



GIRL RACER

FAST AND FEARLESS, SWISS DRIVER NATACHA GACHNANG IS HOPING TO BECOME ONE OF FORMULA ONE'S FINEST

WORDS | BRITT COLLINS PHOTOGRAPHY | TIZIANO NIERO

NATACHA GACHNANG IS SOMETHING OF A LEGEND ON the circuit. The first woman to take part in the newly launched Formula One feeder series, FIA Formula Two, the 23-year-old sensation is carving out a reputation for herself as a driver to watch.

When we meet on the Paul Ricard track in Marseilles, the crew from Italian *Vogue* is also here to do a photoshoot with Gachnang. There's been a swirl of media attention around her and her two gorgeous Swiss teammates, Cyndie Allemann and Rahel Frey.

This is Gachnang's first GT1 World Championship race since breaking her leg in Abu Dhabi a few months ago. She has just come off the track in the blazing heat and looks shattered. "It's been a long day, but this is the toughest part," she says in a subtle French accent, readily admitting she doesn't enjoy the sudden fuss or even the more glamorous side of racing – the champagne and the parties. Sitting amid the chaos and smoke fumes outside her garage in a snugly fitted pink T-shirt and velvet sneakers, she has a tomboy prettiness – the antithesis of a boy racer or grid girl

(the sexy types parading around the paddocks like show ponies before any motorsports event).

Speed runs in the family: not only did Gachnang's grandfather Georges race in the Le Mans 24 Hours in 1960, but she is also a cousin of Formula One driver Sébastien Buemi.

Raised in Vevey, a sleepy resort town outside Montreux, where her ex-racing driver father ran a successful car dealership, Gachnang has always had a burning desire to race. "I started racing at five years old when my father gave me a go-kart," she says. "I began driving with my cousin Sébastien and then did mini-kart and a lot of different tracks. When you are a child, it's difficult to know what you really want. I didn't even know what a go-kart was. But after getting to know this magical world, I fell in love."

Gachnang – who also lists climbing and flying helicopters with her pilot boyfriend among her hobbies – has been beating the boys at extreme sports from a young age. She competed on the track with her cousin for over a decade and has the war wounds to prove it. ▶