

Retro: Andretti's '67 Sebring/Atlanta doubleheader

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By Marshall Pruett / Images by LAT



A 50-year-old wave of exhaustion washed over Mario Andretti as he thought back to the time when barnstorming the 12 Hours of Sebring and NASCAR's Atlanta 500 took place on the same weekend.

Sitting in St. Petersburg's Mahaffey Theater, the motor racing icon recalled a manic experience where winning the great Sebring endurance race in the new Ford GT40 Mk IV (*pictured above*) only satisfied half of his responsibilities to the Blue Oval over April 1-2 in 1967.

"The obvious thing is that at the beginning we had a really good weekend going as far as the car being strong enough [to win]," Andretti told *RACER*.

The opening endurance race of the year at Daytona saw Ferrari take the 24-hour race as Ford's armada of older GT40 Mk IIs faltered. The brand's response

with its flowing MK IV would help Andretti and co-driver Bruce McLaren to win by 12 laps...

"But the surprising thing was the Mark IV never raced before; we got licked so bad at Daytona in the 24 Hours with the Mark IIs," the 77-year-old recalled. "So [chief mechanic] Phil Remington, that was his job to create this car aerodynamically, [but] the car was never wind tunneled. We had a short testing [window], but we liked [the Mk IV] right away. And here we are at Sebring and were going up against the Chaparrals, and all of the sudden this thing is working."



Andretti's Sebring win followed his stunning victory for Ford at the Daytona 500 on Feb. 26, 1967 (pictured, No. 11). Outside of his full-time Indy car duties, the legend kept busy with Ford's factory Holman Moody

team in GT40s and a Ford Fairlane stock car, but the April 1-2 experience pushed Mario to his physical limits.

When he wasn't being shaken to death on Sebring's notoriously bumpy road course or turning left and left and left and left on the big Atlanta oval, Andretti was being thrown into airplanes to shuttle back and forth between Georgia and Florida to partake in practice and qualifying sessions.

The non-stop motion took its toll, and with a boiling GT40 cockpit to deal with over 12 hours on April 1, Andretti was cooked by the time he reached Victory Lane.

"Ford is carting us back and forth from Sebring to Atlanta in the same weekend, [and] after the race at Sebring, I was as spent as I had ever been because there was a lot of wind during the race and the air intakes into the cockpit were plugged up, and it was so hot," he remembered with a look of exasperation.



Despite achieving the amazing feat of winning with the Mk IV on its debut with McLaren, Andretti still had one more race to go.

"And then I ran almost 500 miles; I think I blew the right front [tire] in Atlanta," he continued. "It was at 493 miles or something."

Andretti lost out on a chance to score an amazing string of wins from Daytona to Sebring to Atlanta, but the NASCAR loss isn't what stands out after 50 years.

"My wife [and I] were staying at the hotel in Atlanta, and I stayed there till Wednesday!" he said as laughter erupted. "I couldn't even get out of bed! When I went home, my mother cried; my eyes were [sunken] in my head about two inches. I looked like a skeleton."

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