



VISTA

MAGAZINE

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DECEMBER 2005

Race Car Driver

Milka Duno

*Determined
to Win!*

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Milka Duno



Determined to Win!

The famous Venezuelan race car driver is at the peak of her career. Spokesperson for Pontiac, she scored second in the VIR 400 at the Virginia International Raceway as part of the CITGO Racing Team. First podium finish since the team victory in the 6 Heures du Mont-Tremblant last May.

BY CARMEN TERESA ROIZ

Talent, beauty and brains are just a few of the adjectives that can be used to describe Latina racer, Milka Duno—arguably the most successful female race car driver in the world today. “Just because racing is regarded as a men’s sport it doesn’t mean that a woman cannot participate and win. Racing is based on personal ability, not physical force,” says Duno.

Born in Caracas, Venezuela and now living in Miami, Florida, Duno demonstrated from an early age her competitive nature and the dedication necessary to succeed. As a young woman in Venezuela, she recognized the value of education as the first step on her path to fulfilling her dreams. “I learned to drive when I was 12,” she explains. “I never had driving lessons, I learned how to drive by observing my parents. I learned in my mother’s car, without her even knowing.”

It was Duno’s competitive spirit what prompted her to change gears and become a race car driver, instead of the career she had picked for herself. She had planned on working as a naval engineer, having obtained master’s degrees in Organizational Development, Naval Architecture, Marine Biology and Maritime Business. It is interesting to point out that she earned the last three degrees simultaneously. It was in 1998, while working as a naval engineer, that Duno was invited by a friend to participate in a Porsche Driving Clinic in her native Venezuela. The rest, as they say—is history. “I like challenges. I love wining. I do not thrive on danger, but I do like to race, all the time. I love taking risks and I welcome the competition,” she said.

Captivated by the precision and mechanics of motor sports, Milka instantly realized that racing stimulated her passion for challenge and competition. She quickly discovered that she was meant to be a race car driver. “To be a race car driver you need to work on your concentration. You have to make quick decisions while driving at very high speeds. So you must be very focused. You must be disciplined and



very responsible, because any distraction could have serious consequences.”

In her first five seasons in professional motor sports, Milka has raced in over 12 different types of race cars at some of the most famous racing circuits in North America, Europe and Australia. In only her second year of racing, Milka was named “Venezuelan Auto Racing Driver of the Year” and won her first series championship—the Panoz GT Series Championship. In 2001 she was crowned Vice-Champion Driver in the LMP 675 Class of the American Le Mans Series.

In 2004, Milka became the first woman in history to win a major international sportscar race in North America, when she captured the overall win at the Grand American Rolex Sports Car Series Grand Prix of Miami. How do fellow drivers feel about competing against a woman? According to Duno, she has earned their respect. “I don’t get any special treatment because I’m a woman.



Once I put on my helmet, I’m just another driver. And I don’t give anyone a break either.”

The truth of the matter is that race car driving is an extremely demanding sport, where your physical condition is just as important as your mental capabilities. “I stay in shape. I exercise constantly. Mainly, I do cardiovascular exercises. I need to do it because I must improve my resistance. I spend two hours, three hours, maybe six... driving at high speed. It’s a very confined environment, and it gets very hot. So my resistance has to be high,” she explains.

For Duno, the most important thing right now is her career. There’s no time for a personal life. She admits that she is totally focused. She really feels that her most important relationship is with her car. “When you drive, your car becomes a part of you. You have to feel that way. You must get to know it well so you can transmit to the engineers the right information as to how it’s running. That way, changes can be made, if needed.”

Off the track, Duno continues to be a major part of CITGO Petroleum Corporation’s Hispanic marketing campaign. Duno is featured in Pontiac’s largest Hispanic advertising and marketing campaign ever to promote the all-new Pontiac G6 and other Pontiac products and was the subject of a four-part documentary on *Discovery Latin America* and *Discovery en Español*. She also participates as often as her schedule allows in activities in support of her favorite charity—the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

Milka Duno will return to pilot the #2 CITGO Pontiac Crawford for Howard Motorsports with teammate Andy Wallace at the final race of the 2005 Rolex Series in Mexico City, on November 5th. “I can’t wait to race there and to meet all the wonderful Mexican racing fans!”

Carmen Teresa Roiz is editorial director of VISTA.

Racing Highlights

2005 - Rolex Sports Car Series Championship with CITGO Racing

Currently twelve races into the fourteen race schedule - 8th in Driver Point Standings

Earned 3rd Rolex Series overall win at Le Circuit Mont-Tremblant, Quebec

2004 - Rolex Sports Car Series Championship with CITGO Racing

5th in Driver Point Standings, 2 Wins, 5 Top-Five Finishes, 10 Top-Ten Finishes

First woman to win overall a major international sports car race in North America

First woman to twice win overall a major sports car race in North America

First woman to drive the fastest cars in the Rolex Series - the Daytona Prototype

American Le Mans Series Championship Class Win - Petit Le Mans LMP 2 Class

First woman with two class wins at Petit Le Mans

2003 - Europe’s World Series Light by Nissan Championship

VIP Driver - Porsche Supercup race as part of Formula One Grand Prix of Spain

2002 - American Le Mans Series Championship - LMP 900 Class

First woman to drive the fastest cars in the American Le Mans Series - LMP 900

The 24 Hours of Le Mans, Le Mans, France

Europe’s World Series Light by Nissan Championship

Europe’s Open Telefonica World Series

First woman to race the fastest cars in the Open Telefonica World Series

2001 - American Le Mans Series Championship - LMP 675 Class



Vice-Champion Driver - LMP 675 Class

4 wins - including first woman to win the prestigious Petit Le Mans

Europe’s World Series Light by Nissan Championship

First woman in history to score points in this prestigious series

The 24 Hours of Le Mans, Le Mans, France

The 24 Hours of Daytona, Daytona Beach, Florida

2000 - Champion - Panoz GT Series Championship

Barber Dodge Pro Series

Ferrari Challenge

First woman to win a Ferrari Challenge race in the USA

American Le Mans Series GTS Championship