

PEBBLE BEACH CONCOURS d'ELEGANCE® *Celebrating the Life & Legacy of the Automobile*

# INSIDER



PEBBLE BEACH TOUR d'ELEGANCE

*Celebrates 25 Years of Elegance in Motion*

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Ladies & Gentlemen,

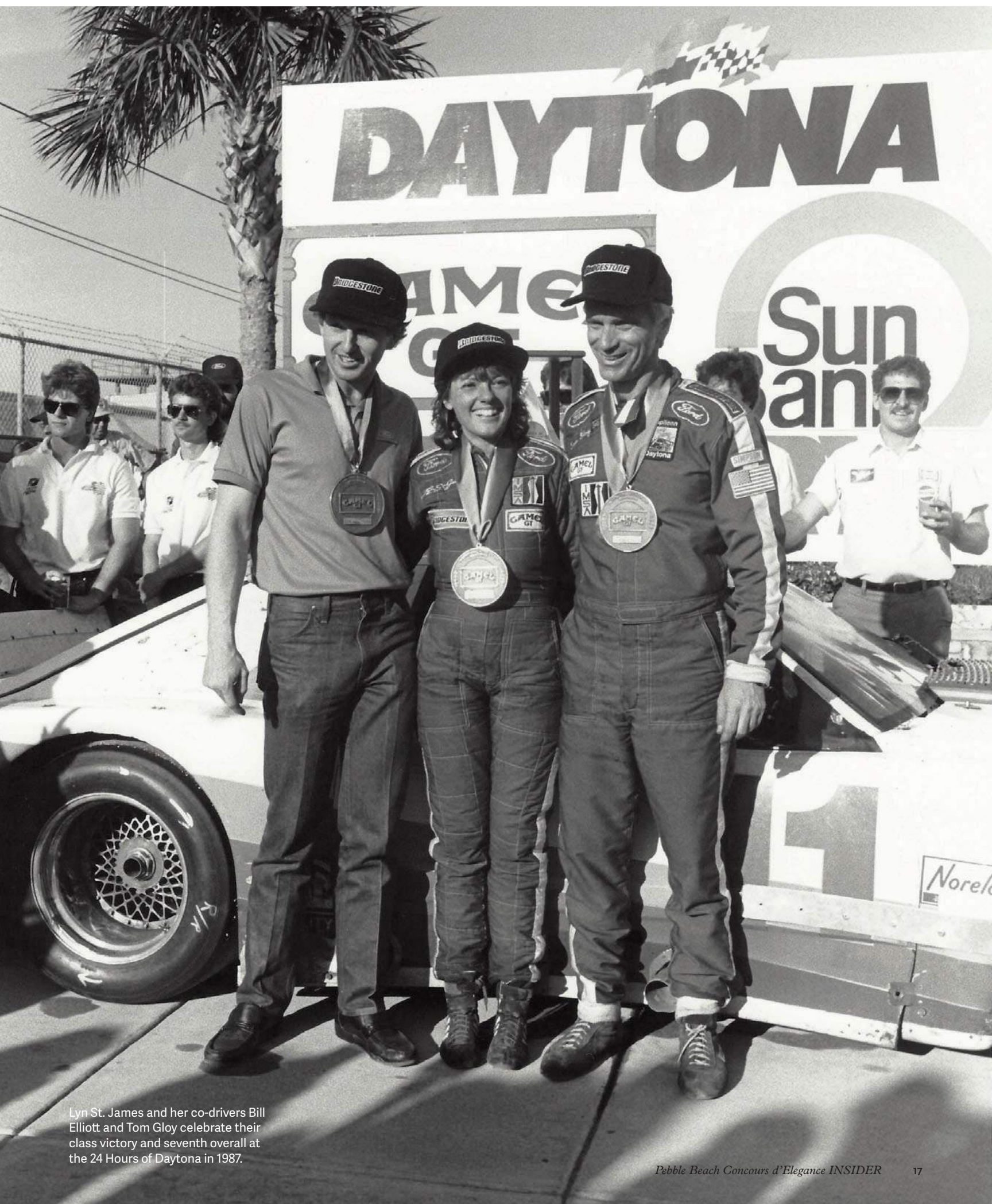
# START YOUR ENGINES!

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Lyn St. James is still in the game 50 years after starting her racing career. She gives us the inside track on competing, negotiating, crashing—and winning.

*By Kate Constantin*





Lyn St. James and her co-drivers Bill Elliott and Tom Gloy celebrate their class victory and seventh overall at the 24 Hours of Daytona in 1987.



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Lyn St. James went to a private girls' school and took piano lessons as a child. She was shy and introspective and was told by her mother to act like a "lady." But after a stint as a secretary in a steno pool and a spell as a piano teacher (a job from which she was fired after two weeks), Lyn put her foot down—literally. She became a successful race car driver, the second of just nine women to qualify for the Indy 500, and the first woman ever to be awarded Indy 500 Rookie of the Year. She raced the 24 Hours of Le Mans twice, 12 Hours of Sebring nine times (with one victory) and was the GTO class winner of the 24 Hours of Daytona—twice. This was not the track her mother had envisioned for her.

At the 2023 Pebble Beach Concours, Lyn returned as an Honorary Judge for the third time and was able to hang out with old friends and fellow competitors Derek Bell and Jacky Ickx. Between catching up with other racing legends, participating in the Pebble Beach Classic Car Forum, and her judging commitments, Lyn sat down with me to explain how she got from the piano to the pits, and the trials and U-turns she encountered along the way.

**Kate Constantin: What steered you toward the racetrack? Was it the speed, the competition, the acclaim, the money?**

Lyn: Partly the speed, partly the competition. My mom taught me to drive in the family Pontiac in Willoughby, Ohio, where we lived. She had polio and the car was her lifeline, and she wanted me to have the freedom that driving offered. I loved to drive fast so I got a lot of tickets when I was young. Later it became a pursuit of perfection, getting all the power and performance out of a car, striving for the ultimate cerebral strategy—the exact braking point in a corner, the perfect gear shift.

**Speed must have been a factor since you have held 21 international and national closed circuit speed records over a 20-year period, including 226 mph during qualifying for the 1995 Indy 500!**

I guess so. Those speeding tickets were an accurate predictor!

**How did you migrate from the family Pontiac to professional racing?**

I got married and moved to Florida where my husband and I started a manufacturers' rep business in consumer electronics. We went to the 24 Hours of Daytona and the 12 Hours of Sebring and got this crazy idea that we could both race. We joined the Sports Car Club of America, I went to drivers' school, got my competition license, and bought a Ford Pinto—and I was off to the races. I was 27 and for the first time in my life I felt like I had found myself. I was quite shy and in retrospect had been





In the Lotus Gold Leaf Special Grand Prix car, Lyn sits first on the grid for the 2011 Goodwood Revival.

searching my whole life for direction. When I got behind the wheel of that Pinto, I had a sense of power and a place in the world. It was a turning point for me. Everything gelled.

That said, I didn't have a stellar start to my career. In 1973, in my first regional sports car race at Palm Beach International Raceway, I was racing the Pinto, not paying attention to my mirrors, and I lost control of the car and ended up in a lake!

**You did well in regional races, winning the SCCA Florida Regional Championship in 1976 and 1977. You also won your class in the 24 Hours of Nürburgring in 1979. You raced on your own dime until 1981 when you were sponsored by Ford—a relationship that lasted over a decade. How did that change things?**

I saw an article in *Car & Driver* magazine about Ford's equal employment opportunities program for women, so I made a presentation and secured sponsorship. Being a

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This #48 Cosworth Vega participated in the SCCA's Showroom Stock class and doubled as Lyn's street car.

factory driver for Ford meant better equipment, bigger venues, more exposure. One of my first commitments for Ford was to drive from Los Angeles to New York City in a Ford Escort powered by ethanol. It was a big PR venture and the PR guy who accompanied me watched me struggle to get more sponsors as we went along. He told me, “Once you make your story bigger than yourself, you will get sponsorship.” It didn't really sink in at the time, in fact it took me another eight years, but that was the seed that grew my Women in the Winners' Circle Foundation. The foundation was bigger than me.



## LYN ST. JAMES

Right: The remains of a crash amidst qualifying for the 2000 Indianapolis 500.



Lyn leads a driver development training program, mentoring young female drivers.



To move on after a bad crash, Lyn relied on four "Rs": Recognize and Replace negative thoughts with positive ones, Repeat that process, and Reinforce the positive.



**During your time with Ford you had two contracts: one as a driver and one as an ambassador for the company. How did that come about?**

Ford required me to renegotiate my contract every year. I soon came to realize that I could offer "added value," doing speaking engagements and making personal appearances, which would give me protection from being dropped if my race results weren't what we expected. So, I created a separate personal services agreement where they paid me for personal appearances. This contract served me well because during my first few years with Ford, 1981 through 1983, the engines kept blowing up, so I had some DNFs, as well as some good finishes, but no wins. But they recognized the uniqueness of having a woman promote their product and kept renewing my contracts.

**So, there were advantages to being a woman in motorsports at that time?**

There were advantages and disadvantages. The disadvantages were that I didn't have any mentors, I had to learn from watching the guys, like Derek Bell and Jacky Ickx. I would hang on their every word and learn from their successes and mistakes. Sponsors tended to overlook you because they wanted a winner, and since there were fewer women racing, with none of them winning, it was a downward spiral. If you didn't have the best equipment and the best team, you weren't going to win.

The advantage was that people were curious, so you got more attention, more meetings, more media coverage. But exposure does not necessarily translate to success. I was





Lyn drove for the BF Goodrich team at the 24 Hours of Nürburgring in 1979.

with Ford for 14 years, with 14 one-year contracts. Every year I had to renegotiate my deal. But I never gave up, I was always hungry for the next race, the next car.

**In 1985, you got your first professional win in the IMSA GTO at Road American, then the next race driving solo at Watkins Glen. But that was followed in 1986 by a horrific crash at the Riverside International Raceway at Turn One. You were driving the GTP Mustang Probe when you were clipped by Doc Bundy in his Corvette, which sent you into the Jaguar of Chip Robinson. All three of you crashed out of the race—and you were launched into a death roll, landed on your roof, and your car burst into flames. How do you continue to race after a crash like that?**

I've had several crashes in my career, and some really bad ones, but Riverside was probably the worst. The video of that crash is the first thing that pops up if you search my name on YouTube! It ended with me upside down and on fire. I walked away but I was pretty banged up. On the Monday morning the crew called me and said they were going to Laguna Seca and did I want to take a few laps

in the backup car. I said "yes" immediately. I had a neck brace and was really sore with a herniated disk. But I got in the car, and as I started down the pit lane my brain began to replay the crash, right there on my windshield. I remember thinking "This isn't real," and I tried to wipe the vision away with my hand. I remember saying out loud, "Realtime! Realtime!" trying to focus on the present. I had to file it away and replace it with what was happening now. It's a technique I have used throughout my life to get rid of negative thoughts. It's called the Five Rs and I teach it when I do my speaking appearances.

**You talk about the Five Rs in your book, *The Ride of Your Life*, published in 2002 (and revised in 2010 as *An Incredible Journey*). Can you explain the concept?**

First, you have to "Recognize" that you are having a negative thought; you have to catch yourself having a negative thought or you cannot change the behavior. Then "Replace" it with an alternative positive thought. This is the hardest part; it requires active decision-making. Then



Lyn with the Spice GTP team at the 24 Hours of Le Mans in 1989.

“Repeat” that process. It will become a learned habit as you “Reinforce” the positivity, and then you are on a “Roll.” Recognize, Replace, Repeat, Reinforce, Roll. If you entertain negative thoughts repeatedly, you will end up going down a rabbit hole. After the crash I had to actively replace my brain’s replay with the reality of the moment—which was a positive moment in the present. Bad stuff happens in life, but thoughts are not real, not unless you make them real. It’s up to you.

**Were you afraid that Ford would drop you after the 1986 crash?**

Yes, but the opposite happened. Apparently, walking away from the crash, being frustrated and angry like the rest of the guys, and then getting into a car again the next week, proved that I was just like any of the other drivers. I think they thought I would crumble! But I went on to race for Ford for another six years, winning the GTO class at the 24 Hours of Daytona twice (in 1987 and 1989) and the Sebring 12 Hours (in 1990). They moved me to Trans-Am for a period, and in October 1988 I went to Talladega and set 21 national and international speed records in the Ford Thunderbird. In 1989 I raced Le Mans, then I won the GTO class at the 12 Hours of Sebring in 1990, and then went back to Le Mans in 1991. Ford basically dictated my races and my career trajectory.

**You were at Le Mans twice but didn’t finish either time. What are your memories of Le Mans?**

Le Mans was extraordinary. The uneven pavement of city streets, going under the Dunlop Bridge, using the

old pits—it was amazing. In the pits there were people everywhere; as you pulled in all you could see were kneecaps, and you felt like screaming “Get out of the goddamned way!” There is no other feeling like tearing down the Mulsanne Straight in the black of night. Even now, just talking about it takes me right back there.

In 1989, my teammates were Ray Bellm and Gordon Spice, and before the race there was a parade through the streets. We were riding in a convertible escorted by girls in crocheted bikinis provided by the sponsor Hawaiian Tropic. Gordon and Ray were “admiring the scenery” and then became embarrassed when they looked over at me. I said, “That’s okay. When we race together at Daytona, I’ll have Tom Cruise and Paul Newman escort us!”

**In 1992 your 14-year relationship with Ford came to an end and you pivoted straight into Indy. That year you were awarded Indy 500 Rookie of the Year at the age of 45—the oldest person to win that title (a record you held for 30 years!) How did you make the transition to Indy?**

It wasn’t easy but I am nothing if not tenacious. I wasn’t the first woman to qualify for the Indy 500; I was the second after Janet Guthrie—and am still one of only nine women out of 796 drivers. I am proud of that, but being second isn’t the same as being first.

While I was racing for Ford I got involved in the Women’s Sports Foundation, first as a volunteer and eventually serving as President. That role really helped me develop

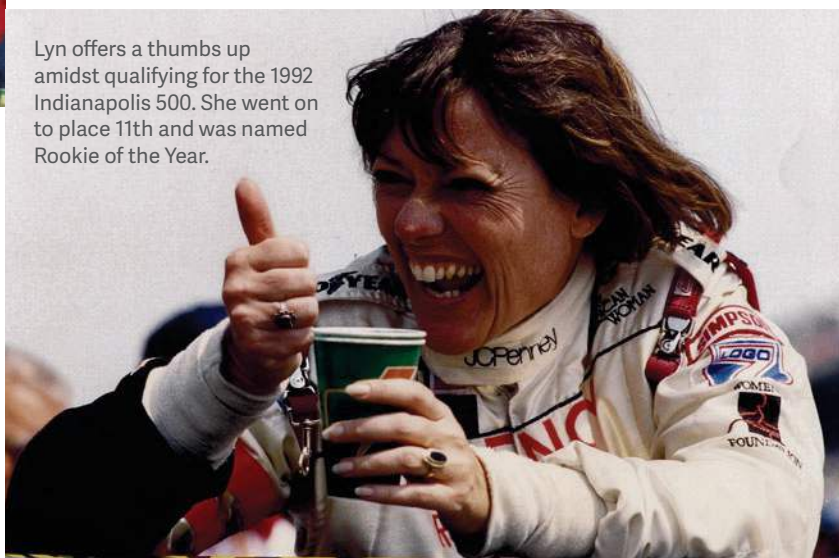




At the 24 Hours of Daytona in 1980, with co-drivers Calvin Fish and Robby Gordon, Lyn placed first in class and fifth overall.



Lyn piloting the Spice GTP car.



Lyn offers a thumbs up amidst qualifying for the 1992 Indianapolis 500. She went on to place 11th and was named Rookie of the Year.

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—Lyn St. James

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my own leadership potential—and it was, predictably, a role that was bigger than myself.

While I was with Ford I also got the opportunity to test an Indy car for Dick Simon Racing. I did well in the test and decided I was going to try Indy racing. It took four years and 150 sponsorship “no’s” before J.C. Penney said “yes,” and in 1992 I raced in the Indianapolis 500 for Dick Simon Racing.

**You have raced all the big circuits. Do you have favorites?**

I love Daytona. It’s fast, and I saw my first-ever sports car endurance race there. Then there is Watkins Glen and Indianapolis where you have high-speed corners and can get into a flowing rhythm. Flowing circuits are like a magnet to me. It’s very hard to get into a flowing rhythm on a tight circuit where you are wrestling with the car all the time.

**Most of your race accomplishments were in endurance racing. What qualities do you need for endurance racing compared to sprints?**

Today’s long-distance races are like long sprints. In my era, you would drive a sprint at nine-tenths or ten-tenths

of the car’s capacity. But if you drive at ten-tenths, with every gear shift, every braking, you are using up the car’s resources: the tires, the engine, and the working components. You cannot sustain ten-tenths for very long. In endurance racing you have to take care of the car. You know where ten-tenths is and you back off to about eight-tenths. You leave something on the table and you smooth things out and save the car’s resources. And then the most amazing thing happens. You might feel you are going slower, but when you are in tune with the car and running at eight-tenths, sometimes you find that you can go as fast if not faster than if you were running at ten-tenths. You become a better racer because you have the ability to get everything out of the car without abusing it. In a sprint you don’t have the time to smooth things out.

**In 2001 you retired from Indy 500. Why stop?**

2000 was my last Indy 500. I was still trying to get sponsorship for Indy in 2001, but I had to finally face the fact that at 53 my cerebrum-processor was a little off and my reaction times weren’t good enough. I was faced with that abyss of a question: What’s next? I couldn’t chase the



Above: Lyn was among participants at a 2022 Pebble Beach Classic Car Forum celebrating the Centennial of Le Mans.

Right: With Lyn leading the pack for Dick Simon Racing, cars line up to take to the track on opening day for the 1993 Indianapolis 500.

next car or the next race. I was pretty low at one point but I had a friend who knew me well and she rattled my cage. She told me I had everything in my toolbox to move forward and switch gears. That's when I wrote my book, *The Ride of Your Life*, published in 2002. It is basically a recap of my racing career with reflections at the end of each chapter in the form of a "pitstop" underlining life lessons learned. Everything I have learned in life has been through the pursuit of racing—strategic thinking, patience, teamwork, relationship building, how to deal with rejection, and how to negate those negative thoughts that stymy success. The "Five Rs" is one of those Pitstops. I wanted to write a book that would be relevant to people who were not necessarily race fans. It was quite enlightening, because I got to learn about things that I wasn't aware of at the time, things that happened while I was busy with my car. It provided a whole alternative perspective.

I have to admit, it was a difficult adjustment for me not to race. I had launched my Driver Development Program in 1994 as a training program to help other female racers learn things that would help them in their careers, and that helped fill that gap.

**You obviously feel strongly about promoting women in sport. Can you talk about that?**

I have had strong women as role models in my life: my mother, whom I greatly admired—and feared—and my aunt, who was in the Navy and was a powerful female

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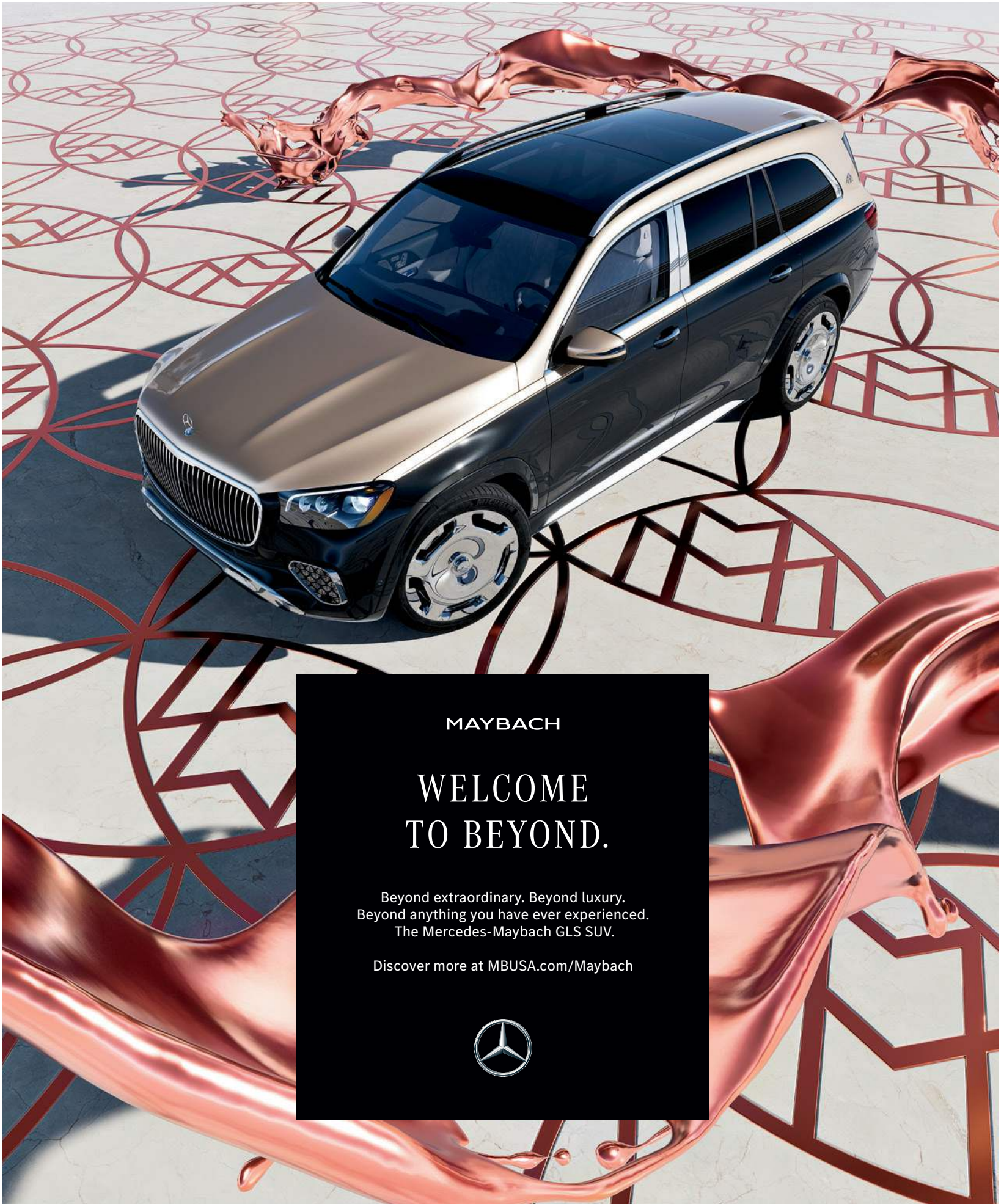


role model. There was a woman I worked for at a summer resort who gave me the keys to the store when I was 13 and told me to get on with it. Then I met Billie Jean King, founder of the Women's Sports Foundation, and she has been without a doubt the biggest influence on my life. Billie Jean is a hard-core inspiration to all women. You cannot be in her company for more than three minutes without it becoming very apparent that it is your own responsibility to go out there and change the world. No excuses. So, I became involved in the Women's Sports Foundation. I truly believe it is every woman's responsibility to be an ambassador for our gender, and now is the time. We are seeing advancement for women in soccer, business, motorsports—in all walks of life.

**Retiring from Indy wasn't actually the end of your racing career. You then began vintage racing. So, you didn't give up completely.**

No, I didn't. I raced at the Goodwood Revival and Festival in the 2000s and then a friend offered me a ride in a vintage Formula Atlantic race car, and it was like I was reborn! I began racing regularly again and it gave me so much joy. But then in 2019 I had another crash, a bad one, and that has pretty much ended my racing.





MAYBACH

# WELCOME TO BEYOND.

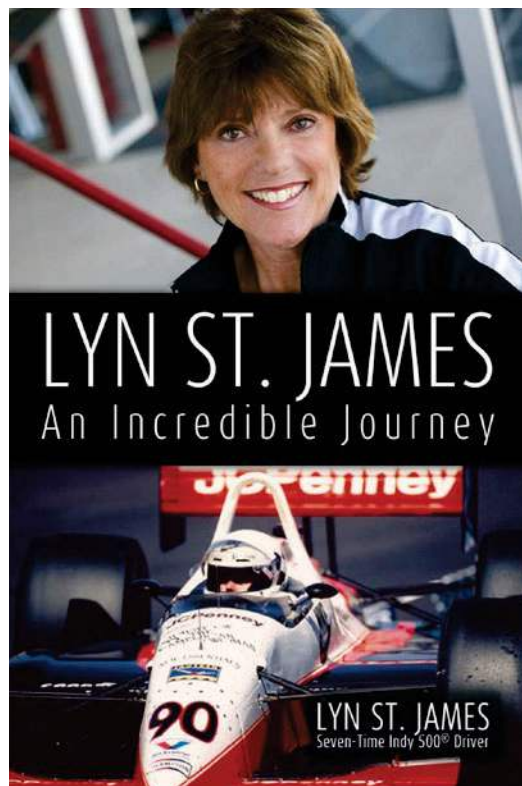
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## LYN ST. JAMES



Serving among our Honorary Judges, Lyn greets the crowd in 2023.

### What happened?

I was in a vintage race in a 1969 Corvette at Indianapolis and something on the car broke, I lost control and hit the wall hard. It was a violent incident and there were lots of pieces flying around me. I was banged up pretty bad—again! But the moment I collected myself my first thought was, “What am I doing? I have a granddaughter, and if anything happens to her, I need to be there to take care of her.” Prior to that the danger had never really affected me. But that was a pivotal moment.

### So, now that Lyn St. James has hung up her racing gloves, how do you use all the knowledge and know-how you have garnered over the years to keep yourself motivated?

I met another female role model who showed me there is still so much to do. I went down to the pits at Indy in 2020 and saw this female-forward team, led by Beth Paretta. I stood in awe and watched all these women in their race suits doing their jobs, and honestly it made me tear up! While I was always comfortable at a racetrack, I had never realized how alone and isolated I was. Beth gave me a big hug and said, “This is for all of us.” Long story short, we did a bunch of Zoom calls, and last year we formed an organization called Women in Motorsports North America.

It is a community of women and men in the industry, not just drivers but all aspects of motor racing including designers, engineers, mechanics, pit crews, PR, and media. It is a fountain of empowerment, energy and acceptance. We are helping women step out of the shadows and into the spotlight. The industry is coming to us now.

### At Pebble Beach you are an Honorary Judge. How does that feel?

Fantastic! I get to hang out with my old buddies, chat with Sandra (Button, Chairman of the Concours) and her wonderful team, and see extraordinary cars, some of which were a part of my history. It's an honor and a privilege to judge here and I learn so much. Each year I see more and more women owners, judges, and officials.

### Next year, 2024, you celebrate 50 years in racing. What is your most prized accomplishment?

Exactly that—50 years in racing! I did 14 years with Ford, a decade in Indy, and then moved to vintage racing. Now I am mentoring young engineers and racers. I am still at the track, and I am still relevant. I have had some fabulous individual races and wins, but the thing I am most proud of is Lyn St. James is still in the game!