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Denise McCluggage

1927 -

Nationality: American

Raced during the 1950s and 1960s

Origin: Denise McCluggage was born in El Dorado, Kansas in 1927. It was there where she started a neighborhood newspaper at the age of twelve. She moved to California to attend Mills College, earning degrees in philosophy, economics, and politics. After graduating, she was intent on getting a job with the *San Francisco Chronicle* and after going back and asking them for a position many times, she was finally hired. McCluggage moved to New York in 1954 and joined the staff of the *New York Herald Tribune*. She became involved in the sports department, covering motor racing and skiing, and her interest in both grew immensely during this period of her life.

Early Influences: McCluggage's interest in cars and in racing did not come from her parents, but it did begin when she was quite young. In an interview with Barry Meguiar at the Barrett-Jackson Auction (year unknown, possibly 2003) in Scottsdale, Arizona, McCluggage described her first attraction to automobiles. She was only six years old when she spotted a Baby Austin parked on the street, but she immediately knew that she wanted one. She joked about how she even asked Santa Claus to bring her one for Christmas. Her first car came while she was working for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. A man she worked with just happened to be selling his Chevy for \$100 and she had precisely that amount. She purchased the car and not long after bought a second one - a Dodge from her boss, who was selling it for \$15. Additionally, McCluggage gained an interest in automobiles from her co-workers and friends in San Francisco. Traveling to a store with one of her friends at the time, she encountered an MG-TC and fell in love with the car. Her fascination with racing grew as she began to write for the

sports section of the *New York Herald Tribune*. Covering motor racing and skiing, McCluggage said that she “gained a reputation for doing what she wrote about,” and in the 1950s, she began racing against many of the men she interviewed. Although she had no professional instruction in racing, it came naturally to her and she loved it.

Racing Accomplishments:

- During the 1950s and 1960s, McCluggage raced against such competitors as Stirling Moss, Phil Hill, Peter Collins, Carroll Shelby, Dan Gurney, the Rodriguez brothers, and Juan Manuel Fangio.
- Winner of the Nassau Ladies Race 1 on December 8, 1956 in a Porsche 550
- Winner of the Watkins Glen Grand Prix Ladies Race September 20, 1957 in a Porsche 550.
- Winner of the Nassau Ladies Races 1 and 2 on December 7, 1957, driving a Porsche 550 again.
- Placed in 5th at the Watkins Glen Grand Prix on September 24, 1960. She was the only woman to compete in the race that day.
- Earned 1st place in the GT category at the Sebring 12 Hours in 1961, driving a Ferrari 250. She placed in 10th in the overall standings.
- She won the Copa de Damas at the Grand Prix of Venezuela, driving her Porsche 550.
- Earned 1st place in her class at the 1964 Monte Carlo Rally, driving a Ford Falcon.
- Inducted into the Automotive Hall of Fame in 2001.
- Inducted into the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) Hall of Fame in 2006.

Life off the Track: Denise McCluggage was credited in the past as being one of the top women race drivers in America during her racing years, yet her list of accomplishments and interests extends well beyond motor racing. Besides participating in motorsports, she spent a great deal of time skiing, even serving as an instructor at one point. Her adventurous spirit can further be exemplified by her parachuting out of an airplane.

McCluggage is a journalist, an author, and a photographer on the short list of things. She helped in the creation of the *Competition Press*, which later became *AutoWeek*, and she continues to serve as a columnist and senior-contributing editor for this motorsports magazine. Additionally, she writes a newspaper column entitled, “Drive, She Said” for *Road & Travel Magazine*. McCluggage’s pieces have covered a variety of topics, focusing on topics that include particular drivers of the past and present, reviews of European cars, and the importance of safety in driving. She is the author of such books as *By Brooks Too Broad for Leaping*, *American Racing – Road Racing in the 50s and 60s*, and *The Bahamas Speed Weeks*. McCluggage was, and still is a determined journalist. Writing during the 1950s and 1960s when it was difficult for women to even gain access to the racing pits and garages, she managed to track drivers down and get her interviews: “To them I was a woman, not a reporter, so I just did what I could do, reported from wherever I could” (Stone, Matt). In 2001, McCluggage became a recipient of one of the greatest honors in the motor vehicle industry: she was inducted into the Automotive Hall of Fame. She is the only journalist to have received this honor. She can also be credited with having received the Ken W. Purdy Award for Excellence in Automotive Journalism and the Dean Batchelor Lifetime Achievement Award. McCluggage also serves as an honorary judge at Pebble Beach Concours d’Elegance.

Interesting Fact: She appeared on an episode of *To Tell the Truth* in 1959. Also, in addition to motor racing, skiing, and parachuting out of an airplane, McCluggage has bungee jumped and is said to have shown an interest in interior decorating at one time.

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