

UP CLOSE & PERSONAL

Full name: Mario Gabriele Andretti

Birthplace/birthdate: Born in Montona, Italy on February 28, 1940

Current residence: Nazareth, Pennsylvania

Wife: Dee Ann (married November 25, 1961)

Three children: Michael (10/5/62), Jeffrey (4/14/64), Barbra (7/13/69)

Seven grandchildren: Marco, Marissa, Miranda, Isabella, Lucca, Miati, Mario

Two siblings: Twin brother Aldo and older sister Anna Maria

Arrived in US from Italy: June 16, 1955

Became naturalized US citizen: April 7, 1965

Q&A

Do you still feel like you're a part of racing?

I'm definitely still part of racing and loving it. If I didn't, I wouldn't be following it so intensely and studying every series. I still watch every race – Formula One, IndyCar, motorcycles, NASCAR.

If racing had not been your occupation, what would?

A fighter pilot. In 1985, I was invited to fly in an F-15. Since then I've flown in an F-16 and F-111. The only one I haven't been in is the F-18 Hornet which lands on aircraft carriers. That's on my bucket list.

What else is on your bucket list?

I'd like to travel to places I've never been: Prague, Budapest, Russia, New Delhi, Antarctica, Mumbai, Mars.

Favorite movie?

The one I really enjoyed as a kid was *To Please a Lady* with Clark Gable and Barbara Stanwyck. It was about a racer. Actually, the title of the movie in Italy was *Indianapolis*. I was so captivated, completely mesmerized.

Favorite music?

When we were living in Italy, my dad sometimes worked as an extra at the local theater during opera season. When he was hired, we got free tickets up in the peanut gallery. Even as a kid the opera spoke to me. I loved it. Opera was also something we heard all the time on radio; it was quite common in our house. As a result, I have had a lifelong love of the opera.

What is something about you that nobody would guess?

I can sing a number of opera arias from beginning to end in Italian (you'll have to take my word for it).

What is your fondest memory of your grandparents?

Everything they did was festive. They owned a small hotel and restaurant in our town in Italy. Every Sunday the entire family gathered for a special event.

What was your first job?

Working at my uncle Louie's Sunoco gas station in Nazareth, Pennsylvania when I was 15. My brother and I both worked there.

Favorite dessert?

Dark chocolate gelato is bliss.

You're hosting a dinner party for your favorite people. What's on the menu?

I'm grilling veal chops.

How would you define a great friendship?

A confidant. Someone you trust completely. Someone who reinforces your best self. A sounding board, a safety net, someone who is there when you go flat out saying "cliff, waterfall, banana peel, look out!"

What do you most dislike?

I detest cruelty to animals and animal neglect. I also can't stand a mediocre effort, only because it was more convenient to be mediocre.

Any pets?

We've had a Schnauzer, Great Danes, a Basset Hound and a Pug. We've had a parrot named Gonzo for almost 30 years. We had a pot belly pig named Martini who lived in the house for 18 years.

What activities do you enjoy in your pastime?

Flying my ultralight, snowmobiling, playing tennis, water skiing and I used to do quite a bit of motorcycling.

What talent do you wish you had?

Many! I'd like to play saxophone like a cool cat in a smoky jazz club. I'd like to dance like Derek Hough. I'd like to speak six or more languages.

Who would you trade places with for 24 hours?

The Pope

What is your most treasured possession?

My dad's 1987 Ford Bronco.

First car?

My first brand new car was a 1957 Chevrolet. My father bought it for my twin brother and me when we were 17. That car was my love. It was a red two-door, with a white hardtop. We had it until late 1961 when I got married. At that point it had 175,000 miles on it, but it was still a cream puff.

Worst car you ever drove?

A Can-Am car called the Honker II. It was just born wrong, born from the designer's bad dream.

Current personal vehicles?

1987 Ford Bronco II (navy/tan)
2009 Honda CBR10REP9 motorcycle (Repsol orange)
2011 Lincoln Navigator (royal red metallic)
2012 Audi A8L W12 Quattro (ibis white)
2013 Audi Q7 (glacier white)
2014 Lamborghini Aventador (arancio argos)
2015 Chevrolet Corvette Z06 (crystal red)

What do you look for when buying a used car?

I don't buy used cars. And I'm not a collector of vintage or restored cars either.

What is your favorite indulgence?

There is nothing quite like Italian white truffles showered on dishes. They are very highly esteemed, very rare because they are available only a couple of months of the year. Oh, and they're \$2000 a pound!

I'm crazy for....?

I love wristwatches and have more than 100. Not all of them are expensive, but some are really spiffy from way back. I especially love complicated watches, modern and unique.

What puts you in a creative mood?

Putting a big idea into 140 characters to post on Twitter

Which living artist do you most admire?

Bronze sculptor Elie Hazak

Favorite vacation spot?

In 1968 I bought 638 acres in the Poconos and turned it into a family retreat. There's a big house, which was built in 1912 and eight two-bedroom cabins. There's a private lake where we go boating, water skiing, fishing. We have a beach, tennis courts, all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles and an ultralight that I love to fly. It's about 75 miles from my house, which is one reason I stayed in Pennsylvania.

First concert or musical performance ever attended?

When I was about ten years old, I saw *La Traviata* at the Teatro Comunale del Giglio, the main theatre and opera house in Lucca, Italy.

Who were your racing heroes?

Alberto Ascari and Stirling Moss. Ascari was very cool and relaxed. He sat back doing his thing, totally in control of his car. I loved that style. Stirling Moss was an artist, so technical and perfect in his driving technique. When I saw him in the 1955 Mille Miglia I couldn't keep my eyes off of him.

What was the first race you ever saw?

I went to Monza, Italy in 1954. I was 14 years old.

Is it true you inducted Albert Ascari into the Hall of Fame?

Yes, in 1992 I had the great honor of inducting him posthumously into the International Motorsports Hall of Fame. I presented the medal to his son.

Favorite racing sites?

Monaco
Kayalami (South Africa)
Indianapolis
Road America (Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin)

Most memorable racing achievement?

1978 Formula One World Championship

Toughest competitors on the race track?

AJ Foyt, the three Unsers, Jackie Stewart, my son Michael, Niki Lauda, Dan Gurney. They were exceptionally tough, all exceptionally good in my opinion.

Who was the funniest driver you ever knew?

The one guy who could crack me up was Graham Hill. A wonderful British guy with a sense of humor that was so unexpected because he was also so proper. Graham Hill was just genuinely funny. I think he could have been a stand-up comic.

Which single piece of art do you wish you'd created?

La Pietá by Michelangelo

The greatest lesson you ever learned from a child?

An acquired taste for caviar at age 5 will cost a fortune

What six people would you invite to dinner?

I'd invite **Mikhail Gorbachev**. It took a lot of courage for him to stand up against the old regime and become an incredible force in ending communism and changing the politics of Russia. I'd invite **Puccini**, who wrote some of my favorite operas. I'd invite

Michelangelo, Julius Caesar and Lady Gaga. And I'd invite **Ellen DeGeneres** because she is hilarious and a great conversationalist. I'd like to get her assessment of all the other 'cats' around the dinner table.

How would you like to be remembered?

Worked hard, showed respect, fun, generous, ethical, optimistic, genuinely kind, ambitious and passionate about life. Had an interest not only in motor racing, but all of life.

What are your greatest strengths?

Perseverance for sure. I set a goal and don't give up. But also my ability to deal with people. I'm pretty easy going and I don't get upset easily. I'm a team player; always give lots of credit to the team. I don't think everyone on the team has to think alike. Just know how to think.

What is your greatest fear?

Alzheimer's disease

If you had to pick a theme song, what would it be?

Climb Every Mountain

What is your motto?

If everything seems under control, you're just not going fast enough.

What are you most proud of?

That my head always fit on my shoulders and that I took care of my parents. Also, that my wife and I are still together after more than 50 years.

What is your greatest regret?

Ask me again when I'm old. But truly, that my dad never saw the Andretti Winery. When we lived in Italy, he managed seven farms, mostly grapes. He lost everything after the war because the basic doctrine of communism is that the state owns everything. Had he seen the Andretti vineyards in Napa, he may have felt satisfaction, that he had won back what was lost.

You're penning an autobiography. What's the title?

Fairy Tale Ending