

SHIRLEY MULDOWNEY

WINNINGEST WOMAN IN DRAG RACING HISTORY & 3 TIME WORLD CHAMPION



After a twenty race sojourn during which she was recovering from injuries suffered in a 1984 accident, drag racing's first lady is back on the National Hot Rod Association tour this season and resolute in her desire to depose all pretenders to the throne.

In 10 seasons prior to her 1984 accident, Shirley Muldowney won 17 NHRA national events and was runner-up in six others. In seven full seasons, only once has she failed to finish in the top five.

Since 1980, she has won 12 times in 41 starts, that despite qualifying on the drag racing "pole" (an indication of mechanical superiority) only twice. It is that statistic that speaks volumes about her driving prowess and the esteem in which she is held by her peers.

Of course, success has not always come with such apparent ease to the sport's only three-time fuel champion.

From the moment she decided that she wanted to be a race car driver, Muldowney met stern opposition, first from ex-husband Jack Muldowney, whose disapproval of her career escalation was well-documented in the feature-length film, "Heart Like A Wheel", and later from officials, fans and rivals ostensibly seeking to "maintain the integrity of the sport."

But the lady didn't become the most feared driver in Top Fuel history by folding under pressure — either physical or psychological. Confronted by opposition to her very participation, Muldowney simply determined that no one was going to fight her battles, except her.

Although Muldowney got her first taste of fast cars on the streets of Schenectady, N.Y., where her mother, Mae Roque, worked in a laundry and her father, Tex, drove a taxi between prizefights, her aspirations quickly turned to loftier goals.

After her marriage, the Muldowneys raced locally while Shirley worked for a newspaper, a dentist and a restaurant owner to augment Jack's earnings as a mechanic. It was a situation with which Muldowney could not be content.

After a stint at the wheel of 200 mile-an-hour

Top Gas dragster, Muldowney got her first taste of big-time racing when Conrad Kalitta sold his back-up Funny Car to her.

When she moved to Top Fuel in 1974, with Kalitta as Crew Chief and Rahn Tobler as Mechanic, she became the first woman to: (1) qualify for a national event in Top Fuel; (2) win a round; (3) gain the final round; (4) win an event title; (5) qualify No. 1; (6) break the 6.00 second barrier; (7) win a Winston World Championship (1977), and (8) earn a berth on the Auto Racing All-America Team as selected by the American Auto Racing Writers and Broadcasters Association.

When Kalitta left after the '77 season, Muldowney found herself at another crossroads, faced with the need to prove that she had succeeded not necessarily because of Kalitta, but on her own merit.

It took her a full season to get the wheels back under her, but when she won the 1980 world title, it silenced whatever skeptics remained.

She has responded to other challenges in the same, straightforward manner which is why few doubt that she will once again reign as champion of the sport's most glamorous racing division.

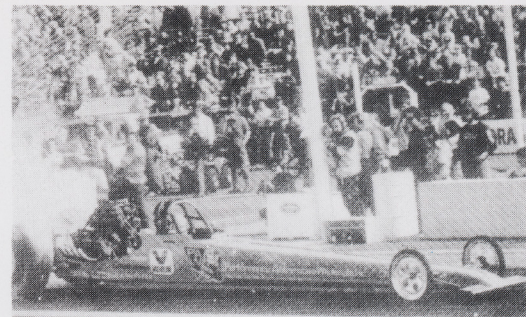
SPORTS ILLUSTRATED, which, in 1981, documented Muldowney's career in an 11-page article, said she was more than a driver, she was a racer — high praise indeed.

Once hailed for her pioneering efforts on behalf of women, Muldowney now is considered not the best woman drag racer, just one of the best drag racers. Period.

Dividing time between a home in Mount Clemens, MI, and a home in Northridge, CA, Muldowney collects antiques and enjoys gourmet cooking.

"I enjoy spending quiet time with close friends, with Rahn and with my dog Skippy," Shirley says. "I've never been a party person. I don't like to be in the spotlight 24 hours a day."

"But I race to win. I can't win 'em all, but I can sure try to. That's the big difference between me and a lot of them. They just don't have the attitude it takes to win constantly."



MULDOWNEY'S ACCIDENT PRODUCED IMMEDIATE SAFETY RESPONSE FROM INDUSTRY

In 1986 when Shirley Muldowney climbs behind the wheel of the 1,800 pound, Al Swindahl-built Performance Automotive Wholesale Top Fuel dragster to pursue the 1986 Winston World Championship, she won't worry about a recurrence of the 1984 accident which left both her legs mangled and put her career on hold for 18 months.

That confidence can be traced to the development work conducted by two of her associate sponsors in addressing the problem that led to her 250 mile-an-hour, June 29 crash at Montreal, Canada.

Muldowney was transformed from pilot to helpless passenger during that ill-fated qualifying effort when the left front tire separated from the rim and wrapped around the steering arm, locking the wheels in such a position that the car turned directly into a dirt embankment bordering the track.

The response of Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co., one of Muldowney's long-time associate sponsors, was to develop a new type of front tire capable of safe operation at speeds exceeding 320 seconds.

As a result, bicycle-type tires adapted from other applications were used almost universally on the front wheels. Such tires simply "were not capable of handling today's speeds," said

Rahn Tobler, Muldowney's 32-year-old Crew Chief.

While Goodyear engineers were responding to that problem in their own way, wheel manufacturers, led by Streaker Wheels, Inc., were introducing a new "bead lock" design that provided a more solid seal.

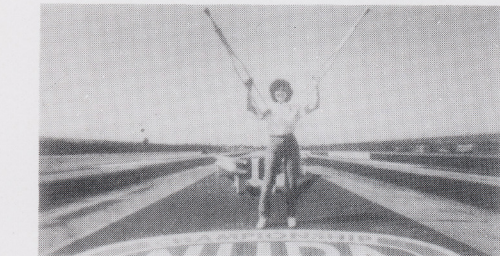
Furthermore, the National Hot Rod Association, through its rule structure, moved to eliminate the further use of bicycle-type wheels altogether.

"They (NHRA officials) have been quick to adopt rules and guidelines that protect the racer," Muldowney says. "We are strapped into the cockpit with a five-point harness, and the rollcage has been redesigned to further protect the driver in case of a rollover."

"I don't want to crash again. I know that much, but actually, I feel pretty secure once I'm strapped in. It's a lot more dangerous to drive on the freeway."

Other than her Montreal crash, Muldowney's only other serious injury involved facial burns above her eyes as a result of Funny Car engine fires in 1972 and 1973.

Ironically, that accident prompted her decision to move into the rear-engine dragsters and hastened NHRA into adopting regulations dictating mandatory fire suppressant systems now required.



5 OPERATIONS AND 18 MONTHS LATER, MULDOWNEY READY TO REASSERT HERSELF

No one really close to Shirley Muldowney ever doubted that the only three-time National Hot Rod Association Winston World Champion would ever come back from the critical injuries she suffered in the June 29, 1984 crash of her 250 mph Top Fuel dragster.

After all, the 45-year-old race driver didn't climb to the top of her profession by shying away from a challenge — whether physical or psychological.

Nevertheless, there was a time there, before she sought the help of Indianapolis-based sports doctor and orthopedic surgeon Terry Trammell, when the lady from Mount Clemens, Michigan, briefly entertained the possibility of facing a life without drag racing.

Trammell, who also worked wonders in getting former CART champion Rick Mears back into his car following similarly serious leg injuries, promised to have Muldowney back at the wheel of her Performance Automotive Wholesale-sponsored dragster within a year.

"That's exactly what the six-time Auto Racing All-American wanted to hear."

"I didn't feel like I was making any progress," Muldowney says of the traditional post-injury treatment she had received. So, at the encouragement of friends within the auto racing community, the 17-time NHRA tour winner consulted Trammell for the first time on Jan. 11, 1985.

"He understood athletes," Muldowney said. "He understood the need to heal as quickly as possible."

Dr. Trammell performed two major operations and put Muldowney in therapy at the Institute for Living in Northridge, Calif., just a

few blocks from the lady's winter home. There, she worked herself back into shape in five months of almost daily physical therapy.

Trammell's surgery, in which he ultimately fused the left ankle, followed three earlier operations which simply put the pieces back in place.

The crash, which occurred on a qualifying attempt during the NHRA Grandnational at Sanair International Dragstrip, left auto racing's most successful woman driver with massive injuries.

She emerged from the wreckage with broken bones in five fingers, a nearly severed right thumb, a broken right hand, a broken pelvis, broken right leg (with compound fractures), and broken and dislocated left foot.

"The hospital staff spent six hours cleaning my wounds with wire brushes and a saline solution to get the dirt, grease, grass and stones out," Muldowney recalls painfully. "When I woke up in the intensive care unit (at Montreal General Hospital), I hurt so bad I didn't know whether I'd make it or not."

But make it she did.

"The hardest part," she says, "was not knowing what my future was going to be. After Dr. Trammell assured me that I could race if I really wanted to, we (Crew Chief Rahn Tobler, son John and herself) started making comeback plans."

"The accident took a lot out of me physically," Muldowney says, "but it really didn't kill my will to win. I wasn't ready to give up the cockpit. I wanted to decide when I retire. I didn't want someone else or something else to decide for me."



415 North Figueroa, Wilmington, CA 90744 • (213) 835-9687



Specifications of the Performance Automotive Wholesale TOP FUEL DRAGSTER

RACE CAR AND BODY	AL SWINDAHL
WHEELS	STREAKER
TIRES	GOODYEAR
ENGINE	KEITH BLACK ALUMINUM DODGE 498 Cubic Inch
	3000
HORSEPOWER	NITRO METHANE
FUEL	VALVOLINE
OIL	CHAMPION
SPARK PLUGS	VELASCO
CRANKSHAFT	DIE HARD
BATTERIES	CHILDS & ALBERT
STARTER	CHILDS & ALBERT
CONNECTING RODS	MILODON
GEAR DRIVE	MILODON
OIL PAN	MILODON
VALVE COVERS	PERFORMANCE AUTOMOTIVE WHOLESALE
SUPPORT COMPONENTS	BRAD ANDERSON
	MALLORY
CYLINDER HEADS	SIG ERSON
IGNITION	BILL CARTER
CAMS AND VALVE TRAIN	STEVE STANFORD
PAINT	BELL
ARTWORK/LETTERING	DENNIS TAYLOR
HELMET	CRAFTSMAN
UPHOLSTERY	NHRA
TOOLS	RAHN TOBLER
RACING SCHEDULE	JOHN MULDOWNEY
CREW CHIEF	BILL BELVEL • FRANCIS GRAY
CREW	