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active life guide

July 2012 TM

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MILKA DUNO

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By Matthew Hume

MOVE OVER, MILKY WAY!

Race Car Driver

MILKA DUNO

“Learn everything you can and take full advantage of every opportunity that life brings you.”

TURN THE
PAGE FOR
MORE



I

just looked up the word *overachiever* in Webster's, and the picture next to it is one I hadn't noticed before. Yep — right next to that word is a beautiful, full-color

shot of professional race car driver Milka Duno. And now that my eyes have been opened to the "Milka Way," it seems that the stars in the night sky have some competition. Venezuelan racing sensation Milka Duno takes competition *very* seriously. She earned the highest finish ever by a female driver (2nd Place Overall) in the legendary 24 Hours of Daytona; she won the Rolex Series Grand Prix of Miami (the first major race ever won by a female driver in the US); she's the first woman ever to have won the Petit Le Mans not once, but twice; and she was the first Latina to qualify and compete in the world's most famous race, our own Indianapolis 500. As if that weren't enough to rival the stars, Milka is a Naval Engineer who holds four master's degrees (she earned three of them simultaneously). Then there's the movie she was in, and the children's book she wrote. And last, but not least, there's the Milka Way foundation, which Milka founded to spread the message to children around the world of how a strong education

benefits kids in all aspects of life. I'm not sure a two-page spread is enough to fully encapsulate just how awesome Milka Duno is—but here we go!

ACTIVE LIVING – A MATTER OF LIFE OR DEATH

Milka has always led an active life. "My parents are awesome, and they were always encouraging me and my brothers to live life to the fullest," she says. In high school she played volleyball, and in college she was selected to be on her school's varsity team, giving her a chance to compete against all the other universities in Venezuela. As a professional race car driver, staying in tip-top shape is vital to her success—and her safety behind the wheel. "You could say that my life depends on it," Milka says. With a workout regimen that contains very specific cardiovascular and strength training exercises, Milka makes sure she stays in top physical shape. "Racing is a very demanding sport due to the high speeds and G-forces involved," she says, "—in addition to endurance demands under high heat conditions inside the car during a race." What kind of diet does a super-competitive pro race car driver maintain? "I eat very healthy all the time, with fresh fruits and vegetables and high-quality proteins," Milka tells me. "I love sushi!" (On the other hand, nobody—not even Milka—is perfect. She admits to loving Nutella a little too much.)

AIMING FOR THE STARS

So much more than an athlete on the racetrack, Milka advocates strongly for athletics of the mind when she's not behind the wheel. Founded by Milka in 2004, the "Milka Way" program's mission is to inspire children and students to "Aim for the Stars" and achieve academic excellence. Through the program, Milka has spoken to thousands of young people around the world about the importance of education. "What I hope I provide is a message of inspiration," she says. "I



speak with kids and students all over the world and many ask, 'Do you mean, I can be a race car driver, too?' or 'I can be an engineer?' I say, 'Of course! You can be anything you want to be — you can have any career you want.' Milka's message to students is that anything is possible—but studying hard and learning has to come first. Her words are an inspiration to children and adults alike: "Take full advantage of every opportunity that comes your way. Never give up—let nothing stand in your way."

Milka is an inspiration to so many—but who inspires her? "I meet parents, their children, students, aunts, uncles and grandparents both on and off the track, and they are inspiring to me because they see me as an inspiration," says Milka. "They say I inspire them—but they inspire *me!* It's very rewarding." Take her experience at the Indy 500, for example. "As a race car driver, I always dreamed and hoped to compete in the Indy 500—so it was like a dream come true for me," she says. But it's not just the racing that made the experience for her. "One of the things I remember most is the fans—they were so welcoming and supportive! Not only did I get good wishes from people at the track, but from people everywhere I went in Indianapolis—and from media and fans around the world. I felt that there were

> See more exclusive photos of Milka's cover shoot at www.facebook.com/pages/activelife-Guide



people from all over the world cheering me on. I was incredibly moved and honored.”

LEAVING NO STONE UNTURNED

With the grueling demands of a professional race car driver’s schedule, there’s not a lot of time for Milka off the track or out of the training room. That doesn’t mean she hasn’t found time to take advantage of some really rewarding opportunities that have come her way, though. (Remember her advice? “Take full advantage of every opportunity that comes your way!”) There was her role in the 2008’s *Speed Racer*, starring Emile Hirsch, Matthew Fox and Christina Ricci. “Being in *Speed Racer* was a great experience for me. The movie business and how much creativity and effort that goes into making a movie is fascinating to me,” Milka says. She’s also written a children’s book, *Go, Milka, Go!* “The response to my book has been wonderful—it was a lot of work and a true labor of love.” The book was awarded the Best Young Adult Sports/Recreation Book of 2009 at the 11th Annual International Latino Book Awards. And there is no rest for this overachiever this summer. “With the level that racing is at, there is really not much of an off-season anymore,” Milka says. “When I do get a short break, I enjoy traveling back to my home country of Venezuela to visit with family and friends.”

Milka’s future looks brighter than ever. As if four master’s degrees and her successes so far aren’t enough to cement her place in professional racing history, Milka’s next goal is to become the first Hispanic woman to compete in NASCAR. “As you can see, I like to win,” she says, “—and I compete to win in every aspect of my life.”

So move over Milky Way—Milka Duno will *not* be outshined.

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