

From Gold Medals To Checkered Flags: Olympians Bring Competitive Drive To Toyota's Pro/Celebrity Race

(NAPSA)—Olympic athletes train intensely, study the game and push their bodies to the limit. The same skills and discipline serve them well when they turn their eyes on another prize: the Toyota Pro/Celebrity Race. More than a dozen Olympians have participated since the event's inception in 1977, including gold medalists Carl Lewis, Misty May-Treanor, Mary Lou Retton, Dara Torres and Bruce Jenner.

One of six main events held during the annual Toyota Grand Prix of Long Beach, the Toyota Pro/Celebrity Race brings together stars of film, television and sports to compete against professional drivers on the historic 1.97-mile circuit. This year's race will take place April 20th.

Olympians are well-conditioned athletes, with superior hand-eye coordination and intense focus under pressure. That experience gives them a leg up when they and the other celebrities arrive for four days of tough driving training. The participants learn racing techniques such as proper cornering, shifting and braking while acclimating themselves to the new-for-2013 Scion FR-S Pro/Celebrity race vehicles.

"Olympic athletes bring a competitive spirit and energy to this worthwhile and high-speed charity event," said Les Unger, national motorsports manager at Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A. "While they are familiar with high-stakes competition, it's still an adrenaline rush for them to get behind the wheel and onto the course in



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front of tens of thousands of fans."

Decathlon Olympic gold medalist Bruce Jenner competed five times in the Pro/Celebrity Race between 1979 and 1996—winning twice—and went on to race sports cars. Twelve-time Olympic swimming medalist Dara Torres raced three times and became the first female winner in 2002.

Racing requires unique athleticism with regard to hand-eye coordination, endurance, sustained G forces and high cockpit temperatures. In 2009, NASCAR driver Jimmie Johnson was named "Male Athlete of the Year" by the Associated Press. ESPN analyst Dr. Jerry Punch has been inter-

viewed comparing a race car driver to a quarterback in the high speed needed to process information and make decisions.

Fast Lane race school owner and lead instructor Danny McKeever said race car driving requires concentration, focus and technique. Olympians usually do well in the Toyota Pro/Celebrity Race thanks to their high level of competitiveness, but it's no guarantee for a win, as any participant with the desire has a chance at the trophy.

"For most of our participants, this is the first time they have experienced the limits of a car and how fast they can really go and still be in complete control," McKeever said. "We have four days to get them race-ready and most are surprised how much they learned and how much fun it is. It is certainly not a career change, but sometimes winning is accomplishing something you never thought you could do."

In addition to Olympians, race participants have featured Hollywood elites such as Keanu Reeves, Adrien Brody, Cameron Diaz, George Lucas, Ashley Judd and Jay Leno. On behalf of each driver, Toyota donates \$5,000 to Racing for Kids, a national organization benefiting children's hospitals in Southern California, and \$5,000 more to the winner's charity of choice. More than \$2 million has been donated by Toyota over the past several decades.

For more information, visit www.toyota.com/motorsports/pro_celeb.