

NORMA "DUSTY" BRANDEL

A CELEBRATION OF LIFE

SEPTEMBER 29, 1934 - FEBRUARY 27, 2022

Norma "Dusty" Brandel was born September 29, 1934 to Leila and Charles Brandel. She was a lifelong resident and dedicated member of the Burbank community. Norma embarked on her remarkable career in motorsports journalism in 1955 as a writer for the Hollywood Citizen news, covering car races all over Southern California. When she was encouraged to use a "gender-neutral" name to avoid the roadblocks that existed for female journalists at the time, the name "Dusty" was born. She was the president of American Auto Racing Writers and Broadcasters Association and enjoyed her many trips to the Indianapolis 500 hosting the annual AARWBA events. She served as president of the Los



Angeles Press Club and was a board member of the West Coast Stock Car Hall of Fame. In 1972 she was the first woman to receive a press credential to report from inside a professional NASCAR garage area and she was inducted to the NASCAR Hall of Fame as a recipient of the Squier-Hall Award for media excellence in 2018. In recent years she worked as the history factotum for the Burbank Association of Realtors. Dusty passed away at home on February 27, 2022. Her professional and personal journey influenced and inspired many. She is blessed to be survived by many valued friends, colleagues, cousins, companion Michael Bishop, her niece Christie and two grand-nephews.



BRANDEL HELPED PAVE THE WAY FOR WOMEN IN MOTORSPORTS

There was only a handful of women covering motorsports when I started at the Hollywood Citizen-News in the mid 1950s. There were not a lot of men sportswriters who wanted to cover auto racing.

Most of them were stick-and-ball enthusiasts and enjoyed the pampering they received when covering those events. I was happy to get the opportunity to write about auto racing, even if I had to change my name. In those days, sports editors did not want women to write about men's sports, so Norma became Dusty - something to do with the male ego or who would believe a woman could write about motorsports? I could - and I did.

It was a learning experience. I helped out at tech inspections prior to the sports car events. By listening to the men writers like Murray Powell, Wilson Springer and Bill O'Bryan - and reading their racing stories, I learned a great deal. These guys were helpful too, because it was a new sport for all of us.

I drove sports cars and wheeled a Rolls Royce around the 2.65-mile Riverside Int'l Raceway at the August 1957 unveiling. I had the opportunity to ride on the back of Dan Gurney's dirt bike that same day. For many years I worked along with other volunteers on the press information team at Riverside.

California has lots of short tracks, which sadly have gone by the wayside for housing tracts. The most famous was Ascot Park in Gardena, but I had the opportunity to do the publicity and promotion for Whiteman Stadium's grand opening in the San Fernando Valley. After a short time, a housing tract moved in and the track closed.

Although I covered sports-car racing and drag racing with no problem, the United States Auto Club and NASCAR were no-nos for women to cover. It took a while to get that changed.

In 1971, after a lawsuit threat from a New York publication, I was one of seven women to gain access to the pits and Gasoline Alley at Indianapolis Speedway. The first two ladies to receive a "silver badge" from Speedway President Tony Hulman were Mary McCloskey and Bette Cadou.

It took another year before NASCAR began allowing women (heavily screened) to cover their races. I am the proud recipient of garage pass 0001 signed by Bill Gazaway at Ontario (CA) Motor Speedway to cover the event properly.

Lots of changes have made that ancient history. Women now are team owners, publicists, driver reps and presidents of major speedways. In this age of diversity, there is no more discrimination - the sky is the limit for women who want to be involved in motorsports.

Dr. Rose Mattioli and husband Dr. Joe own Pocono Raceway. Kelly Earnhardt runs Dale Earnhardt's business. Gillian Zucker is president of California Speedway, Lesa France Kennedy is the president of International Speedway Corp.

Through the years, I had help from icons: Bob Russo, the founding president of American Auto Racing Writers & Broadcasters Association; Past presidents Johnny McDonald, Chris Economaki, Ray Marquette, Norm Froscher, Dave Overpeck and Jim Wilson all were very supportive through the years.

It was Jim Wilson that insisted I become president in 1987. He said, "you do all the work anyway!"

The American Auto Racing Writers & Broadcasters Association has worked diligently to encourage race tracks to update their facilities to accommodate the many changes involved in covering their events.

Our 50th anniversary dinner at the Hyatt Regency in Indianapolis was a huge success thanks to Chairman Michael Knight and Mike Hollander's video presentations and souvenir program.

A special thanks to Indianapolis Motor Speedway and the IRL Indy Car Series, we again have sponsors for Annual AARWBA Media Contest.

Through the years, I have had the pleasure of meeting many great drivers and celebrities like Juan Manuel Fangio, Mark Donohue, Dorothy Deen, James Garner, Jack Brabham, Phil Hill, James Dean, Carroll Shelby, Ruth Levy, Tiny Lund and Mary Davis, to name just a few.

I've been very fortunate to have been involved with motorsports early and have so many friends in the racing community.

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