



## Maria Teresa de Filippis

Nov. 11, 1926- Present

Nationality: Italian

Raced between 1949 and 1959

**Origins:** Maria Teresa de Filippis was born and raised in Naples with her three brothers. Maria's first love was horses, but her attention was turned to auto racing in her twenties when two of her brothers bet the third that Maria could not "drive fast." She then began to train on Italy's Amalfi Coast in her Fiat 500, ready to prove that she could not only handle, but thrive behind the wheel. Although her parents were initially apprehensive about her involvement with the sport, thinking it was a phase since she had not shown any interest before the bet, they were soon persuaded by her natural ability and immediate success.

**Early Influences:** de Filippis ended up winning the first race she entered, an event held in Salerno- Cava dei Tirreni. She continued to claim victories throughout Italy, racing cars with larger and larger engines. Her second-place finish in the Italian Sports Car Championships gained the attention of Maserati, which then offered her a position as works driver to represent the company in races. Maserati's involvement allowed de Filippis to pursue bigger opportunities through Formula One in 1958 when she was 31 years old. Although she unsuccessfully attempted to qualify for that year's Monaco Grand Prix, she got her chance to become a Formula One racer a few months later at the Belgian Grand Prix.

### Racing Accomplishments:

- First woman to compete in a Formula One World Championship, finishing tenth in the 1958 Belgian Grand Prix, while driving a Maserati 250F. The car had been driven by Juan Miguel Fangio the previous year when he claimed his fifth World Championship.
- Competed in the 1958 Italian Grand Prix. de Filippis's engine failed with only 13 laps remaining in the race, but she managed to place eighth out of 21 competitors in the race.
- Overall entered seven Grand Prix races between 1958 and 1959. De Filippis qualified for five of the events, three of which were part of the championship series. Her highest finish was the 1958 tenth-place finish in Belgium.

**Interesting Fact:** Even though she was one of the first women to enter the male-dominated world of Formula One, de Filippis remembers only one instance of overt sexism. She was denied entrance in the 1958 French Grand Prix, with the race director claiming "the only helmet a woman should wear is the one at the hairdresser's."<sup>1</sup>

**Life off the Track:** Racing was a dangerous undertaking in the 1950s, with many of de Filippis's friends being killed in crashes on the track. When her mentor and racing team owner Jean Behra died after a racing accident at the Avus Motorway in Berlin in 1959, de Filippis took the loss hard and retired from the sport. (She had been originally scheduled to compete in that race instead of Behra.) In 1960, she married and dedicated her time to raising a family. Decades after leaving the track she rekindled her love of racing with membership to the International Club of Former F1 Grand Prix Drivers in 1979 and working with the Maserati Club since its inception in 2004. Currently Maria Teresa de Filippis lives near Milan and keeps busy by serving executive positions with the International Club and Maserati Club, and visiting her two grandchildren

### Awards and Achievements:

- In 1997 de Filippis became Vice-President of the International Club of Former F1 Grand Prix Drivers. Jack Brabham, Damon Hill, Stirling Moss, and Jackie Steward are a few of the around 100 members.
- Current Chairman of the Maserati Club, an organization founded in 2004 to connect fans of the car company.

**Research and biography written by Hilary Resteck and Casey Schuster, graduate students at Indiana University/Purdue University Public History Department.**

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with James Eve for *The Observer*. 5 Sept. 2006.