



TRAVIS OKULSKI 2/28/13 12:13pm

Even At 73 Years Old, Mario Andretti Is Way Cooler Than You

Mario Andretti

If you ask someone who doesn't like motorsports to name a racing driver, there is a good chance they'll only know a few names. One of those names will almost definitely be Mario Andretti, arguably America's greatest ever racer. And today is Mario's 73rd birthday. Here is what makes him far cooler than any of you reading this... unless you're Mario.

In terms of what Mario has accomplished in a race car, it's almost easier to name the major circuit races he hasn't won. And I really only count two: The Monaco Grand Prix and the 24 Hours of Le Mans. And even then, he won his class at Le Mans in 1995 and finished second overall. And he was 55 when he did that.

Mario won the 1967 Daytona 500. Mario won the 1969 Indy 500. Mario won the 1978 Formula One World Championship. Mario won the 1972 24 Hours of Daytona. Mario is a four time IndyCar champion. Mario won the 12 Hours of Sebring three times. Mario is a dirt track champion and a two time IROC champion.



That's staggering. Mario won his last IndyCar race in 1993 and retired from full time competition in 1994. After his retirement, he raced at Le Mans four times and even tested an IndyCar in 2003 at the age of 63 for his son's team. The intent was to qualify the car for the injured Tony Kanaan.

As you'd expect, he was damn fast. But a massive crash that made Mario flip a bunch of times cancelled those plans. Some say the crash had something to do with the famously bad luck that the entire Andretti family has had at Indianapolis. But he walked away and just had a small cut on his chin. Sounds like good luck to me. Sounds pretty damn cool too.

There are very few drivers that are in Mario's league when it comes to how well rounded he is in different formulas. In my opinion, AJ Foyt is his only rival in that regard.



Mario's success is also something will probably never be recreated. Motorsports have become very specialized since Mario's huge success in multiple formulas of the 1960s and 1970s. Most modern drivers tend to choose a specialty and focus on it, which makes them less adaptable to other formulas of motorsports.

Many also have ironclad contracts that restrict them from driving all other sorts of cars as well as really doing anything dangerous. There are just a handful of modern drivers that have jumped formulas AND found success everywhere they've driven. Tony Stewart, Robert Kubica, Juan Montoya, and Kimi Raikkonen are ones that immediately come to mind. Even then, their successes aren't really as grand or varied as Mario's. Their careers also won't last nearly as long as his has.



Add in the fact that Mario accomplished much of his success in the incredibly dangerous '60s and '70s, and it makes the accomplishments that much more impressive.

And he's still active with IndyCar. He goes to all the races and watches his grandson, Marco, race. He also works with the IndyCar two seater program. Just last April I got a ride around Laguna Seca with Mario at the wheel (That's me in the back, below).



He's definitely still got it, although I wonder what it's like driving around a track that has a corner named after yourself. That's how freaking cool he is. A race track that didn't kill him named a corner after him.

Bad. Ass.

Tanti auguri Mario! Here's to 73 more.

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