

For additional details, contact:

Amy Lewis
Strategy Communications
Phone: 619-713-0622 (office) (858) 752-1085 (cell)
E-mail: amy@scpublicrelations.com



PRESS RELEASE

WOMEN IN RACING

Why Should Boys Have All the Fun?

SAN DIEGO, September 3, 2008 – While some women would cringe at the idea of having the windows rolled down when driving, for fear of messing up their perfectly coiffed hairdo, some women delight in their “helmet hair” proudly presenting it as a badge of honor. The reasoning – what’s a little helmet hair after you’ve just done speeds of over 200 while flying by the opposite sex? Who are these women, you ask? They are the women drivers of the Coronado Speed Festival.

With that kind of attitude, it’s no wonder that there seems to be more and more attention placed on women race car drivers recently. This fascination was fueled even further by Danica Patrick’s history making win in April of this year at the IndyJapan 300 which made her the first woman ever to win an Indy race.

Although women in racing are nothing new, the public’s sentiment towards the female racer is a recent revelation. No longer are women seen as silly girls trying to compete in a “man’s sport”, but as true competitors who deserve the respect of their fellow racers and spectators alike.

The History of Women’s Racing

Given the progress that’s been made for women in the sport, it may be hard to believe that there was a time when women were not allowed in the pit or garage areas of races let alone in the driver’s seat. Female auto racers were definitely rare at the onslaught of competitive motorsports. In fact, women that were thrill-seekers were often branded with negative labels. However, with the help of some important trail blazers, the sport eventually expanded its membership to women, and today, out of 61,000 SCCA members, women make up approximately 25 percent.

Key Women Racing Role Models

When we look back at history, we see that all successful movements have had pioneers who have dared to brave adversity and confront norms in order to make the journey just a little easier for the next generation. The same can be said for women in racing.

Kay Petre: In the early 1930’s, Kay Petre, daughter of a Canadian barrister, began competing in her small, six-cylinder Wolseley Hornet. A petite girl standing just under five feet tall, she brought what some say was glamour and style to the racing image instead of the usual grease and grime. Given the vehicles that were raced at that time, it definitely took strength, stamina and courage to compete.

Shirley Muldowney: Another trailblazer, became the first woman to earn a NHRA competition license as well as the first woman to break the five-second barrier. In 1977, she became the first and only female to win the Winston World Championship for top fuel, NHRA’s fastest division.

“It was a good day for the NHRA,” Muldowney recalled that day, “They finally relaxed and realized this is something the sport had needed for some time.”

She followed that distinction by becoming the first racer ever to win three consecutive NHRA national

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events back to back, and in 1990, Muldowney was deservedly inducted into the Motorsports Hall of Fame.

More than a Finish Line for Patrick

As mentioned earlier, Danica Patrick is the most recent female race car driver to have notable success on the track. On top of her latest Indy win, Patrick was named Rookie of the Year in 2005 for both the Indianapolis 500 and the IndyCar Series season.

Recalling her reaction to her IndyJapan 300 win, Patrick said, "I didn't expect to get emotional, but that's what was lying underneath and how much blood, sweat and tears has gone into getting that first win out of the way.

"I was embarrassed with all of the photographers there and took the helmet off to cover my face. Then I said 'Screw it, this is how I feel, and this is what sports are all about.'"

What Women have Added to the Sport

The addition of women to racing has undoubtedly had some positive side effects. The fan base for the sport has increased considerably bringing with it a whole new demographic, and given this new demographic, fresh sponsors have been drawn to the races in an effort to market to the new audience.

According to the Davie Brown index which measures a celebrity's awareness, charisma, relevance and influence, Patrick ranks eighth among female athletes. There's just no denying Patrick's marketability and sponsor appeal. Furthermore, media attention is constantly increasing since with each win, women continue to make history setting new records that were previously held only by men.

Where You Can See Women Racers in Action

Noted women drivers like the ones mentioned above can be seen in action at the Coronado Speed Festival on Naval Air Station, North Island. Female alumni include established female drivers Beth Phillion and Camee Edelbrock. Both Phillion and Edelbrock will be back to compete around the 1.7-mile course on the runways and taxiways of the 11th annual Coronado Speed Festival on September 27th & 28th.

Beth Phillion: For his 50th birthday, Beth Phillion gave her husband, Jim, a gift to the Bondurant School of Racing. Little did she know that this present would bring a new found passion into both of their lives. Jim enjoyed the experience so much; Beth found the same gift in her stocking that Christmas. Although she went to the Bondurant School of Racing with the intentions to just improve her driving techniques as opposed to gain racing skills, she quickly changed her mind. Being the only woman in the class, she became motivated to "keep up with the guys".

Only three years after enrolling at the school, Beth competed in her first club race in 1998. She drove a 1979 Mustang in the beginning but now races a 1965 Spitfire with 95hp. Beth also has an Alpha Romeo and 2 NASCAR's, which she races most frequently; a 1992 Thunderbird #28 Texaco Havoline car previously raced by Davey Allison before he passed in 1993. Her second car is the 2000 Dodge #40 Coors Light car previously run by Sterling Marlin. This is the one she will be racing in the Coronado Speed Festival this year.

Beth takes pleasure in racing because it is an exciting adrenaline rush that she and her husband can enjoy

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together. They race all over the country in events such as the Phoenix PIR, California Speedway, Infineon, Laguna Seca and has even competed in England. She loves that her and her husband can share the same passion but she secretly savors when she passes Jim on the track.

Beth says that challenges with respect to being a woman racer have been minimal. In fact, she feels the other guys think it is cool when a woman racer holds her own on the track. Beth would like to see more women get involved with racing because it's the only sport where men and women can compete against each other because it is not dependent on physical capability.

Beth looks forward to racing at the Coronado Speed Festival each year due to the one-of-a-kind pit tours, which allow event goers to visit the pit and meet the drivers. She loves showing off her cars to the fans and getting to know others who share her passion for racing. Beth truly appreciates the way the Coronado Speed Festival unifies a diverse group of racers and enthusiasts.

Who knows? Maybe for the first time in Coronado Speed Festival history, one of these driving divas will claim the checkered flag. So, don't miss out on your opportunity to witness history in the making. Watch out, boys.

The Coronado Speed Festival is produced by San Diego Fleet Week Foundation and hosted by the Naval Base Coronado and the Morale, Welfare and Recreation Program (MWR) which benefits military personnel and their families. They in turn provide positive support for the active duty military community and their families through Quality of Life Programs including single Sailor Recreation Centers, Fitness and Aquatic Facilities and the Base Theatre Free Movies. The Southern California community is given this unbelievable opportunity to thank the men and women defending our freedom in person. Visit www.fleetweeksandiego.org/coronadospeedfestival today.

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