

Behind the scenes with Emma Raducanu

30/08/2022 At 18 years old, she took the tennis world by surprise when she won the US Open a year ago, becoming an overnight star as well as a role model for an entire generation. In an interview before her return to this year's Grand Slam tournament in New York, Porsche brand ambassador Emma Raducanu talked about motivation and motorsport.

"Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence," wrote Jane Austen about her protagonist in 1816. The name Emma – the title of that famous novel – means 'whole' or 'universal'. When Ian and Renee Raducanu named their daughter 'Emma', it was an expression of their high hopes for her.

Born in Toronto on 13 November, 2002, to a Romanian-born father and a Chinese mother, Emma Raducanu was two years old when the family moved to the UK. With her parents both working in finance, they made their home in Bromley, an hour's drive southeast of London. The heroine of Austen's novel, who is close to the same age, lives the same distance from the city, in Highbury. But the biographies of the two inspiring Emmas are worlds apart: while the literary figure was destined to idle

away the hours, the modern-day athlete began training for success at an early age.

Resilience and logic

“I feel like my culture and family background have definitely played a part in who I am,” says Raducanu, when we get together for the photo shoot. “I feel like I’ve got a lot of resilience from my mum, which helps me on the tennis court. I’m more logical in my thought processes. I feel like that is from my dad. Both of them expected a lot of me. They inspired and motivated me.”

During her sports career, she completed her A levels with top grades in mathematics and economics. And she has always been passionate about motorsport. “Tennis alone would be too one-dimensional,” she says. And the young woman leaves little doubt, brimming over, as she is, with curiosity and lust for life. She can imagine studying economics or law. But first, tennis.

Raducanu began playing when she was five years old, practicing before school and again in the evening. She even continued training when the floodlights went out. “My dad always told me, if I could serve in the dark, it would be easy in the daylight.” Even as a child, she knew exactly what she wanted to do: play at nearby Wimbledon and clinch a Grand Slam victory. She also began driving go-karts at the age of six. “I thought it was cool and a lot of fun. The better I got, the more I enjoyed the feeling of speed and control.” Not even motocross racing gives the high-energy athlete pause for thought. “Which kid doesn’t like getting dirty in the mud?” she asks, laughing. “Seriously though, that was a step up from go-karting. Motocross requires coordination and balance – and gives you an adrenaline rush.” Attributes that are also necessary for tennis.

From the age of 13, Raducanu was eligible to take part in International Tennis Federation (ITF) tournaments for players under the age of 18. Just eight days after her birthday she became the youngest player in ITF history to win the Nike Junior International in Liverpool, the first notable victory in her budding career.

The sound of the 911 before school

Her coach drove a sports car. “Hearing his 911 pulling up at 7 o’clock in the morning was pure motivation,” she says. “I really liked the car and dreamt of having a Porsche one day.” She went to Brands Hatch to watch the British Carrera Cup races and the Tourenwagen Meisterschaft final. She even went to watch a Formula One Grand Prix. “I follow different categories. I like Formula E because it’s an environmentally friendly innovation and the electric motors generate sensational acceleration. All the passing is also really exciting. I was thrilled when Porsche won for the first time!” She has experienced the performance of an electric vehicle first-hand – in the Taycan GTS Sport Turismo. “It was the most high-performance car I’ve ever been in on a public road,” she says. She would like to race again – but for now, it’s all about tennis.

As number 338 in the WTA global rankings, she competed at Wimbledon in 2021 using a wild card, making it into the final 16 – the youngest British player to get through to the fourth round of the professional tournament. That would be the next notable achievement in her career.

Full throttle in 2021

Just weeks later, she played in the second Grand Slam tournament of her career: the US Open. In order to compete in New York, she first had to fight her way through qualifying and effortlessly won her three matches. No one initially took much notice of her at Flushing Meadows – that is, until she excelled in the first three rounds and beat Shelby Rogers in the final16. She went on to defeat Olympic champion Belinda Bencic in the quarter final and Maria Sakkari in the semi-final, winning the tournament against Leylah Annie Fernandez 6–4 and 6–3 in the final match. Including the qualification, it marked her 10th victory in a row without losing a single set.

A qualifier had never won the trophy before, turning the world of tennis upside down. The media immediately ran with the story, and Raducanu was congratulated on all sides. Even the British Royal Family published the Queen's words of congratulations, and Martina Navratilova tweeted that "A star is born!"

The BBC named her Sports Personality of the Year, and the WTA Newcomer of the Year. In early 2022, Raducanu became the youngest woman to be made an MBE – Member of the Order of the British Empire – for her service to her country. How does one deal with that as a teenager?

Loved by just about everyone and criticised by virtually no one, Jane Austen's heroine Emma Woodhouse would have an easy job of it. But life is not a novel. Raducanu has become a celebrity not with a single stroke, but with many professional strokes, some of them exceeding 160km/h. Well-wishers and critics ride up and down with her as if in an elevator. Her motivation on her way up and down? "Continuous improvement and getting better and just trying to learn and experience new things."

Raducanu still has plenty of plans: for example, she played her first Porsche Tennis Grand Prix in Stuttgart in 2022, took a look behind the scenes at the Porsche Carrera Cup at Brands Hatch, and did laps with Mark Webber at the Porsche Experience Centre in Silverstone this summer. She has already been able to fulfil some of her dreams. What's next? First, it has to be tennis. And then we'll see …

Info

Text first published in the Porsche magazine Christophorus, No. 403.

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