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## Through The Esses - Those Damn Women Drivers (In Grand Am)

09/28/04 - © Andrew S. Hartwell

The expression “Damn Woman Driver!” has often been used to convey a sense of significant displeasure with the driving habits of the occupants of other road-going vehicles. Typically an incident of poor judgment or inattentive behavior has prompted the refrain from men who see themselves as being better drivers than the members of the fairer sex. For some, the phrase comes readily to the lips when driving on public roads. But at Virginia International Raceway this weekend, the phrase will represent the efforts of at least two women who will look to demonstrate their prowess behind the wheel of a race car. Two ‘damn women drivers’ who intend to earn the respect of the men they will be racing against.

Julie Allen is the founder of DWD (Damn Woman Driver) Racing Inc., an event management company and racing team located in Danville, VA. She, along with Divina Galica – an established and respected talent who has competed in races from the Panoz GT Women’s Challenge to Vintage events to ALMS racing and even in European Truck Racing – will be competing in the Grand Am Cup series race, driving a Nuzzo Motorsports/ DWD Racing Mini-Cooper S in the ST class. The #21 Sleep Inn/ Sunoco/ VHTA Mini will be pressing on at speed looking to establish the DWD pair as potent adversaries in a sport so long dominated by men.



Photo By Victor Newman

We talked with Julie Allen this week and learned all about her new team, her background in the sport and her aspirations for the future. A press release on her web site ([www.dwdracing.com](http://www.dwdracing.com)) provided some background. “She began her racing career as Membership Director for Sportscar Vintage Racing Association (SVRA) and then advanced to Marketing Director. Julie recently served as Marketing Director for Virginia International Raceway.”

We asked Julie to fill us in on some of the details of her involvement in racing.

“I only started driving race cars about ten years ago. Until now, racing was a hobby since my husband Mike and I have two daughters. Ashley is 17 and will graduate from high school this

year and Jessiann will turn 15 next week. We bought Jessiann a go-kart to keep her busy and to perhaps encourage the next DWD generation. We aren't sure where she is going with it".

While colorful names for race teams have been used before, the DWD moniker is probably a bit outside the norm. But it is clever and it has attracted our attention. So how did it come to be the name of choice we wondered?

"Years ago there was a lady who had a race team she called "PMS" and I thought that was pretty creative so when I wanted to form a race team I came up with "DWD". At the time, my two daughters were fairly young so to them the team was known as both "Determined Woman Driver" and "Darn Woman Driver".

"Racing wasn't something I grew up with or even knew anything about until I married. When I was younger I never thought I would grow up to race cars. I don't think my parents quite understand what it is all about since it wasn't a part of our lives; however, they have been supportive and they will be at the track this weekend for the Grand Am Cup race so I hope to show them more about what I am doing.

"My father in law drove an Austin-Healey Sprite Mk II in vintage racing and I got into co-driving with him in enduro events. He moved on to an MGB GT and passed the Sprite onto me. I've also raced a friend's 1966 Shelby GT350 so today, after 10 years of sharing; it is a pleasure to have my own car.

"During this same time, I've worked on the management side of racing. Once I accomplished my goals there, I formalized my own team and company, and to celebrate my 10th year in racing I decided it would be a good time to try racing in the Grand Am Cup series. Tony Nuzzo was willing to rent me his Mini - I only needed to find a co-driver and sponsorship. Since Divina and I raced against each other in a vintage event, and had a great deal of fun, I invited her to join forces with me."

As of now, Allen isn't clear about what a successful weekend driving a Mini in a man's world will lead to, but she is going to have plenty to think about before, during and after the race.

"I honestly don't know where my racing career will go. I guess it depends on how we do this first time out. I have been doing everything a team needs to do from landing sponsorship to planning pre-race activities to setting up the team hospitality arrangements for the weekend. I figured that if I didn't keep myself really busy before hand I would be too nervous going into this first Grand Am race. There are a lot of really great drivers in the event – drivers that I have watched on TV or at the track – and to know that I will be competing against them is somewhat surreal. I will find out during the practice sessions on Friday what it is really all about!"

Besides vintage racing in the Sprite and the Shelby, Allen recently took the wheel of a stock car and established her ability amongst a field of veteran racers. No, she didn't beat Jeff Gordon or Mark Martin at Talladega, but she did finish 9th in the Stock Car Road Racing Championship (SCRRC) feature during the Stock Car Spectacular presented by Hardee's, held at VIR on Sept. 5.

The one-race experience in the big stocker taught her a lot about the variety of race cars there are in the world and how to be an even better racing driver.

“After my experiences in the Shelby, the stock car reconfirmed that these cars do not corner. I have a healthy respect for their power. I can hardly wait to drive the Sprite again, hopefully faster and with more confidence, since it handles so much better than the stock car.”

Allen told us how her one-off ride in a Chevrolet Monte Carlo came about.

“While I was selling sponsorship for the Grand Am race, I talked with Rick Jones, the owner of the Sleep Inn and Sir Richard’s Steakhouse and Lounge. I secured the sponsorship and then asked to drive his stock car. He wanted to sell the car and since I would be the only woman in the race, he immediately saw the potential in letting me run his stock car (i.e.: press coverage). I finished 9th (after starting 14th) and after the race I was surrounded by family, friends and fans. I had little girls asking for my autograph! It was an awesome experience and Rick really felt like he got a great return on his investment. It is funny how one opportunity led to another with me.”

Her debut in the Grand Am Cup race could be the next big opportunity for her, perhaps the one that leads to even more time to practice being a Damn Woman Driver at the professional level.

“This is the only GA event I have planned for this season. Of course, if somebody says ‘come drive my car for free’, then I will do it! I guess it all depends on how the weekend goes and how fast I can grow my event management company. We have several events coming up with various car clubs. I am also involved with promoting tourism in Virginia and will be putting together car rallies throughout the state. I have lived here for three years and I really haven’t seen enough of its beauty.”

At almost 39 years of age, Julie Allen is moving her DWD company into high gear and expects to grow her business at a rate somewhere between the top speed of the Sprite and the Mini Cooper. Gentlemen, we suggest you watch your mirrors this weekend, for the madam in the mini is most certainly a Damn Woman Driver!