

SPEED SISTERS

A film by Amber Fares

80 min / Arabic and English w/ English Subtitles / 2015 / Color / Palestine – USA / Digital



FIRST RUN FEATURES

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Logline

The Speed Sisters are the first all-women race car driving team in the Middle East. They're bold. They're fearless. And they're tearing up tracks all over Palestine.

Short Synopsis

The Speed Sisters are the first all-woman race car driving team in the Middle East. Grabbing headlines and turning heads at improvised tracks across the West Bank, these five women have sped their way into the heart of the gritty, male-dominated Palestinian street car-racing scene. Weaving together their lives on and off the track, SPEED SISTERS takes you on a surprising journey into the drive to go further and faster than anyone thought you could.

Long Synopsis

Despite a tangle of roadblocks and checkpoints, a thriving street car racing scene has emerged in the West Bank. Held at improvised tracks – a vegetable market, an old helicopter pad, a security academy – the races offer a release from the pressures and uncertainties of life under military occupation. The fanfare and rivalry between cities brings spectators out in droves, lining rooftops and leaning over barricades to snap photos of their favorite drivers and to catch final times on the scoreboard.

Brought together by a common desire to live life on their own terms, five determined women – Marah, Betty, Noor, Mona and Maysoon – have joined the ranks of dozens of male drivers, competing against each other for the title, for bragging rights for their hometown, and to prove that women can go head to head with the guys.

The new racing season opens with 19-year old reigning champion Marah determined to defend her title. Representing one of the most socially conservative and economically depressed cities in Palestine, Marah's determination to make her hometown proud pushes her to be her best on the track. Betty, her biggest competitor, comes from a wealthy, influential family of racers. Marah and Betty find themselves neck in neck when Betty's luck turns and a questionable decision by the officials places her on top. Betty is swept up in a flurry of media attention while Marah must decide whether to quit in protest or follow her drive to win. Her family has already sacrificed so much; will Marah find the resolve to navigate the obstacles in her way and make a comeback?

The friendships between Maysoon, the team manager; Mona, the pioneering free-spirit; and Noor, the thrill-seeker struggling to find her way, bring a tenderness and texture to life off the track as each of the women navigate love, religion and family pressures while trying to be true to themselves in the face of a military occupation. With a character-driven narrative, tire-screaming racing scenes and a dynamic Middle Eastern indie music soundtrack, SPEED SISTERS is offers a surprising look into what it takes to go further and faster than anyone thought you could.

Director's Statement

I grew up in a small town in Northern Alberta. My parents were both children of Lebanese immigrants, and my grandmothers were a big part of our childhood. As a result, we had a blend of Lebanese and Canadian cultures swirling around in our home. I didn't think too much about my identity until 9/11, when things changed for us in a major way. In a heartbeat, we went from being citizens to suspects. And I felt like I needed to better understand my Arab heritage to make sense of what was happening, and so I set off to the Middle East, a journey that eventually took me to Palestine.

Soon after arriving in the West Bank I met a woman who was part of the local street car racing circuit. She invited me to come to a race in Jenin, which had a reputation for being a tough and defiant place. As we searched for a race car for her to borrow, I found myself on a dimly lit side street. A few flickering streetlights cut through smoke rising from a crowd of revving cars. Some guys leaned into the hoods of their cars, while others milled around checking out their friends' ultraviolet paint jobs. I was surprised by the scene: not only are there women race car drivers in Palestine, but the guys are helping them and cheering them on!

Here began my journey with the Speed Sisters: The Middle East's first all-women race car driving team. Over the next four years I got to know the Speed Sisters and their families. Each one in her own way took me on a ride through Palestine that I will never forget. They taught me to push boundaries, while still respecting your community. They taught me about resistance, about not giving up and what it means to stay true to your dreams despite endless obstacles.

I wanted to make sure that the feelings of excitement, camaraderie, intimacy and resistance were translated into the film. The political situation in Palestine often seems hopeless, but through the eyes of the Speed Sisters I discovered the magic of Palestine. I wanted audiences to experience this too.

While living in the Middle East, I also discovered a thriving, vibrant independent music scene. I wanted the SPEED SISTERS soundtrack to highlight some of these talented artists. The soundtrack needed to be authentic, fresh and as diverse as the Middle East.

On the surface, SPEED SISTERS, is a film about two seasons in the lives of five women race car drivers from Palestine. But more importantly, it is a film about the human drive to break through the obstacles in our lives and be true to ourselves and to our dreams.

– Amber Fares
Director & Producer

Filmmaker Biographies

AMBER FARES – DIRECTOR & PRODUCER

Amber Fares is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and photographer. Her feature length directorial debut *Speed Sisters*, premiered at Hot Docs in 2015, where it was one of the top 20 Audience Choice Awards, and won the Audience Award at the Irish Film Institute Festival. *Speed Sisters* is currently playing in film festivals around the world. Amber's continually expanding storytelling approach is driven by the belief that personal stories can best help connect audiences to important topics and issues and has worked with organizations like UNRWA, Defence for Children International and Amnesty International. Amber co-founded SocDoc Studios to produce story-driven films that explore social issues. Amber is Canadian and is based in New York.

AVI GOLDSTEIN – PRODUCER

Avi Goldstein is a creative producer and filmmaker, and co-founded SocDoc Studios. He was a 2014 Sundance Institute Creative Producing Labs Fellow as the Producer of *Speed Sisters*, and recently produced *Fire Lines* with the Ma'an Network in Bethlehem and Common Ground Productions. Avi received an AB in Psychology from Princeton University and was previously a business consultant at Vantage Partners, a Boston-based negotiation and relationship management consulting firm spun out of the Harvard Negotiation Project. He now leads a program that teaches high school students constructive approaches to negotiation and problem solving in daily life. He has facilitated workshops for hundreds of students, and has been a featured speaker at film festivals and professional conferences.

JESSICA DEVANEY – PRODUCER

Jessica is an award-winning producer and impact strategist. She is currently producing the feature documentary and interactive game, *Roll Red Roll*, an immersive thriller examining sexual assault in small town America. She co-produced the Peabody Award winning short *My Neighbourhood* (2012) and produced its companion web series *Home Front* (2011). Jessica associate produced *Budrus* (2009), which won over a dozen international awards, including the Ridenhour Documentary Film Prize. She was a key driver behind the film's engagement strategy, which was recognized with the PUMA Impact Award. Jessica was previously the Director of Communications at Just Vision, where she produced films and led communications strategy in support of Palestinian and Israeli community organizers and human rights defenders. She is a 2015 Women at Sundance Fellow.

RABAB HAJ YAHYA – EDITOR

Rabab has edited award-winning documentaries, including *Bed and Breakfast*; *Beyond Blue and Gray*, which won Best Documentary (Moving Pictures Magazine) and Best Short (Moondance Film Festival); the multiple award-winning documentary *Full Signal*; and *Aggressive Decrees*. She has also edited documentary films commissioned by Al Jazeera Documentary Channel including *A Palestinian Wedding*, *The Knowledge Industry*, and *On The Hotplate*. Rabab lived for years in East Jerusalem and is fluent in English and Arabic.

Press Quotes

"An eye-opening doc that succeeds in its goal of shattering stereotypes."

THE
Hollywood
REPORTER

"A spirited, crowd-pleasing portrait."

Indiewire

"An engaging, high octane documentary... a savvy and at times nicely spikey film."

SCREENDAILY

*"Speed Sisters shows the magic of daily life in Palestine
despite the reality of ongoing military occupation."*

THE HUFFINGTON POST

"Kinetic."

Sports
Illustrated

"A thrill-ride from beginning to end."

TheNational

UK Press Quotes

"Speed Sisters is a muscular, unapologetic and surprisingly feel-good documentary about the Middle East's first all-female team of racing drivers."

★★★★

THE  TIMES

"Strikes a perfect balance, telling a righteous, uplifting story of triumph against the odds without ever losing sight of the bigger political picture."

★★★★



"Nothing will make you want to get behind a steering wheel faster."

GLAMOUR

Racing in Palestine



Illustrative Map of a Speed Test Course

Founded in 2005, The **Palestinian Motor Sport and Motorcycle Federation** (PMSMF) organizes and officiates autocross car races (aka “time trials” or “speed tests”) every 6 weeks in cities throughout the West Bank. The season typically runs from March to December.

Speed tests have been hosted in Ramallah, Jenin, Nablus, Bethlehem, Hebron and Jericho – set up in controlled spaces like a fruit and vegetable market, a helicopter landing pad, or closed off main streets within a city.

In recent years the race has found a regular home base in the city of Jericho. Races are open to the public and are formally organized, supported by the presence of emergency services and police.

A few days before a scheduled race, a map of the race course is released. The map demarcates the exact pathway that drivers must navigate, between and around cones, in the fastest time possible. Each contestant must memorize the track course before they get to the starting line.

Each racer competes individually against the clock and gets two attempts for the fastest time. The racers with the top ten times go to the final round. The fastest woman racer after two rounds is automatically included in the final round. (Racers like Marah and Betty have made it to the top ten based on the merit of their time alone).

There are various penalties applied for violations, such as:

- Wrong road: A racer is disqualified from their current round if they stray from the map course and go the wrong way.
- Hit a cone: A time penalty is applied to the racer’s time for each cone during the round.
- Door or trunk comes ajar during the race: A racer is disqualified from the round.

Awards are given for fastest overall racer, fastest woman and fastest car in each car type and motor class. There are no cash awards, just cups and titles. Each year the top three male racers and the top female racer are chosen to compete in a special race in Jordan.

Khaled Qaddoura, seen in the film, founded the federation and served as its chairman from 2005 – 2014. He was instrumental in recruiting women into the ranks of the racers.

Credits

Directed by

AMBER FARES

Produced by

AMBER FARES

AVI GOLDSTEIN

JESSICA DEVANEY

Edited by

RABAB HAJ YAHYA

Directors of Photography

AMBER FARES

LUCY MARTENS

Co-Producers

STEPHANIE ECONOMU

BEN & ROB EDWARDS

TALAL JABARI

ANNE O'SHEA & BRIAN QUATTRINI

Associate Producers

REBECCA DAY

ENAS AL MUTHAFFAR

LAUREN CIOFFI

NADIA SAAH

Additional Camera

LAUREN CIOFFI

AVI GOLDSTEIN

RABAB HAJ YAHYA

NADIM HAMED

TALAL JABARI

CASEY ASPROOTH-JACKSON

MASHAL KAWASMI

ANDREW LANG

GEOFFREY LE GUILCHER

XAVIER GUIGNARD

BASILE LEMAIRE

GEOFFREY SMITH

JORGE YETANO

MICHAEL ZANANIRI

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