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Michèle Mouton

June 23, 1951 - Present

Nationality: French

Raced: 1974 - 1986

Background: Michèle Mouton was born in Grasse, France in 1951. Growing up, her parents owned a large plot of land in the southern part of the country. They produced a number of plants on the property and it was there where Mouton started driving for fun at the age of fourteen. In the 1970s, she was introduced to the world of rallying and eventually began participating in events. It did not take long before she made a name for herself. She was competitive and continued to improve with every rally she participated in. After being sponsored by Elf and Fiat in the late 1970s, Audi asked her to race for them in the early 1980s. Competing in the Group B Audi Quattro with co-driver Fabrizia Pons, the two earned four victories in World Rally Championship (WRC) events between 1981 and 1982. In 1985, Mouton accomplished another feat by winning the Pikes Peak International Hillclimb. Referred to as the “Race to the Clouds,” Pikes Peak is one of racing’s toughest challenges with no markers, over 156 blind turns, and sheer drops off on either side. It climbs almost 5,000 feet in elevation. Not only did Mouton finish the 12.42 mile course first, but she set a new record time for the event driving her Audi Quattro. When the Group B category was banned in 1986, Mouton retired. She was intent on starting a family and gave birth to her daughter the following year.

Early Influences: Mouton did not grow up wanting to be a rally driver or involved in motor sports at all. Her first experience with a vehicle came when she was fourteen and she decided to move her parents’ car. At the time, her father was unaware that it was her and thought that someone was trying to steal it. She liked cars and viewed them as a symbol of independence. Still, she did not gain an interest in rallying until years later. In 1972, when one of her friends was practicing for a rally in Corsica, she went to watch him. Upset with his co-driver, he asked Mouton to co-drive with him in an event at Monte Carlo in 1973 and she agreed. The two participated in a few more rallies together before Mouton’s father told her that she should try driving by herself. He believed she could be successful and bought her a car. He gave her one year to prove herself and it was all Mouton needed. Her driving career officially began in 1974 behind the wheel of an Alpine-Renault and she proceeded from there to compete in a number of rallies. She developed a love for the sport and was determined to win.

Racing Accomplishments:

Became French Ladies' Champion after successful rallying seasons in 1974 and 1975.

Won the Tour de France in 1978, driving a Fiat Abarth 131.

Became the first woman to win a World Rally Championship (WRC) event after winning the San Remo Rally in 1981.

Won the Rally of Portugal in March 1982.

Won the Acropolis Rally in Greece in June 1982.

Won the Rally of Brazil in August 1982.

Finished in 2nd place at the RAC Rally in Great Britain in November 1982.

Was runner-up for the WRC title in 1982, coming in behind Walter Röhrl by just twelve points.

Finished in 3rd place at the 1983 Safari Rally.

Participated in the Swedish Rally in 1983 and 1984.

Finished in 4th place in 1983 and in 2nd place the following year.

Finished in 2nd place at the Pikes Peak Hillclimb Race in 1984.

Won at Pikes Peak in 1985, setting a new record at 11 minutes 25.39 seconds.

Won the German Rally Championship in 1986.

Life off the Track: Michèle Mouton stopped rallying in the mid-1980s in large part to have a family. She began focusing on raising her daughter and taking care of her dogs. Her interests outside of motor sports include traveling and playing golf. She even has a dancing background. Additionally, she works each year with the Race of Champions. She helped organize this annual international motor sports event in 1988 and continues to be involved with it. She also remains a part of the rallying world by attending various motor sports shows.

Interesting Fact: Michèle Mouton has said that she never went into rallies trying to beat men. She simply wanted to compete at their level and not come off as looking ridiculous.

She believes that her background in dancing actually helped her rally in the 1970s and 1980s, comparing her car moving on gravel with that of a dancer's moves.

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-This is an excellent source! The interview provides insights into Michele's intro to rallying and her different races.

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