



the
**Henry
Ford**®



Janet Guthrie

March 7, 1938 – Present

Nationality: American

Raced between 1960-1983

Website: www.janetguthrie.com

Origins: Janet claims to have gotten her start by being "born adventurous and grew up insufficiently socialized," inheriting her love of speed, adventure, and machinery from her pilot father. Raised in Miami in an old homestead with her four siblings, Guthrie spent a good deal of her childhood reading adventure stories, exploring the wilds that surrounded her house and attending a prestigious school for girls on Biscayne Bay. In 1950, her mother was diagnosed with tuberculosis and spent months in a sanitarium, shifting Janet's role from a care-free girl to woman of the Guthrie household. Janet, then 13 years old, assumed most domestic duties and was the authority figure, missing school on days her father was away on business to take care of her younger siblings. When her mother recovered, Guthrie enrolled in public school, desperate to be "normal," but was bored with classes and returned to the girls' academy the next year. Deciding to combine her passions for machinery, speed, and independence, Guthrie began flying lessons in 1953, hoping to follow in her dad's footsteps and eventually become a pilot.

Early Influences: Catering to her love of adventure, Guthrie sky-dived at the age of 16, after months of begging her father Lain for permission. Her father finally conceded, under the condition that he be the one to pilot the plane from which she would jump. She earned her own private pilot's license a year later, using the money she saved from her summer job at the air strip to pay for flying lessons. Guthrie started college in 1955, choosing to attend the University of Michigan and apply her love of flight in its aeronautic engineering program. After a year of coursework, Guthrie switched to physics, hoping that field would provide more of an intellectual challenge. Between her sophomore and junior year, Guthrie took a year away

from academics, using the time to earn her commercial pilot's license and hitchhike around Europe, but returned to school and ultimately received her B.S. in 1960. Immediately upon graduation, she accepted a position in research and development in aeronautics at Republic Aviation and relocated to New York. It was in New York that she discovered her love of sports cars after purchasing a grey 1953 Jaguar XK 120 and competing in local gymkhanas (intricate courses set up in parking lots where competitors would try to complete the course as quickly as possible and now referred to as solo competitions) and a few hill runs around the state. Guthrie decided to seriously pursue racing in 1963 when she enrolled in the Sports Car Club of America competition drivers' school, received her racing license and started competing as an amateur. When NASA announced their Scientist-Astronaut Program in 1964, Guthrie thought her background in engineering and thrill-seeking attitude made her the ideal candidate and immediately applied. Although placing in the 94th percentile for ability and 99th percentile in aptitude, she was removed from consideration when she did not meet the requirement of possessing a doctorate or its equivalent. In 1967, with Republic Aviation closing, Guthrie attempted to qualify for the Daytona 500, but her car's engine threw a rod in the middle of the run, leaving her out of the running and without a car to race. Between 1973 and 1975, Guthrie continued to race in a Toyota Celica B Sedan she constructed, maintained, and repaired herself. She took odd-jobs to support her racing, including towing boats, certain she could be a champion driver if only she had the funding for quality equipment. After winning the 1975 Vanderbilt Cup in her Celica, she was contacted by Rolla Vollstedt, a member of the United States Auto Club Board of Directors and owner of Indy qualifying cars. Vollstedt was looking to support a female driver's attempt to qualify for the Indy 500, heard of Guthrie's passion and ability and wondered if she would be interested. Vollstedt supported Guthrie's 1976 attempt at qualifying for the Indy 500, allowing her to use one of his cars during her run, as well as her continued involvement in the sport. She was successful in competing in the Indianapolis 500 in 1977, and again in 1978 and 1979 owning her own team with sponsorship from Texaco.

Racing Accomplishments:

- Competed in 120 amateur races in a variety of cars, from heavy, front-engine models (Jaguar, Camaro, Mustang, Corvette) to small, single-seat, rear-engine models between 1960 and 1975.
- First woman to enter Indianapolis 500 and pass the rookie test in 1976, although she did not qualify for that year's race.
- First woman to compete in a NASCAR Winston Cup event, taking 15th place in a Chevy owned by First Union National Bank Vice-President Lynda Ferreri at the 1976 Charlotte 600.
- First woman to earn a starting spot for the Daytona 500 in 1977. She finished the race 12th as the top rookie.
- In 1977, she became the first woman to earn starting spot in Indianapolis 500. She again qualified for Indy in 1978 and 1979.
- Finish ninth in the 1978 Indianapolis 500, despite sustaining a broken wrist during the race. (This was the only top-10 finish for a female racer at Indy until 2005.)
- Had highest open-wheel finish of her career at the 1979 Milwaukee Cup, her last Indy car race. She finished fifth.

Life off the Track: After completing the Indianapolis 500 in 1978, Guthrie had difficulty securing sponsors and only competed a few high-profile races before officially retiring in 1983, vowing to settle down and write about her racing experiences. Married in 1989, Guthrie still does numerous television appearances and comments on the current status of women in racing. She released her autobiography *Janet Guthrie: A Life at Full Throttle* in 2005 to stellar reviews from both the literary world and those involved in racing. Guthrie continues to be active on the lecture circuit, as a keynote speaker, and as grand marshal for many racing events

Awards and Achievements:

- Earned over \$84,000 in 11 Indy-car starts between 1976 and 1980.
- The helmet and driving suit (made to measure from the flame-resistant fiber Nomex) worn by Guthrie during the 1979 Indianapolis 500 were donated to the Smithsonian Institute in 1979.
- Member of the Women's Sports Hall of Fame (inducted in 1980) and the International Motor Sports Hall of Fame (inducted in 2006).