



# DRIVING JUSTICE

HAYLEY SWANSON HAS A NO-MERCY APPROACH ON THE V8 RACING CIRCUIT, AND IS SIMILARLY UNCOMPROMISING AS SHE DRIVES TOWARDS A FUTURE IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION, WRITES **JESSICA JURY**.

## WOMEN BEHIND THE WHEEL

Although dominated by males – spectating and participating – motor sport has had many fascinating women behind the wheel.

### AUSTRALIA'S FIRST

Born in Melbourne in 1905, Joan Richmond was Australia's first female professional racing driver, beginning her motoring career in 1926 driving a Citroen. In 1931, she placed fifth in the Australian Grand Prix (at Phillip Island). Following this success, she drove with four friends from Melbourne to Palermo in Sicily to compete in the Monte Carlo Rally. Over the next eight years she competed throughout Europe in many makes of car with many successes.

### SPIRITED SPEEDSTER

Throughout the 1920s, Frenchwoman Violette Morris was a gifted athlete in many sports, often competing with men when no women's league was available. She was also a cycling champion, graduating to motorcycles and finally racing cars. Morris deviated from traditional behaviours – smoking heavily and swearing profusely. She was refused license renewal by the French Women's Athletic Federation amid complaints of her lesbian lifestyle and was therefore barred from participating in the 1928 Summer Olympics.

So strong was her commitment to motor racing that she had an elective double mastectomy so she would be more comfortable behind the wheel of the tight-fitting cars of the time.

**S**HE IS SMART, STRONG AND STUNNING. When Hayley Swanson steps out of her V8 ute

in head-to-toe racing gear, you could mistake her for one of the boys. And when she takes off her helmet, you might think she's just a pretty face.

But this Victoria University law student is tackling stereotypes as aggressively as she takes the corners at Bathurst. At 24, the Albury-born model and race car driver already has a business degree and is now pursuing a Bachelor of Laws at VU's City Queen Campus in Melbourne's CBD.

Finding her way from horse riding to horse power, Swanson's love for racing was a natural progression.

"I'm a self-confessed adrenaline junkie and have always been very sport-oriented," says Swanson. "I enjoy jet skiing, water sports and horse riding, but I just love fast cars.

"Dad raced motorbikes so that's where I get the speed bug from. Four years ago he took me to the track and I tore it up in his Subaru WRX. I was hooked from then on."

With support from her parents, Swanson has raced cars since the age of 19, and this year began racing V8 utes. The only woman currently racing in the category, Swanson travels the country supporting V8 Supercars at national events such as the Clipsal 500, Gold Coast 600 and Bathurst 1000.

So dad is a petrol head too, but how does mum feel about the hobby?

"Mum does get a bit nervous, but she has faith in my abilities as a driver," says Swanson. "She was more worried when I was riding horses because a horse is completely unpredictable. You have more control over your car.

"You can never get too comfortable, but you can't get psyched out. When you're driving along Bathurst's Conrad Straight at 250km per hour, you need to have a cool head."

Swanson's exceptional ability to handle pressure was tested during an incident at this year's Tasmania Challenge when her steering wheel

came off mid-race. "I was more concerned when the video footage attracted thousands of hits on the racing website," she says. "That was embarrassing!"

As a woman taking part in a very 'blokey' sport, Swanson has encountered some discrimination, but she never lets it bother her.

"Sometimes people don't take you seriously, and perhaps treat you a little differently," she says. "But once you get out there it's every man and woman for themselves."


Notwithstanding her love for racing, Swanson says her law studies are her top priority. "Racing is my passion, but it's a hobby. My studies are my future."

Interested in the law from a young age, Swanson worked for a year after school in a law firm and undertook work experience at the Wodonga law courts. Her caring nature, in particular her love for animals, has translated into a passion for social justice.

"A huge goal of mine is to be able to give animals a voice and seek justice against those who mistreat or harm them," she says.

Along with her modelling – winning several competitions since 2008, and featuring in *Women's Health* and *Ralph* magazines a number of times, as well as various advertising campaigns – Swanson is also working part time for energy drink company Monster in administration and promotions while she studies.

Her study and extra-curricular commitments keep her extremely busy, but she knows with the bright future ahead of her, it's definitely going to be worth it.

"In the long term I'd like to be a barrister in a busy Melbourne law firm. I hope when I'm a lawyer I'm still racing. Actually, it'll be a good way to fund my racing career!" 

**Read more inspirational stories about Victoria University's Bachelor of Laws students on page 15. Visit the VU website to find out more about VU's law courses at [vu.edu.au/courses](http://vu.edu.au/courses)**