



the
**Henry
Ford**®



Desire Wilson

Nov. 26, 1953-Present

Nationality: Born in South Africa, naturalized United States citizen

Raced between 1972 and 1997

Origins: Desire was born in Brakpan, South Africa, a community located east of Johannesburg. Wilson's father, Charlie Randall, was already a champion motorcyclist when Desire was born and he passed his interest in racing on to his daughter, exposing her to the world of racing while still a toddler. By the age of five Wilson was already racing micro-midgets, with her father building her cars and mentoring the young driver, and having success. She won numerous club and provincial championships, capping off her career with second place in the 1966 South African open championship. Despite her achievements, Wilson decided to "retire" from midget racing at the age of twelve.

Early Influences: Throughout her teens, Wilson's love of competition was kept alive through her involvement in tennis and horse-jumping, but she was not yet done with racing. When she reached South Africa's legal driving age of 18, Wilson's father asked if she was seriously interested in racing and Desire returned to the sport. In 1972, driving a Formula Vee single-seater with her father, Wilson marked her triumphant return with a fourth-place finish in her first South African Formula Vee Championship. After two years in the Formula Vee circuit, Wilson decided to pursue the international acclaim associated with Formula One racing and won the South African Ford championship in 1976.

Racing Accomplishments:

- Won the 1976 South African Formula Ford 1600 championship and the "Driver to Europe" award. This trip to Europe allowed Wilson to race across Belgium and record two lap records and four fastest laps.

- In 1978 won an all-women's race held at the Brands Hatch Racing School, gaining the attention of John Webb, British Gran Prix promoter and head of Brand Hatch. Webb immediately offered Wilson a job with Brand Hatch as a sponsor.
- Won the British Aurora Formula One Championship at Brands Hatch after turning in the race's fastest lap and leading the race from start to finish. This 1980 victory marks the only Formula One win of any kind by a woman.
- Places first in two 1980 endurance races: the 1,000km World Endurance Championship at Monza and the six-hour run at Silverstone. Besides Michele Mouton (in World Championship Rally), Wilson is the only woman to have ever won a World Championship event.
- In 1982, Wilson became the second woman to enter the Indianapolis 500. She easily passed the rookie test. During her qualifying run, she set the women's track record, reaching 191.04 mph, but failed to qualify for the event after her engine failed a few laps later. She again passed the rookie requirements in 1984, but did not attempt to qualify.
- Wilson qualified second for a 1983 race in Brainerd, MN. During the race, her March 83G's front suspension broke, resulting in a terrifying crash and leaving Wilson with a broken leg. Three weeks later, Wilson returned to racing and qualified 11th for a CART open-wheel race, although her still-broken leg limited her braking abilities!
- Competed in the 1991 World Sportscar Championship at Le Mans as part of an all-female team with Cathy Muller, Lyn St. James and Tomika (?). In spite of the team's enormous effort, their Spice SE90C Ford crashed out of the event.
- In 1995, finished second overall and first in class in the CalClub 3-Hour Endurance race while driving a Mazda RX7.
- Earned the pole position and went on to win the 1996 Detroit GP Neon Challenge event.

Interesting Facts: The media's nickname for Wilson, "the African Queen," as well as her desire to keep looking feminine led to her signature helmet design, a yellow crown on a blue background.

Life off the Track: In 1975 Desire married Alan Wilson, a former auto racing competitor and team owner. The couple expanded their love of racing into the world of business, founding Wilson Motorsports Inc. in 1983. This venture combines both Alan's and Desire's extensive experience with their combined business savvy to design, produce, and manage award-winning race tracks. Desire, who currently resides with Alan in Utah, still finds time to compete, racing historic cars by participating in the yearly Goodwood Festival of Speed and Revival events. She might be officially retired from the professional world of racing, but Wilson's love for speed and competition are still strong, with her completing the fastest lap by a woman at Goodwood's 2007 festival.

Awards and Achievements:

- Only woman to hold licenses for both the World Championship Formula One Grand Prix and CART IndyCars.
- Earned Springbok Colors, a prestigious South African sports award, in 1977.
- Named 1978's South African Sports Woman of the Year.

Sources Consulted

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