



the
**Henry
Ford**®



Lella Lombardi

March 26, 1943- March 3, 1992

Nationality: Italian

Raced between 1975-1988

Origins: Maria Grazia “Lella” Lombardi was born in a small Italian village outside Turin in the midst of World War II. She came from modest means, with her father supporting the family through his work as town butcher. Growing up in rural Italy, Lella did not have much exposure to racing, or even cars, since her family’s fastest means of transportation was a 10-speed bicycle. Little did she know an injury during her teenage-years would lead her to a life of speed and adventure.

Early Influences: Lombardi was a competitive and fearless child, excelling at the physically demanding sport of handball. Rumor has it that Lella’s first automobile experience was the result of a handball injury. Anecdotal evidence says Lombardi suffered a broken nose during a heated handball match and had to be driven to the nearest hospital. Instead of being concerned about her injury, Lombardi was awed by her first car ride. Impressed by the auto’s speed and driver’s ability to maneuver the busy streets of her hometown, she dreamed of one day having a car of her own and a racing career. A few years later, Lella finally saved up enough money to afford driving lessons and honed her skills behind the wheel of her boyfriend’s car. After passing her driving test, she bought a second-hand Fiat and began looking for racing opportunities. By coincidence Lombardi was introduced to a race car driver and began working with him, determined to learn all she could about the sport. After demonstrating her interest and dedication to racing by changing countless tires and timing innumerable laps, the racer saw her promise and gradually allowed her to participate in rallies, first as a navigator, then co-driver. Finally, she made the leap into single-seaters, winning her debut event in 1973.

Racing Accomplishments:

- Won the 1973 Ford Mexico series championship. After this initial success, Lombardi dedicated herself to Formula One racing.
- Lombardi qualified for the 1975 race in Kyalami, South Africa, becoming the first woman in 17 years to compete in a Grand Prix race. Lombardi's March-Ford 741's fuel system went out in the middle of the 23rd lap, resulting in a DNF.
- Became first woman to earn Formula One Championship points with a 6th place finish in the 1976 Spanish Grand Prix. The race was called during the 29th lap after a tragic 26th lap crash killed five spectators and knocked many cars out of the race.
- Competed in the historic 1977 Firecracker 400. This Daytona race, with a line-up including Janet Guthrie and Christine Beckers, marked the first time since 1949 three women competed in the same event and the first time for that many women to be racing together at a superspeedway. Lombardi drove the Bearfinder Radar Detector-sponsored Chevrolet that placed 12th in Talladega earlier that year. She battled transmission issues throughout the first part of the race and, after a two-hour rain delay, was unable to continue. Although she did not finish, Lombardi was given 31st place, making her the 1977 Firecracker's highest female finisher.
- In 1979 Lombardi co-drove an Osella-BMW PA7 with Giorgio Francia to two wins on the European sports-car circuit, Pergusa and Ballelunga (Italy). Lombardi recorded the fastest lap of the Pergusa race, and the duo finished four laps ahead of their nearest competitor at Ballelunga.

Interesting Facts: Half-points were award at the 1976 Spanish Grand Prix since more than 1/3 and less than 2/3 of the laps were completed, meaning Lombardi received .5 points for her 6th place finish. These unusual circumstances mean that Lella Lombardi is, and probably will continue to be for a very long time, the only driver to ever earn .5 points as a career Grand Prix total.

Life off the Track: The 1977 Firecracker 400 was the only Cup appearance Lombardi made, although she continued to race touring cars throughout Europe. Her career was cut short after being diagnosed with cancer in the late-1980s, leading to her official retirement. Lella Lombardi died in 1992, a few weeks shy of her 49th birthday, at her home in Milan.

Sources Consulted

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