

## Grandma Tears Up the Racetrack

There aren't any knitting needles in great-grandma Sandy Mendia's house, just high-performance auto parts. Mendia's fervor for drag racing began in high school, and she now races her vintage car in statewide competitions.

"I started drag racing illegally in high school. I'd race with the guys after school, and on weekends we'd go to the drag strip to watch the races," said Mendia, a program manager for Global Business Continuity Planning in Santa Clara, Calif.

Since revving up her interest in the sport during the late 1980s, Mendia now races a jet black 1935 Plymouth Coupe. Her husband, who races a 1960 Corvette, shares her passion for drag racing. In a recent Bakersfield, Calif. competition, Mendia was the only woman in her division of 135 vintage cars. As if that weren't impressive enough, she made it to the top eight in the quarterfinals.



Sandy Mendia drag races this 1935 Plymouth Coupe.

"Now more women are getting into drag racing," Mendia said. "I even do all my own work on my car. I learned by asking people and watching them."

She added that learning how to race is a gradual process. Learning aside, Mendia now can drive a quarter of a mile in 12.4 seconds, with a top speed of 108 miles per hour.

"It's the rush. It's the adrenaline. No matter how much stress you're under, the drag strip erases it away," she admitted.

In addition to drag racing, Mendia and her husband do auto cross racing in empty parking lots and road courses at raceways. Generally, the couple drives their motor home to the track and tows the Corvette behind the vehicle. Mendia will change the racing tires on her Plymouth to street tires and follow the motor home. When it comes time to race, Mendia said she wears a helmet, a long-sleeved shirt and long pants, steering clear of easily flammable fabrics. The duo also supports each other when each is racing in a competition.

"We race every other weekend. It's in the blood. It's something we really enjoy," she added. Next season, Mendia hopes to finish a quarter of a mile in 11 seconds. She also hopes to one day have a sponsor to cover the cost of racing.

"I would love to have a sponsor to pay for gas and entrance fees," she said.

Right now, Mendia seems content to receive auto-racing-related gifts from her husband. Her granddaughters, though, haven't expressed an interest in their grandparents'



Mendia's husband races this 1960 Corvette.

hobby; instead they prefer to shop.

"I like shopping too, as long as it's for a high-performance auto part," Mendia joked.

*By Staff Writer Janet Haney*

*March 31, 2003*