

A row of classic cars, including a silver coupe and a dark red coupe, parked in a lot. In the background, there are palm trees and a clear blue sky. The scene is set in a sunny, outdoor environment, likely a car show or a parking area in a warm climate.

AVANTI Magazine

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Free for AOAI Members

Inside: Holiday in Palm Springs

ALSO:

2023 Muscle Car and Corvette Nationals

Remembering Paula Murphy

Art Center College's Annual Car Show

Electrical Gremlins

Editor's Ramblings



Dave Kinney photo

Welcome to 2024 and our first issue of the new year! We hope your holidays were merry and bright and you're busy shining up and maintaining your cars for the coming show and traveling season.

For the year just past, several Avanti chapters ended the year with holiday gatherings. This issue's cover shows 15 cars at the southern Palm Springs area eighth annual holiday gathering, tying the record for the best turn-out. Others in Missouri and Illinois celebrated the end of the year, although there are probably others we don't know about.

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For our tribute to and remembrance of Paula Murphy, inside on page 12, Helen Hutchings assembled a group of accomplished writer-historians. They share in common in addition to admiration for all Paula accomplished that each is proudly a member of the Society of Automotive Historians. So next, I'll let Helen introduce you to her fellow SAHers. You can learn more about the SAH at its newly redesigned website AutoHistory.org

■ Andy Beckman likely doesn't need an introduction as most all reading this know him as the Studebaker National Museum's archivist and one of the organizers of the Copshaholm Concours. Perhaps you are not aware that he's a past president of SAH and served multiple years on its board of directors.

■ Sigur Whitaker's curiosity and interest in gaining a deeper knowledge of her great uncle James Allison, co-founder alongside Carl Fisher of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, led to her first book, a biography of James Allison. To date, Sigur has now written five books all published by McFarland. She also authors a weekly blog obtained by visiting her website found at sigurwhitakerbooks.com

■ Dave Hermanson saw and photographed the start of every Mobilgas Economy Run for seven years, 1960-'67, meeting and talking with participants and officials and gathering information. Afterward, he continued collecting literature, including programs, Daily Route itineraries and still more photographs. Once retired, his interest was "rekindled by finding some previously unknown to me items in an antique shop in Maine." All he had experienced and collected made his book *The Mobilgas Economy Run* published in 2014 its definitive history.

■ Another needing little or no introduction is John Hull. John recalls "being dumbstruck at age 11 when I first saw an Avanti." That passion and interest has never waned. He joined AOA in 1972 subsequently serving the organization in a variety of positions, has organized meets and, yes, written three books

and countless articles on the car and the companies that produced them. And they still leave him dumbstruck to this day.

■ Louise Ann Noeth earned her "Landspeed Louise" moniker as a result of her dedicated and unfailing interest and enthusiasm for every facet of land speed record quests. She's authored three seminal works on the topic and, in addition, written who knows how many magazine articles as well as working with numerous record seeking teams including Craig Breedlove. If you watched the documentary on Paula we told you about in issue 202, Spring/Summer 2023 (page 8), Louise was one of those interviewed. (hvh)

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When members received Issue 204 of this magazine in December, along with the 2024/2025 *Membership Roster*, we discovered an awful error, thanks to email and phone calls from several Minnesota members who were looking for their membership listings.

All members from Minnesota are indeed listed in the state-by-state roster listing. Due to a programming error in compiling the book, Minnesota members are listed following the last two Michigan members. All Minnesota member names, addresses, ZIP code, phone numbers, email addresses, and car listings are correct *EXCEPT* that they show the Michigan abbreviation (MI) instead of the Minnesota abbreviation (MN). Because of this error, the Minnesota heading was dropped. As far as I know, this is the only state heading that was dropped in the roster.

If you look on page A-22 in the new 2024/2025 roster, the third listing in the far left column (last name of Abraham) begins the Minnesota membership.

While checking all the pages and listings, I totally missed the fact that the state abbreviation did not change from Michigan (MI) to Minnesota (MN), which is why the Minnesota state heading was not inserted at the beginning of the Minnesota group of members.

The corrected page of Minnesota members is reprinted on the reverse side of this issue's label sheet. Simply paste, tape or staple the corrected page over the misprinted Page A-22.

I'm deeply sorry and frustrated for the error.

Happy Motoring.....

Viva Avanti!



REMEMBERING* and SALUTING PAULA MURPHY

Versatility describes Paula's driving talents. Whereas the majority of drivers, no matter their gender, specialize, Paula wanted to experience it all and proved herself able and capable of all she tried as the litany of her firsts and accomplishments that follow attest. To salute and pay tribute to Paula Louise Murphy we've assembled a team of automotive historians each of whom recount Paula's accomplishments in the various areas of motoring in which she put her foot to the accelerator.

Andy Beckman on A Lady named Paula Louise Murphy

Paula Murphy was many things: Mother, athlete, pioneer, fearless. Her domain 1956-1976 was one that few women had entered and none were welcomed. Yet, Ms. Murphy not only competed but triumphed in a hostile arena through steely determination, strategic choices and sheer talent. Her granddaughter described her as, "funny, witty, smart, and stubborn as a mule, but also very kind, generous and loving." These traits were no doubt tremendous assets in negotiating the motorsports landscape as well as some of racing's largest personalities such as Andy Granatelli.

Ms. Murphy endured the era's prevailing gender attitudes with grace and patience. Her 1963 Indianapolis Motor Speedway session was prefaced by demands for photo ops of her freshening her lipstick and primping her hair. No one has ever asked for pre-drive photos of Parnelli Jones applying aftershave.



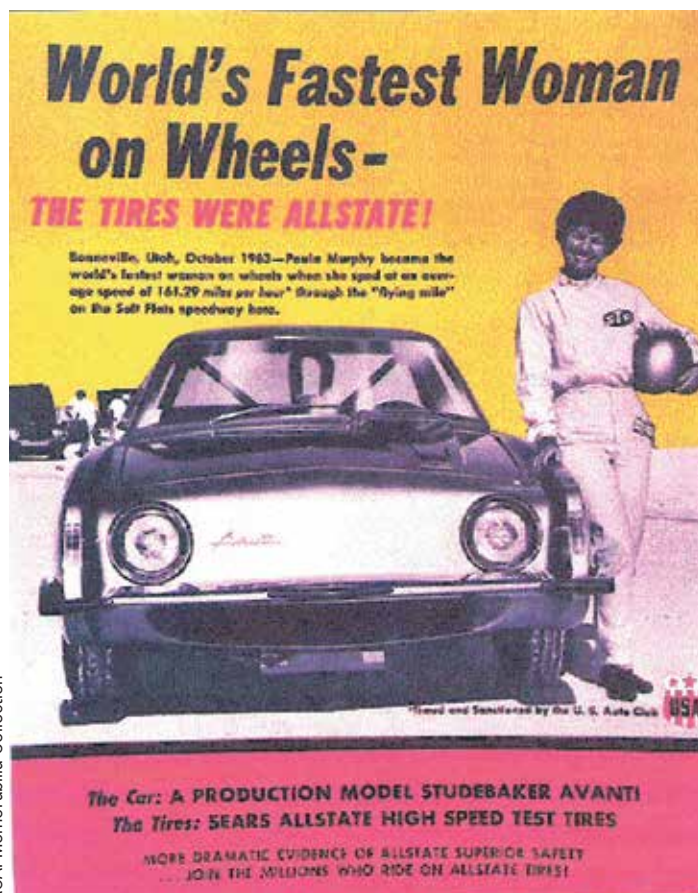
Studebaker's long history is far richer thanks to its brief intersection with Paula Murphy's versatile and storied career. Her driving skill helped jumpstart Studebaker's newfound high-performance program and gave the aging company some positive press when little could be found.

To examine her vast body of work, from circle track to drag racing to land speed records, it's clear there was little that Ms. Murphy could not conquer. "I feel I'm doing what not too many women do," she was quoted as saying in 1964. Clearly Paula Murphy also had the gift of understatement, as she was doing what not too many people do, and did it at an exceptional level.

Sigur Whitaker on Paula at Indianapolis Motor Speedway

In an old video, Paula Murphy is getting into the number 6 Novi racer plastered with STP stickers. With a million-dollar smile, she could be a star on a movie set but she wasn't. Despite being apprehensive as she had never driven the Studebaker STP Special, she showed not a care in the world as she prepared to run a Goodyear tire test for her boss, Andy Granatelli, at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway on November 7, 1963. She circled the track three times becoming the first woman to drive a Championship car on the fabled track. It would be nearly thirteen years before Janet Guthrie, frequently credited with being the first woman to drive at the Speedway, would become the first woman to qualify for the Indianapolis 500.

Murphy was at the Speedway with her coach Eddie Sachs, car owner Andy Granatelli, and Jim Hurtubise who had finished twenty-second in the four-wheel-drive, blown-Studebaker-powered Novi-Ferguson STP Special in the 1963 Indianapolis 500. After attaching her visor to her helmet, she was pushed off.



Granatelli and Hurtubise placed bets on whether she could get the racer off pit road without stalling it—a feat that some male novices have been unable to do.

Paula later told Marjorie Eicher of the *Detroit Free Press* about her experience, “They push you off and you have to let the clutch out right away and give it the gas immediately. It’s tricky because the clutch is heavy and the gas pedal is really a bar that wraps around your foot.” Despite the doubts, Murphy left the pits without stalling. She had some trouble shifting and explained to Eicher, “There are only two gears and you shift with your left hand. I had to use both hands.” She enjoyed her drive around the fabled track. At the end of the three-lap tire test, Murphy commented to an *Indianapolis Star* reporter, “What a ball. I’d like to stay out there all day.” Unfortunately, she never drove again at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

Dave Hermanson on Paula’s Mobilgas Economy Runs

Switching gears, Paula began participating in the annual Mobilgas Economy Runs in 1961. For those unfamiliar with these runs, they were not about speed but rather designed to gauge the fuel-efficiency of American-designed and -built automobiles. Each year’s run originated in Los Angeles with destinations across the United States differing from year-to-year. In 1961, Paula was co-driver (navigator) for Sunnie Baker in a Chevrolet Biscayne 6, L.A. to Chicago. They placed fourth in their class. Also later that same year Paula drove a Citroen ID-19 in the Mobil Mileage Rally, a one-day affair for imported models patterned after the regular Economy Runs. She placed first in her class.

For 1962, running to Detroit, Paula drove her Chevrolet Biscayne 6 finishing third in her class. Ford tapped Paula to drive a 300 6 in 1963 to Detroit. Then in 1964 she began a five year association with Buick driving both 6-cylinder Specials and larger Electra 225s. Her best performance was in 1966 running to Boston when she finished second in her class in a Special. The exception was the year before when a recurring back issue forced her to withdraw midway through the run. Overall, Paula consistently placed high in her respective classes.

John Hull on The Start of the Studebaker Connection

Paula Murphy brought her indomitable and competitive spirit

to Studebaker through her association with Andy Granatelli. An *LA Times* automotive reporter first introduced Andy and Paula, putting before them an audacious proposal: Paula and a co-driver make a timed transcontinental run in Studebaker’s new Avanti automobile that would be riding on Sears’ new Allstate tires.

So, Paula along with her friend and co-pilot, Barbara Neiland, embarked on a mad dash cross country following a preplanned route Los Angeles to New York City that covered 2,933.2 miles. They completed the run in 49 hours 38 minutes according to the U.S. Auto Club (USAC) which sanctioned the run and which it also declared established a new record. The return piled on even more miles as it ultimately included a 1,372.75 mile drive down the Pacific Coast from Vancouver, B.C. to Tijuana, Mexico completed in another record setting time of 23 hours 38 minutes per USAC.

Paula next embarked on a display of driving ability piloting various Studebaker automobiles as part of an October 1963 assault on Bonneville’s salt flats where over 370 new land speed records were set during that one week. Most prominent was her garnering the fastest woman on land description with a record two way speed of 161.29mph driving the #9 Studebaker R-2 powered Avanti (a record she was destined to break and reset a year later).

This record led to Studebaker loaning her an R-2 Avanti on which had been lettered “Paula Murphy, World’s Fastest Woman on Wheels” adding on the rear quarter panel “161.29 MPH.” Paula recounted to this writer that when she drove the car running errands, shopping, or to the bank, it always surprised and amazed her to find a crowd around the car when she came back to where she’d parked it. That reaction provided her with many smiles and, naturally too, a feeling of pride.

“LandSpeed” Louise Noeth on Jet-powered on Bonneville’s Salt Flats

Studebaker and Avanti record-setter Paula returned to the salt when STP Corporation asked her if she might like to go “a bit faster.” Walt Arfons was on Bonneville, but his rocket record attempts were halted due to rain. However, he had also brought his 10,000hp J46 “Avenger” jet dragster and agreed to let her spool up the beast.

“Although I had never seen, let alone driven one before, I thought, ‘why not?’ ” Paula told me as we enjoyed sushi one night in Utah. She borrowed a fire suit and jumped in on November 12, 1964, but her feet did not reach the pedals. “They stuffed a big pillow behind my back which pushed my head forward and out of the roll cage a bit, and off I went, with only three miles of salt that was *not* under water. After ‘puddle jumping’ I made the required two-way runs and bumped up my personal record to a 226mph average best (that which she’d set in the Avanti of 161.29mph). I guess I got a little braver on the one-way return run and recorded 243.44mph. Let me tell you that at these speeds the pressures on your head and neck are incredible.”

This 20-minute, open cockpit driving adventure
See PAULA, page 14

AT LEFT: Paula during the first day’s brunch stop in Parker, Arizona of the 1964 Mobilgas Economy run.



Courtesy Dave Hermanson Collection

Paula, from page 13

reinforced her previously earned moniker “World’s Fastest Woman on Wheels” when USAC’s Joe Petrali certified the runs with signed official timing slips.

This comfortably fearless female pioneer who wore a helmet and fireproof underwear, Paula Murphy led the way for hundreds of women to follow her to starting lines in many aspects of motorsports’ many venues. She was inducted into the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America in 2017, British Drag Racing Hall of Fame in 2016 and the International Drag Racing Hall of Fame in 1992. She had long since earned the lasting respect of her peers regardless of what she drove.

Helen V Hutchings on Paula and NASCAR, NHRA, and her Drive ‘Round the World

Paula truly could and should be described as the lady of firsts. In addition to all the accomplishments others have recounted, she was the first femme to obtain a Funny Car license from both the United Drag Racers Association (UDRA) and NHRA before strapping herself in a nitromethane fueled and blown Mustang fastback. As one writer put it she “was popular with spectators who saw her take her male counterparts to the woodshed.” And that’s just what she did in 1966 when she set records competing against those guys in NHRA’s Formula4 and Formula6 classes.

She gained recognition with NASCAR and its fans in 1971 when she broke the existing women’s closed course speed record on the 33 degree banking of Talladega becoming the first woman to drive that track at speed. Five years later she returned



to that same superspeedway and broke her own previous, but still standing, closed course record going 172.336mpg.

That same 1976 year Paula undertook a Drive Around the World, an event co-sponsored and organized by Pontiac and Enterprise Car Rental as their observation and celebration of America’s Bicentennial. She completed the trip in just over 100 days or a bit less than one-third of a year after which she announced her retirement from racing and took a job at the California rocket engine-design and builder Rocketdyne, renamed Aerojet Rocketdyne after its 2013 merger.

**(We’d long planned this tribute to Paula’s accomplishments that also became a remembrance upon her unexpected passing December 21, 2023. ed) //*

Mike Baker

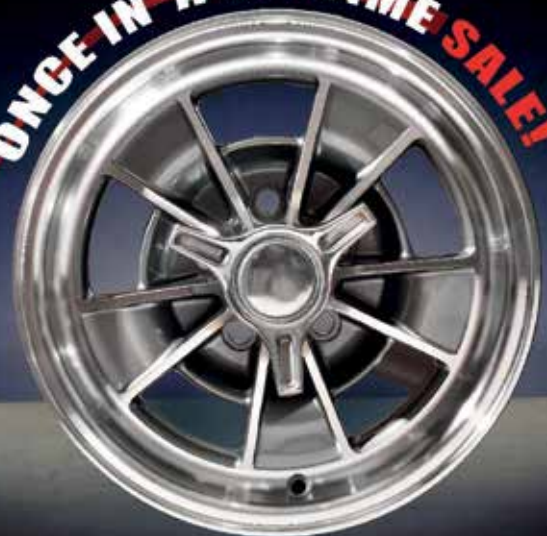


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