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## Alba Colon

1968 – Present

Nationality: Puerto Rican

Involved in racing since 1994

**Origins:** Alba Lynnette Colon Rodriguez was born in Salamanca, Spain in 1968. At the age of three, her family moved to Mayagüez, Puerto Rico and she spent the rest of her childhood and youth growing up there, eventually moving to the United States in 1994. From the beginning, Colon set her goals high, eager to be successful in whatever she did. Her parents encouraged her, her sister and brother in this regard. Her father was a doctor and her mother a teacher and both of them supported their children and helped them believe they could achieve whatever they put their minds to. Colon credits them for much of her success in life.

**Early Influences:** Colon did not grow up with an inherent desire to enter the motorsports world, nor was she around racing much as a child. Her interest and involvement in the sport began in her college years. Although her parents hoped that she would remain close to home while attending school, this did not stop Colon from dreaming big. A diligent student, she initially enrolled in college in order to pursue her long-term goal of becoming an astronaut. She admired Sally Ride and was inspired by her to load up on math and science classes with the goal to work for NASA in the future. However, it was while working on her degree at the University of Puerto Rico in 1991 that Colon began to develop new dreams. A professor asked her to join a Formula SAE team, a competition put on by the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) where students from various schools design, build, and compete in race cars. Colon agreed and served as team captain, eventually traveling to Detroit, MI for the competition. She remained involved with the Formula SAE program for the next three years and the more she did, the more she discovered how much she enjoyed working on cars. The experiences opened Colon's eyes to a whole new world of opportunities and cemented her passion for the racing world.

**Education:** Determined to follow her initial dream of becoming an astronaut, Colon attended the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez, where she completed her degree in mechanical engineering. As one of only seven women enrolled in the program, she worked hard to showcase her talent and aptitude in the field and prove that she could compete with both her

male and female peers. She was successful, achieving high grades and eventually earning recognition from her professors and others in the program.

**Career Path:** While in college, Colon served as a project manager for Sterling Pharmaceuticals Company in Puerto Rico, and after graduating in 1994, she was hired by GM and immediately relocated to the United States. During her first assignment, she worked as a data acquisition engineer for the Oval Track Group (NASCAR Sprint Cup, NASCAR Craftsman Truck, ASA and Busch Grand National). She was named NHRA Pro Stock Truck program manager in 1998 and held this position for two years. By 2000 she was put in control of all of GM's NHRA drag-racing programs, including the Funny Car, Top Fuel Dragster, Pro Stock, Pro Stock Truck and Sportsman series. She was selected as GM's program manager for the prestigious NASCAR Cup series in 2001 and continues to hold this position today.

**Major Responsibilities:** To be successful at her job, Colon must remain knowledgeable about everything that is going on both on and off the track so that she can keep teams and owners aware of potential problems and opportunities. As program manager, she is in charge of Chevrolet's engineering programs with regard to races and testing. She is the chief point of contact at the track and spends much of time serving as a liaison, trying to establish and maintain relationships between the teams, GM, and NASCAR. Colon's other responsibilities include negotiating contracts between the teams and GM and dealing with budget issues. She works to get teams what they need to be competitive, while making sure it is feasible for GM.

**Becoming Established in the Field:** Despite her skill and determination, few would have predicted that Colon would advance to become one of the most powerful women in motorsports. Just driving into work used to be a challenge for her. When she first started at GM, security guards regularly stopped her from entering the tracks, believing that she was there to see someone rather than actually working on the cars herself. Coupled with her gender, Colon also found it hard to assimilate with her coworkers because she spoke a mixed Spanish, influenced both by her Spanish and Puerto Rican background. Many had trouble understanding her and some went so far as to state that she would not last a year in the field. Nevertheless, she pushed through these barriers, working hard at every stage to make a name for herself. Making the switch from drag racing to NASCAR posed another challenge because of the differences between the two series, but her relationships with teams helped her in this regard. Her efforts have paid off and today Colon is recognized as one of the most respected people in the garages.

**Life off the Track:** Colon currently lives in Royal Oak, Michigan with her husband Jeff Ruedisueli. She loves her career and she takes pleasure in motivating and inspiring other women to become active in the field. When she is not working, she enjoys volunteering her time. In particular, she assists with SAE competitions, establishing the rules and helping organize the program every year. She also works as a GM recruiter and is a speaker for the NASCAR Diversity Program and the Army Educational Program.

**Interesting Fact:** E:60 reporter Lisa Salters did a feature about Colon's involvement in motorsports and it won the Gracie Award for Best Feature - Soft News Program in 2009. The award was given out by the Association of Women in Radio and Television (AWRT).

#### **Awards and Achievements:**

- She has helped Chevrolet earn 160 race wins, six driver's championships (in 2001, and each year from 2005-2009), and eight Manufacturers' Cup awards (in 2001, and each year from 2003-2009) while working as a GM program manager.
- Received the "Women Looking Ahead Magazine Award" in 2003.
- Awarded the "Trailblazer Award" by the Association for Diversity in Motorsports in 2004.
- Received "Distinguished Younger Member Award" by the SAE in 2005.
- The award is given out in honor of Edward N. Cole, a past automotive executive for GM, and celebrates those who have made significant contributions to SAE.
- Selected as one of Hispanic Business Magazine's "20 Elite Women" in 2007.
- Colon and nineteen other women beat out hundreds of others considered for the list thanks to their contributions to their respective fields of expertise and their work in trying to promote and advance the Hispanic community.
- Received the "Distinguished Alumni Award" from the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez Campus in 2008.
- Received the C&R Racing Woman in Engineering Award at the Women in the Winner's Circle Foundation ceremony in February 2010.