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ash - through the esses

Cindi Lux – A Racer Once Left Behind And Now Looking Ahead

10/12/08 - © Andrew S. Hartwell

Cindi Lux drives a Mopar Dodge Viper in the SPEED World Challenge GT class. She has also logged a lot of racing miles in SCCA amateur racing, collecting several divisional championships along the way. Her resume includes 12 road racing championships, becoming the 1999 American Le Mans Series Women's



Global GT Series Champion, collecting the 2003 Oregon SCCA National Driver of the Year award and being presented with the Pro-Driver SCCA Driver-of-the-Year Award in 1999.

While she has had a taste of racing at the professional level in prior years - and enjoyed real success there - she is coming off just her second somewhat-full season of World Challenge racing this year. And the return to the professional ranks has her eager to get back behind the wheel of her Viper again in 2009.

Growing up on a farm in the state of Washington, and being the youngest Lux to arrive in the family, she missed out on all the racing action that had been so much a part of the Lux's world before she was old enough to know anything about cars and racing. As a youngster, she never made it to the races with the rest of the family. She was the baby who stayed home with the babysitter.

She has been making up for lost time ever since.

Lux can trace her driving talents all the way back to the time she borrowed the family farm tractor – at age 12. She had two older brothers who rode motorcycles everyday after school in the mountains. They said their little sister could come along but she had to keep up or be left in the dust. This was a tough task when she was riding on a mini-bike while the boys rode high powered off-road motorcycles. But her determination and drive to 'keep up' proved without question that, though she may not have grown up in the heart of her family's time in racing, inside of her there beats the heart of a racer.

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What follows is the story of her childhood and the paths she took along the way to becoming a seriously competitive Viper pilot.

“I grew up in a family that was involved in motorsports, but I was the youngest, and the only girl in the family, and by the time I came around they decided they had been racing long enough and stopped! I was never taken to the race track to watch my dad race. My grandfather raced in the Pan American road race in 1953. My dad raced Ferrari Tassarossa’s for many years in the Pacific Northwest. One older brother was a drag racer and the other a road racer. But whenever they would go racing I always stayed behind with the babysitter.

“When I got a little bit older, my dad stopped racing so he could concentrate on the family automotive business. He owned the Chrysler, BMW and Mercedes Benz dealerships in Yakima Washington. When he was in racing, dad was something of a hot ticket along the west coast. It was pretty cool when I finally got into racing; people would come up to me and ask me if I was Dick Hahn’s daughter. They would always tell me that he was a hell of a racer. In fact, he was the first winner of the prestigious 1961 Rose Cup Races at Portland International Raceway.

“When I graduated from college in Tacoma, Washington, I had taken a job with Toyota Motor Sales in Los Angeles after having to decide whether or not to go into the family business. I decided I wanted to do something on my own and something different. I had always enjoyed the automotive business and thought it was kind of cool, so I sent my resume to a few places and I actually interviewed with Nissan and Toyota in Los Angeles.

“When I received the call that I got the job at Toyota Motor Sales, USA, I didn’t know a soul in LA. I packed my bags and moved to LA. I started out working in inventory control in the Parts Department. I worked there for about 15 years working my way up through the ranks and I had a great career going. If it weren’t for the racing I’m sure I would still be there and my career would have gone even further. It was great working for this company. I couldn’t think of a better place to learn about building relationships in the business world.”

Lux would come to learn all about the importance of relationships and teamwork in the sport of road racing. She introduced herself to it all by purchasing a totally spent Dodge Shelby – because the price was right. While hardly an auspicious beginning – it wasn’t at all like one of her dad’s Ferraris after all – she did gain a tremendous respect for what it takes to improve as a racer.

The racing bug bit after attending a driving school sponsored by Toyota.

“I went to the Toyota Grand Prix at Long Beach in 1987 with my Dad. Something happened that weekend that changed my life. I wanted to learn the art of driving and that is when I decided to go to the driving school. I was 22 when I enrolled at Fast Lane Racing School at Willow Springs Raceway. Four days later, I was hooked and looking for a race car to buy.

“When I bought the Dodge Shelby Charger, I had no clue what I was doing. I bought it from an owner who shall remain nameless! That car was the biggest cockroach you ever saw! It was held together with baling wire and superglue. It was an old endurance car with tons of miles on it. But I didn’t know any better so I took it racing!”

That Shelby would teach Lux much about relationships, and about support and the art of going faster.

“At work, I went to the Toyota Tech center a few times and hung out there with the guys. I knew I had to learn more about cars. I’d ask them if they had a wrench or two, and ask them about whatever they were working on. After a while the guys started feeling sorry for me and they would help me with my car. And I had no place to keep my Dodge Shelby so they found a spot in the back of the warehouse and put a car cover on it. There were so many prototypes and other developmental cars in this building that the bosses never found out about it being there! I’d take the car out for a race weekend and then tuck it back there, with the cover on it, and it would sit there unnoticed until the next race.

“I ran about 30 races with the Shelby, in SCCA Regional racing. And that first year I was just pathetic on the race track. I couldn’t get out of my own way. I would get lapped after just three or four laps! I was on my own that first year, with no one to help coach me or show me how to cure the car’s ills. I started hanging out at race shops and asking questions and studying everything I could about race cars. I think that is when I really started to become determined to improve.

“My first year racing the Shelby was in 1987. In my second year I won the Showroom Stock A championship. Two things had changed that second year. First, I went to more races so I racked up more points that way. Second, I started to get my act together with better parts and a better understanding of how to make the car faster. That first year I would rummage through the dumpsters looking for tires other teams had thrown away, looking for any with a little bit of tread left. By the second year I was running better tires. They didn’t have the cords showing anywhere on the tread and to me that was good!”

Lux would go on to move from the once-decrepit Shelby to a race car with a pedigree. And while all seemed set for her to launch her career in a professionally built and prepared race car, she suffered a set back that really tested her capacity to build relationships – and repair race cars.

“I raced the Shelby for three years in Southern California. And then I met a person named Dave Wolin who ran the factory Mitsubishi race team. Meeting him would lead to the next big step in my career. He had a race shop in California. I went over there one day and said ‘I know you don’t know me from Adam but would you mind if I hung around the shop and swept the floors and learned more about racing?’ I worked for Toyota in the daytime and at night I would go to his shop and watch them build race cars. Dave could see my determination and strong desire towards racing. So one day Dave said to me, ‘You can take one of my cars from last year – a Mitsubishi Starion – and go drive it for a year to get more experience.’

“I thought it was awesome to be driving somebody else’s real race car! I took it up to Willow Springs for the very first race and put it on the pole. I was so excited, but I will never forget what happened. I got into one of the worst accidents of my racing career! A tire went down in turn 9 and another car T-boned me, almost splitting the car in two! This was in my first race with Dave’s car!

“That night I was sitting in the hot tub, soaking my injuries, feeling really beat up, I finally made the hardest phone call of my life. The Mitsubishi Team was racing at Lime Rock that weekend, in the SCCA Escort Series, and I had him to tell him the bad news. All he said to me was. ‘All cars can be fixed so let’s see what you are made of, so fix it. See you later. Bye.’

“That was a pivotal point for me mentally. I was at the beginning of my career and I came out of that experience telling myself that no one was going to beat me mentally at this game. So we

got the car back on track and went out to see what we could do. And in each of the next three years, I won the SSA Regional Championships”

Her association with Team Mitsubishi would provide Lux with a gift far greater than a race car. The person who was the crew chief for all six of Dave Wolin’s race cars would have the biggest influence on Cindi’s life. Cindi met Fred Lux in 1989. Fred and Cindi immediately knew their friendship was something special.

“After seven or eight years of working together I married Fred! He is not only my husband; he is also my best friend. His car building skills are incredible and I am just the lucky person who now gets to drive his race cars. Anybody could jump in one of his cars and go win races any day. He is that good. He preps all the cars for me now.”

Lux first came to our attention when she ran in the inaugural season of the Panoz GT Women’s Series 1999. She looks back on that time as one that helped open a door or two, and gave her an appreciation for how much talent and ability to learn is required in this sport.

“Running in the Panoz GT Series for women was my start in professional racing. That series kind of launched my career. It also opened up my eyes to what was out there. I went into the program somewhat in awe and just looking to make the cut. I look back at it now and I think how it was really harder racing against 20 other females than racing against the guys. It was bizarre. Some of the girls were just tough as nails. They were so determined. That experience really gave me a positive outlook about racing.

“Those Panoz cars looked alike but they were not totally identical. I was told that every car you get in will be slightly different and that it is my job to figure out what the car wants. I’ve never forgotten that advice and that is what I have tried to do. For example, if I would get in the car that didn’t corner well on track then it was my job, as the person behind the wheel, to figure out what it needed. Because of this, I learned so much about how to become a more adaptable driver.

“I met some great people through that series. It was an opportunity for me to go out there and be at race tracks. And we did well, taking the championship that first year. And Don Panoz came through for me by helping me to get a ride in a G&W Porsche at the 2000 Petit Le Mans, driving with Belinda Endress and Divina Galica, who also ran in the Panoz series.”

Unfortunately Lux was not able to turn that opportunity into a full time ride in the American Le Mans Series. Instead she partnered up with a fellow SCCA veteran and got herself into the top tier of SCCA racing, where she would go on to win several divisional championships, and the ‘June Sprints’ at Road America in 2004 and again in 2006.

“I couldn’t afford to go professional racing full time so I went into the T1 class in the SCCA, running a Corvette Z06 for a couple of years. I joined up with Scotty B. White and we agreed to share resources. I went out and got a car, he got us a tire deal, and we shared a transporter. We became teammates and great friends. We ran the Corvettes for a few years and then switched over to Dodge SRT10 Vipers in 2005. At that point we made a connection with Dodge that eventually led to the Mopar Dodge in SPEED Challenge.

“We called up Dodge and asked if they would like to run the Vipers in the T1 class. That led to a two year program. We ran our Viper team like a team running in a pro series. We ran 20 something races across the country. Dodge and Kumho contracted with us to run a lot of races and that took us across the country. We worked hand in hand with the Dodge engineers on that

program, helping them develop parts for the cars. That was the first time I had ever worked with a factory. We had a brand new car in a brand new class, and we were up against the Corvettes.”

In her SCCA career, Lux made the National Runoffs several times.

“I had a top-five finish in 2003. And the last two years, in the Viper SRT10, I finished fifth (2005) and second (2006) in the T1 class.”

“Scotty put his car on the pole at the SCCA runoffs both in 2005 and 2006. In 2006, he was leading when he had a punctured tire and ended up dropping out. I worked myself into the lead and then on the last lap got passed when my brakes started to fail due to a cut brake line. I ended up with the silver medal. But the thing about working with Scotty is that he was my first real strong teammate. He is a very colorful person but we developed a ‘brother and sister’ type relationship. He was someone you could trust. Someone you felt had your back both on and off the track. It truly was a very positive experience. We worked together very well and we could push each other when the need arose. He has been a great friend.”

Seeking to move on with her career as a racer, Lux and White made the decision to enter the professional ranks. There they put together a talented team and, with Dodge’s support, became immersed in the game of professional racing in 2007.

“Believe it or not, the SRT 10 Vipers we ran in T1 were very similar to the cars that ran in the SPEED Challenge GT class. We decided to seek Dodge’s support to move up to that series and they got behind us. Scotty had done World Challenge before while I had not. We ran five races in 2007. The best finish I had was 11th but I also managed to win a couple of Rookie of the Race Awards.

“This year, his business needed his full attention so he took the year off. I picked up the Mopar deal and we ran most but not all of the races. We had a couple of DNF’s with transmission’s blowing up. The cool thing about having a relationship with the factory is they truly want to make the parts better on the Vipers. We are the only Team Mopar program involved in road racing, so Mopar wanted the transmissions back immediately so they could go through it to make it stronger for their customer cars.”

Lux had one other professional race opportunity in 2007 and it brought her back, albeit briefly, to the ALMS. And once again, her Dodge connection made it possible.

“I returned to the ALMS in 2007 driving the factory Dodge Viper Competition Coupe, on KUMHO Tires, with Stan Wilson, at Mid-Ohio. We were asked to evaluate the car against the GT2 class.”

Looking back on this season, Lux is as aware as anyone could be that having a goal and having good people to work with you towards achieving that goal is what a person’s life is really all about.

“Running the Mopar car this year was something myself and other team members have been working hard to obtain. Its one of those deals where you have to remember to be careful what you wish for because it’s gonna happen.

“We had one top 5 finish and five top ten finishes in the eight races. Those 2 DNF’s really killed us this year. We also won the Hard Charger and Hole Shot Awards in Detroit as well.

“And the people we put together on our team this year are the kind of people that you want to hang with both on and off the track. They are there because they believe in themselves and in the car. It was a special year and we had just so much fun.”

While the past is comprised of certainties, the future remains a repository for the uncertain. These are difficult times for motorsports because so much of what is accomplished relies on sponsorship dollars and support. Can Lux, and so many others who choose to live life at an accelerated pace, continue to pursue their dreams if the currently bleak outlook for the economy does not improve? Lux, like so many others who possess the drive to move forward despite the odds, remains optimistic.

“What we don’t know is what will happen next year. Chrysler is encountering some financial problems so we don’t know if they will even have a program for us next year. And the shame of it is we are making so much progress. I think the competitors in SPEED World Challenge have come to respect our team. It’s one of the hardest series in the US and we were constantly running in the Top 10 this year. I really hope Mopar pulls some type of rabbit out of their hat and we can do another year. I really think good things could come in 2009.”

Coming back to her childhood again, Lux may not have attended the races with her family, but she did come to see that the blood of a racer flows through her veins.

“When I was younger I used to downhill ski race in the winter and I was on a swim team in the summer. Hanging out with my older brothers also exposed me to various speed related activities. One summer day, my oldest brother, Steve, took me drag racing in alfalfa fields, on his snow mobile. We used to hit speeds of up to 80 miles an hour. One time, on the return road back to the pits, I went over a bump and I accidentally grabbed at the handlebars to hang on. But I hit the throttle button! That threw me right off the sled! It was pretty embarrassing and, needless to say, after that my brother stopped taking me along.

“The very first thing I drove on the freeway was a 1949 Ferguson tractor. I used this tractor a lot on the farm that I grew up on. One day when I was 12, I was told to stay home and take care of the horses and the cows. Well, I really wanted to go to the store for something and since you were allowed to drive the tractor on the street in a farm community, I climbed up on the tractor, pulled down my hat and put on my sunglasses so no one would recognize me, and I took off. I probably went about 5 miles an hour and within a few minutes I had a mile long stretch of cars backed up behind me.

“Sure enough, I get to the store and one of mom’s friends saw me so I was busted. My parents made sure from that point on that, before they left me home alone, they took the keys to everything motorized!”

Of course, no one is taking the keys away from Lux anymore. And she is more determined than ever to learn all she can about going fast and sustaining outstanding working relationships with her crew and her competitors.

“If I am asked why I race, I say I can’t imagine my life without it. And the more I am into it the more I realize how much I want to be perfect at it. While I know I will never fully master this art, achieving the goal of getting that perfect lap is intoxicating. To move me closer to being the best I can be, I do several things that you might call ‘out of the box thinking’. One of these is working with a person from the sports psychology department at the Olympic Training Center in Boulder, Colorado. I spend a lot of time working on learning how to bring out the best in myself

and in my crew. What I have come to learn for sure so far is that surrounding yourself with really positive, motivated people is the key in life.”

Cindi Lux also knows that nothing speaks louder and clearer than being fast on a race track. We expect to hear a lot more from her in the coming years.



Belinda Endress, Divina Galica and Cindi Lux at the 2000 Petit Le Mans.