

AUTOMOTIVE

McLaren film celebrates women in STEM

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Sitting down with in-house engineer Ella Podmore and her father, the automaker's "Parent Power" comes in time for an international observance. Image credit: McLaren

By ZACH JAMES

British automaker McLaren is looking toward the future of its business and engineering efforts with a new creative project.

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Called *Parent Power*, a short film examines the role caregivers have in the career and life choices of their children, particularly when it comes to women in male-dominated industries. Debuting a day before International Women in Engineering Day, McLaren's conversation on STEM careers is specifically started between the brand's materials scientist Ella Podmore and her father, Bruce Podmore.

"As we mark International Women in Engineering Day at McLaren Automotive, not only do we recognize the impact women continue to have in shaping the future of engineering, but we also focus on conversations that encourage girls to explore the wonders of science, technology, engineering and math," said Jim Marsh, chief people and transformation officer at McLaren Automotive, in a statement

"Those continuous conversations can help the career choices of girls and ensure that more young women pursue exciting engineering careers," Mr. Marsh said. "Childhood is a vital time for laying foundations for the future, including influencing the jobs we dream of doing one day.

"Sadly, around the world, the gender stereotypes and societal norms that hold girls back from pursuing an interest in science and maths often start from an early age."

Stemming conversations

The father-daughter duo shines a light on the part parents play in their daughters' interest in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields.

The subject of the discussion is Ms. Podmore, an engineer at McLaren, working on the brand's supercars. In the past, she has been honored with the Institute of Engineering and Technology's Young Woman Engineer of the Year Award at her alma mater, the University of Manchester.

Parent Power celebrates Ms. Podmore's support system found in her father

The engineer looks back on her life for the camera, detailing her journey to break into her current career. As highlighted in the film, Ms. Podmore's father supported her work along the way, and continues to do so.

As they reminisce, the two family members build the Lego McLaren F1 LM and Solus GT set, sharing their thoughts on the lack of representation in STEM.

"I've definitely noticed when going to schools and talking to students, both primary schools and secondary schools, when they were younger, you would speak to girls and they would talk about how they would want to be an astronaut," says Ms. Podmore, in the film.

"They wanted to create a cure for cancer and things like that."

Both she and her father agree that after the age of 11 or 12 however, pre-teen girls' scientific interest fades, or as Mr. Podmore puts it, "disappears" altogether.

This observation is backed by research, as children's rights charity Plan International, a McLaren partner, finds that 27 percent of girls worry that they may not be "good enough" to be involved in STEM subjects.

When considering possible solutions for this gendered issue, both of the Podmores concur that parents can make a difference in this regard.

At this point, the materials scientist credits her father and the environment she grew up in, stating that she believes it fostered her love for her chosen field.



The pairing admits that a more hands-on upbringing, sans technology, may be vital to getting today's children interested in STEM careers. Image credit: McLaren

"Ella is [a] real-life example of how conversations had with her as a child have influenced her later adult choices," said Mr. Podmore, in a statement.

"By encouraging conversations about STEM early on after seeing that McLaren poster on her bedroom wall as a child, we tapped into that natural curiosity she had that most children possess about the world," he said. "It makes me so proud to think that not only does she now get to work with the McLaren supercars that she admired as a child all day, but she is so passionate about the joy of science and engineering others and especially parents on the role of parent power' in fueling the scientists of tomorrow."

Pledges and initiatives

McLaren has committed to making women more visible in their organizations, from the bottom up.

Specifically, the automaker is holding educational and skill-based workshops for 1,000 girls by 2025, in collaboration with Plan International.

Other luxury brands are moving forward with their own shows of support for women in STEM.

Italian fashion house Gucci is among them, renewing its Chime initiative for another decade ([see story](#)). Through Gucci Equilibrium, the brand's corporate responsibility arm, it continues to push for gender equity at large as well, releasing podcasts and campaigns alike in the effort ([see story](#)).