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## Milka Duno

April 22, 1972 – Present

Nationality: Venezuelan

Started racing in 1998

**Origins:** Milka Duno was born in Caracas, Venezuela. Her love for learning was evident in childhood, with young Milka always bringing books on her family vacations, but she was not just interested in studying. Duno also had an interest in mechanics, turning her insatiable appetite for information towards her family's car. She "borrowed" her father's Chevy for a joyride when she was 12, only to be stopped by a police officer for looking younger than the legal driving age of 18. Duno quickly concocted a story about her sick mother needing medicine and made sure to keep her composure, convincing the officer to let her continue on her way without a ticket.

After graduating high school, Milka earned a master's degree in organizational development and then travelled to Spain. While in Madrid, she completed three masters programs concurrently, naval architecture, aquaculture, and maritime business, and then returned to her native Venezuela to work as a naval engineer.

**Early Influences:** Duno had a relatively late start in racing, with her first experience in the sport coming when she was 26 years old. A friend persuaded her to attend a Porsche driving clinic in 1998 and she was drawn into the sport, speeding around streets courses and wanting to compete. After initial success in South American races, Duno travelled to the United States, first racing sports cars and to eventually manage to get to open-wheel racing.

### **Racing Accomplishments:**

- In 1999 and 2000 Milka competed in the Women's Global GT Series.
- In 2000, Milka became the first woman to win a U.S. Ferrari Challenge race.
- She was the first woman to score points in the Europe's World Series Light when she competed there in 2001.

- Milka finished the 2004 Rolex Sports Car Series fifth in point standings after two wins, five top-five finishes, and ten top-ten finishes. Throughout the season she accumulated recognition by becoming the first woman to win overall a major international sports car race in North American and the first woman to drive the Rolex Series' fastest car, the Daytona Prototype.
- Duno placed second in the 2007 24 Hours of Daytona, the highest finish recorded by a woman in the race's 45-year history.
- While competing in a 2007 Chicagoland event, Duno became the first Latina to lead laps during an Indy car race. After holding first for five laps, she finished the race in 14<sup>th</sup> place.
- Became the first Latina to qualify and race in the Indianapolis 500 when she participated in the 2007 race. Duno was knocked out of the race on lap 65.
- She qualified and raced again in the 2008 Indianapolis 500. Duno was the top female finisher in 19<sup>th</sup> place.
- Duno finished 23<sup>rd</sup> in point standings in the 2009 IndyCar Series after a 17<sup>th</sup> place finish in the Firestone Indy 300 October 10, 2009.

#### Interesting Facts:

- Milka appeared in the 2008 Wachowski Brothers movie *Speedracer*, playing a female racer named "Gearbox."
- She is the focus of Raquel Benatar's *Go, Milka, Go: The Life of Milka Duno*, a bilingual children's book focusing on the importance of education. The book was awarded the 2009 International Latino Book Award's Best Young Adult Sports/Recreation book.

**Life off the Track:** Duno currently resides in Miami and continues to share education's importance and give back to the community. She is involved "Racing for Kids," a non-profit that works with hospitalized children and has earned over \$5 million in its two decades of existence, and founder of "Milka Way, a program that promotes academic excellence in Latin American youth. She is in high demand as a presenter and speaker, promoting her message of education and achievement, and also acts as a spokesperson for various marketing campaigns.

#### Awards and Achievements:

- Named 2000 Venezuelan Auto Racing Driver of the Year.
- Voted "Favorite Alternative Athlete" at the 2009 American Latino TV Awards.
- Special Achievement Honoree at the 2009 ALMA Awards, honoring Latin Americans in the entertainment industry.
- Chosen as 2009 National Hispanic Woman of the Year by the Mexican American Opportunity Foundation.

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