

ROYALTY – HOW MARIO ANDRETTI CREATED A FAMILY LEGACY

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Having enjoyed a legendary career which saw him win races in Formula One, IndyCar, Sportscar and NASCAR, Mario Andretti is the Godfather of probably the most famous family in racing. Lee Spencer explores the world of the Andretti family, whose legacy has become a symbol of the modern American Dream.

The hair may be greyer, the waistline a bit wider, but mention the name 'Mario' in racing circles, and there's only one person who comes to mind.

Now 77 years old, Mario Gabriele Andretti came to the U.S. with his family from Italy in 1955. His passion for racing was sparked one year earlier, watching Formula One World Champion Alberto Ascari at the famous Autodromo Monza.

When the Andretti family settled in Nazareth, Pennsylvania, it didn't take long for Mario and his twin brother, Aldo, to discover the local dirt track. The brothers started racing – and winning – at the age of 19, and that winning tradition has continued with the family ever since.



Over the next five decades, Mario Andretti accumulated 111 wins throughout 11 different disciplines including F1, open wheel, sports cars and NASCAR. In addition to four Champ Car/CART championships and an IROC championship, Andretti considers the 1978 Formula One title his most memorable racing achievement.

Andretti's seamless versatility in different racing series on a variety of track surfaces and layouts defined his legendary status. Certainly, his F1 accomplishments – 12 wins, 19 podiums and 18 poles in 128 starts – are remarkable. Still, ultimately, his enduring legacy will be the establishment of the Andrettis as the unofficial 'First Family' of IndyCar.

Yes, A.J. Foyt holds the all-time IndyCar record with 67 victories. Andretti is second with 52. And only Foyt and Andretti have been able to win both the Indianapolis 500 and the Daytona 500. However, three generations of Andrettis – Mario, Michael and Marco – have combined to amass a whopping 96 wins in IndyCar. The Andretti Family was the first to have four relatives compete CART at the same time, with Mario, Michael, his younger brother Jeff and Aldo's son John. Different combinations of the foursome have also raced sports cars together in the 24 Hours of Le Mans and the 24 Hours of Daytona.



Michael's 42 [IndyCar/CART] victories rank third in the all-time list. In 1991, he added another championship to the family's totals. Two years later, Michael followed his father's path to F1. He earned one podium finish (at Monza) and seven points with McLaren, before parting ways with three races remaining in the 1993 season. Andretti returned to IndyCar where he found success once again with Chip Ganassi Racing, before returning to Newman/Haas Racing in 1995. After six additional seasons with Newman/Haas, he moved to Team Green in 2001 and bought interest in the company two years later. In 2009, Andretti Green Racing evolved into what is now Andretti Autosport.

Under Michael's direction at Andretti Autosport, the family's winning tradition continues throughout IndyCar, Indy Lights, Global Rallycross and Formula E. The organisation has earned four IndyCar titles, championships in U.S. F2000 and Pro Mazda, as well as the last two titles in Global RallyCross.

Michael's son Marco, 30, currently pilots the No. 27 Dallara/Honda full-time in IndyCar, having made his series debut in 2006. Like his grandfather and father before him, he went on to win rookie honours in the Indianapolis 500, having finished second on debut. Later that year, he was victorious at Sonoma Raceway, becoming the youngest series winner at 19 years, 167 days.



Just the constant exposure to two champions has benefitted Marco greatly in his quest to succeed in IndyCar. And he could not have asked for two better mentors.

“You learn something every day from them, obviously,” Marco said. “A lot of it in this business, at this level, you have to learn by fire; go out and learn on your own.”

“I think, definitely, ‘Trust your butt’ still sticks out in my mind, because especially in places like this [Indianapolis], you have to do that. You have to know it’s loose before it’s loose. So that’s one thing that sticks out, for sure.”

That feeling came in handy on Sunday during qualifying. Andretti, who was first on the track, struggled on his second lap. Following his eighth-place run, it was a lap will continue to haunt him.

“On Lap 1 you have the new tires so you don’t know what the car is going to do on Lap 2, so I adjusted from there,” Andretti said. “I had to react, whereas everyone else that goes after me will be able to react on my second lap and make the necessary adjustments. That’s where I’m bummed. I wanted to be further up and go for the pole, but I’m really just focused on winning this race... and it’s been done from further back than eighth.”

Yes, but considering the so-called ‘Andretti Curse’ at Indianapolis Motor Speedway, that might be wishful thinking. In 72 attempts by Andretti family members in the Greatest Spectacle in Racing, only Mario has held on to win. He beat Dan Gurney to the checkered flag in 1969 for the Andrettis’ only victory in the race they covet most.



“The Indianapolis 500 is iconic because of names like Foyt, Unser and Andretti,” said Jay Frye, President of Competition and Operations at IndyCar. “Mario started his family’s tradition at Indianapolis Motor Speedway with a third-place finish in 1965, adding the memorable win four years later.

“Three of the five Andrettis have been Rookie of the Year at IMS, and the family has combined for 72 starts over 45 years. Michael’s team has also won the race four times with four different drivers, further linking the family’s incredible legacy.”

Although it's been nearly two decades since Mario Andretti retired from full-time driving, the former champion is still a fixture in the IndyCar paddock. When Andretti suits up and climbs inside the two-seater Honda race car, he shows no signs of slowing down.

Nor – at 80 – does Richard Petty, who continues to embrace the ambassador's role on the stock car side of the sport. Although the Petty family once spanned four generations in NASCAR, today the King currently advises Richard Petty Motorsports. While he prefers motorcycles to Andretti's scooters, each weekend Petty routinely climbs to the top of the transporter to eye the action at the track. Kyle Petty marvels at both Andretti and his father's longevity.



“It amazes me that, whether you’re six, 26, 56 or 76, you still know who Richard Petty and Mario Andretti are,” says the former racer and current TV commentator. “They are still relevant to the sports they helped to build. I don’t understand it. If Michael Jordan stops going to basketball games, they’re going to forget him. They just kind of phase out. But these guys, for some reason, they’re still there. They’re timeless.”

Given the body of work in Formula 1, IndyCar, sports cars and NASCAR, the Andretti brand is recognized throughout the world. For his on-track accomplishments, Andretti earned the Driver of the Century Award from the Associated Press in 1999. On May 16, Andretti was

honoured with the Stuart Scott Lifetime Achievement Award from Clio Sports, which recognises creative excellence in sports marketing and advertising internationally.

Indeed, Andretti learned early on in his career how important image was to building success in motorsports.

“It takes a long time to create that, so I’ve been very fortunate,” Andretti told The Drum after accepting the award. “I always say I count my blessings every day because I had a long career and I know how many bullets I had to dodge to do that.



“And it’s not a given, and so that has given me exposure and longevity, and I was able to accomplish almost all of my ambitious goals. It’s something you have to cultivate and you hope that you have a family behind you that understands. I was armed with all of that.

“I’m proud of what we’re doing. We have a family legacy here now. We’re going to third generation drivers. It’s a sport that has been our life, certainly my life, and it’s treated me very, very well. I have a very competitive family around me. My kids, they all have passions for what they do. They are, on top of everything else, very competitive, and that’s what we like. We beat the hell out of each other. They don’t give the old man any kind of a break, and I like that.”

This weekend in Indianapolis, the family will be hoping Marco can make his own history. Andretti Autosport has won two of the last three Borg-Warner trophies, with Ryan Hunter-Reay (2014) and defending winner Alexander Rossi (2016). With an All-Star lineup that includes Marco, Hunter-Reay, Rossi, Takuma Sato and former F1 champion Fernando Alonso – all of whom qualified in the top 10 – along with newcomer Jack Harvey, the Andrettis have more than a fighting chance to celebrate in the winner's circle come Sunday.

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