

SPEED Presents Three-Time F1 Champ Vettel With Second Mario Andretti Trophy

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On the Sunday night edition of SPEED Center, Mario Andretti named 2012 Formula One champion Sebastian Vettel as this year's SPEED Performer of the Year. (Photo: SPEED)

NASCAR CHAMP KESELOWSKI EARNS 'SPOTY' RUNNER-UP HONOR, FOLLOWED BY LARSON, HUNTER-REAY AND LOEB

ZANARDI SALUTED WITH DAN GURNEY SPIRIT OF RACING AWARD

Motor sports icon Mario Andretti presented his namesake trophy to 2012 Formula One champion Sebastian Vettel as this year's SPEED Performer of the Year on the Sunday night edition of SPEED Center.

"You are going up against the best of the best for this award," said Andretti, the only driver to ever win the Indianapolis 500, the Daytona 500 and the Formula One World Championship. "We're considering every major discipline in motor sports. That's what you are up against ... that's the grandeur of this award."

Vettel, who captured his third consecutive Formula One title in dramatic fashion to become the youngest triple champion in series history, came out atop five SPEED Performer of the Year finalists, including NASCAR champion Brad Keselowski, versatile youngster Kyle Larson, IndyCar champ Ryan Hunter-Reay and WRC legend Sebastien Loeb. Ten of this year's 16 nominees earned at least one first-place vote in the balloting.

"It's unbelievable ... I'm very proud to get the trophy of one of the best racers of all time -- Mario Andretti," said Vettel, who also took home the Andretti trophy in 2010. "It does mean a lot to me and I really appreciate it."

Andretti headlines a 22-member SPOTY voting panel that includes racers Dan Gurney, Darrell Waltrip, Don Prudhomme, Scott Russell, Tommy Kendall and Dorsey Schroeder. In addition, some of the most recognizable names in motor sports television -- Dave Despain, Bob Varsha, Leigh Diffey and Ralph Sheheen -- are joined by motor sports journalists Robin Miller, Tom Jensen and Marshall Pruett on the panel.

“(Vettel) had an unbelievable season,” Andretti said on SPEED Center. “When you look at the overall performance – qualifying, race wins and the start of the season when things were not really going their way ... all of a sudden, the way he just came back and forced his way to the very top was exemplary of a real champion. He could not be denied.”

The award, now in its seventh season, is presented annually by SPEED to the racer who puts a premium on winning races, shines on motor sports' biggest stages and does it all with a measure of sportsmanship and class.

The Mario Andretti Trophy, a true work of art created by bronze sculptor Elie Hazak, stands 38 inches tall and weighs 95 pounds. It features eight cars, including six of the most important in Mario's rise to superstardom, as well as an array of artistic symbolism that captures the essence of the trophy's namesake.

Former SPOTY winners and runners-up:

- 2012 – Sebastian Vettel, F1; Brad Keselowski, NASCAR
- 2011 – Tony Stewart, NASCAR; Casey Stoner, MotoGP
- 2010 – Sebastian Vettel, F1; Jimmie Johnson, NASCAR
- 2009 – Tony Schumacher, NHRA; Jimmie Johnson, NASCAR
- 2008 – Jimmie Johnson, NASCAR; Tony Schumacher, NHRA
- 2007 – Jimmie Johnson, NASCAR; Donny Schatz, WoO
- 2006 – Jimmie Johnson, NASCAR; Nicky Hayden, MotoGP

Racer Alex Zanardi, who continues to personify the heart of a racer despite an accident that robbed the Italian of both his legs in 2001, was recognized on SPEED Center with the Dan Gurney Spirit of Racing award for his success last year as a paracyclist. The two-time CART champion won two gold medals and a silver medal in the 2012 Summer Paralympics in London.

<http://formula-one.speedtv.com/article/speed-presents-three-time-f1-champ-vettel-with-second-mario-andretti-trophy/>

