. They'd actually met a few years before—Nico was stepping off the track having just won his first Monaco Grand Prix, Musk was the guest of honour.

He headed to Silicon Valley to meet entrepreneurs, innovators, and investors and was amazed by what he saw.

First of all, it was the incredible ability of these companies to pivot, regardless of whatever speed bumps or hurdles the world threw at them. Secondly, a concept that was alien given his winning mentality in sport—an ability to embrace failure.

"Some of them even celebrate failure," Nico laughs.

But most of all he saw that this could be an area where he could have a real impact, not just in terms of investing in promising companies, but in driving forwards trends and innovations that could change the world.

"I've always wanted to be of service, to do good. Things that will bring benefits to others, and bring me happiness—this is at the core of all my investing and projects."

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Nico's exciting projects

Nico's investments to date touch on some of the most exciting and diverse areas of innovation.

Lilium is one of the industry leaders in air taxis, developing a four-seater miniature aircraft designed, one day, to compete with Uber and other ride-sharing apps. The company launched its latest round of funding at the end of March this year, amidst the global financial downturn, raising \$240M.

"It's a company that will contribute to a great quality of life, reduce pollution, and will democratise short distance flying because it won't cost much more than the ride-sharing model," he explains.

Chargepoint, another one of Nico's investment projects, is the largest network of electric vehicle charging stations. Stroll around any major European or North American city, and you'll likely see their charging stations.

Nico was also an early investor in Formula E, the Formula One spinoff featuring only electric vehicles. It's now second only to Formula One in motorsports, Nico believes.

Bringing together all these ideas, and a desire to push change, led to Nico founding GREENTECH Festival. In 2019, in its first year, over 40,000 people attended and the festival was hosted alongside the Formula E Berlin meeting. As well as bringing together startups, he acknowledges the festival's role in driving green ideas in corporate culture.

"How do you instill sustainability into corporate culture? It's such a great challenge, because for many it's just about making money, and sustainability can be seen as a compromise. How do

you get it to the core of a brand?”

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Next steps and areas to explore

Nico has no plans to take his foot off the pedal in the coming years. He’s constantly on the lookout for new, exciting ideas to invest in that will have big impacts on society. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a lot of these ideas to the fore: things once seen as far off, perhaps, now more pressing.

While conventional sports has ground to halt under lockdown, eSports has increased its audience and popularity considerably, accelerating its growing dominance over traditional sports.

“eSports has a gigantic future. In racing, we’re still lagging, because there are many small platforms, not one big platform, so there’s not quite a business case there yet, but it’s moving fast. The greatest power of virtual is bringing in the youth, and getting interest from millennials.”

He’s also looking for a startup that’s changing the game when it comes to meetings—something like a VR/AR alternative to both Zoom and traveling for meetings - managing to feel more “real” than the former and more sustainable than the latter.

For any entrepreneur’s looking to grab Nico’s attention, there’s one main thing he’s looking for, above any exciting idea or product.

“I’ve learned to focus more on the founders than the business model. I’ve always seen that the

business model is not as important, it's always going to be changed, often quite radically, but the founders are fundamental."

firstminute capital runs a webinar series called "My firstminute" in which they interview some of the world's top minds - ranging from unicorn founders to VCs, to athletes who double up as angels or venture investors. The interviews are upbeat discussions around the "first minute" of their careers and how they battled through some of their hardest business days, and how they now enjoy helping or backing early-stage entrepreneurs.

Discover the myfirstminute webinars

* Niklas Zennström. Co-founder of Skype (\$8.5B acquisition by Microsoft), Founding Partner & CEO of Atomico (\$2.7B AUM multi-stage venture fund) and Co-founder of Zennström Philanthropies. 13th May, 5:00 pm

* Sir Clive Woodward. Former World Cup-winning England Rugby Coach, Great Britain Olympic Director of Sport. 14th May, 4:00 pm

* Spencer Rascoff. Co-founder & former CEO Zillow (\$8B market cap), Board Advisor at Tripadvisor (\$2.5B market cap), Co-founder & Executive Chairman of dot.LA, Co-founder Hotwire.com (\$663M acquisition by IAC), Co-author of the New York Times' bestseller "Zillow Talk: The New Rules of Real Estate". 15th May, 4:00 pm

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