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Brigitte Castaing Addimando

Nationality: French

Involved in racing since 1996

Origins: Brigitte Castaing Addimando was born just outside of Paris in the late 1970s. Her father is Francois Castaing, a Frenchman who was then an engineer working for American Motors Corporation. He and Brigitte's Austrian mother, Marlies, relocated their family to the United States in 1980 after he was transferred near Detroit, Michigan. The move was intended to be a two-year commitment, but it ended up lasting much longer. By 1987, Chrysler had bought out American Motors and the Castaings still found themselves living in Michigan. Brigitte attended grade school near Detroit with her older and younger sisters and the three grew up being taught to dream big and set their goals high. In high school, her siblings focused their attention on liberal arts, but Brigitte was more interested in her science classes than anything else. Following in her father's footsteps, she soon discovered a love for engineering and it was a passion that continued to grow throughout her college years and early in her career.

Early Influences: Brigitte went through most of high school thinking that she wanted to pursue a career as a doctor. Her interest in science and her ability to get along well with others made this seem like a logical path, but after taking a course in physics during her senior year, she soon realized that she loved it much more than biology. After high school she took a sabbatical and went to Europe with a group of friends. When the car they were driving broke down on the roadway, Brigitte was not only able to fix the car, but found a sense of pride, satisfaction and fun in being able to do so. While she was already familiar with engineering because of her father's career in the automotive industry, Brigitte had her mind made up that she didn't want to study engineering. But after her experience in Europe she decided to attend Duke University and get a degree in mechanical engineering. During Parents' Weekend there her first year, she and her dad walked by a group of students working in a garage and stopped by. The students were part of Duke's Formula SAE team and they spent their time designing, building, and competing in race cars for a competition hosted by the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE). Intrigued by their work, Brigitte joined the team her freshman year and participated in the competition all four years she was at Duke. She took what she learned in the classroom and applied it while working on the cars. Although Duke's team lacked the resources that other schools had, she still loved what she was doing. Eager to become more active, Brigitte approached

one of her professors after her sophomore year about starting an intercollegiate association for engineering students interested in racing, where groups from various schools could buy stock cars, fine tune them, and practice racing them to get more hands-on experience. Students at other schools expressed similar interest in forming such a group. The association became known as ICAR (Intercollegiate Auto Racing Association) and Brigitte participated in it during both her junior and senior years. Like Formula SAE, it only helped to augment her love of engineering and urged her forward in her career goals.

Education: Brigitte spent all four years of her undergraduate career studying mechanical engineering at Duke University. Although she was involved in a number of activities, it did not hurt her studies, as she repeatedly found herself on the honor roll. After graduating in 1999, she immediately enrolled in a graduate program at MIT and received her Master's degree in mechanical engineering just sixteen months later. She wrote her thesis about fuel efficiency with regard to engines and determined that for a minimal cost, a person could use a device to check what stroke of the engine a car was on when it was initially turned on. The device would reduce the need to immediately pour in large amounts of fuel to determine the stroke, thereby reducing the amount of exhaust. In addition to her undergraduate and graduate degrees, Brigitte also took two classes at MoTech, a mechanical trade school that allows students to become state certified mechanics. Of the students in attendance the year Brigitte enrolled, only two others were women, while the remaining fifty-eight were men. After working for a few years, Brigitte eventually returned to school and added to her already impressive resume by earning an M.B.A. degree from Harvard Business School in 2005.

Career Path: Brigitte's first real experiences applying her engineering skills came in 1996 when she began working on Duke's Formula SAE team. She continued to build on these skills two years later when she helped form and worked with ICAR. During the summer between her sophomore and junior years, she interned with Chrysler and worked on tuning and suspension jobs. She also spent time working with the design group there and increased her knowledge about the engine compartment. The following summer, between her junior and senior years, Brigitte interned with Penske's Racing team in Reading, Pennsylvania. She worked alongside the team engineer and chassis engineer and quickly became enamored with the idea of working out on the race track. Brigitte continued to improve her knowledge in engineering while at MIT and it only helped to enhance the hands-on work she had been doing in her internships and while at Duke. After applying for jobs in the latter part of 2000, she started working for Honda Performance on their race engine program. Based out of Santa Monica, California, she was assigned to Mo Nunn Racing for driver, Alex Zanardi, and she traveled with him wherever he went until his accident at EuroSpeedway Lausitz in September 2001. Brigitte was only twenty-three years old at the time. From 2001 to 2003, she continued working for Honda for IndyCar driver Tony Kanaan, who was also driving for Mo Nunn Racing. A year after Honda partnered with Ilmor, a British based motorsport engineering company, and the two groups began working together to develop Honda's Indy engines for the Indy Racing League. Although Brigitte was offered an opportunity to continue to work for Honda and move into Formula One, she decided it was time to pursue other goals and she left Honda in 2003.

Major Responsibilities: During her career in motorsports, Brigitte spent most of her time working on engines - building, improving, and testing them. Whether it was with Formula SAE or while working on her thesis, she was always determined to find a way to improve the engine and make it run as smoothly and efficiently as possible. At Honda Performance, her responsibilities included overseeing the changing of her team's engine, doing maintenance work, and trying to optimize how the engine ran. She was always busy, frequently working on the road with the team Wednesdays through Mondays before returning to California and doing it all over again a few days later.

Becoming Established in the Field: Like other women who have come before and after her, Brigitte experienced multiple levels of adversity as she tried to earn respect in the motorsports world. She was the only female engineer at Honda in the early 2000s and many drivers were hesitant to accept her, assuming that she did not have the skill to successfully do the job. On her first day at Honda, the team owner went so far as to tell her that he would not work with girls and walked out. In addition to the criticism she faced because she was a young female, Brigitte also incurred judgment because she came only from an academic background. Some argued that there was a big difference between learning in school and learning on the job. However, Brigitte had been well-educated in engineering both inside and outside of the classroom and with her parents' support, she ignored her critics and pushed forward, determined to succeed.

Advice to Others: Fully aware of the time commitment and dedication necessary for a career in engineering and motorsports, Brigitte believes that a person really has to love it to be able to do it. Oftentimes exhausting and grueling, the field can be very trying on one's lifestyle. Nevertheless, Brigitte claims there is also something romantic about engineering and that it can be an extremely rewarding job for those who are willing to devote their time and energy to it.

Life off the Track: Brigitte spent the greater part of her college years and mid-twenties working in engineering and dedicating her time to learning all she could about the field. In 2003, she decided it was time to take a break from that world and left Honda to explore her other interests. In the last few years, she has worked as a Senior Director for Energy Plus and

just recently left this position. She enjoys photography, traveling, and running, and has participated in three half marathons. In 2007 Brigitte married and she and her husband have one child and they are expecting another. They currently live in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Interesting Fact: Although she is no longer working in engineering or motorsports, Brigitte's love for science and engineering still persists today. There currently is a program in Boston where individuals help teach engineering in elementary schools through the use of nursery rhymes and short stories in an attempt to spark interest in the fields. Brigitte, who has spent her entire life helping mentor and tutor kids, hopes to be able to set up a similar type of program in the Philadelphia area.

Awards and Achievements:

- Brigitte's Master's thesis was well-received and was eventually included in a book.
- She was a lead engineer at Honda Performance and was the company's only female working on engines at the track in the early 2000s.
- She received the Dean's Award from Harvard University in 2005 thanking her for her efforts in mentoring, tutoring, and counseling younger students. The award is given out to those who show strong leadership during their time at Harvard Business School and is considered one of the School's highest honors.