Sandy Solofonirina: «We believe African women can play a great role in promoting motor sport»

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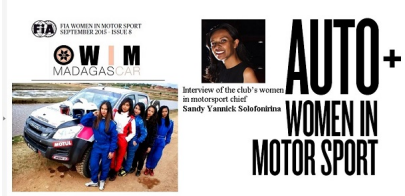

FIA WOMEN IN MOTOR SPORT
SEPTEMBER 2015 · ISSUE 8

WIM MADAGASCAR

Interview of the club's women in motorsport chief
Sandy Yannick Solofonirina

AUTO+ WOMEN IN MOTOR SPORT

Fédération du Sport Automobile de Madagascar

Madagascan women take to the stages

The Women in Motorsport arm of the Fédération du Sport Automobile de Madagascar will this month carve out a small piece of history as it stages the first one-day rally event to be held in the country.

The event, which forms part of the country's national rally championship, will be wholly run by the club's women in motor sport department and in addition to providing competition for Madagascar's foremost drivers the event will also see a female contingent competing, thanks to an innovative development which allows free entry to the rally for female crews.

AUTO+ Women in Motorsport spoke to the club's women in motorsport chief Sandy Yannick Solofonirina to find out more about the event, which begins on 19 September.

How did the event come about?
We decided to organise the fifth round of the National championship to show our ability to do so, to take that challenge and put into practice what we have learned from FIA training, from our travels and the exchange of experiences that involves. We were lucky that Continental Auto, a car dealer, decided to support such a big project.

What is the format for the event?
It's a one-day event, composed of 70 kilometres of special stages. There will be six stages on gravel. The challenge will be to maintain a good rhythm while trying to keep up with the 'sprint' format of the stages. We call it 'one day, one chance'. It's the first one-day event ever organised in Madagascar.

Who is the event aimed at?
It is for all licensed drivers competing in the National championship. But we're encouraging female participation by making the entry fee free of charge to female crews. We expect to have all licensed drivers in Madagascar, but we also hope to be able to host foreign drivers. The cars will be the FIA homologated cars (Group N), as well as group S cars.

What are your hopes and expectations for the rally?
The One-Day Event, which counts towards the National Championship, also aims to give a fair chance to all racers and will hopefully foster more participation from families.

We also hope to gain more attention from the public, our partners and government officials, not just to promote motor sport, but to focus attention on our future Road Safety campaigns. Women in Motorsport Madagascar already has the support of both the Minister of Population and Minister of Education in disseminating safety messages and is also in touch with the United Nations representative to prepare future campaigns.

How much progress do you think Women in Motorsport Madagascar is making?
Considering where we started, I would say that Women in Motorsport Madagascar is performing better than we imagined.

I was appointed in 2013 as Women in Motorsport Coordinator for Africa, and for one year I was the only WIM member in Madagascar, trying to convince my peers of the need for a Women in Motorsport chapter in the country.

Since 2014, we have started to have a positive impact on Malagasy motorsport: we have conducted safety awareness campaigns, we have organised a fund-raising event to support our activities, we have promoted the participation of female drivers in national championship rallies, and the number of licensed female drivers has regularly increased. Late but not least, this September 2015, we are organising the first-ever Rally One-Day Event in Madagascar, inspired by the FIA.

What inspired the creation of a Women in Motorsport programme in Madagascar?
We believe African women can play a great role in promoting motor sport. We created in the value of these women, we relied on their passion and gave them the opportunity to play a role in it, as opposed to simply supporting sons or husbands.

Michèle Mouton was also such an inspiration, she proved that women can do it, and we would like to write a similar history on the African continent.

Do have you big plans for the future?
While we try to take it one step at a time, we do not exclude the possibility that the Madagascar Women in Motorsport organisation could organise a rally on an international scale in the future.

We also would like to have the opportunity to host a Women in Motorsport meeting in Africa. Finally, our long-term project would be to build a sports complex where young drivers could train themselves in a safe manner.

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