

## GPUpdate



### **GPUpdate pre-season feelings: Mario Andretti**

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In a special series of articles running up to the new season, GPUpdate.net has assembled an exclusive panel of guests. We hear the good, the bad, the expectations and predictions ahead of the sport's most eagerly-anticipated year. Let us begin with Mario Andretti: Indy 500 winner, Daytona 500 winner and F1 World Champion of 1978.

#### **Mario, 2012 promises to be fantastic! Just how thoroughly will you be watching and do you expect more dramas than in 2011?**

I follow Formula 1 very closely and look forward to every event, for sure. It is always going to be the height of my interests in motorsport and I thought it was another very interesting season last year, no question. Like everyone else, I think when it is dominated by one driver it seems to be a little bit too predictable, but there were some revelations. For instance, I assessed that Jenson Button would probably have a tough time with Lewis Hamilton and it turned out to be the other way round this time. The way I put it was that it was going to be tough for number twos such as Mark Webber, which it was, but I also picked Jenson and that was totally wrong! But I like the surprises, it's good for the sport.

#### **From a British point of view, Lewis Hamilton's 2011 was up and down both on and off the track. Did you ever have such problems in your own career?**



Well, when you are doing something so demanding, emotions play. I feel that one of the assets in my career was a very stable family life; my wife was rock solid, she took care of that end well and was always supportive. I didn't have to bring a trophy home to get the same welcome – I got exactly the same kiss and everything, whether I had a trophy in my hands or not. To me, that was key to keeping my head where it needed to be without being distracted. Personal relationships can be devastating sometimes and it is bound to affect your performance. I think it is tough enough even if you are able to concentrate on your job 100 percent, but if you are only doing it at 85 or 90 percent then you are missing something. When results don't come, frustration sets in and then of course that is when mistakes are obviously made because you are forcing things. So it is kind of a snowballing effect.

### **What's your opinion on driver aids like KERS and DRS?**



Well, it is somewhat artificial - especially the way that it is regulated. With the way it is allowed to be used, it seems like the driver you are trying to overtake is naked (laughs)! You know, he cannot really defend himself because if you block you get penalised. So it is a bit artificial. I like the KERS better than DRS in that sense. But, you know, nobody has the real answer for how to create more overtaking, so you cannot fault any suggestions for trying these sorts of things. So you can take it or leave it. Some people would probably prefer not to see that but you still have to put yourself in a proper position to even take advantage of KERS, so the driver still has to do it correctly. All in all, I would like to think that they should keep these systems in place.

### **You drove for some legendary teams, notably Lotus when you won the title. How do you feel when names such as Williams are struggling nowadays?**



I would love to see Williams pick up somewhat, it was sad to see their incredible drop in performance, vis a vis the second and third tier teams. It's an emotional thing, to see that; I know that Patrick Head is bowing out but old Frank (Williams) is still soldiering on, which is great to see. It's a tough one, it really is (laughs)! What snowballs are the negatives. When you don't have the performance to show for, then not too many people are too keen to spend a lot of money and sponsor you, so it takes its toll. But what drives every train is a headline driver. And I mean a real headliner. Barrichello was very solid and experienced and everything else, but they just need a superstar. So it's a cart and horse type of thing. But you never know...there could always be a surprise there.

### **For Williams' sake, it's a shame they didn't sign Kimi Räikkönen...**

Yes, that is true. I think that would have really sparked some incredible interest which is what they needed - something like that which would really jolt everyone. I agree with you, I think that could have made a big difference there.

### **On a lighter note...we are returning to the USA this year! But why has Formula 1 never really caught on in America?**

I can't say it never caught on because I think it was quite popular and stable at Watkins Glen, for several years. It is just that, once they left that venue, it became a temporary thing. I think it was really quite good for a couple of years at Long Beach because it was something new - at a time when street events were disappearing in Europe, all of a sudden it started here and was extremely successful. But it became too expensive and just didn't work out economically, so it just disappeared and so happened to the rest of them...Detroit, Phoenix and every other one that was a temporary event. It's a shame. Having said that, I

think if this thing in Texas happens – if they construct the facility and ultimately achieve what they want to achieve – then at least you would have a world-standard facility in place which I think could hopefully make a difference in stability. With Austin and New York on the schedule I just hope that it all comes to fruition, I really do. As a real fan of Formula 1, I love to see it successful in this country and I think it would be good for the US but also good for Formula 1. The United States needs to have Formula 1 and I think F1 needs the US.

**Is it a good idea to re-introduce F1 with a brand-new, purpose-built facility? Would a street race be better?**



That's a tough one. It depends...I looked at the layout at New York (for 2013) and my first take on that was, 'Actually, this is really good!' 3.2 miles in length and, looking at the features of the track, it's really, really good. I have no doubt they will pull that one off, quite honestly; knowing the people involved there I feel very, very confident – I really do – that that one is going to come off. I know that Bernie Ecclestone has been really, really wanting to be in the proximity of New York City. Well, he got it and I think that could really develop into something very, very interesting and I hope it does for many reasons. It's even close to my home, I can drive there (laughs)! That's a good reason for me!

**Sorry to put you on the spot, but we have to ask: Who will win the 2012 world titles?**

(Laughs) Well, you would go for the obvious! But I just don't like to venture into some of those predictions, I've been burned before. Specifically, I don't have just one individual or one team. I like to see the top teams all get their share and, like all the other fans, I obviously like to see a bit of a mix. I'd like to see a resurgence of Ferrari, that is always good and always very strong for motor racing and Formula 1 – and I think you're going to see that.

*Mario Andretti was speaking exclusively to GPUUpdate.net in Pennsylvania*