

Forget the gender jokes. Top female drivers are making a dent in the male-dominated sport of racing, proving they're . . .

By Thomas Pope



MORE THAN JUST A PRETTY FACE

Janet Guthrie became front-page news two decades ago when she tried to become the first woman to qualify for the Indianapolis 500.

Women?
Racing at 200 miles per hour?
At the Brickyard? Ludicrous!

But as the 20th century comes to a close, women in race cars are no longer perceived as sideshows. Men may still be curs-

ing women drivers, but it's not because they whipped the family station wagon into the last available parking space at the grocery store.

Two hundred's a warm-up lap in an Indy car these days, and drag racers Shelly Anderson and Rachelle Splatt have cracked 300 mph. Women represent far more than just the lipstick and eyeliner of the racing scene, and

some have risen to the top of their male-dominated profession, especially in drag racing.

The history-making continues at top speed in 1996.

For the first time ever, a woman will be the driver-owner of a team planning to run a full schedule on a major stock car circuit. Patty Moise is fielding her own No. 14 car on the Busch Grand National circuit this season, complete with sponsorship from three products of Dial Corp.

Lyn St. James should bring women drivers considerable exposure this year as she races full-time in the Indy Racing League, which has five races planned for its inaugural season. St. James will be sponsored by Lifetime, the women-oriented cable television channel.

And in drag racing, Anderson continues her assault on the Top Fuel record books. Shelly has two career victories and is coming off back-to-back top 10 seasons in the points standings.

Forget the mini-vans, here comes victory lane.

While the doors for women have been slow to open in other forms of motorsports, that hasn't been the case in drag racing. Many experts, in fact, say females have a better chance

in drag racing because the short drives put a premium on skills and minimize stamina and strength.

But whatever the reasons, women have been excelling on dragstrips for decades.

Among the prominent pioneers of women in racing are Shirley Muldowney (below), the first woman to win a national drag racing championship, and Janet Guthrie (above), who has competed on IndyCar and NASCAR circuits.

KEITH WINE/ALBANY USA



LADIES OF THE HOBBY

Collectors wanting to specialize in cards of women drivers should check out #171 of the 1989-90 Masters of Racing set. The card includes four women drivers with racing legend Lee Petty before the start of the Firecracker 400 on July 4, 1977, at Daytona International Speedway.

The race was the only time since 1949 that three women had competed in the same race at NASCAR's top level. Lee presented the three drivers — Janet Guthrie of the United States, Lella Lombardi of Italy and Christine Beckers of Belgium — with roses before the race with former driver Louise Smith looking on. Smith had been one of the drivers 28 years earlier when three women made the field of a NASCAR race.

All three drivers failed to finish because of mechanical problems. Not all of the woman racers in history have a trading card.

Perhaps the biggest absence from a checklist of women drivers is Sara Christian, called "the leading stock car driver in the country" in early NASCAR press releases. Sara finished 12th in the first ever NASCAR race in June 1949. She started six of NASCAR's first eight races, posting a fifth and a sixth on her way to finishing 12th in the 1949 points standings.

Several of the current women drivers also are without trading cards. Funny Car driver Rhonda Hartman and Rachel Splatt, a Top Fuel racer from Australia, are perhaps the most noticeable drivers missing cards in the major sets.

SHELLY ANDERSON

Shelly Anderson is one of the rising stars in the Top Fuel class. At one point, Shelly held the NHRA elapsed-time record with a run of 4.718 seconds. Her brother, Randy, was the 1994 NHRA Top Alcohol Funny Car champ while her father, Brad, is a former





In the 1960s, Paula Murphy became the first woman to receive a license to race Funny Cars. Shirley Muldowney not only became the first woman to win a national championship, she was the first person to win the NHRA Top Fuel title three times.

The current queen of drag racing is a 30-year-old native of Ontario, Calif., with the bloodlines of a thoroughbred. Shelly Anderson's father, Brad, won the NHRA Top Alcohol Funny Car championship on three occasions, and she's been involved in tuning race cars most of her life. Shelly actually served as

her dad's crew chief for several years before beginning her driving career in 1991.

Shelly won her first Top Alcohol Dragster national event in April 1992, and by July had moved into a Top Fuel machine. The 1993 Keystone Nationals marked her first Top Fuel victory and enabled her to join Muldowney, Lucille Lee and Lori Johns as the only women to win a national event in the sport's elite division.

Shelly still owns the quickest and fastest runs by a female in drag racing history. With sponsorship from Western Auto Parts American and Texaco Havoline, Anderson believes she can join Muldowney as an NHRA champion as soon as this season.

"We've had a crew and crew chief working on the 1996 season all through the winter for the first time in my career," Anderson says. "This is the first time we weren't negotiating with sponsors up until the last minute.

"To be competitive, we

need to be more consistent," Shelly continues. "We need to win races."

Anderson grew up admiring Muldowney, who won Top Fuel titles in 1977, 1980 and 1982. Shelly believes her road to racing was a fairly smooth ride because her idol had busted through most of the gender barriers before her.

Muldowney, a winner of 18 NHRA national events, has been out of the national spotlight for several years. But she continues to compete on a regular basis, running match races across the continent and making an occasional appearance on the International Hot Rod Association trail. She was runner-up at the '95 IHRA Spring Nationals at Bristol, Tenn.

"The intensity is still there, the will to win is still there, and the competitiveness is definitely still there," Muldowney says. "We chose to forego NHRA racing because they structured the rules to make it technically cost-prohibitive and hard on equipment. So we said to

four-time Top Alcohol Funny Car titlist.

'93 Finish Line NHRA ☒ #4

'95 Action Packed NHRA ☐ #10

'95 Action Packed NHRA Silver Streak ☐ #10

CAROL BURKETT

Veteran Top Alcohol Funny Car driver Carol "Bunny" Burkett has been sidelined since suffering serious injuries in a racing accident in September. Bunny, the 1986 IHRA Top Alcohol Funny Car champion, is the first woman to win a national event in her division on both the IHRA and NHRA circuit.

'91 Big Time Drag ☒ #33



JANET GUTHRIE

Janet Guthrie paved the way for the current generation of women drivers.

Guthrie was the first female to enter the Indy 500, the first to take and pass the rookie test, the first to qualify for the 500 and the first woman to finish the 500. She competed in three Indy 500s, with her best finish being a ninth in 1978.

Janet also appeared regularly behind the wheel of stock cars. Her first NASCAR race came at the 1976 World 600 in Charlotte, N.C., when she failed to qualify for Indy. She started 27th and finished 15th that Memorial Day.

In 1977, she competed in 19 NASCAR events and recorded four top 10 finishes. She finished 23rd in the season points standings, ahead of Donnie Allison, Dave Marcis and Bill Elliott. Her 1978-79 Grand Prix card is the first of a woman driver.

'78-79 Grand Prix ☐ #213



heck with it.

"Racing the way we do now, we control our own destiny, we control our own souvenir sales, and we have a lot of fun without the grind."

Top Fuel has been particularly good to women, including Kim LaHaie, Danielle DePorter and Australian Rachelle Splatt. Della Woods raced nitromethane-powered Funny Cars for decades, and Carol "Bunny" Burkett is a former IHRA Alcohol Funny Car world champion and former NHRA national event winner.

Other women who've gripped the reins of alcohol-powered machinery include Carol Henson, Roberta Schultz, Melinda Green, Amy Faulk and Tiffany Hyland. Malinda Bertozzi swept the IHRA national events at Bristol, Tenn., in 1995 in her gas-powered dragster, and finished the season by winning the IHRA Bracket World Finals. Judy Boertman, Vonnie Mills, Cathy Veenstra, Charlene Wood and Margaret Glembocki have all won

NHRA national events in sportsman classes.

In other forms of racing, success hasn't always been so easy, but there have been numerous pioneers.

Deborah Gregg has followed in the footsteps of her late husband, road-racing legend Peter Gregg, as a standout on the Sports Car Club of America circuit. South Africa's Desire' Wilson raced Indy cars on a part-time basis for several seasons. Margie Smith-Haas of San Diego, Calif., became the first woman to win a North American road racing series title when she finished first in the 1994 American City Racing League.

But there's still a long way to go, baby, before there's gender equity inside the roll cage. A woman is still much more likely to reach victory lane as a wife or trophy queen than as a driver.

"You'll get back what you project," Deborah Gregg says. "If you choose to have a chip; if you choose to perceive that



Shawna Robinson (above left), the pole winner at Atlanta in '94, and Patty Moise (above right), racing full time in '96, are the Busch circuit counterparts of IndyCar driver Lyn St. James (opposite page).

men are against you; if you choose to think they're picking on little old you, then by God you'll never make it in auto racing. That's life, and that's business."

Guthrie, a New York physicist, wasn't the first woman to compete in an IndyCar race; Arlene Hiss finished 14th at Phoenix in 1976. In May of that year, Guthrie's IndyCar career began with a start at Trenton, N.J.

But it wasn't until May 1977 that Guthrie was thrust into the worldwide spotlight. And though she failed in her bid to become the first woman in the Indy 500, she put her name in the record books a year later, finishing ninth in the famed Memorial Day weekend event.

Later, Guthrie tried her hand at NASCAR stock cars. She raced on the Winston Cup circuit for parts of three

'89-90 Masters of Racing ☐ #171

'91 Legends of Indy ☒ #66

'92 Legends of Indy ☐ #61

LORI JOHNS

A native of Corpus Christi, Texas, Lori Johns made a brief but spectacular splash on the NHRA circuit in the early '90s.

In 1990, Johns finished fourth in the Top Fuel points, winning three races and becoming the 12th driver in history to break the 5-second barrier in a quarter-mile run.

Still just 30, Johns made a brief return to the NHRA circuit in 1995, but has struggled to find sponsorship.

'89 Mega Drag ☐ #75 ☐ #76

'91 Pro Set NHRA ☒ #4 ☐ #53

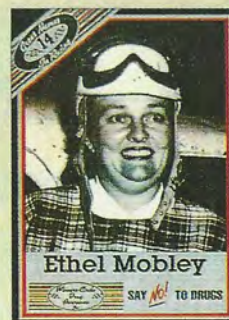
'92 Mac Tools Winner's Cup ☐ #NNO



ETHEL MOBLEY

Ethel Mobley comes from a family of racing siblings. Sister of the racing Flock brothers — Bob, Tim and Fonty — she started in the second NASCAR race ever, finishing 11th on the sands of the Daytona Beach road course in July 1949.

1989 Winners Circle ☒ #14



PATTY MOISE

Patty Moise enters the 1996 season as the first woman to be an active owner-driver on a major stock car circuit. Moise, who plans on racing full-time on the Busch Grand National circuit, is married to Winston Cup driver Elton Sawyer. Patty, 35, has been racing sporadically on the Busch



seasons and scored five top 10 finishes in 33 starts. When the sponsorship money ran out, she returned to Indy cars for a year, and finished fifth in the 1979 Milwaukee 200. She ran a total of 11 IndyCar events, and her only remaining connection to racing is as a driving school instructor.

"The thing women don't have is money. Without money, the best race driver is just a fast pedestrian," Guthrie says. "The fields are filled with sponsored men. This is a big country with a lot of rich companies, and none sees fit to fund a woman at the top."

She added that sponsors are America's "largest institution with an expenditure of tax-deductible dollars on a racially and sexually segregated system."

No one ever said life is fair," responds Lyn St. James, the lone woman driver currently in the IndyCar ranks. The IMSA Driver of the Year in 1985, St. James is the

only woman to earn Indy 500 Rookie of the Year honors, and in May she will try to make the field for a fifth consecutive year at the age of 49. In 1995, St. James was the oldest starter in the Indy lineup.

She shared driving duties in the winning GTO-class car at the 24 Hours of Daytona in 1987 and '90, but still is looking for a breakthrough Indy triumph.

She announced in January that she will make a bid for the championship of the fledgling Indy Racing League with sponsorship from Lifetime. She finished eighth in the inaugural IRL race, held at the new Walt Disney World Speedway in Orlando, Fla., in January.

One of the reasons the cable company hooked up with Lyn is that studies show that IndyCar crowds and television audiences are 40 percent women, a much higher share than other sports. NASCAR claims similar numbers among its loyal follows, with its fan base being

circuit for a decade. She competed in the 1987 Winston Cup race held at Watkins Glen, N.Y.

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| '89 Maxx <input type="checkbox"/> #216 | '92 Maxx Red <input type="checkbox"/> #59 |
| '90 Maxx <input type="checkbox"/> #138 | '92 Pro Set <input type="checkbox"/> #197 |
| '91 Maxx <input type="checkbox"/> #91 | '94 Maxx <input type="checkbox"/> #305 |
| '91 Traks <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> #88 | '95 Maxx Premier Series <input type="checkbox"/> #186 |
| '92 Maxx Black <input type="checkbox"/> #59 | |

SHIRLEY MULDOWNNEY

Shirley Muldowney dominated the Top Fuel circuit in the late '70s and early '80s.

Muldowney was the first woman to get an NHRA Top Fuel license. She has 18 career victories and won the NHRA Top Fuel championship three times ('77, '80 and '82).

The movie *Heart Like a Wheel* detailed the early portion of her career.

- '89 Mega Drag ☒ #21 ☐ #22



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| '91 Pro Set NHRA <input type="checkbox"/> #10 <input type="checkbox"/> #59 | '94 Action Packed NHRA <input type="checkbox"/> #32 |
| '92 Pro Set NHRA <input type="checkbox"/> #27 | '94 Action Packed NHRA 24K Gold <input type="checkbox"/> #32G |
| '93 Finish Line NHRA <input type="checkbox"/> #131 | |

SHAWNA ROBINSON

A native of Des Moines, Iowa, Shawna Robinson made her first Busch Grand National start in 1991. She became the first woman in Busch history to win a pole when she qualified first for the Atlanta race in March 1994. Shawna became the first woman to win a race in a NASCAR touring division when she claimed a victory in the Goody's Dash Series in 1988.

- '90 Maxx ☐ #118
 '92 Maxx Black ☐ #65
 '92 Maxx Red ☐ #65
 '92 Pro Set ☐ #33
 '92 Winner's Choice Busch ☐ #98 ☐ #99



38 percent female.

Lyn's made a big leap from the Pinto in which she started her racing career more than 20 years ago. She says that her sex has had very little to do with her career, positively or negatively.

"Auto racing is genderless; the car doesn't know the difference, and no one can even see that it's a woman driving," Lyn says. "No one judges me by my smile or personality, but by my results."

Jack Roush, a winning car owner in drag, stock and sports cars, like St. James believes there's much more to the big business of motorsports than gender. "Any driver needs the ability to strike magic with the sponsors," he says. "The successful driver strikes a note with industry that returns industry two or three times its investment."

"I don't care if a driver is black or white, male or female," he continues. "Hey, I'd race a three-legged dog if I could find one that would go fast enough and help get a return to his sponsor."

Be that as it may, there's never been a full-time female competitor in NASCAR's premier Winston Cup division. Several women drivers raced in the early days of NASCAR, but no female has yet to make a career out of driving stock cars.

Patty Moise is doing the best she can to change that, one step at a time. A native of Jacksonville, Fla., the 35-year-old Moise is no stranger to NASCAR's Busch Series, but neither can she be considered one of its veterans.

From 1991 to 1994, Moise raced just 15 times. She ran more in '95 than she had in any other season, but was still seeing some of the tracks for the first time. In 1996, her new Moise-Sawyer Motorsports team will run the entire Busch schedule with major sponsorship from the Dial Corporation's Dial Soap, Purex detergent and Armour Star Canned Meats brands. Patty's seventh at Talladega last summer was the best finish by a woman in series history.

"At one point, I was thinking of a future in Indy cars," says Moise, who drove a pace car on the IndyCar circuit for a decade. "I was road racing for Buick at the time — won a race, finished second in the American Challenge Series points in '86 — and they were using the V-6 pretty heavily. That was the engine of choice at the time in the Busch series, and Buick said they'd keep sponsoring me in road racing, but that if I wanted most of their attention, I needed to be in NASCAR."

"It was like being taken out in the middle of the ocean, thrown in, and having to learn to swim right then," Patty continues. "I had no basis of knowledge of driving stock cars, but I was racing against guys like Dale Earnhardt and Darrell Waltrip. My first oval-track race was Rockingham and, beginner's luck, I was the second-round fastest qualifier. I had no business starting in the middle of that field. I wouldn't ever recommend that route for a series that's as difficult



and competitive as Busch Grand National."

Moise, who is married to Winston Cup racer Elton Sawyer, implies that if she's been discriminated against by sponsors or team owners because of her gender she's

'93 Maxx ☐ #78

'93 Maxx Premier Plus ☐ #78

'93 Traks ☐ #35 ☐ #162

'93 Traks First Run ☐ #35 ☐ #162

'94 High Gear ☐ #62 ☐ #169

'94 High Gear Gold ☐ #62 ☐ #169

'94 High Gear Day One ☐ #169

'94 High Gear Day One Gold ☐ #169

'94 Maxx ☐ #184 ☐ #314

'94 Maxx Autographs ☐ #184

'94 Maxx Premier Series ☐ #184

'94 Optima XL ☐ #60

'94 Optima XL Red Hot ☐ #60

'94 Press Pass ☐ #63 ☐ #70

'94 Traks ☐ #35

'94 Traks First Run ☐ #35

'95 Maxx Premier Series ☒ #185

from 1945 to 1956 and entered 11 NASCAR races.

'89 Winners Circle ☐ #7

'89-90 Masters of Racing ☒ #169 ☐ #170 ☐ #171

LYN ST. JAMES

Lyn St. James, just the second woman to start in racing's biggest event, has started the last four Indianapolis 500s. She was named the 1992 Indy 500 Rookie of the Year in her first race and was the oldest starter in the field in 1995 at the age of 48.

'93 Hi-Tech Indy ☐ #27

'93 Hi-Tech Indy ☐ #46

'93 Hi-Tech Indy Checkered Flag Finishers ☐ #SP11

'94 Hi-Tech Indy ☐ #26

'94 Hi-Tech Indy Champ Driver ☐ #CD29



'95 SkyBox Indy ☐ #24

'95 SkyBox Indy ☒ #91

LOUISE SMITH

Louise Smith, a Georgia native, was one of three women in the field of the second race in NASCAR history. She flipped her Ford early in that race, which was held on the sands of Daytona Beach, Fla., but finished 20th when several spectators helped her upright her car. Smith raced on bullrings



LOUISE SMITH