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Welcome to the second edition of AUTO + Women in Motorsport, in which we share news of women's achievements in our sport from around the world.

If this issue reveals anything, it's that women are now competing at every level of motor sport and in every possible discipline.

From Susie Wolff's impressive lap times during her outing for Williams at Formula One's recent Young Drivers' Test to Michelle Gattling's pursuit of the VW Scirocco R-Cup title and her excellent showing at the FIA Institute's Young Driver Academy shoot-out and on to Steffi Halm's title ambitions in truck racing, it's clear that women are making waves in a diverse range of series.

It's not just on the track either. We also speak to FIA steward Silvia Bellot and Williams Deputy Team Principal Claire Williams to find out how women are influencing motor sport off-track. We hope you enjoy this latest newsletter.

Your AUTO + team

FIA European Rally Championship

Taylor closes in on ERC Ladies' Trophy lead

After five rounds, the FIA European Rally Championship Ladies' Trophy has developed into a tight battle between Bulgaria's Ekaterina Stratieva and Australia's Molly Taylor.

Heading into last weekend's event, the Sibiu Rally in Romania, Stratieva enjoyed a four-point lead over Taylor and the Australian, who was competing on asphalt and gravel for the first time this year felt she would be at a disadvantage.

"I do not know the Sibiu Rally at all, but I am told it is a very tough race for both car and crew," she said before the start of the event. "Obviously knowing nothing of the roads we'll drive on will put us at a disadvantage compared to local drivers or to those who have already tackled this rally."

And her hopes for the rally were dealt an early blow when on stage two a loss of steering fluid caused considerable concern for the 25-year-old. However, with Stratieva rolling into retirement on the very same stage, Taylor knew that by reaching the finish in her Citroën DS3 R3T the category spoils would be hers for the second time this year.

"We said before the start that we weren't interested in our times, it was all about getting to the finish and this made for quite a weird sensation," said Taylor. "It's been a tough rally but I'm very pleased to have got through."

For Stratieva, a rare appearance on gravel would prove to be one to forget after she hit trouble on Friday in her Citroën C2 R2. "I hit a big stone, the car went onto two wheels and landed on the roof," she said afterwards. "There was not too much damage but we were stuck."

Introduced by ERC promoter Eurosport Events ahead of the third event of the season, Rally Islas Canarias, in mid-March, the Ladies' Cup seeks to encourage more female drivers to tackle rounds of the ERC. On each round three points are handed to the winner, two to the second-placed driver and one to third based on the overall classification of each round regardless of car performance. Drivers are allowed to count their best four scores and do not have to be paired with a female co-driver to be eligible for points.

Next stop for the ERC Ladies' Trophy is the Czech Rally Zlín from 30 August-1 September where the competition is expecting five new additions to its ranks. The rally is one of Europe's most difficult events due to the proliferation of high-speed sections through forests and woodland, sections of broken tarmac, a high likelihood of intermittent showers and the bumpy nature of some of the roads.

After that the series will move on to Rally Poland on 13-15 September. The ninth round of the ERC will see the arrival of Inessa Tushkanova, a glamour model and magazine cover star from Ukraine will make her debut in the class.



Australia's Molly Taylor in action at the Sibiu Rally in Romania.

Formula One

Wolff impresses at Formula One's Young Drivers' Test

Women in Motorsport Commission ambassador Susie Wolff hailed her first full Formula One test as a "fantastic experience", after she recently finished ninth out of the 16 drivers running on the final day of Formula One's Young Drivers' Test at Silverstone.

"It was fantastic," she said afterwards. "The team did a great job getting me through the day, talking me through everything step by step. Physically it wasn't easy, but it was what I was expecting. I was well prepared, so it was completely manageable."

The Williams development driver posted a fastest lap of 1:35.093 in the team's FW35. That put her ahead of Caterham Formula One regular Giedo van der Garde, GP3 driver Daniel Kvyat in the Toro Rosso and the second Caterham of Charles Pic.

Triple world champion Sebastian Vettel was the day's quickest driver, with a time of 1:32.894. Wolff's best time was just 0.4 sec adrift of the best time of F3 European champion and current DTM driver Daniel Juncadella, who also drove for Williams at the YDT.

Wolff's 89-lap run, just 15 laps shy of two grand prix race distances of Silverstone, earned praise from Williams' Chief Engineer Xevi Pujolar.

"Susie did a great job for us today," he said. "We did some aero tests [in the] morning while she familiarised herself with the car and then we moved onto some performance and development work. In the afternoon we combined some general running with live pitstop practice, which is an area we are keen to improve ahead of the next race. Susie was good at stopping on the mark every time."

Wolff later told the BBC that she felt the test had proved she can be on the pace in F1. "It was important for me to show I have the performance, it was important to show, given the limited laps I had, I can be on the pace," she said. "I was only 0.4 secs off the F3 European champion, the guy who's rated as an up-and-coming young star. For me that was important. If that has more meaning for other people because I am female, then I will use that to my advantage but I'm not going to play the card 'I'm a girl so give me the car I'm fast enough'."



Susie Wolff at the wheel of the Williams FW35 during the recent F1 Young Drivers Test.

Junior Dragster Racing



Belle and Paige Wheeler with their Junior Dragster.

Sisters shape up as future drag stars

While female drivers are breaking new ground in rallying and single seaters, the power-hungry, pure speed world of drag racing is still viewed by many as perhaps the last real bastion of male-dominated racing. Well, Paige and Belle Wheeler are here to disprove that notion.

The sisters, from Wellingborough in the UK, have been making waves in the Junior Dragster category for several years, with 14-year-old Paige beginning her racing career in 2009 and nine-year-old Belle starting in 2011. Earlier this year, however, it was the younger of the two who took the limelight by landing her first pole position and almost a maiden win at Santa Pod Raceway.

At the Lucas Oil Junior Dragster competition in April, Belle, one of the youngest in a class in which ages can range from eight to 17, led the 20-strong field in qualifying.

Junior Dragster racers qualify on their start-line reaction times – measured by the time taken between the green light illuminating and the car being launched – and Belle's reaction time of 0.005 sec was good enough to see off all challengers. Sister Paige also made it into the top half of the field, qualifying sixth with a 0.0208 sec reaction time.

Both girls progressed through the opening round of eliminations but then found themselves matched against each other in round two. Paige's more powerful machine earned her a five-second starting handicap and that was all Belle needed. She completed the 220-yard course at an average speed of 47mph and while her sister closed fast at 74mph, it was Belle who emerged triumphant.

After two more rounds the nine-year-old made it through to her first final, but fell just short of victory and was narrowly beaten by an older competitor, Billy Everitt.

Since landing her first pole position Belle and Paige have been in action at Round One of the FIA European Drag Racing Championship, where the Junior Dragster competition was a support race, and this summer the Wheeler family will travel to the US where both girls will take on America's best Juniors at Bristol, Tennessee.

CIK-FIA Karting Academy Trophy

Prudent powering forward

After two rounds of the CIK-FIA Karting Academy Trophy, Adeline Prudent, who was earlier this year singled out for support by CIK and the FIA's Women in Motorsport Commission, lies sixth in the drivers' standings. At the first event in Genk, Belgium, the teenager from St Etienne in France was 10th in qualifying practice, seventh in qualifying heat A/B and fifth in qualifying.

In race one on Sunday the French youngster was running well when a collision forced her off the track, though she rejoined to eventually finish 11th. In the second race Adeline spent most of the race in third place before eventually losing out on the podium spot and finishing fourth.

Following her efforts in Genk, Adeline flew to Albi in southern France to participate in a fitness programme organised by the Regional Commission Karting Midi-Pyrénées. Over two days Adeline was trained by coach Benoit Leduc and took part in Nordic walking, swimming, climbing and athletics.

The championship's second round took place in Ortona, Italy on the weekend of 19-21 July. There Prudent finished both the Qualifying Heat A/B and the A/C heat in sixth place. The following day, she finished race one in fifth position and recovered well to finish in 13th position after being pushed off the track.

Adeline now lies sixth in the overall standings with 132 points. At the head of the pack, Maxime Potty leads with 185 points, 39 clear of Pedro Piquet, son of three-time F1 champion Nelson. The next CIK-FIA Karting Academy round is set for 22 September in Varennes, France.



Adeline Prudent, who finished fifth in Ortona.

ADAC Formel Masters

Red Bull Junior Visser masters ADAC series

She may only have completed one season in single-seater racing but 18-year-old Beitske Visser has already turned plenty of heads in the motor racing world, so much so that recently she was announced as the latest member of Red Bull's Junior Team.

"It was a really great feeling," she said. "I think everyone would love to get this chance to be in the junior programme of a Formula One team."

The Dutchwoman has some big shoes to fill, joining a programme that has taken Daniel Ricciardo and Jean-Eric Vergne to F1 with Toro Rosso and of course produced reigning F1 World Champion Sebastian Vettel. "It's good, as we can see the way they did it," she explains. "So there is a good base we can work on."

As with so many young drivers, Visser's involvement in motor sport is the product of a family passion for racing.

"My dad used to race in Touring Cars and when I was three he took me to a race and I saw a little baby kart," she explained. "I asked if I could drive it, but he thought I was too young but when I turned five he got me a kart and I started then."

After impressing in karting, Visser made the step-up to single-seater racing in the ADAC Formel Masters series last year and took two victories in her debut season. The first was something special, not only coming at her home race in Zandvoort but just two days after she fractured her back in a crash. "The race in Zandvoort was definitely a highlight, to win after my big crash," she admits.

After taking one more win in 2012, Visser is this year competing in the series again and after three events and nine races she picked up her first win in race three at the Sachsenring last month. Starting from second position on a reverse grid, she raced into the lead in wet conditions. The weather rapidly worsened, the safety car was brought out. By lap six the track was undrivable and the race was red-flagged giving Visser full points.

Ahead of the next round at the Nürburgring on 3-4 August, Beitske is ninth in the championship standings with 32 points. Series leader Alessio Picariello has 144 points.



Beitske Visser was recently signed up to the Red Bull Junior programme that has promoted the likes of Sebastian Vettel to F1.

Volkswagen Scirocco R-Cup

Gatting second in Scirocco R-Cup standings

After four of the nine races in the VW Scirocco R-Cup, FIA Women in Motorsport Commission-supported racer Michelle Gatting is second in the standings, just 20 points off the series lead.

After finishing third and 3.4 seconds behind winner and former F1 racer Nicola Larini in the May season opener at Hockenheim, Gatting went one better in the first race of a double-header at Austria's Red Bull Ring, the series' only event outside Germany.

In a tough race, Michelle battled against a loss of power steering early on but still managed to claim the lead. She was not able to hold on, however, and finished second to South Africa's Kelvin van der Linde, who was quick to credit Gatting: "Michelle put me under immense pressure right from the word go. She really surprised both me and Kasper Jensen with her overtaking on the uphill section just after the start."

As for Michelle, she was naturally disappointed not to have triumphed but was pleased with her second podium finish in a row, and after the race said: "I am still a bit disappointed that I was not able to defend the lead I held for a while. However, that will probably give way to joy at my second podium in a row later. After finishing third in Hockenheim and second in Spielberg – who knows, perhaps I can go one step higher in the next race at the Norisring."

She didn't have to wait that long. In the second race at Spielberg she grabbed another second place, again finishing behind van der Linde. The two podiums left Gatting just eight points behind the South African as the drivers and teams prepared for round three.

Arriving at the Norisring street circuit, spirits were dampened by events at the Le Mans 24-Hour race, where Gatting's fellow Dane Allan Simonsen had been killed in a racing accident. In association with fellow Scirocco R-Cup racer and compatriot Jensen, Gatting set about organising a tribute to the sportscar driver and as a result all Cup Sciroccos racing at the Norisring bore a special sticker

in memory of Simonsen.

On track, Gatting once again finished second to van der Linde in the single Scirocco R-Cup race and left the track somewhat dissatisfied with her weekend's work. "I am not that happy with the way the race panned out," she said. "Second place is nice, but I had my sights set on winning. Unfortunately, I lost two places shortly after the start. I also drove too aggressively, so my brakes were too hot towards the end of the race."

"With the continued support and guidance of the people at Volkswagen Motorsport and Cathy (Muller), Michelle is making great progress. To be challenging for the title is fantastic! The Commission's partnership with Volkswagen is very important and we are grateful for their ongoing commitment to this project and for giving young female talent the opportunity to demonstrate their potential," said Michèle Mouton.

After her efforts in Germany, Gatting travelled to Teesdorf in Austria where she was one of 25 young drivers competing for a place at the FIA Institute's Young Driver Excellence Academy. Michelle made it into the top six at the European region shoot-out but missed out on the single guaranteed Academy slot, which went to Lithuania's Ignas Gelzinis.

Gatting could yet make it to the Academy, however, as the young Dane was singled out for praise by the competition judges and tipped to be in strong contention for one of the three wildcard Academy places still up for grabs.

Elsewhere in the Scirocco R-Cup, the championship's only other female competitor, Mikaela Ahlin-Kottulinsky, scored her best result in the series so far with fourth place at the Norisring.

The Swede opened her season account with 11th place at Hockenheim and then finished eighth and 17th in the races at the Red Bull Ring. The Norisring suited her, however, and she put in an excellent performance to finish less than a second behind third-placed Manuel Fahnaer of Germany.



(Top and above) Michelle Gatting, who took her third second place of the season at the Norisring recently.

Road Safety



Women in Motorsport Commission ambassador Maria de Villota speaking at the inaugural FIA Sport Conference Week in June.

Walking Tall for Road Safety

In May, Women in Motorsport Commission ambassador and Drivers' Commission member Maria de Villota, joined FIA President Jean Todt, Bernie Ecclestone and a host of Formula One stars at her home grand prix in Spain to promote road safety for pedestrians as part of the second UN Global Road Safety Week.

The UN event's Long Short Walk project, in which people walked routes special to them to highlight the need to be aware of pedestrian safety, was embraced by the FIA and F1, with its major players choosing to walk the grid at Barcelona's Circuit de Catalunya just hours before the Spanish Grand Prix.

Explaining her involvement, de Villota said: "I became involved at a Women in Motorsport Commission meeting in Paris. Following an Action for Road Safety presentation, we believed we had to be active and

participate in spreading the Road Safety message. The Spanish GP was close and we all agreed that I should take part in it as a WMC ambassador. After what had happened to me, I believe it was the best I could do."

Accompanied by a large number of local schoolchildren on the grid walk, the former Marussia F1 test driver admitted it had been a special moment.

"It was a fantastic moment. Children and families were excited and proud of taking part in it," she said. "We all did something unique in F1 history, crossing the finish line with the same goal: safer roads for pedestrians. I think that I am alive because I still have to do something important. And this is important to me."

Following her activities in Barcelona, de Villota next spread the message of safety, this time in motor sport, at June's inaugural FIA Sport Conference Week.

"I should not be here," she told delegates. "Last year I had my accident on 3 July. I woke up on 7 July and the doctors said I was a miracle. We cannot forget that motor sport is dangerous. I hear the word accident but for me an accident is something like a tsunami or being struck by lightning. You cannot avoid them.

"Things that you can avoid are not accidents, so there is still a lot to do," she added. "The first thing is a regulation on aero testing at airfields. It's not regulated. In Formula One, we go into detail in the pursuit of excellence.

"When I go into schools and I see all children, they ask me what the best thing about Formula One is. I say it's not about the speed, it's not about the glamour. It's about doing things in the very best way. We need to do a lot more."

FIA World Endurance Championship

Ihara targets WEC podium after Le Mans heartbreak

After being forced to retire from the Le Mans 24 Hour race, sports car driver Keiko Ihara says she will take the lessons learned and target a podium finish before the end of the 2013 FIA World Endurance Championship season.

Ihara began her WEC campaign with Gulf Racing at Round Two in Belgium in May, where she and team-mates Frédéric Fatien and Fabien Giroix finished 29th overall but it was at Le Mans where the Japanese racer began to find form.

After qualifying in 19th position she and her team had every reason to look forward to a successful race but as the event unfolded severe vibrations in the team's Gulf Lola B12 eventually forced the squad into retirement.

Before commenting on her own race, however, Ihara paid tribute to Allan Simonsen, the Danish GTE-class driver killed during the race.

"I hope his soul may rest in peace," she said. "Due to extremely difficult weather, so many drivers, including the top racers, spun and crashed. The conditions were the most difficult of my whole career.

"Our car suffered from serious vibration and we retired from the race at 1.30am," she continued. "We always have to face issues of vibration and heat on race cars but it was

the most severe vibration I have ever experienced. The team worked on the car for ten hours to fix the problem and the car was ready but then we had another problem. The wheels couldn't be put on due to parts breakage. It was like the god of Le Mans telling us not to run."

Her Le Mans experience has given Ihara hope for future rounds of the WEC, however.

"The next round is in Brazil at the end of August and by making full use of what we learned in Le Mans, I want to finish all the races in the rest of the season," she said. "And I want to get on the podium to thank to all the people who have supported my challenge in the series."

While at Le Mans, Ihara, in her role as the company's Global Zero Emission Mobility Ambassador, helped Nissan launch its ZEOD RC (Zero Emission On Demand Racing Car), which it will run in the 2014 Le Mans 24 from Garage 56, the slot reserved for experimental vehicles.

"Electric vehicles are one of the key items for environmental protection," she said. "For a better future for our children, I'd like to contribute to raising awareness of EVs. As a racing driver and also an educational practitioner, demonstrating the potential of EVs by driving an electric racing car at Le Mans is my dream."



WEC racer Keiko Ihara, who finished in 29th place overall at Le Mans.

Driver Academy

Karlsson organises training for young female drivers

Swedish rally star Ramona Karlsson recently organised a meeting of the girls taking part in the Young Female Drivers programme she has launched in association with Sweden's National Sports Federation as part of its Idrottslyftet initiative to encourage youth participation in sport.

The seven girls aged between 15 and 20 years of age gathered for a two-day programme aimed at improving their physical fitness and their ability to talk in front of large groups of people.

Day one was focused on training exercises, as Karlsson explained. "This was something all the girls have asked for, so it was really great that my personal trainer Erik of Set Sail Fitness in Arvika could help the girls with this," she said. "Physical training is good, both for keeping focus, but also for preventing injuries." says.

The girls were also given instruction in nutrition, and how best to eat to ensure maximum performance.

After the training, the girls visited Kristoffersson Motorsport (KMS) to learn how the team has been built up since being founded in 1989 and how it works across a range of motor sport disciplines.

On the second day, each girl was tasked with preparing a lecture outlining their hopes, to be delivered to an audience of junior stock car drivers. "This was very good practice for them, to talk in front of people, and to make their own presentations," commented Ramona. "I was so proud of them. They were talking with strong passion, and each girl delivered a very professional and inspiring lecture."

As for her own motor sport activities, in May Ramona and co-driver Miriam Walfridsson gave their Skoda Fabia WRC car its 2013 gravel debut at Round Three of the Swedish Rally Championship, the South Swedish Rally.

And despite their lack of gravel experience, the pair were fighting for top times from the off. After the first day's seven stages Ramona and Miriam were in third place in the championship's top class.

However, the duo hit trouble on the final day. Brake problems and a puncture hindered them on the first stage and they lost over a minute. The delay dropped them to fifth place.

On the following two stages they set fastest stage times and jumped back into contention. A clever, tactical drive on the final stage, saw Ramona and Miriam take third place overall, just 0.7 second behind second-placed Hasse Gustaffson and winner Eddie Hörbing.

"Of course it felt a bit frustrating to be that close to the top, but we are very satisfied with a podium place in the first gravel competition with our Skoda Fabia WRC," said Karlsson.

The podium finish was a historic result as Ramona and Miriam became the first women to take a podium place in the top class of the Swedish Championship. The pair are now third overall, with three remaining competitions. The next round is the AM-Snapphanerallyt, Hässeholm on 9-10 August.



Ramona Karlsson with the racers of her Young Female Drivers training programme.

FIA European Truck Racing Championship

Racing the big rigs with Steffi Halm

One of the first potential blocks put in the way of aspiring female racing drivers is that they lack the strength to wrestle racing machinery around circuits for a race distance. Steffi Halm, the 2012 French Truck Racing Cup champion, is living proof that this isn't the case.

"If you compare a truck with a touring car it's a heavy vehicle," says the German, who is again leading the French

Cup at the wheel of a Lion Racing MAN racing truck. "The weight of the race truck is minimum 5,5 t. But I would not say that the truck is difficult to drive. It's a different driving style and not the same as a formula or a touring car. But physically it's not harder to drive."

Steffi began her racing career in karts in 1993 before moving up the ladder in the usual manner, graduating to single seaters in 2000 and then racing in Formula Renault. A six-year stint in the Mini Challenge netted her five wins and she also competed in the German Porsche Carrera Cup and the 24 Hours of the Nurburgring.

It was in 2011 that she found a home in truck racing. She signed up for that year's European Truck Racing Championship with Tankpool 24 Racing and finished 24th overall. She moved to Lion Racing last year and competed in six rounds of the 2012 championship.

It was in France that she gained her biggest successes to date, however. Last year she became the first woman to win the French Cup, with 13 podium finishes from 15 races.

She's on course for a repeat performance this year and after three rounds is at the top of the standings with 137 points, nine ahead of Noël Crozier of Crozier Competition. In this year's European series she is currently 14th in the standings.

While Halm's choice of racing series may seem strange, she says she feels completely at home in truck racing, though she says it is still a male-dominated arena.

"For me it feels normal," she says. "In every motor sport series I drove before trucks, I was usually the only girl, so I got used to it. But sometimes it's really hard. It is a man's world, you have to fight harder and show everybody that you're fast before earning respect."

"There is a lot of contact on the track, but I don't have the feeling that the men racing want to intimidate me. For sure they try to intimidate every new driver, but this is independent of the driver's sex. I like the truck world, though, and until now I didn't feel a difference to the regular race. It's more that people are really impressed and find it good that a woman is racing with a truck."



Lion Racing's Steffi Halm in action earlier this season.

Rallying

Road safety at top of Suvanto's rally agenda

Up and coming rally driver Laura Suvanto will be on hand at this weekend's Finnish round of the FIA World Rally Championship to help with the country's national road safety campaign *Turvassa Tiellä* (Safety on the Road).

The initiative, organised by Finland's ASN, AKK Motorsport, in association with Liikenneturva, Michelin and FilmWorks, is operated in support of FIA Action for Road Safety and brings together some of the country's best young motor sport talents to educate people about road safety. Along with Suvanto, the campaign is supported by F1 racer Valtteri Bottas, WRC driver Esapekka Lappi and rallycross driver Toomas Heikkinen.

At Neste Oil Rally Finland, 18-year-old Suvanto will be helping the *Turvassa Tiellä* campaign in demonstrating safe moped riding.

"In spite of my young age, I have already covered thousands of kilometres on the road – on mopeds, light motorcycles and cars," she says. "I know the thrill of speed feels exciting at the time of getting a license, even though driving skills may still need improvement. I've always been able to experience the thrill of speed in the safe environment of the track, but not everyone has that opportunity."

"That's why it's great that the national road safety campaign provides practical training in a controlled environment before getting in the middle of traffic."

Suvanto is currently driving for the VAG Motorsport team, competing both in the Finnish Junior Rally Championship and the Suomi Cup, which is contested at events of the Finnish Rally Championship. Her next Junior Championship event is one she will be particularly keen to do well in, as it's taking place around her home town of Turku.



Laura Suvanto demonstrates safe moped riding.



FIA Stewards

Laying down the grand prix law

Women in motor sport doesn't start and end with who's behind the wheel as Silvia Bellot, Formula One's only female race steward, explains.

Can you explain the work of an FIA Steward?

The main work of the FIA stewards is to adjudicate on the races and impose penalties where there is a breach of the regulations. The penalties can range from a simple reprimand all the way up to the exclusion from the race or suspension. When an incident occurs the Race Director [Charlie Whiting] reports it to us. We look at it carefully in light of the Sporting and Technical regulations.

In judging incidents we rely on a range of data. For example, in F1 we have the circuit cameras, the TV broadcast feed, the cars' on-board cameras, the team radio transmissions, timing screens, the GPS system, tyre information, and of course, car telemetry. We can see all this data in real time or compare different laps or drivers.

How did you get to this point? How did your career in motor sport begin?

My father has been a steward for more than 40 years and he was president of the Rally Commission of the Real Federación Española de Automovilismo (RFEdeA), so I've been involved in motor sport all my life. When I was 16-years-old I took a course to be a marshal and I passed the exam. Two years later I did the same with the steward's course.

I did lots of races as runner, secretary of the stewards and trainee steward in national events before I worked properly as a steward.

Being a steward is an enormously responsible position. Does that responsibility weigh heavily?

It is absolutely a big responsibility; we are taking decisions that can change the result of a race or a championship. However, all the stewards are very conscious of that fact and we are aware of the importance of delivering a quick and correct decision.

How long have you been working as an FIA Steward?

Three years. Before that, in 2009 I had the chance to be an F1 trainee steward at the Spanish Grand Prix, where I could learn and improve my knowledge of that championship. A year after that I was part of the permanent stewards of the GP2 and GP3 championships.

At the age of 25 I realised my dream. I was invited to be an FIA steward at two events, the Turkish GP and Italian GP. In the following years I've had the chance to work as an FIA and ASN steward at several World Championships including WRC, WTCC and F1.

You were recently Chairperson of the Stewards at the WTCC event in Marrakech. Did you feel more pressure leading the panel?

I'm not afraid of leading a panel of the stewards, I've been doing that role for several years in other international series and this year in GP2 and GP3. It's true that a World Championship is a bit different, everybody's looking at your decisions, but I'm ready for this new challenge, and I hope I can do the same in other FIA World Championships.

What's your regular career?

I've got a degree in biology and this year I'll finish a degree in fashion business and design.

You recently received the FIA Outstanding Official Award. Explain what that means?

Two years ago the FIA Volunteers and Officials Commission created this award to honour officials who have had an outstanding career in motor sport. The first winner was Andrés Mas, the marshal who rescued Jacky Ickx after an accident at Jarama in 1970. I was given the award last year and received it at the FIA Gala in Istanbul last December.

So far, what has been your most memorable event?

I think my most special event was the 2012 Brazilian Grand Prix, because it was the final round of the championship and Fernando Alonso and Sebastian Vettel were fighting for the world title.

Formula One

Formula for female success

A meritocracy in which the best are chosen regardless, Formula One is the ideal environment for women to prosper in, says Williams F1 Deputy Team Principal Claire Williams

You've been in your role of Deputy Team Principal since the early part of this year now, have you settled into it, and how do you see it developing?

I love it. I'm so glad I've been given this opportunity. It wasn't necessarily one that I entered into lightly; it's a big challenge. Williams is a big team with a lot of heritage and success, but clearly we're not where we want to be at the moment, so there's that aspect to take into consideration and added to that, of course, following in your dad's footsteps is never easy. So I had to think about those elements a lot. I took my time in making the decision as it's a big commitment and you have to sacrifice a lot. But I love Williams and I love Formula One, so I see it as a wonderful opportunity to hopefully make a difference to the team and to bring back some performance and to get us back to where we want to be.

Is it more of a challenge than you expected?

No, it's not. I don't want to say it's easier but it's actually not as daunting as I'd built it up to be. You look at all the other very impressive team principals and you think 'wow, can I really do this?' but when you step over the brink you realise that, yes, you can.

My life hasn't changed that much. I was always pretty involved and sat on the board, so I knew how the team worked. Now it's just a deeper understanding and more work!

The performance of the team has become my responsibility and that's the biggest issue. When you're given the power to effect change that is quite exciting because you can make a difference but you have to be very careful in what you do with that power.

Does it make any difference that you're a woman working in motor sport? Has that question arisen a lot?

It's only in this job that it seems to have become an issue. Before, in my role as a press officer for the team, I was never conscious of being 'a woman in motor sport' but since I've taken over the Deputy Team Principal's job it's become a thing. In almost every interview I do it's pretty much the first question and I think: 'Really? Are we actually discussing this?' It's amazing that people are even asking the question.

This is not a big deal in my mind. Thirty years ago we had a female prime minister in Britain who won three successive terms in office. There are women running much bigger operations than I am, in bigger companies. A woman runs the IMF. To me it's just not an issue at all. It's not just men that ask the question either, lots of women's magazines are fascinated by it as well.

I do find it strange that there is still this perception about F1 being so male-dominated. Look at other sports – how many women manage premier league football clubs? None. I think Formula One is well ahead of the curve proportionally. There are no barriers to entry in our sport, even as drivers. Simply, if you are good enough you can take part at any level – even on the grid.

However, I suppose it is a surprise to some people and if I can use that for good, to create awareness around women being more than able to do these roles, then that's fantastic.

Certainly, the percentage could be higher. There is work we can do there in terms of raising awareness, encouraging girls to get involved, and I think that the work Michèle Mouton and the Commission are doing is great. It can only be a positive thing to promote more women into the sport.

Is it a sport in which women can do well?

Yes, absolutely. There is no differentiation between a female engineer and male engineer. It's completely about what that person brings to the team. Formula One is about innovation and it would be exceptionally foolish to turn away someone who has that innovation in them on the basis of their sex. For instance, half of our executive committee is female. We don't look at people any other way than in terms of the talent and skill they can bring to the company.

Is it important that people have role models in the sport?

I think so. Monisha [Kaltenborn, team principal of Sauber F1] has talked about this a lot and while I don't think I'm a prime example or anything, I think you have to acknowledge that you are in the position you are in and you have to embrace it. If we can do more to encourage girls into the sport we should be doing it.

And there is a need for good people – male or female. Take engineering. We're not struggling but there isn't a surfeit of really talented engineers out there. If we want the sport to continue to attract engineers, then we have to encourage girls to see it as a career path. After all, why would you deprive yourself of 50 per cent of the talent pool?

In terms of role models, how important is the work that Susie does?

It is a big thing for us. It annoys me when people say anything to detract from it. Susie works so hard at being a good racing driver and being a good member of our team. She is a development driver for us. There is a remit for that and a job description. She is not asked to go out and drive at 200mph and put the car on pole, that's not her job at the moment. What we ask her to do she does with great professionalism and great enthusiasm. She is hugely ambitious and she simply wants to do a good job for the team. Having someone like that in the team provides a fantastic role model for all the girls coming into the sport in the junior categories.

