

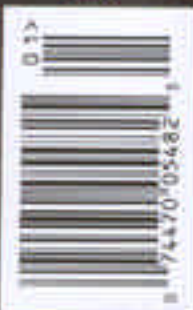
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POWER, CULTURE & SUCCESS

ALEJANDRO FERNANDEZ
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Pole Position

It's a Man's World, No More

[by Teresa Casteñeda] [photography: Martin Mireles]

Remember the old movies when men put on the gloves, buckled up, revved the engines, and the race began? In the stands, a gentle woman waited in anticipation of the accident that would steal the driver from her world, her life. Then a car crossed the finished line, the winner was met by a beauty queen who handed him a trophy, and then kissed him on the cheek. The hero turned away the track girl and embraced the devoted dutiful woman of his dreams as she ran down onto the track. Well, those days are over. Milka Duno finds no comfort in the stands, or handing out trophies to men. In fact, she has made a habit of taking them away from the good ole boys who have long dominated the racetrack experience. With brains, brawns and beauty, Milka Duno has rocked the racing world becoming one of the most popular competitors in the history of the sport. Her popularity is not unwarranted, both her talent and intelligence have allowed her to become one of the sport's strongest competitors in just a few short years.

Milka dreamt of becoming a racecar driver. You might even say that the sport picked her. "I was more focused on education and engineering. I studied Naval engineering at the university. I hardly graduated from the university when I started a post-degree in Organizational Development," explains Milka, "Soon I was granted a scholarship by the Spanish Embassy and I went away to study in Spain." There she pursued three master's degrees in Organizational Development, Naval Architecture, Maritime Business and Marine Biology simultaneously and achieved them in less than two and a half years. She then returned to Venezuela and began working on yet another degree in Economic Development. In her education she took advantage of the opportunities before her. Not only was she extremely intelligent, but competitive as well. She was sure she would succeed in business and gave it everything she had. It was these characteristics that would soon shine on the track.

This lipstick engineer was a woman of style and class. So who would be surprised then, that she was driving a Porsche. One day the Porsche dealer called and told her they were having a driving clinic and asked her if she would like to participate. She accepted the invitation and went down to the racetrack where the clinic was held. At the end of the clinic they stated that there was going to be a competition. They asked her if she wanted to participate. Her response? "Si! Claro!" The only woman, she entered the competition and discovered a new hobby. After that she began racing in a Porsche Club on a regular basis where individual owners competed against each other, driving their own cars. She began winning some of the races and gaining respect. It wasn't until the final competition though, where she came in second place, that she seriously considered the idea of making it her career. But when she committed, she committed whole-heartedly, "In education, I was striving to become number one, in engineering number one, and in racing I go

for number one. Whether it be career, love, or whatever, you need to use your time to go for it. 100% of 100% or else don't do it."

Her strategy seems to be working. After a few years Milka quickly showed her competitive edge and ability, rising to become "Venezuelan Auto Racing Driver of the Year" in 2000 and "American Le Mans Series 2001 Vice Champion Driver" in the 675LMP class.

Now known as the fastest girl in the Americas, literally, Milka has captured the hearts of fans around the world, especially Latino/a fans. For this reason CITGO has teamed up with her to become sponsor along with PDV, CANTV, and MRW. With the Latinaization of the U.S. on the forefront of everyone's market strategy, CITGO has found an ace in the hole with Milka.

Not only are the racing fans paying attention, but her good looks haven't escaped the eyes of fashion either. Milka has been featured in numerous fashion and lifestyle magazines including *Cosmopolitan en Español*, *Selecta*, *Latina Magazine* and *Caralina Magazine*. She makes no apologies for her womanhood and femininity. "There is no reason why I can't be both feminine and competitive. Yes, it has been a man's sport, but I am a woman and I like to dress nice, with fashion." It's not enough that she is taking trophies on the track, but she takes pages away from men in the media. She also appeared in the April, 2004 issue of *Men's Fitness Magazine*.

Milka is a reminder to all, that there is no single role that defines us. And there is no obstacle that cannot be overcome with enough tenacity, and yes this is especially true for women who are redefining gender roles in the world everyday. "We have the capacity to do whatever we want. There are no limits. This is one of the things I feel very strongly about. I am in a man's world but that doesn't matter to me. What matters to me is that I live up to my capacity."

Milka is the first Latina American woman driver ever to be classified as "expert." She is the first woman to win a long distance race in the U.S. and 2nd in the world. Her wins are too numerous to mention. She has participated in many international races and has driven a wide selection of race cars, including the Porsche Super Cup, Ferrari Challenge 355, Formula 2000 Dodge, Reynard Dodge 98E, Panoz GT-RA, Dodge Viper GTS, Coloni Nissan CN1/C, Reynard-Judd 01-Q, Lola B2K/40/Judd and the Dome S-101/Judd. In 2002 Milka became the first woman in the history of sports car racing to pilot the fastest and most technologically-advanced sport scar in the world – the Le Mans Prototype 900, Milka also became the first woman in history to pilot the fastest car in the Open Telefonica World Series – the last step on the ladder to Formula One.

Milka gives a new meaning to the term "fast girl."



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