

# Women in Racing

## Mishael Abbott

*Mishael Abbott drives the Michael Crawford Motorsports car #8 in the Indy Pro Series. She was the first female to win a SuperKarts USA (SKUSA) feature event and the first to test and race in the Indy Pro Series where she is still the only female.*

**SW:** How did you get interested in motorsports; when and how did you start racing?

**MA:** When I was very young, my dad used to race as an amateur. When I was seven, he was working for a pit crew and I would go to the tracks with him. I got my first go-kart at age 13 and started racing at 14.

**SW:** Do you have a lucky charm, Bible verse, family member photo, or something such as that with you in the car during the races?

**MA:** I don't take anything in the car with me. A dear friend I knew since before I started racing passed away about six years ago from leukemia and I always put his initials on every racecar I drive because of his attitude and what he was about. I do have race day rituals such as always eating the same cereal for breakfast, going to chapel service on Sunday mornings, and I eat homemade macaroni & cheese about an hour before getting into the racecar. And, I like to get in my racecar as early as possible so I can focus and block everything else out.

**SW:** You are pursuing dual degrees from Florida Atlantic University in elementary education and at the University of Indianapolis in sports marketing. What is it like managing school and racing?

**MA:** It's a huge balancing act. It takes a lot of work and dedication. I never schedule a class on Mondays because that's my day to get back into town or on Fridays because that's practice day at the racetrack, and I take a lot of online classes. All I really have left is my internship

and I can't do that right now, while racing.

**SW:** You spotted for IndyCar Series veteran Jaques Lazier during the last two Indianapolis 500's. Does that make you better at racing?

**MA:** It has been a tremendous help to me. Before I ever got into a pro series car, I had seen thousands of laps at Indy from the two best seats in the house; on top of turn one and three. I got to see what to do by drivers like Jaques, Sam Hornish Jr., and Helio Castron-



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eves. Jaques is a lot like me in his communication with the engineer. So, I get to be included in that discussion and learn what changes are being made and how it affected the car. So, I really enjoy doing it and learning from it.

**SW:** Your primary sponsorship spot just happens to be available at this time. What do you tell prospective companies?

**MA:** The biggest benefit of sponsoring my team

is you get almost all the benefits of being in the Indy Racing League but on a much smaller budget; about a third of the cost. And, I get a lot of press for being the only female in a field of 18 cars.

**SW:** Has being a female driver been difficult, or about as expected?

**MA:** Being a female driver has its moments where it's definitely challenging. But I wouldn't say that it has been so difficult; if it were that difficult there wouldn't be any females racing. But there are more eyes on my career and that puts a lot of added pressure on me if I have a bad weekend or something goes wrong. At age 15, I had to race in the adult class at the local go-kart track, and a lot of those guys had a hard time being beat by a 15-year-old girl. Ten years later those same guys are supportive and happy to see me doing well. There will always be a few good-ole-boys in any series but with more and more females out there it's getting easier.

**SW:** Is there a female motorsports figure that has influenced or inspired you?

**MA:** Not really. Perhaps Janet Guthrie because of what she went through back in the seventies when women were not even allowed in the garage area at Indianapolis. She broke down barriers and opened a lot of doors.

**SW:** In a recent Associated Press interview, NASCAR legend Richard Petty said he does not think women belong in auto racing. Do you believe there will ever be a 'successful' female driver at the 'Nextel Cup' level?

**MA:** I know there are many, many, talented female race car drivers out there, and I think there is absolutely no reason why one of them won't be successful in the Nextel Cup Series. Eventually, I think Mr. Petty will be proven wrong. **SW**