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Mario Andretti, Lauded by Peers, Receives IMRRC's Argetsinger Award

CORNING, N.Y. (Sept. 1, 2017) – International racing stars, captains of the motorsports industry, local dignitaries and race fans gathered to honor an American racing icon at the Corning (N.Y.) Museum of Glass on Thursday.

Mario Andretti, motorsports' greatest ambassador, was presented with the Cameron R. Argetsinger Award for Outstanding Contributions to Motorsports by the International Motor Racing Research Center. This was the fourth year the glass trophy has been presented. Previous honorees were Chip Ganassi, Richard Petty and Roger Penske.

Andretti was clearly moved by the outpouring of love, respect and admiration from the sold-out audience that included a number of his fellow competitors, friends and fans.

“This is the most amazing evening that I’ve ever spent. I’ve never ever experienced anything like this, ever,” Andretti said after being presented with the Argetsinger Award by IMRRC Governing Council Chairman Bobby Rahal and Peter Argetsinger, one of nine children of the late Cameron and Jean Argetsinger.

Among the salutes throughout the evening were videos from Dan Gurney, Edsel Ford III, Scott Pruett, Linda Vaughn, Don “The Snake” Prudhomme, James Hinchcliffe, Graham Rahal, Alexander Rossi and Bobby Unser.

Ganassi was on hand to honor Andretti, while other past award recipients Penske and Petty congratulated him on the big screen. Master of ceremonies Dr. Jerry Punch interviewed IndyCar star Dario Franchitti and longtime versatile racer Rick Mears in the audience.

Speaker after speaker told stories of being a young fan of Andretti and of the thrill of meeting him years later. Rahal set the stage when he said he was a teenage fan.

“Mario was the man,” he said, continuing, “He’s not just a great driver. He’s a great gentleman. He’s the greatest ambassador for the sport we love.”

Ganassi recalled being an 11-year-old asking Andretti for his autograph when he saw the famous driver having lunch at the Glen Motor Inn in Watkins Glen. Their careers would intertwine.

“Any success I’ve ever attained in the sport, you can draw a direct line back to your mentorship,” Ganassi said.

Franchitti was a fan at an even younger age. He recalled being a 5-year-old, dreaming of someday meeting Andretti. It happened 19 years later at a race track.

“I was so flummoxed, afterwards I pretty much crashed,” he said.

A common thread of attributes was woven throughout the comments from Punch and other speakers: a master of motorsports, a gentleman and a family man, a humble man of high integrity, a man passionate about and committed to the future of racing.

A heartfelt question and answer session between Andretti and Punch followed the award presentation.

Andretti told of his childhood plan to race motorcycles. A plan he thought dashed when his family moved to Nazareth, Pa., as refugees from Italy. But one week after moving to the States in 1959, he and his brother, Aldo, discovered a race track nearby.

His competition career began four years later, racing underage at 19.

“I just wanted to drive and drive and drive,” he told the audience.

Andretti’s debut in Formula One happened at Watkins Glen – on the pole in the 1968 United States Grand Prix. Ten years later he was on the pole again and World Champion.

“I felt so good in the car,” Andretti said about that 1968 start. “It was an amazing day for me.”

Since then, he said, he has raced in four different series at The Glen.

“There is no other track like it,” said Andretti, 77, who’s back at The Glen Sunday, behind the wheel of the American Honda two-seater, leading the field for the launch of the Verizon IndyCar Grand Prix at The Glen at WGI.

Andretti posted victories at virtually every level of motorsports in a career that spanned five decades. He is the only driver in history to win the Formula One Championship, the Indianapolis 500 and the Daytona 500.

“I feel so blessed. I’ve gotten so much out of the sport. You’re living the dream, and I’m still living it,” Andretti said.

When asked how he wants to be remembered, Andretti answered simply: “I’m just a racer.”

The evening was supported by NASCAR, the International Speedway Corp., Watkins Glen International, IMSA, Sahlen’s, Corning Incorporated, Bosch, Firestone and IMRRC Governing Council members Larry Kessler, Bob Newman and Archie Urciuoli. Several sponsor representatives also related stories of their relationships with the legend.

“You’ve been my hero since I was a little kid. It’s an honor to work at Watkins Glen International, knowing that you raced here,” Michael Printup, WGI president, said.

On display in the entry were two cars from Andretti’s history: the 1964 Kuzma Watson Indy roadster he drove in the mid-1960s, owned by Lawrence Auriana, and the John Player Special Lotus 79/1, team car to the Lotus 79 that Andretti drove to his World Championship in 1978, owned by Paul Rego of Regogo Racing. Also on display was the IndyCar two-seater that Andretti now pilots, giving fans a thrill of a lifetime, courtesy of American Honda.

An original painting by famed artist Randy Owens, depicting the iconic cars Andretti drove in his decades-long career, was auctioned at the end of the evening, and a champagne toast and several standing ovations ended the gala evening.

Other event supporters were Honda, Chip Ganassi Racing, Team Penske, Sports Car Club of America, Smithfield Foods, AmeriCarna, Stone Bridge Gallery, Williams Auto Group, the Hilliard Corp., Elmira Savings Bank, Welliver, Corning Automotive Glass Solutions, Lotus WNY, Regogo Racing and Glenora Wine Cellars.

Andretti has supported the work of the Racing Research Center since its opening in 1999. He serves on the Center’s Drivers Council and twice has been chairman of the annual membership campaign.

The Racing Research Center, located in Watkins Glen, N.Y., is an archival library dedicated to the preservation and sharing of the history of motorsports, all series and all venues, through its collections of books, periodicals, films, photographs, fine art and other materials. The IMRRC is a 501 (c)(3) charitable organization.

For more information about the Center's work and its programs, visit www.racingarchives.org or call 607-535-9044. The Center also is on Facebook and Twitter.



Mario Andretti receives the International Motor Racing Research Center's Cameron R. Argetsinger Award on Aug. 31, 2017, from Peter Argetsinger and Bobby Rahal, chairman of the IMRRC Governing Council. (photo by Angelo Lisuzzo)