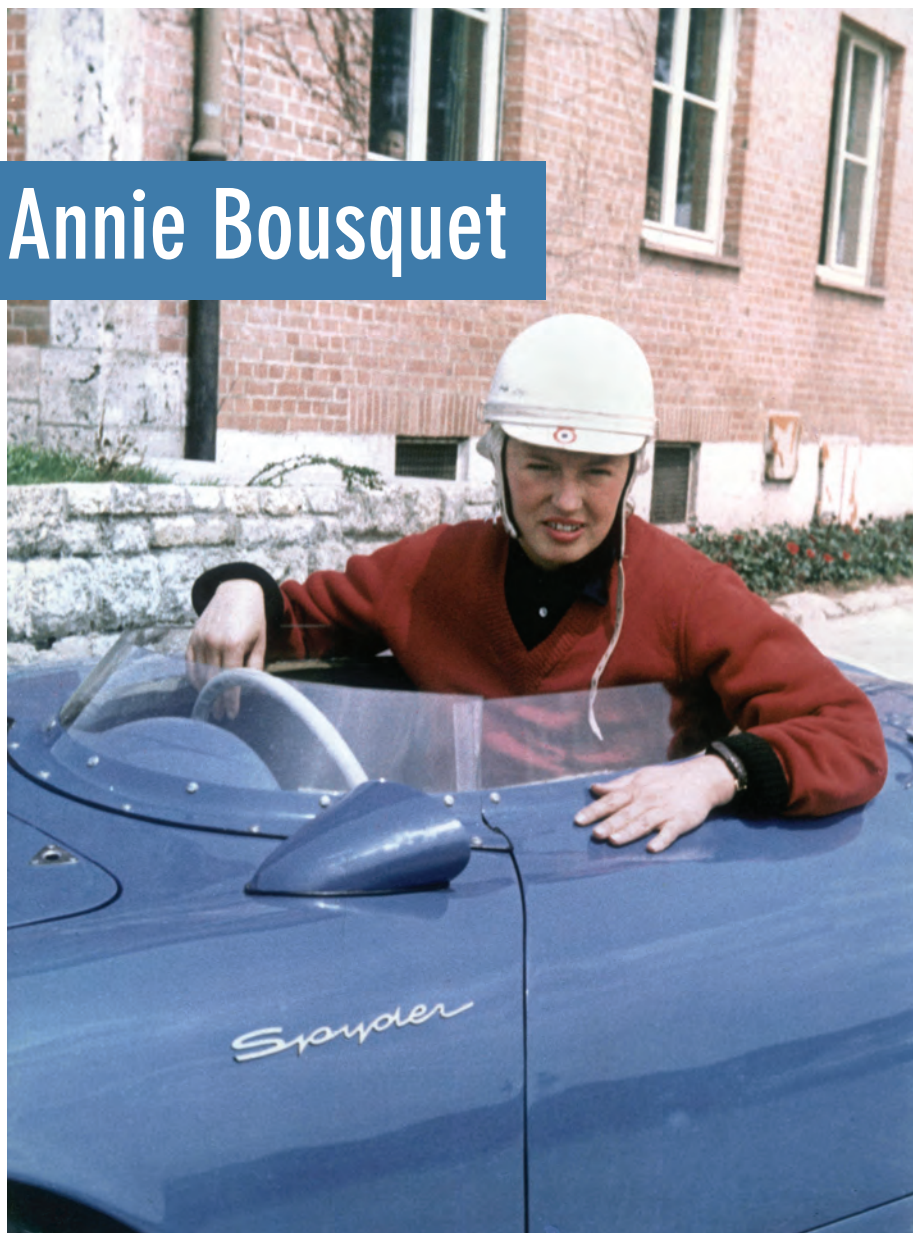


A Racing Lady

young and daring

Annie Bousquet



Annie's Spyder was painted blue, the racing colors of France. Although she was born a native of Vienna, she married a Frenchman who was a POW in Austria and later made France her family home. This 1955 photograph was taken outside the Porsche Werk I in Zuffenhausen. Photo courtesy Porsche archives.

By Phil Carney

Photos courtesy Porsche archives

During the early Porsche days of the 1950s and '60s, Denise McCluggage and Ruth Levy were two of the more popular U.S. women sports car racers. In Europe, Gilberte Thirion and Annie Bousquet are the two most recognized women racers during this period. Similar in age, they began as close friends but apparently racing changed this. Historians claim Annie's fierce competitive nature caused her to not only lose a friend but to eventually lose her life.

Born Annie Schaffer in Vienna, Austria, her exact birth year is debated but apparently falls somewhere between 1921 and 1925. Annie's French identity is the result of her marriage to Pierre Bousquet whom she first met while he was a POW in Austria during the war. After the marriage, the couple moved to France.

Legend has it that Bousquet's racing career began as the result of a 1952 ski trip. Having injured herself, she was recuperating in a Sestriere, Italy hotel bar where she met Gigi Viloresi and Alberto Ascari. Annie was overwhelmed by their exciting racing escapades and a few months later she entered the Rally Sestriere. Some writers state that Bousquet raced with Alberto Ascari but this seems highly unlikely. Ascari was the 1951 Formula One World Champion and was driving for Scuderia Ferrari at the time. So it seems very unlikely he would have teamed up with a neophyte woman.

The records show Bousquet did enter two other races in 1952. The first was the July Alpine Rally where she drove a Renault 4CV but broke the gearbox in Col d'Izoard on the first leg. Her next race was two months later in the September Tour de France, at the wheel of a Panhard X86. Alas, she did not finish that event either. Nevertheless, the 1952 season was a learning experience and Annie definitely caught the racing bug that year.

The year 1953 was more training time for the young lady, who at this time was around the age of 30. The first event entered was the April Mille Miglia where she co-drove a Renault 4CV with Simone des Forest (likely the first woman to be awarded a driver's license in France). Other women drivers that year were Giovanna Maria Cornaggia Medici and Olga Della Beffa. Some 577 cars entered the event and 490 of those were at the starting line on April 26th. Although weather conditions were excellent that year, traveling 1,000 miles over rough roads at reckless speeds takes its toll on cars. As a result only 283 cars were classified at the finish line. Bousquet and des Forest came in #282. Annie's next race, the 12 Hours of Hyères in June produced much better results. Her car again was the Renault 4CV and this time Annie managed a third in class behind two Panhards.

In July, Annie Bousquet and noted 356 SL driver Gilberte Thirion struck up a friendship. It is not difficult to understand why. Both women were about the same age and both were interested in a sport that was dominated by men. They decided to co-drive in that year's 24 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps using a Fiat 1100. They finished 16th overall (just behind two other Fiat 1100s) and won the Coupe des Dames and Coupe du Roi. They also formed a bond that grew much tighter in future months. It is interesting to note that at Spa that year there was another women team of Simone des Forest and Elyane Imbert driving a Porsche 356 1500 Super. Unfortunately, they were disqualified.

The most significant event for Annie in 1953 occurred at Agen, in southeastern France. Pressing tremendously hard in her Panhard DB 500, Bousquet overturned in a corner and sustained her first serious injuries. After the race she spent a month in the hospital and had the opportunity to think seriously about racing. In hindsight, perhaps the lesson Annie should have learned was to be less aggressive. In reality however, it appears she reached a different conclusion; she needed a better car if she were to be competitive in the 1500 class.

The Gordini Race Car

Over the years, race car development has been filled with enthusiasts who think they can build a spectacular car by modifying production hardware from a major manufacturer. Some of these people were very successful. As we know, Ferry Porsche used this approach and based his 356 on the Volkswagen. The earliest stallions in Scuderia Ferrari were based on Alfa Romeo products and Carlo Abarth built his reputation around modifying Fiats. And there were many more such builders whose names have now faded into dusty archives. One such almost-forgotten race car constructor was Amédée Gordini who designed his race cars around the output of the Simca factory.

Bugatti, Largo and Gordini were Italian by birth but their cars are remembered in the context of French automotive history. Amedeo Gordini (sic) was born in Bazzano (between Modena and Bologna) in 1899. He initially tutored at Fiat under the watchful eye of Edoardo Weber, the famous carburetor manufacturer. Later Gordini moved to Isotta-Fraschini where his boss was Alfieri Maserati. Convinced that the best automotive products were coming from France, Gordini moved to Paris after World War I and opened his auto business in 1925.

In 1936, Simca (Société Industrielle et Mécanique et Carrossière) was manufacturing Fiats under license and Gordini signed a contract with them for tuning and racing support. The following year, Gordini-prepared cars, fitted with special alloy bodies, were very successful in the 750 class. In 1939, Gordini and José Scaron took the 1,100 class win at Le Mans.

As might be expected, the World War II years were very bleak. But in the first race following the war, the Coupe Robert Benoist in September 1945, Gordini handily won, driving his 1939 racer. Following this success, Gordini established an agreement to build a monoposto car based on the Simca-Fiat 1100 parts bin. The result was the Gordini T11 which used the Fiat 1.1 liter engine, Simca suspension, a tube chassis, and a Gordini-designed body. The car quickly scored wins in two French races in 1946.

Arguably, Gordini's T15, designed in 1947, is the most famous of his creations. This car, initially powered by a 1,220-cc engine, was exceptionally successful and frequently dominated the lower-displacement Voiturette classes. It was also was a serious contender in Formula 1. Gordini's T15 racers were continuously modified and by 1950 were sporting a Wade supercharger to keep them competitive. Eventually Amédée's cars faced strong competition from Alfa Romeo and Ferrari in Formula 1 and 2 and Simca officials started losing confidence.



The date and event for this photo are unknown. It is believed Annie entered a variety of local and regional competitions that have not been recorded. Perhaps this may have been one of those since the 133 race number seems to be have been applied using tape in a rather casual manner. Photo courtesy Porsche archives.



This 1953 photograph was taken shortly after the light blue Gordini 17S was delivered to Europe's famous racing ladies. Seated in the car is Gilberte Thirion. Standing beside are her father, Max Thirion, race car builder Amédée Gordini and Annie Bousquet. The Gordini 17S, bearing chassis 039, has been restored and is on display at the Schlumpf Museum, Mulhouse, France. Photo courtesy Jacques Mertens.

The Type 17S built in the fall of 1953 was an attempt by Gordini to regain prominence by providing a two-seat racer originally powered by a 4-cylinder 1,095-cc engine. Although sometimes used as a factory racer, the car was actually owned by Gilberte Thirion and Annie Bousquet. It was a good but not exceptional performer in major national and international events. If up against the higher performing Porsche 1.5 liter race cars, the 17S did not fare well. This is likely the reason that both Thirion and Bousquet would be racing Spyders a year later.

Simca funding dried up in 1953 but Amédée Gordini struggled on for a few more years. Unfortunately the competition from Porsche, Ferrari, Mercedes-Benz and Maserati made it impossible for him to find a niche in any class. Following the April, 1957 Naples Grand Prix, Amédée threw in the towel and dropped out of racing completely. He hired on as a consultant at Renault, advising them on handling technology. There he worked on the design of the successful Renault Dauphine and Renault 8 racing and rally cars. In 1968 the Gordini company was absorbed by Renault and has since been used to identify sporting versions of many Renault products.

Annie's best finish driving her Spyder was at the 1954 Tour de France Automobile where she was second in the Coupe des Dames class- but that is a somewhat distorted précis of the full story. This photo shows Gilberte Thirion driving an antiquated 356 SL following Annie. But at the finish line it was Gilberte in front of Annie. Prior to this competition the women were very close friends. Afterwards they would more properly be called strong competitors.



In 1954 Annie switched to a Gordini Type 17S which she co-owned with her Belgian friend Gilberte Thirion. During the 1954 season the ladies drove the car in a number of different events and loaned it back to Gordini for factory drivers to participate in other races. Thirion used the 17S at Spa and produced a second in class, and then at Reims achieved a 3rd in class. Annie was less successful in the events she entered.

There are many interesting anecdotes from the 1954 season. For example, Annie and Gilberte entered the car in the 1954 Sebring 12 hour race. Lore says they were refused entry because they were women but the Sebring records simply state they were DNA (Did Not Arrive, although at least one notable source lists the entry as NAC, Not Accepted).

In the May Mille Miglia the team finished 55th overall and 5th in the 1500 class. But they also won the Ladies Cup bettering Giovanna Maria Cornaggia Medici driving an Alfa Romeo 1900 TI and Anna Maria Peduzzi in a Stanguellini 750 Sport. The big news for the tabloids however, was not the ladies in the Gordinis but behind the wheel of a Porsche.

At the September 1954 Tour de France Automobile, Bousquet was behind the wheel of a Porsche. Sharing driving responsibilities with her was Marie Claire Beaulieu. In the same Sport 1500 class was the 356 SL of Gilberte Thirion with her co-driver Ingeborg Polensky (wife of Porsche driver Helmut Polensky). Thirion's SL, 356/2-061, was not quite the same car her father had purchased two years earlier. A few months prior, the aging SL racer had been converted to a mid-engine configuration in an attempt to keep it competitive. So the event obviously would be an interesting matchup of friends and Porsche's old and new race cars.

Of course a multi-day race over the public roads around Nice, France was exciting but the results are what are really telling. The overall winner was the team of Jacques Pollet and Hubert Gauthier in a two liter Gordini T15S. Right behind them were Claude Storez and Herbert Linge in 550-08 followed by the 550's biggest competitors in the 1500 class, two OSCA MT4s. Where did the two Porsche women teams finish? Fifth overall was the mid-engine 356 SL driven by Thirion and Polensky. Bousquet and Beaulieu finished eighth overall. Everything considered, the female Porsche drivers did well in a field of 124 cars where only 55 finished.

Apparently Annie was not pleased with getting the second place Coupe des Dames trophy in that 1954 Tour de France. Some writers said this event permanently broke the Thirion-Bousquet friendship. Jacques Mertens, who has interviewed Gilberte Thirion, has a slightly different perspective. After the race there was really no vicious antagonism but rather a jealousy began when either woman perceived the other had a better car at any particular race.

With just a couple of exceptions, Annie's favorite car for the 1955 season was the Porsche 550. The first 1955 race in which she drove a 550 was the Grand Prix at Agadir, Morocco in late February. The car was 550-05 and likely owned by Jaroslav Juhan at the time. It was not a particularly good start for Annie since she crashed and broke her leg. After recuperating, she was in a 550 again at the 24 Heures Gran Prix de Paris (a.k.a. Bol d'Or, Monthéry) in mid-May and her co-driver was Josef Jeser. This was Spyder 550-016 owned by Jeser. This time the team did quite well, finishing 2nd overall bettered only by another Spyder driven by the very experienced team of Auguste Veuillet and Gonzague Olivier. Her luck changed again two weeks later when she raced at the Hyeres, France 12 hour with Jaroslav Juhan in his 550-05. They were DNF due to brake failure.

There is debate about when Annie purchased her own, pale-blue Spyder (the racing colors of France). There is also speculation on the chassis number, supposedly 550-043, but except for a build date of May 1955, factory records for that number are devoid of additional data. It could be that Annie purchased her Spyder second hand; the facts are just not clear.

It appears Bousquet's effort to break the one hour 214.68 km/hr ladies record set by Gwenda Hawkes in 1934 may have been the first time she was in her own 550 Spyder. The record-breaking attempt was held in the summer of 1955 on the difficult banked oval at Monthléry where centrifugal forces place a heavy strain on both driver and car. Annie managed a significant improvement over the previous record (214 km/hr) at the 50 km (221.9 km/hr) and 50 miles (223.6 km/hr) marks and achieved a fastest lap of 230.5 km/hr. The real plum however, was to beat the coveted hour record. Unfortunately, while challenging the record a tire blew sending her into the wall at around 230 km/hr resulting in major injuries to



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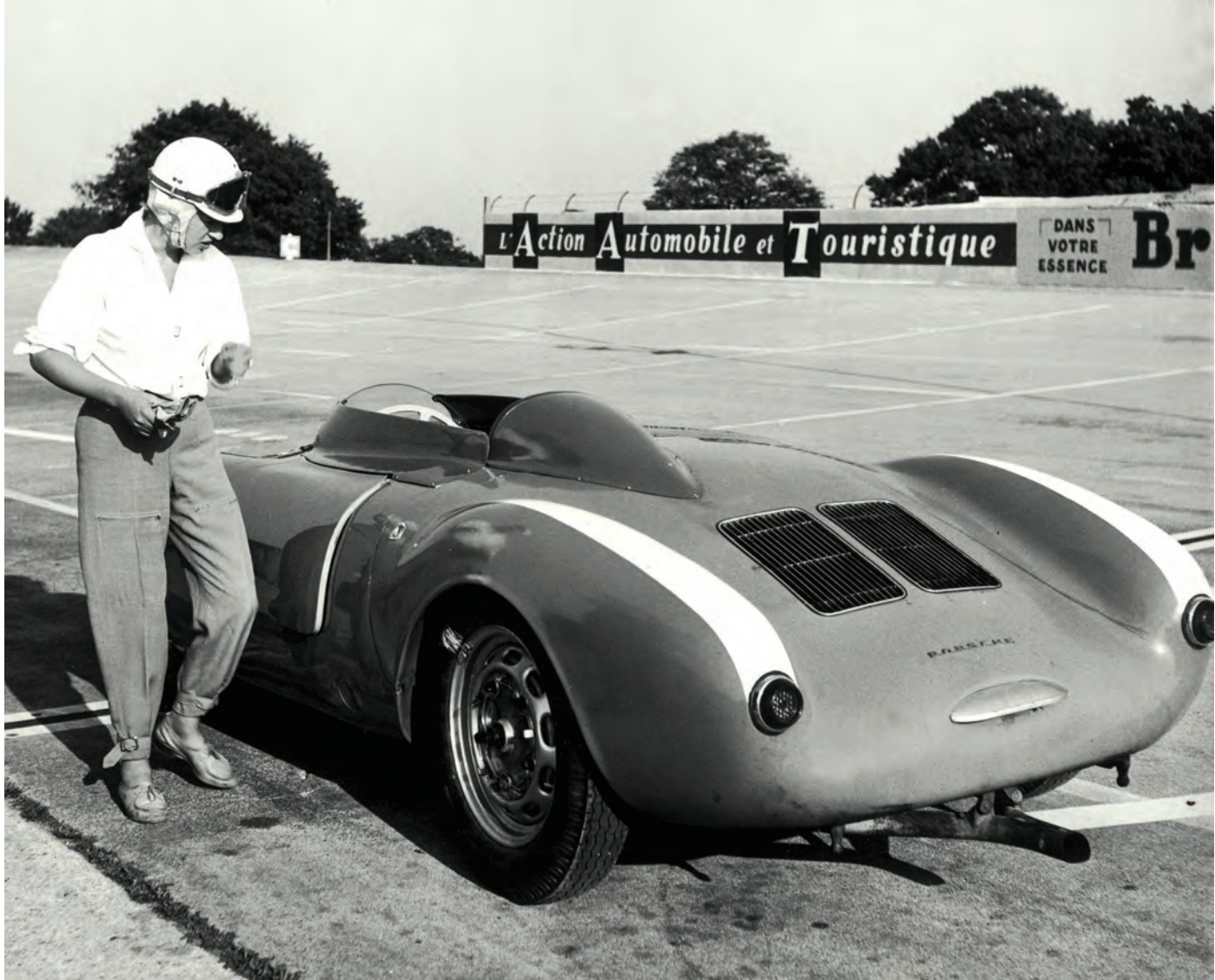
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both her and the Spyder. Christophorus reported that two days later a telegram was received at Zuffenhausen declaring, "...leg broken, but no fracture of the neck, feel good. Regards, Annie."

The year 1956 started off well enough. In the April Mille Miglia Annie piloted a Triumph TR2 (possibly a works entry) and finished 95th overall and 3rd in class. Not a bad result considering there were over 550 starters, of whom 182 finished. Six weeks later she shared a drive with Alejandro De Tomaso in his Maserati at the 1000 km de Paris. They were DNF.

The event that has engraved Annie's memory in time was the June 29, 1956 42nd Grand Prix de l'A.C.F., 12 Heures Internationales at Reims. Bousquet entered her 550 Spyder listing Isabel Haskell DeTomaso as the co-driver. Annie's mental state was far from optimal at the time. Just a few months earlier, her husband had been killed in a driving accident near Saulieuon. In addition, her Spyder needed some work done and she drove it non-stop from Zuffenhausen to Reims just prior to practice. Despite having gotten almost no sleep for two days, Annie insisted she start the race and drive the first hours.

On the 17th lap, travelling at over 100 mph, Annie went wide and careened down a bank. Her body was thrown from the Spyder and at the hospital she was pronounced dead on arrival due to a broken neck. She is buried next to her husband Pierre in the cemetery at Mames-la-Coquette.

This page: Originally Annie was behind the wheel of 550s owned by other racers like Jaroslav Juhan and Josef Jeser. The available data seems to indicate that she bought her own Spyder in the summer of 1955 and the first event she entered was a record breaking attempt at Monthléry. For the event the car received some special modification including increasing the engine's compression ratio, setting up the fuel system for alcohol, non-factory tires, covering obstructions on the nose, en-



closing the cockpit's side tonneau covers and adding a conical air-fin behind the driver. Although the record attempt started well enough, unfortunately one of the non-standard tires blew during the endeavor sending the car and driver into the wall. Photos courtesy Porsche archives.



Two days before the Formula 1 race at Reims-Gueux track in June, 1956, a 12 hour race was held featuring a "LeMans" start. At the green flag, Annie's Spyder #32 is fourth on the left and she can be seen beginning her sprint to the car, fourth driver from the right (arrow). The course was considered one of the three fastest in Europe at the time, and had been extended in length to 8.3 km in 1953. The long straights were good for high-speed drafting while late braking in the sharp curves could test both a driver's skill and courage. Below, Annie's Spyder after the accident. Racers in the sports car classification were required to carry a spare tire but not an effective roll bar. That same summer, an American SCCA racer named William Snell died in a rollover when his helmet, similar to that worn by Annie Bousquet, failed to protect him in what would have been a survivable accident. The following year, friends and fellow racers, including Dr. George Snively formed the Snell Memorial Foundation, which has worked to design and improve protective helmets for motorsports and other occupations ever since. A Snell certification is found in the best helmets and has continually improved the safety of racers for over 50 years.

Analyzing Annie

There are many footnotes to this tragic ending. According to several of her contemporaries, Annie Bousquet was an aggressive driver and her enthusiasm outpaced her talent. Add to that her personal mental state just prior to the Reims race and it seems like the result was an almost inevitable disaster. The consequences following her death were felt for many years. The Automobile Club de l'Ouest, organizers of the Le Mans 24 Hour race, banned female drivers from competing. Their edict lasted until 1971 when Marie-Claude Beaumont was allowed to race a Corvette. The corner where Annie died was renamed in tribute to her and the French Automobile Federation announced the "Challenge Annie Bousquet" special award for the top female driver in the National Rally Championship.

Looking purely at the statistics of Bousquet's four year racing career, it is difficult to analytically recognize why she gained such notoriety in Europe. Of the 16 major races she entered (there may have been other local and regional races), she finished 10 times, retired 4 times and failed to start in 2 events. She never had either a first overall or first in class finish and was classified second just once. Supposedly, her best racing achievements were in a Porsche Spyder where she competed six times and was DNF half of the time. Her top finish in the Spyder was in the 1954 Tour de France where she was second in the Coupe des Dames class behind Gilberte Thirion driving an antiquated 356 SL.

So why all the hype about Annie Bousquet? The answer is largely sexist. She was a good looking French woman challenging men on their own



turf and even in those days the press knew how to generate stories that sold. She was also perceived as young and somewhat reckless which again generated headlines and was perhaps the ultimate cause of her demise. The fact is, her death and not her racing skills, is likely the reason she is so well remembered in Europe if not in the States. 🚗

I want to thank Jacques Mertens for his insight related to Gilberte Thirion and Andrew Hosking (www.type550.com) for his support by providing information on the Porsche 550.

Review

Porsche Ladies

Late last year the Porsche Museum produced a new book titled *Porsche Ladies*. As the name implies, the book focuses on the relationship between the Porsche company, its sports cars and women. The book's 220 pages are broken up into five chapters and consist primarily of photographs with a concise amount of supporting text.

The first chapter is something of an introduction, though it also seems like a justification for why women like Porsche sports cars. It reads as if written by the company's Public Relations organization; indeed almost all of the graphics on these first 40 pages are well-recognized copy from the Porsche advertising department.

The title of chapter 2 is "Pioneers of the Automobile" and this is where the interests of 356 enthusiasts will start to rev. Aloisia Porsche (née Kaes) is credited with being the first woman to drive a Porsche car when she took the wheel of a Lohner-Porsche Mixte Touring Car in 1902. There are lots of other interesting anecdotes including the first woman race car driver (1901), a mention of a 1906 book "...for all women who motor or want to motor;" and how the first rearview mirror was the result of advice that women should carry a small pocket mirror with them to observe the traffic behind them. Curiously, most of the text addresses women who were involved with racing cars which is the theme of the next set of pages.

"Porsche and the Fast Ladies," is Chapter 3. New (at least to this author) historical detail comes to light in the first few sentences when it is revealed that "the world's first Porsche customer was a woman. Jolanda Tschudi, a glider



pilot, in 1949 purchased 356/2-002 - the first Cabriolet bodied by Beutler." Apparently, the first 356 built, Roadster 356-001, was also purchased in 1951 by Swiss actress Elisabeth Spielhofer. (All of this information would have been more suitable in the previous chapter.) After that lead-in there are individual write-ups on some of the best known female Porsche racers: Rita Rampinelli, Gilberte Thirion, Annie Bousquet, Jacqueline Evans and Denise McCluggage. The photographs feature not only these fast ladies but many other notable women race car drivers around the world.

Chapter 4, "Ladies at Porsche," describes several of the women who were involved in the business end of the company. As one might guess, the initial pages are devoted to Louise Piech, Ferry's sister, and the role she played in

getting the Porsche sports car and Austrian VW business started. This is followed by profiles of Helen Werkmeister (Ferry's personal secretary) and three women associated with the press department. Thora Hornung was a foreign language specialist who became the model used for the 901 introduction and, after leaving Porsche, went on to become a highly recognized journalist. Evi Butz was an assistant to Huschke von Hanstein and responsible for producing rapid fire press releases following significant race events. Ilse Nädele was recognized as an early interface between Porsche and the many clubs that were springing up at the time.

The final chapter is actually a picture book. Most of the photographs seem to have come from Porsche's advertising but many were either used sparsely or perhaps unpublished in the past. The images are arranged more-or-less chronologically beginning with the Pre-A 356 and then moving through the long line of 911 models right up to the present. Images of the 908, 914 and 928 are sprinkled in between. In all cases, the photographs feature an attractive lady as well as an attractive sports car.

This pink, hardcover book uses an unusual landscape format measuring 5-1/4" (130 mm) by 8-3/8" (210 mm). According to the back page, the photographs come from the Porsche AG Historical Archives although several have been credited to other sources in other publications. The text, including captions, is provided in both German and English. Unfortunately, a 9 point font size was chosen for the primary manuscript and less than 8 point font was used for the captions. Couple this with the pages having a grey background color and it makes for tired eyes, especially for seniors. *Porsche Ladies* is available from Amazon at \$15 and is a bargain at this price for its seldom seen photographs alone. **Phil Carney**

