

## **Racing Legend Mario Andretti Says a Good Driver Knows How to Adapt**



Photo: Courtesy of Jaime Cody Photography

The most important part of car maintenance is the driver, according to Mario Andretti, and he would know. The racing legend is the only driver in history to have won the Daytona 500, the Indianapolis 500, and the Formula One World Championship. What Michael Jordan is to basketball, Andretti is to racing.

So, who better to explain the importance of proper vehicle maintenance?

When it comes to caring for your car, Andretti explained the importance of following your vehicle's suggested maintenance schedule, not only to maintain peak performance but also to avoid costly repairs down the road. However, the most important factor in vehicle performance, Andretti said, is the driver.

## **Adapting skills**

Consider Andretti's own experience driving both NASCAR, Formula One, and Indy cars at the highest level.

"The skillset of the driver is basically the same but the car is different," Andretti says. "Each racing car has its own characteristics. So it's all about adapting."

He explained that different vehicles need to be handled differently and that a skilled driver will know how to drive to get the biggest advantage out of their car.

"Most F1 drivers would have a tendency to overdrive a NASCAR vehicle because stock cars are slower," he said. "It's the job of the driver to understand the characteristics and adapt."

"A driver has to be skilled enough to be able to get the most out of each car. While it takes the same skill, it's the handling that's different. It's like flying a fighter aircraft (F1) versus a bomber (NASCAR). The IndyCar is driven like a laser. The stock car is heavier and a totally different beast."

## **"Not everyone drives well"**

Obviously, most drivers are not racing drivers, but the principle holds that how well a car operates mostly depends on the person behind the wheel. A good driver knows how best to handle their vehicle, keeps up with routine maintenance, and keeps a watchful eye on the other cars on the road.

"Anyone who has been out on the road knows that not everyone drives well," Andretti says. "Some drivers are aggressive. Others wander into another lane without signaling. Some follow too closely. You can't control what other drivers do but, if you stay focused, you can avoid bad situations."

Andretti recommends a few basic rules for steering clear of irresponsible drivers and staying safe.

"Be courteous. Have good road etiquette. Don't camp out in the left lane," he said. "On a dual highway, unless you're passing, stay on the right side of the road, and don't respond to aggressive drivers — curb your road rage. Be aware of your surroundings, check your mirrors frequently."

## **Keeping it pristine**

When it comes to maintaining your car, Andretti says it's essential to read the vehicle's manual and follow the recommended maintenance schedule. Just as different racing cars have different characteristics, so do the vehicles you see on the road.

“The vehicle is supposed to be operated as it was designed, which is why you have an owner’s manual,” he said.

After the driver, the most important part of the vehicle to maintain is its tires, according to Andretti, “because that’s the part that meets the road.” He said it’s particularly important to pay attention to tire wear and tire pressure. He also stressed the importance of changing the engine oil.

“Keep your car clean both inside and out,” he said, and don’t forget to pay attention to your mirrors.

On his own vehicles, Andretti says, “I like my cars pristine. Always very clean, and I take them to the dealership for the regular service requirements.”

Road trips may not be an option for many this summer, but for anyone who plans on having a long journey in the car, Andretti says, “Make sure your battery is prepared, fluids are at appropriate levels, tires are properly inflated. Make sure you have a spare tire in good condition.”

## **The next generation of vehicles**

As a bona fide racing legend, Andretti knows how cars should be treated, and he’s excited to see how vehicle systems are becoming more sophisticated as new technology emerges. To anyone who loves cars as much as he does, and is interested in a professional auto care career, Andretti has one last piece of advice.

“Go to a good trade school,” he said. “Today’s vehicle systems are more complex than ever. As a result, cars are even more exciting to work on and they’re only getting more and more interesting each year. The proper training can get you familiar with all the newest features, and if that’s what you love, if you thrive on technology, you will enjoy being on top of all the interesting changes and new developments.”

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