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Scottsdale Hosts Panels on Women in Motor Sports

By [LARRY EDSALL](#)



Larry Edsall
for The New York Times Panelists at the discussion held on Wednesday in Scottsdale, Ariz.

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Research by [The Henry Ford Museum](#) in Dearborn, Mich., indicates that women have been racing cars since at least 1901, meeting with success in everything from the nation's drag strips to [IndyCar](#) racing. And yet, "we're still trying to change opinions," said Melanie Troxel, who is among the few racers — male or female — with victories in both of the National Hot Rod Association's Top Fuel and Funny Car categories.

"Women have made huge gains," she added, "but we're still not the norm."

Female racers were the topic of Wednesday's seven-woman panel discussion here, during this week's [Barrett-Jackson](#) classic car auctions. The event, held in a hospitality area sponsored by a restaurant chain whose waitresses were obviously dressed to appeal to male diners, indicated that attitudes have a long way to go.

At another panel discussion held on Sunday — this one at the annual Wheels of Wellness historic race-car show in downtown Phoenix — Desiré Wilson, the only woman to have won a sanctioned race in a [Formula One](#) car, recounted how she was promised a spot on the Brabham Grand Prix team in the early 1980s, but when she arrived at the track, another driver was assigned to the car. When Ms. Wilson asked [Bernie Ecclestone](#), the team's then-owner and current Formula One boss, what had transpired, Mr. Ecclestone reportedly responded that the other driver had “really good hands.”

Ms. Wilson said she then looked at her own hands and asked what they missed. “His hands write really big checks,” Mr. Ecclestone reportedly said, a reference to the higher sponsorship money brought by the unnamed male driver.

Among Wheels of Wellness audience members was two-time Indianapolis 500 winner Arie Luyendyk, who recounted how, as a long-haired driver from Europe, he found acceptance difficult at Indy, adding that he could only imagine the challenges faced by women like Ms. Wilson, Janet Guthrie and Lyn St. James, who in 1992 became the first woman to earn Indy rookie of the year honors. Ms. St. James later launched the [Women in the Winner's Circle](#) race-training and advocacy group. [Danica Patrick](#), who has competed in both Indy and Nascar, was also part of the panel at Wheels of Wellness.

Participating in Wednesday's Barrett-Jackson-affiliated panel were Jessica Brunelli, an 18-year-old late-model NASCAR racer; Denise McCluggage, who raced sports cars against the likes of Stirling Moss and Dan Gurney in the United States and Europe; Kenna Primm, who helps build Nascar engines for Roush Racing; and Christi Edelbrock, the vintage car racer and vice president for business development at Edelbrock, which makes performance auto parts.

A Women in the Winner's Circle exhibit is touring the country to raise awareness of women's history in motor sports.