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**THE YEAR'S
MOST INNOVATIVE
HISPANIC AMERICANS**

**DRIVEN
TO WIN**

Milka Duno

melds good looks with
a champion's desire

WAR-TORN:

The Split Over Iraq

Freddy Ferrer's

Big Apple Dreams



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MILKA DUNO

HEATS UP AMERICAN RACING

Don't bother asking Milka Duno if she ever thinks about crashes. To be sure, as the first woman ever to win a major international auto race in North America, Duno has had plenty of chances to contemplate the worst. But any questions on the subject elicit little more than a polite demurral and self-conscious laughter.

Ask about her future goals, and you'll

get the same treatment. Already, she has racked up victories in some of the world's most competitive sports car races—becoming the first woman to drive racing's fastest car, the LMP 900, and earning the title of Venezuelan Auto Racing Driver of the Year in only her second year of racing.

But despite her perch atop a white-hot racing career after only seven years in the game, Duno says little when asked what she's planning next.

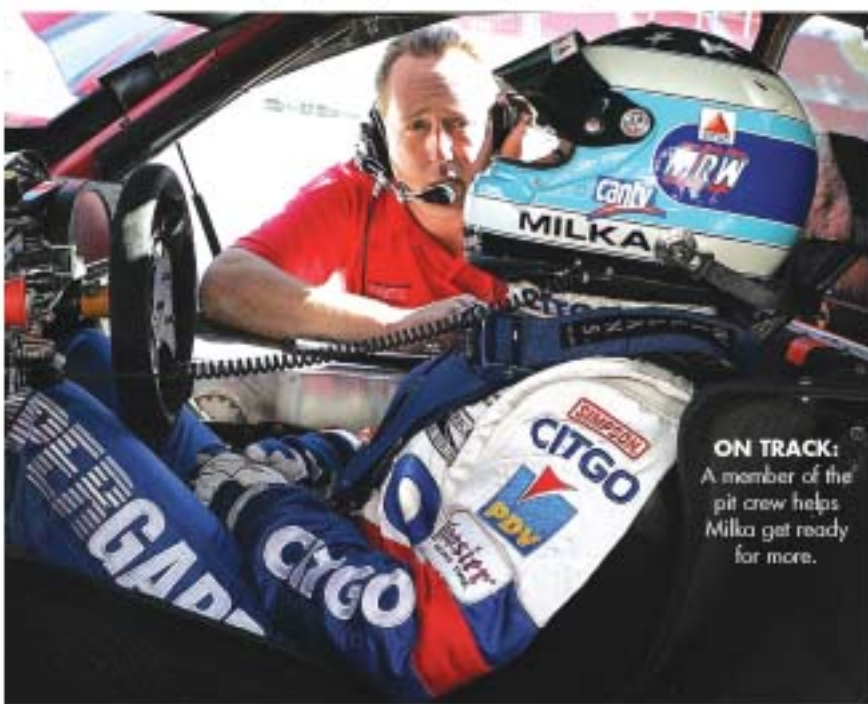
Why keep so quiet? Superstition.

"You need luck in this sport," says Duno, who is also careful never to let her racing helmet touch the ground. "There are many good drivers who lose in the final minutes. If you play tennis, you take your racquet and you depend on yourself to win. In racing, you depend on the car, the team ... many things. If you have a good car but a bad driver, you can never win. So I don't say where I want to go ... I prefer to stay in the moment."

And make no mistake, winning is very important to this native of Venezuela, who expected to live out her life as a naval engineer.

Once upon a time, Duno collected master's degrees like she now collects racing titles, applying the same intense focus she now uses to study racetracks to earn four different graduate degrees—in organizational development, naval architecture, marine biology and maritime business.

"I always dreamed about studying in another country," says Duno, who traveled from her native Caracas to Madrid, Spain for three of her advanced degrees, which she earned simultaneously while on scholar-



ON TRACK:
A member of the pit crew helps Milka get ready for more.

A photograph of Milka Duno, a professional race car driver, sitting on a black race car. She is wearing a black lace top and blue jeans with rips. She has long dark hair and is smiling. The car has 'MILKA' and 'Coke' logos on it. The background is a blurred racetrack.

**BEAUTY,
BRAINS
AND SPEED:**

Milka Duno has racked up victories in some of the world's most competitive auto races.

ship at two different universities. "That was the objective I had—to learn the most that I could and be totally concentrated on my preparation and education. When I decide to do something... I stay focused on my goal and I work hard."

But friends encouraged her to enter a course on fast driving, and she got hooked on the adrenaline rush. Before long, she was racing with an amateur club and beat-

ing drivers with more experience. Once the winning started, that's when she knew she had found her calling.

"I discovered I had this ability... something I didn't know before," says Duno, who furthered her study at a Skip Barber driving school in the United States before starting her professional career. "The instructors there helped me see that I had potential. After that, it was very clear [to me]."

Even now, she says, her past life as an engineer helps in her new work. "I can talk with the engineers, tell them exactly what I'm feeling in the car, and the engineer can make the adjustments," she says. "I can understand the telemetry... it's very good."

The determination and focus she once brought to her university studies are now employed to win races. She has driven in the 24 hours of Le Mans, earning the title of



**ACTION
FIGURE:**

When it comes to future plans, Milka is all action, no talk. "When I decide to do something ... I stay focused ... and work hard," she says. "I don't say where I want to go."

try good looks and exceptional history to sell their G6 Coupe and Solstice models to a growing segment of Hispanic car buyers.

"Milka is surprising. ... She represents style, intelligence and a surprising way to look at Pontiac for Hispanics," says Mary Kubitsky, national brand advertising manager for the company. "Beautiful, accomplished and well-educated ... she is an aspirational figure for us."

Melding a champion's performance with a model's good looks—think a Latina Sandra Bullock—Duno dresses sexily, and she is often showcased on magazine covers or photo spreads (her official website, www.milkaduno.com, features some of the most notable examples—including

**"I think
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determination ...
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has a goal and
wants to chase
that goal."**

—MILKA DUNO

a sizzling cover for the Spanish-language version of *Cosmopolitan* magazine and a set of poolside fashion pictures).

But, like other attractive champion female athletes, she must also exercise care, well aware that the attendant publicity can affect her credibility with other drivers.

"You need to take care of your image ... (because) you can lose the other drivers' respect in one moment," she says.

"I love to see a father bring his daughter to the race and say, 'She wants to be just like you.' I think people look at me and they see the determination ... someone who has a goal and wants to chase that goal.

"People can say, 'If she can succeed in racing ... maybe we can have everything that we want.'" H

American Le Mans Series vice champion in 2001, winning four times in five starts.

And she has lodged an impressive amount of firsts: In 2000, she became the first woman to win a Ferrari Challenge race in the United States; in 2001, she was the first woman to win the prestigious Petit Le Mans race; in 2002, she became the first woman to drive the fastest cars in the American Le Mans Series; and in 2004 she was the first woman to win a major international auto race in North America by taking the Rolex Sports Car Series Championship. Driving with well-known teammates such as Andy Wallace, Bobby Gordon and Scott Maxwell, Duno often found herself competing against opponents with two and three times the amount of racing experience.

"For me, it doesn't matter whether I'm driving with a man, a woman or even an ape," Wallace told the *Miami Herald* last year, just before the two teamed up in the Daytona prototype class of the Gran Prix of Miami. "All that matters is if the person can drive a car. And if I didn't think she could, I wouldn't be her (driving partner)."

"The first time I saw her race, I was blown away," Larry Holt, MBD Sportscar technical director, told the *Washington Post* in 2002. "I'll be the first to say she didn't make it to this level because she's a woman. Guys who say that she has are jealous."

Her unique personal story also attracted a major sponsor. Pontiac decided to make Duno the face of their largest-ever Spanish language advertising campaign, using her sul-