Ladybug Racing

By Nancy Moss

Back in 2011, I was driving with my husband and two other guys with Chim Chim racing. While the guys were wrenching, I usually managed the rest of the race, creating logos, ordering shirts and costumes, lining up the food and motorhome and stickering up the car. We had done 15-16 24 Hours of LeMons races at tracks like Altamont, Thunderhill, Buttonwillow, Infineon, and Fernley since 2007. A post-race team BBQ was always in order and was dominated by stories of race prep, pit activity, penalty box infractions, fastest lap times, mechanical failures, and general car talk. These conversations go pretty well when it's just the team drivers but it sometimes gets awkward when the group expands to include friends and spouses.

Spring was here. The weather was getting warmer. We were just home from a cold and rainy race at Infineon Raceway in March of 2011 and it was time to BBQ and reminisce about the race. Drivers from Chim Chim Racing, Das ZZ Uber, and a 5-Series BMW dressed up like a beer garden (now Fukishima Debris) were in attendance. So were their wives, their kids, and a few others not directly involved in any type of racing.

As to be expected, it didn't take long for the social chit chat to shift to race and car talk. It was dividing. About half of us light up like Christmas trees as the LeMons stories started to pour out of us and laughter filled the room. In seconds, half of us were jabbering fully animated, heads nodding, telling tales, while the other part of the group started to drift off. But this night was to be different.

One wife stayed engaged and did not drift away. Another wife was corralling kids but was laughing historically as we described her husband being put into a straight jacket in the penalty box. The wife representing a non-racing family was inching closer to the conversation wearing a crooked grin, her eyes lighting up whenever someone announced their speed on the front straight. And then the shoe dropped.

The Ladybug Porsche, heading out for its first laps at its first race at Thunderhill in 2011. *Photo by Nancy Moss*

Exiting turn 13 at Thunderhill in 2011, the first race for the Ladybug's Porsche. *Photo by Head-On Photos*

"Why don't we have our own racing team? You know, just the wives." Imagine the Battle of the Sexes, the Tortoise and the Hare, David vs Goliath. More wine was poured and a whole new animated conversation was born. The men thought it was pretty cool that their wives would want to race. On the other hand, I did my best to scare them, describing the heat, the noise, the fumes and how it would be on the track, 3 abreast going into a turn wide enough for two. More wine, more animated talk.

The next day, I spent a lot of time piecing together the details of the night before. My head was kinda fuzzy but it was clear that I had three interested wives that wanted me to captain a team for the Thunderhill LeMons race in August. So I picked up the phone and called each of them to see if they really wanted to do this or if it was just the Chardonnay talking. To both my horror and excitement, they were all dead serious.

Wow! They were serious. So I opened my laptop and fired up Craigslist. When we found the $800 red Porsche 944 in a pasture in Salinas, our identity started to emerge. It would be so simple to throw on some black dots, and costumes would be a snap. There were not many all girl teams and we wanted to be cute but not skanky.

We had about four months to get the car ready. Our husbands would prep the car as long as we handled fueling and driver changes. We practiced in a VW Rabbit on the back side of Lexington reservoir off Hwy 17 in the Santa Cruz mountains. We ordered gear. We did a track day and attended a Hooked On Driving class at T'hill. It was time. We loaded up our Ladybug on a borrowed trailer.

We had our favorite pit location at Thunderhill September 2011 across from the starter. We were actually doing this! Our first tech inspection was a bit of a spectacle but we managed to breeze through the technical and even the BS. Our car was legit and well documented. Nothing cheaty, but who knew how difficult it was to get out of the car quickly in a tutu wearing wings and high heels when your car is "on fire"! We might have been the only Porsche in C class but the judges knew our experience.

The Ladybug's Porsche at Thunderhill in 2012, sporting a "modified" nose, but nevertheless racing, raising money for charities, and definitely not sitting at home eating bon bons. *Photo by Head-On Photos*

Race day and I just wanted everyone to get in one stint. If the car died after each of the girls had a turn then we would put it on the trailer and call it a day. Well, we all drove and the car struggled, but instead of loading it on the trailer when the diagnosis came back that we had a trashed torque tube, we voted to push on. We sent a driver 150 miles to get a replacement and worked all night. Come Sunday, we would live to drive another day. The girls were hooked.

We were running well on day two of our first race. Not that fast but not in the way. Three first time drivers did great and then our only experienced driver suited up and got in to finish the race. On the first lap, I spun on turn 6 and we were done with just an hour to go. I was all alone in my spin and might have been able to finish except I got hit on the track – Race over.

I shook it off and we packed up. I didn't think much of it until the spin video ended up on YouTube and the LeMons forum pages lit up. My heart sank. I was the "worst driver ever" according to the comments. Seriously? I had seen much worse over the years.

After my spin, I thought about throwing in the towel, but my team wanted to drive, they wanted me to get back out there and our husbands had a blast with us there. Another post-race BBQ and it was agreed that we would give it another go

The post-race BBQ had us reminiscing over some of our favorite quotes from that first race weekend.

> Are you the wives of the Ladybug drivers?
>
> Do you drive in those dresses?
>
> Do you wear those dresses under your driving clothes?
>
> (To our husbands) Are you guys married to the Ladybugs?

We now have six races under our belts at three tracks. We have decent lap times and always finish mid-pack. Hell, we even beat our husbands by one lap last year. We're not your typical team. We sell jewelry at races and have donated the proceeds to Speedway Children's Charity and The Stanford

The Ladybug Racing team following the 2013 race at Thunderhill, from left to right: Michelle Strachan, Jayme Wessels, Kat Bertelsen, Nancy Moss, Joanne Cannard. (trying to find out who has the original) *Photo by Denzil Wessels*

Cancer Institute. We hand out balloons, Ladybug wings and hair ribbons to the kids at the race. Jay Lamm and Jonny Lieberman's dogs have Ladybug costumes. We might be the only car who has driven in A, B and C class. We only change our oil before a race but our stock 145 hp Ladybug running on 91 octane keeps running like a sewing machine.

Meet the Team

- Nancy Moss married to Jeff of Chim Chim racing
- Joanne Cannard married to Tim of Das zz über
- Jayme Wessels married to Denzil of Chim Chim
- Kat Bertelsen married to Travis of Fukishima Debris
- Michelle Strachan married to Jeff, chef, kid watcher, radio man extrordinaire

Our goal is to have fun on the track getting our race on. We don't expect to finish in the top 25. How could we, our driver changes are 10-15 minutes long! Our goal is to be good to our fellow racers when the track is hot, when it's cold, and in between races. We keep in touch with our racing pals on Facebook and have supported other all girl teams across the country including the Viva La Vulva team out of Arizona and the Monticello Cheetah Girls on the east coast. We're 5 moms with 8 kids between us. We raise money for charity and we're not happy sitting at home on the couch eating bon bons.

Years later, we still get drivers reminding us to be careful in turn 6 at Thunderhill. Some will never forget our low moment on that first race. Others though have figured out that we're not that lame out there. Not great, but certainly not bad and much better looking!