Eloisa Garza

September 15, 1955 – Present
Nationality: American
Involved in racing since 1980

Origins: Eloisa Garza grew up in a small Texas town close to the Mexican border with her three sisters and two brothers. Although she enjoyed volleyball and played on her high school's team, her first love was art. She enjoyed the freedom allowed in creating art and, with the support of excellent teachers, experimented with different mediums and tried theater.

Early Influences: No one in the Garza family was interested in racing and Eloisa fell into the sport completely by accident. Although she always loved art and wanted to incorporate it into a career, she also had interest in the environment and enrolled in college studying marine biology. Eloisa completed two years of college, but decided to leave school and try her hand in sales. She quickly got a position with a small company producing fiberglass products. After a few weeks on the job, Eloisa made her way back into the fabrication department, interested in the process of making the parts and started to dabble with the materials. Since she had a strong art background, Eloisa was a natural when it came to creating the fiberglass components and was asked to help on big orders and eventually began supervising the production department. The company started to struggle so Garza left for another sales job, now knowing she could fabricate. The fiberglass company that first hired Garza was impressed with her fabrication skills and suggested her to Jim Hall Racing, which was based in Midland, TX. When the team's crew chief first called and asked Eloisa if she would be interested in building cars for the team in the United States, she thought it was one of her friends pulling a prank! After considering how authentic the caller's Australian accent sounded, Garza reconsidered the offer and scheduled an interview.

Education: Garza majored in marine biology during her two years at a New Mexico university, but never finished a degree and does not have a background in engineering. Although she had a successful career in research and design, she admits that

further education would have simplified things immensely and she encourages students interested in racing to get as much education as possible. Her art background definitely helped when it came to designing components, but she acquired most of her knowledge about racing and fabrication from independent research and from working closely with Jim Hall and other technology departments.

Career Path: Garza worked at Jim Hall Chaparral Racing in Midland, TX, from 1980 to 1984, and was incredibly blessed to be able to work with the innovator in race car design, especially in the area of aerodynamics. When Hall decided to start building race cars in-house, Garza was hired on as the team's fabricator, although she had never worked on a race car before. (Hall said he had never hired a woman before Garza.) After Hall's retirement, Garza worked with VDS Racing, based in Indianapolis, IN, and the team that won the 1984 Michigan 500. Since VDS was a smaller team, everyone had numerous tasks. On race days Garza was responsible for the pit boards, telling the crew when to fuel, holding the fuel line, helping push off the car after fueling, and helping do the timing and scoring. Realizing there weren't many people who did fabrication and that she would probably spend her career with various racing teams and constantly relocating, Garza decided she wanted to start her own business. Although it was a risky move, in January, 1985, she opened EG Composites in Indianapolis, IN, knowing she could always go back working for a race team if things didn't work out as she hoped. As President and owner EG Composites Inc., Garza supervised eight employees on all kinds of carbon fiber and composite projects. Many teams now do this work in-house, but during the 1980's and 90s a crash at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway meant a trip to her shop. She helped with the design of composite race car components (engine covers, noses, splitters) that support "ground effects," suction to give the cars grip at high speeds by the use of aerodynamics. Between 1985 and 2008, EG Composites worked on various components for a variety of applications such as skid plate materials, sports cars, dragsters, drag bikes, restorative work, and sleds for the 1988 U.S. Olympic Men's and Women's Bobsled Team. In 2007 a former participant in EG Composite's student apprenticeship now working for NASA contacted Garza about possibly working on parts for the robotic rover. Since NASA's own shop was backlogged, the space program was accepting outside bids for some of its fabrication work. Garza submitted a bid and her crew was given the task of created body bits and fenders for the mission.

Major Responsibilities: E.G. Composites created parts for IRL, CART, sprint cars, and Trans Am race cars using resin systems and honey-comb construction and carbon fiber techniques that increased component durability, reduced weight therefore increasing speed, and improved driver safety and comfort since they also reduced heat transfer from engine to cockpit and absorbed energy on impact. Eloisa was hands on, helping engineer and fabricate components when deadlines approached, but most of her day-to-day responsibilities were administrative. As the shop owner Eloisa had to seek out projects, work out pricing, meet with the design engineer about each job, schedule shop employees with specific projects, and oversee the shop floor. Being in charge gave Garza the freedom to work on sales, the books, and still design parts.

Advice to Others: Eloisa suggests anyone thinking of jumping into racing to look into all of the varied possibilities and positions available within the sport. Although most people interested in racing envision themselves as drivers, there are countless technical and support positions necessary to create a winning team and teamwork is what wins races and leads to success. According to Garza, the most important things to remember when starting out in any field, especially racing, are to stay focused and embrace new responsibilities. She says women within the sport are opening doors by doing their jobs well and gaining acceptance in the racing community. She also stresses how important it is to acknowledge those who helped you along the way and to be willing to reach out to others coming up in the field since the friends she has made through racing are irreplaceable.

Life off the Track: Garza closed her fabrication shop in 2008, deciding it was time to pursue some of her many pastimes and hobbies. Although she admits to being career-oriented, Eloisa never lost sight of how important it is to have outside interests and is staying busy during her "retirement" by volunteering with numerous Indianapolis-area organizations. Her love of the arts is evident through her involvement with IndyFringe, a group dedicated to bringing fringe theater pieces to Indianapolis during their annual festival. She is also a dedicated gardener, donating homegrown vegetables for IndyFringe's 2009 Longest Table Dinner fundraiser and being elected president of Hendricks County Master Gardeners in 2010.

Interesting Fact: After hearing about the plight affecting honey bees, Eloisa started researching the insect and was fascinated by all they do for the environment. She decided to do her part in helping the bee population bounce back and became a beekeeper, purchasing one hive. Over the years her involvement has grown, as she now has 15 hives and is a director for the Indiana State Beekeeper Association.

Awards and Achievements:

- Member of the Society of Manufacturing Engineers
- Coordinated Society of Manufacturing Engineers' first ever Manufacturing for Performance event, 2005
- Created robotic rover parts for NASA mission, 2007-2008
- 2009 Hendricks County Master Gardener of the Year