



Photos Courtesy Jeremy Sale and Sid Priddle



# A CANADIAN TRAILBLAZER

## CANADIAN MOTORSPORT HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE DIANA CARTER

ably the top woman driver in Canada.”

Or how about this story: Canada’s raciest blond. Hooked by auto racing after her first win four years ago, Diana Carter, a 5-foot-2 blonde, is rated as the top woman driver in Canada, good enough to enter the preliminaries to next Saturday’s Grand Prix.

Wow! It’s a bit of an eye opener reading 1960’s press clippings about women drivers. Contemporary press coverage invariably referred to Diana Carter in terms like “blond, lithe, attractive,” and stories, in this case the *Canadian Press*, contained such gems as “Diana Carter of Toronto and Donna Mae Mims of Pittsburgh say they both keep wigs handy to cover their grease stained coiffures after races, especially when there are photographers around.”

Then as now, unfortunately, there weren’t that many female drivers around and few of them were as serious as Diana Carter. In the 1960s many of the events at tracks like Harewood, Green Acres or Mosport featured so-called “Powder Puff Races” where female drivers could find the opportunity to race, most often in their boyfriend or husband’s cars, seldom their own.

It was mostly a fun thing and the talent level was somewhat diverse.

“Among women racers at that time, however, Toronto’s Diana Carter was in a league of her own,” as quoted in *The Chequered Past: Sports Car Racing and Rallying in Canada, 1951-1991*. “A product of the burgeoning sub-

urban car culture, she was taught to drive by her father. A friend took her to a race where she crewed for Jerry Polivka. He taught her how to race, and she won her first novice event (at the Connor Circuit, St. Eugene, QC). Her victory made national news. Soon Carter was working with Polivka for Canada Track and Traffic, was involved in the management of Mosport and was racing regularly. Competing with the men, Diana won the touring class (sedan) championship in 1963 and the production car class in a three-hour endurance race at Mosport in 1964, sharing the drive in a Mini Cooper with Shirley Bowles.”

Carter was also a very successful rally driver, winning the Coupe des Dames in the Shell 4000 in 1963, 1964 and 1965, according to *The Chequered Past: Sports Car Racing and Rallying in Canada, 1951-1991*.

“The toughest rally yet,” claimed pert, fair haired Diana Carter in *Canada Track & Traffic* as she described the 4,000 miles of mountains, prairies, mud and rocks that make up the 1964 Shell 4000 Cross-Canada Rally.

Another 1964 press clipping said “this week Diana brought home a trophy to add to the about 30 she has, which testifies she knows what she’s talking about. The new one is the Coupe des Dames she picked up for winning the women’s section of the Shell 4000 Cross-Canada rally in which she started from Vancouver on April 18, driving a Volvo. She was the winner when she parked in Montreal on April 24. Diana and her navigator, Gillian Field of Adams, NY, were one of four women teams in

By Jeremy Sale

Diana Carter won her first start in 1962, over a field of 19 males, and over the following five years her Volvos became a presence in sedan racing as she garnered some 40 trophies. Carter topped Janet Guthrie and Denise McCluggage, America’s best-known female racers, driving a Formula Vee in a race at the Bahamas Speed Week in 1966. Rallying as well, she won the Shell 4000 Coupe des Dames in 1963, ’64 and ’65.

“I’m delighted to have been selected to join such an auspicious list of Canadian motorsport devotees,” said Carter, who lives now in Lady-smith on Vancouver Island.

Back in the day, as they say, there were few women drivers and they were treated with a distinctly different point of view, a view that wouldn’t go down too well today!

For example, read this contemporary story from *Canadian Weekly*.

“There’s seldom any shortage of beautiful girls at Mosport Park, scene of Canada’s gaudiest racing spectacles: girls in short shorts, girls in tight tights and even girls in bikinis. However, once the green flag falls and 30 cars begin spitting sparks and ear-shattering sound as they burn up the 2.5 mile track, there’s only one girl the boys keep their eyes on: Diana Carter, prob-

the rally. This is the third time Diana has entered and the second time she has won. She keeps part of her collection of inscribed silverware in her office at *Canadian Track & Traffic* magazine where they make a good background for the 26-year-old Diana's blonde attractiveness. She's circulation manager and Girl Friday on the magazine."

So what was the difference between Diana Carter's "blonde attractiveness" and the "wannabes" in the Powder Puff Derbies? For one thing, Carter was serious about her racing; it was not just a playtime weekend diversion in someone else's car. Sid Priddle worked with Carter at *Canadian Track & Traffic*.

"Her title at *CT&T* was circulation manager, but in reality she did much more, including overseeing the admin staff, the books etc. Always pleasant to work with and very unassuming – you wouldn't know she was this daring race driver. When she was racing she used to leave on a Friday, sometimes borrowing my Studebaker wagon to tow her Volvo and off she would go to Harewood or wherever. All reports I used to get said she beat the men constantly. I always felt she was not as recognized as some of the other publicity seeking female race drivers."

My friend Phil Lamont has known Carter since high school.

"She first raced her boyfriend Jerry Polivka's Volvo 544 – won her first race at the Connor Circuit, at St. Eugene, QC - against all men as I recall," said Lamont. "I was driving back from a Haliburton weekend and heard a CBC National news report that a woman had won a car race in Quebec. Big news in those days! I was helping Jack Boxstrom at the time and used to see Diana and Jerry at the races. I had my first race in Jack's Lotus 9 at Green Acres in 1962. Diana was also racing that weekend. Diana and Jerry encouraged my wife and I to come on the *Canadian Track & Traffic* organized Nassau Speed Weeks tour that December. We had a great time – I got to know Norm Namerow and Peter Lerch – co-owners of the magazine. I was still working at *The Toronto Star* at the time. Diana decided to buy her own race car, and asked me to help her at the track. Jerry was a very good driver, but not interested in preparing cars. She bought the Eppie Wietzes Sunbeam Alpine – which I looked after for her. \*

"My then wife and I went to a lot of races with Diana and Jerry. Diana also had successes in rally – after winning the Coupe des Dames in the Shell 4000, Volvo either gave her, or gave her a great deal on the Volvo 122S rally car. It had a lot of good stuff on it."

"I was interested in racing from high

school days since my friends had MGs, etc." said Diana Carter. "When I met Jerry Polivka – back in the days when you could actually attach a muffler to Touring Cars and drive to the track, he thought I had some potential and let me drive his Volvo on the way to races. I then entered a novice race at the Connor Circuit at St Eugene, QC [at that time you had to complete three novice races to get your license] – I won the race with Jerry's Volvo 544 and beat a bunch of men. This 'small' feat actually made it to *CBC Radio National News* since a woman had never won a race before. Once you get a chequered flag you're hooked, so I raced and rallied from 1960 to 1967.

"I raced at all the old airport tracks, Harewood, Goderich, etc. as well as M-sport and one race in British Columbia, I think it was at Westwood. I raced a Formula Vee at Nassau Speed Week and won the Ladies' Race, a big deal at the time as both Janet Guthrie and Denise McCluggage were in the same race. M-sport would have to be my favourite track since I was involved with the inception through to completion. I ran the Shell 4000 Rally across Canada four times and won the Coupe des Dames three times.

"I raced A Volvo 544, Volvo 122, Sunbeam Alpine, a Formula Vee and a couple of others in endurance races. The Volvo 122 was my favourite. With it I was able to win the CRDA over 2500 cc Touring Class Championship in 1963, the first woman to win a CRDA championship."

Carter cites Denise McCluggage as the best woman she ever competed against and recalls a time when racing legend Masten Gregory gave her some advice about driving in the rain.

"I didn't listen and rolled the 544 Volvo end over end at Turn 5!"

Despite her success 50 years ago, Carter still think motorsport is a tough place for women to succeed.

"Racing is now such a huge and expensive business, there are some good women drivers out there, but most won't have a chance unless they can get major sponsorships and/or have the appearance of a Danica Patrick! I still believe that there will never be, for sure in my lifetime, a female World Champion Driver - Formula 1/IRL/NASCAR, etc. It's just not going to happen!"

\* The car Diana Carter bought from Eppie Wietzes is now owned by Vintage Automobile Racing Association of Canada member Alan Weller. The car was originally developed by Paul Cooke and Eppie Wietzes and later owned/driven by young George Eaton, who took his race licence in it prior to buying his just slightly more powerful 427 Cobra. •

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