

IndyCar Legends: Andretti Curse or unfinished business? ‘Trying to win it as a family since 1969’ with Mario, Michael, and Marco Andretti

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INDIANAPOLIS, Ind. – You don’t have to be a race fan to recognize the name Andretti.

It’s synonymous with racing and built on multiple generations of champions. Altogether, five members of the Andretti family have raced in the Indianapolis 500. So far, though, only one has brought home a win.

Are they cursed? Our own Rachel Bogle is going straight to the source by sitting down with Mario, Michael and Marco for that answer.

But first, we have to start from the beginning of the Andretti racing story. It began with a little boy named Mario and his twin brother, Aldo, who fell in love with racing while sitting inside an Italian movie theater nearly half a century ago.



[Mario Andretti and brother, Aldo, as children back in Italy](#)

“We used to go to the movies and it would have news reels in between intermission. Movies used to always have intermission for them to let the smoke out,” explained Mario Andretti. “The movie would have news reels of sports or so forth.”

Those news reels full of fast cars and winning moments were what that captured Andretti’s imagination and sparked a lifelong passion for motor racing.

His story personifies the American dream: After fleeing their home town of Montona, Italy, which had fallen under Communist rule after World War 2, Mario’s family spent seven years in a refugee camp. In 1955, they immigrated to Nazareth, Pennsylvania, to start a new life in the United States. At the time, Mario’s father had only \$125 to his name.



Welcome sign in Nazareth, PA

Today, Mario is often referred to as “the greatest race car driver of all time.” He is one of only two drivers ever to win the Indy 500, Daytona 500, Formula One World Championship, and a NASCAR Cup Series race. That list of accolades only scratches the surface of Andretti’s accomplishments as a driver who spent his five-decade-long career traveling the world doing what he loved most.

"When [my dad] won Indianapolis, there was a big parade in our town of Nazareth. And that's I think the first time I started to figure out somethings different here!"

-Michael Andretti

But there’s something about Indy that keeps he and his family coming back for more.

“When you come up underneath the tunnel and you see the museum there, I mean there’s something that still sends chills down your spine. It’s just sacred ground for us race car drivers,” said Michael Andretti.

Mario’s son, Michael, got his start at age 9. The idea was innocent enough, with Mario purchasing a go-kart to try out for fun.

“I said ‘Let’s go do a little testing’ in a parking lot behind the high school and all of a sudden we set up a little course and it seemed like he had been in it forever,” remembered Mario. “[He was] like a duck to water, you know? Then he started racing and he was winning right away.”



Andrettis go 1-2-3 in Milwaukee
(L to R: nephew John Andretti, Michael Andretti, and Mario Andretti)

The wins just kept piling on and Michael grew up to be statistically one of the most successful drivers in the history of American open-wheel racing. He's also seen tremendous success as a team owner, with Andretti Autosport claiming three of the last four Indy 500 victories.

Those would be tough shoes to fill for anyone. That's a fact Michael's son, Marco, quickly found out as a child just starting out in racing while already under the glare of cameras and media. At just a few years old, Marco knew what he wanted to do.

"As a toddler people would ask [if he wanted to follow in his father and grandfather's footsteps]," Marco said. "And I would say, 'Yeah, of course I'm going to be a race car driver. What else would I be?'"

He was around 10 years old when he decided to seriously pursue the sport. But the aforementioned pressure of filling his predecessors' shoes seemed to weigh on him.

"I remember he started out--I think--for the wrong reasons. He started out because he felt like he had to start. And I knew that feeling because I sort of had that feeling when I started out," Michael recalled.



Marco and Michael Andretti back in the "go-karting days"

Right off the bat, Michael could tell his son wasn't having any fun.

"I told him, 'You know, you don't need to be doing this.' And it was almost like he was relieved," Michael said.

Marco took a few months off to think things over before returning to his dad and telling him that he really wanted to go racing. Before that happened, though, Michael made his son promise two things.

"Number one, you're doing it for yourself. You're not doing it for who you are or for me or my dad. And two, you've got to have fun.' At that point, he said 'That's what I want to do. I want to have fun,' and the rest is history," Michael said with a smile.

When Marco came to Indy as a rookie in 2006, the 19-year-old came out swinging and almost won the Indy 500. Fans held their breath as he and his dad sat 1-2 with three laps to go until heartbreak brought Sam Hornish the win in what was—at the time—the second-closest finish in race history.



[Sam Hornish beats Marco Andretti by only 0.0635 seconds in the 2006 Indy 500](#)

Being so close to tasting victory at Indy has to be bittersweet, but is it a burden for the youngest Andretti to go back each year with that memory in the back of his mind?

"Honestly to answer that question the best—and I got really criticized for this-- I was super angry when I finished second because I knew these don't grow on trees, these opportunities," said Marco. "And here we are, my 13th try, and a bunch of podiums but no wins."

So does he still stand by what he said in the heat of the moment after the 2006 race?

You bet.

“As a rookie, it was a great day, but this is one of the places where you’re either first or not. I said that and I still mean it, honestly. That’s why I said it. Unfortunately, here we are trying to win it as a family since ‘69,” said Marco.



Trying to win it as a family since '69: Three generations of the Andretti family at Indianapolis Motor Speedway

“The three of us have been so dominant at this place, but we just need to lead the right lap. We just need a normal Sunday to go right,” he added.

"I think we have a hunger every year after the checkered flag and we didn't win. I wish the race was [that next] Monday, right? You have to wait every year to do it."

-Marco Andretti

But a normal Sunday on Memorial Day weekend hasn't gone right for any of the Andretti family since 1969, when Mario took home the family's one and only win. That naturally brought us to the question that the Andretti's dread, but the fans always wonder.

Is the so-called "Andretti Curse" real?

Well, it depends on who you ask...

"I have no idea. There's been something for some reason why we haven't been able to win. It's definitely in our minds," said Michael. "You always have that black cloud running around on top of our heads... All you can do is you can't wait until the next race to have a shot to shut everybody up and get rid of whatever that is."

On the other end of the spectrum, Mario views things a bit differently.

"You look at the record of us three and the amount of laps that we have led here as a family... To me, I'm looking at results by the amount of laps that we led which means we were here. They knew we were here," he said.

"I don't want to hear about a curse. That was invented by our venerable Tom Carnegie. That's for the spectators. But there's no curse. Believe me, I think it's a blessing actually," he added.



Mario Andretti after winning the 1969 Indy 500

But *what if* this is the year that Marco can finally put another Andretti on the side of the Borg-Warner trophy?

“It would be one of my greatest days in racing,” said Michael. “And that includes all my own wins. If he were to win, it would be unbelievable.”

“If he wins, I’ll do a snow angel right there on pit row, right on the grease!” Mario exclaimed.

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