

Women in our Industry



Kelly Williams

Race Car Driver & Consumer Coach

"Feeling like I am making a difference", is of great importance to former race car driver Kelly Williams. "Who would have thought vehicle maintenance could be so exciting," she says, musing about the fortunate combination of skills that has put her in the position to combine her passion for cars with teaching, and have fun doing it.

Whether as a driver trainer, or a workshop leader, "I am teaching all the skills I learned in a non-traditional format," explains Williams. "I am looking at you, to see what I need to do, to give you feedback to get you to do what you need to do." While the practical assessment comes from her driving, her university background in education, gives her confidence in her communication skills. 90% of what Williams now does relates to teaching. She derives a great deal of gratification from "seeing the light bulb come on" when she is teaching driver training for BMW. "People are very appreciative when I make them more comfortable by speaking at a level they can understand."

The Racing Career

Williams attributes her racing career to seeing racing as a family activity. She cherishes memories of attending races with her family and having family come to her races. For Williams, "everything about racing is great. I've enjoyed watching the program come to fruition after a winter of hard work to get on the race track. The friendship with people on the track becomes your life."

On the other hand, Williams cautions, "Racing can also take over your life." It's a 24/7 thing. People who are drawn by the excitement of racing don't always realize that, "racing takes a lot of time if you want to do it well. If you're serious, you have to be at the race car shop every night of the week." Some evenings, Williams was at the shop until 4 and 5 am, cleaning, delivering engines to the engine builder, organizing supplies, staying on top of every aspect of the work that needed doing.

1989 and 1990 - Earned recognition with her first career race victory at the Canadian National Exhibition

1993 - Made her breakthrough as one of Ontario's top drivers.

April 29, 1994 - Became the first female driver to capture a win in the 14 year history of CASCAR racing.

2001 - Out of 150 applicants, was chosen as one of three finalists in the Craftsman Truck Test, a competition conducted by Ultra Motorsports, to find a female driver for Dodge to bring up through the ranks. "Ultimately, Dodge decided not to move forward with the program but it was still vindication for me. I tested against Shauna Robinson who already had NASCAR experience and she didn't make it to the second test."

Beyond the Racing



In 2004, Williams became the spokesperson identified with the Automotive Industries Association of Canada's *Be Car Care Aware* Campaign, designed to educate consumers on the importance of vehicle maintenance.

In May and October, Williams hosts a series of free car check clinics across Canada, offering free inspections by certified technicians. "On 78% of the vehicles that came in to be checked at the vehicle check events in the spring, problems were detected with various components, including air filters, tires, oil, and windshield wiper blades," says Williams. While most consumers are guilty of some kind of neglect, they need to be aware that "regular maintenance is important to keeping vehicles safe and dependable." Being proactive about regular vehicle maintenance, translates into a financial benefit, she explains. "There's no need to be intimidated by your car," says Williams, "just go by the maintenance schedule set out in the owner's manual." You don't need to change your own oil, as long as you make sure it gets changed on a regular basis.

Making sure that a vehicle is in good running condition is particularly



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Kelly Williams continued

The Racing Career

Williams started by hanging around the race car shop during the week and going to the track every Saturday, watching her father work on race cars. By 17, she was driving a neighbour's old driving car that was converted into a race car, and found herself in stock car racing. A more typical route is to start in go-kart racing. "I totally fell into it. I don't ever remember expressing the desire to race," says Williams, "The initial idea was Dad's. The deal was I had to go to university, if I was going to race. But I have always been one to recognize opportunities when they present themselves."

Racing is a highly competitive, highly visible sport associated in most people's minds with thrills and challenge. According to Williams, not too many people are aware of the work behind the scenes. "I had eleven people on my team - crew chief, jack man, tire changers, gas man, catch pan person, sign holder, and other people to keep things organized. It takes a lot of dedication." To prepare for the short summer racing season, fall, winter and spring are spent preparing. There are cars to be built, engines to be refreshed, sponsors to be found, racing schedules to be set for the next season, and pre-season tests to make sure everything is in good running order. "A lot of people are not willing to put in the dedication that is needed" for a career in racing. "They get involved thinking it's an easy thing," says Williams, "without understanding the amount of work it takes." 90% of that work is convincing sponsors to back you, as opposed to another driver.

As a good race car driver, you need:

- a competitive streak
- to be in good physical shape to withstand the heat, the physical exertion and to avoid crashing
- the ability to stay focused for 300 laps
- the thinking skills and mental stamina to drive smart under stress
- to market yourself to get sponsorships
- have tremendous business skills

Advice to aspiring race car drivers - "First, I ask what kind of racing do they want to get involved in - solo against the clock, or against other competitors." Racing can be as simple as setting up in a parking lot with a stop watch and some cones. Racing is not the easiest sport to get into, but you can take a driving course at racing school, you can volunteer at a race track. Those who are serious about succeeding, Williams encourages with the words "if there is a will, there is a way."



Beyond the Racing



important in the winter. Williams advises drivers not to wait for the first snowfall to put on their winter tires, to ensure lights are in good working order and to buy or create an emergency kit that includes booster cables, a blanket, a cell phone.

"In winter, it's prudent to never let your car go below half a tank of gas. It gives you a cushion to keep your engine running if you are detained because of poor road conditions or an accident. It also decreases the chances of a gas line freezing due to condensation water getting in the gas lines."

Her other commitments - a BMW driver trainer, a Chrysler new product trainer, and a pace car driver, for events like the Steelback Grand Prix of Toronto. She has travelled around the world with the Champcar World Series for 15 years as a member of the Champcar Pace Car Team. Whether taking competitors on a parade lap or 'packing them up' when accidents need to be cleared up on the track, Williams has to rely on good communication skills and quick reflexes when safety on the high speed track is at risk.



Williams has also recently branched out into television, appearing as host on Mechanical Chicks on the Global Television Network and as an expert panelist on Discovery Channel's Canada's Worst Driver.

Her future plans - Williams' enthusiasm for consumer education has her planning a consumer video on the importance of vehicle maintenance and building on her natural public speaking talent as a motivational speaker. Beyond that, she sees herself continuing to "capitalize on opportunities" that draw her in new and exciting directions.

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