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PHOTOGRAPHS
JULIA LAPALME

THE INDY WINS

A.J. FOYT is the only driver to start 35 straight Indianapolis 500s, the first to win it four times (1961, 1964, 1967, and 1977), and the only one to win it in both front- and rear-engine cars. Which win was most important, and what does he recall about each?

"The most important one was 1961, because my dream was always just to qualify for the race, then to be fortunate enough to win it. I battled with Eddie Sachs all day long, and it looked like I had him beat. Then we had a fuel problem in the pits. My fuel rig messed up, they had to go borrow one, and Eddie took back the lead when I had to come back in for fuel. But with a light load of fuel, I was able to run faster than he could, and he wore out his right front tire and had to come in to change tires.

"Being the first four-time winner in 1977 was also very important to me. We ran hard all day, ran out of fuel once, and got way behind. Then I was chasing Gordon Johncock, waiting 'til the end to turn up the boost because I was catching him pretty quick. But he blew his engine right at the end. So we won with both a car and an engine we'd built ourselves. I'm the only man who has ever won Indy by building his own car and his own motor, and then driving the thing himself. I doubt that anyone will ever do that again.

"In 1964 [the last win for a front-engine roadster], it was a pretty easy win, but a terrible race with all the wrecks we had. In '67, the turbine car

Photo by Darryl Norenberg/The Enthusiast Network



Photo by Bob D'Oliva/The Enthusiast Network

[which broke three laps from the finish] had the advantage over everybody, but I chased him hard as I could. It was a hard race all day long, then it rained, and we finished the next day. The most exciting part was the last-lap crash. I was way out in the lead, a lap ahead of second, and something told me to back off down the back straight. Then all the cars wrecked in front of me coming out of Turn Four. I couldn't see through all the smoke, so I pulled it down into second gear and said, well, whoever I hit, I'm going to push him past the finish line. [Laughing.]" —G.W.

(LEFT) A.J. Foyt after winning the 1964 Indianapolis 500.

(Right) Foyt's Offenhauser-powered Trevis gets pushed down pit lane at the 1962 Indianapolis 500.

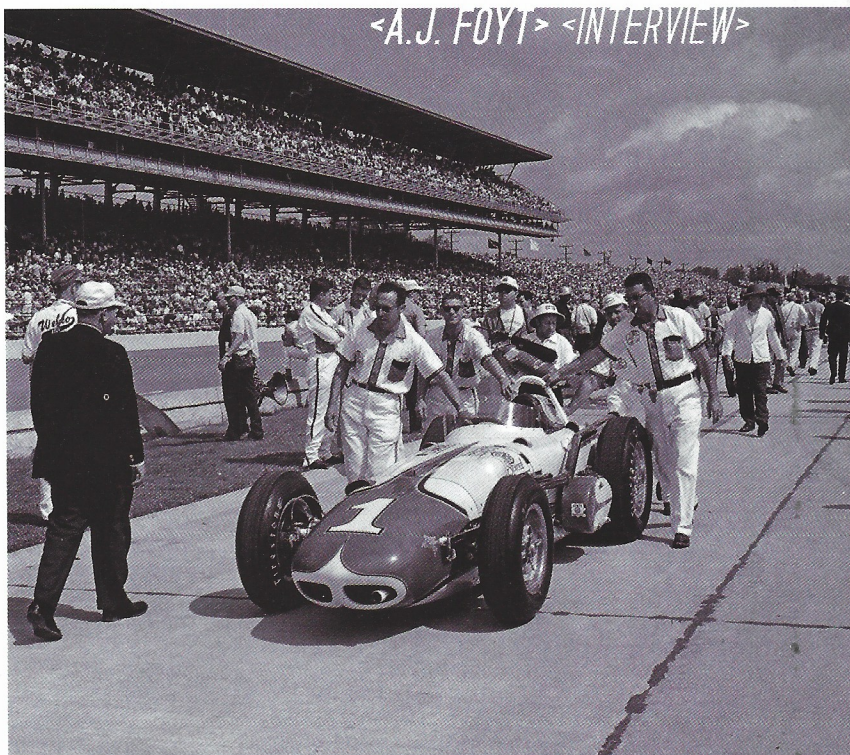
EVERYONE

knows Anthony Joseph (A.J.) Foyt Jr. as a legendary racer with four Indianapolis 500 victories and countless other wins; incredible levels of talent, courage, and determination; and an equally legendary short fuse. But few know the compassionate A.J. who loved and revered his mother and his hyper-demanding "Daddy," Tony. The A.J. who in 1965 offered a rookie Al Unser Sr. his backup car to qualify at Indy after Unser's had blown up. The A.J. who pulled a badly burned Johnny Rutherford out of his crashed car, stayed with him at the hospital all day, then drove him back to his hotel.

Overshadowed by his four Indy 500 wins, a Daytona 500 win, a Le Mans 24-Hour win, a Sebring 12-Hour triumph, and two Daytona 24-Hour victories are his record 35 straight Indy 500 starts (1958-1992); a record 67 wins, 53 poles and seven championships in Indy cars; a record 159 wins and 12 national championships in USAC (United States Auto Club) midgets, sprint cars, stock cars and Indy cars; nine poles and seven wins in NASCAR stock cars; and two IROC (International Race of Champions) titles, among other feats. Not surprisingly, he was named Driver of the Century by an Associated Press panel and ESPN's RPM 2Night.

Yet despite mostly mistake-free driving, he has endured more than his share of pain. In 1965, his stock car's brakes failed at the end of Riverside Raceway's long back straight, and the resulting multiple flip broke his back and heel and bruised his aorta. He might have died had fellow driver Parnelli Jones not arrived in time to clear his airway and coax him back to consciousness. He was badly burned on his hands, face, and neck in a practice crash in his Indy Car at Milwaukee in 1966, then again in a racing wreck at Phoenix the following year. In 1972, he bailed out of his burning, still-moving dirt Champ car at Du Quoin, Illinois, only to have it run over him. That left him with burns again, plus a broken leg and ankle.

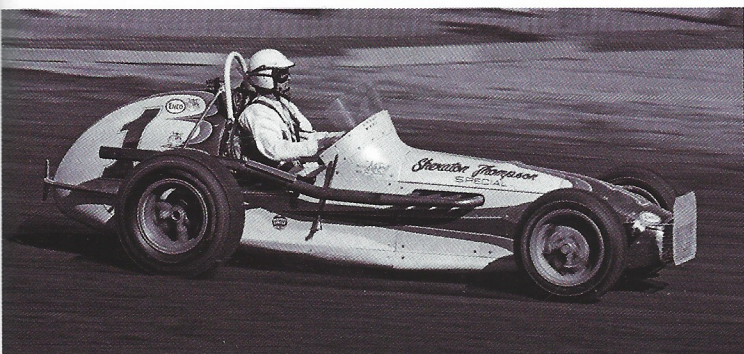
Photo by Ray Brock/The Enthusiast Network



He badly broke (and nearly lost) an arm at the Michigan Indy car race in 1981 and broke two vertebrae in a July 1983 practice crash at Daytona, yet won a sports car race that night. Another bad wreck was a 1990 high-speed plunge into an embankment when his Indy car's brake pedal broke off at the end of the (Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin) Road America road course's fastest straight. It mangled both feet, broke his left knee, and drove his left tibia 12 inches up into his thigh. It took 40 minutes to cut him out of the wreckage while he begged for someone to knock him out to end the excruciating pain. Yet doctors saved that leg, and he was back seven months later to qualify second for the 1991 Indy 500. He broke his left shoulder twice in 1992, in a stock car at Daytona and two months later in an Indy car at Phoenix.

Foyt was born in Houston, Texas, on January 16, 1935, not far from the ranch where he lives today, and he started racing in 1953. As a kid, he worked in father Tony's garage, then dropped out of school to work six days a week, 12 hours a day, as a mechanic at a sports car shop. ("It was the only job I ever had.") He and wife Lucy have three sons, Tony (A. J. III), Jerry, and Larry, and a daughter, Terry.

Since retiring from driving in 1993, he has competed as a team owner in 20 straight Indy 500s (that's 55 consecutive Indy efforts, and counting), and won one with driver Kenny Bräck, plus two Indy car national titles—one with Bräck, another with Scott Sharp. Unfortunately, his litany of medical emergencies and surgeries has continued. It includes, of all things, a brown recluse spider bite, a near-fatal attack by killer bees, a 2006 knee replacement, and a hip replacement shortly after our meeting at the June 2013 Detroit Grand Prix. ("It looks like they stuck a '57 Chevy ball joint up there, then ran a rod down my leg.") He was in pain and seemed less than thrilled about our scheduled interview, yet he graciously granted us some time. We started with his childhood.



At left, A.J. Foyt drives his Offenhauser-powered Meskowski to a second-place finish at the 1965 Golden State 100-Dirt Oval Sprint Car Race in Sacramento. At right, Jody Scheckter (16) leads Foyt into the corner at the 1974 IROC-International Race of Champions race at Riverside International Raceway.



Photo by John Lamm/The Enthusiast Network

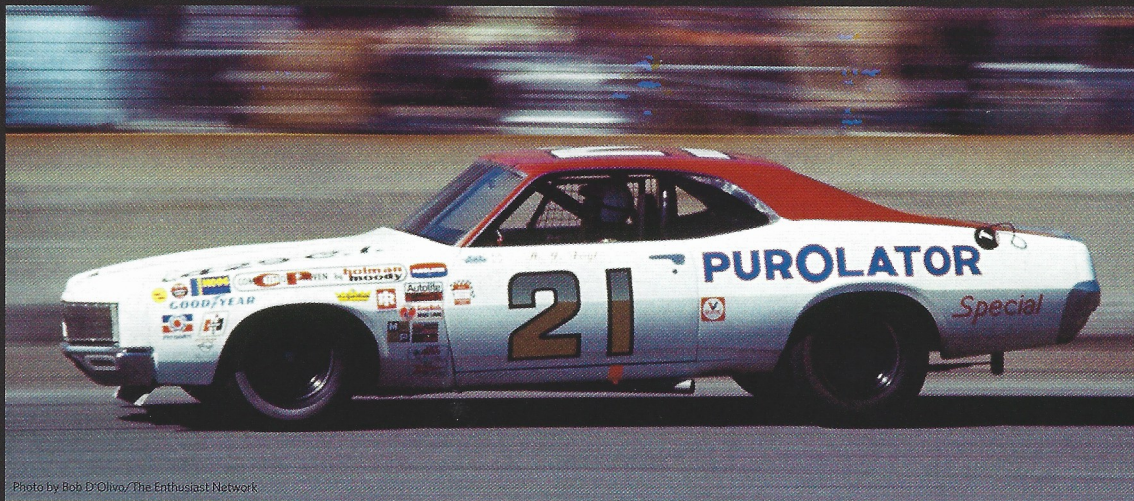


Photo by Bob D'Olive/The Enthusiast Network

ABOVE, A.J. Foyt drives his Purolator '71 Mercury to victory in the 1972 Daytona 500.

THE 24-HOUR WINS

THE ONLY DRIVER to have won the Indianapolis 500, the Daytona 500, and the 24 Hours of Le Mans, Foyt also won the 1983 Daytona 24 Hour co-driving Preston Henn's Swap-Shop Porsche 935 with Frenchmen Bob Wollek and Claude Ballot-Lena. Wollek, himself a legendary sports-car racer, was publicly peeved at Henn's mid-race decision to put oval ace A.J. in his car at midnight in torrential rain. But Foyt turned the race's fastest wet lap, and they won by a large margin, no surprise to anyone who had witnessed Foyt's winning Le Mans 24-Hour effort 16 years earlier co-driving a Ford GT40 Mark IV with Dan Gurney.

In 1966, a bunch of us were hired by Ford Motor Company to go to Le Mans. Then Lloyd Ruby crashed his airplane, Ken Miles got killed at Riverside, Walt Hansgen got killed testing at Le Mans, and I got hurt at Milwaukee, so they lost almost all of their drivers. But I was healed up in '67, and Carroll Shelby wanted me to drive with Dan. I went there as a rookie, and it was super. Ford wanted Dan to start the race and me to finish it—if we were still running—and all the papers came out that we were nothing but rabbits. But we didn't run any harder than we had to, and we led all but 90 minutes.

We ran down the Mulsanne straight at 250 mph, and we didn't have all those nice walls, just trees. There was a wooden bridge called White House Bridge, where it would get really slick, and I liked to have lost it there once real

Photo by John Christy/The Enthusiast Network

A.J. Foyt and Lloyd Ruby drive their GT40 during the night stint of the 1967 Sebring 12 Hour Race.



bad. I came in for one stop at 2:30 or 3:00 in the morning, and they couldn't find Dan. Damn, I was wanting relief! I was hurtin'! But they said, "We can't find him. You've got to get back in." That was in the bad stuff, with all the fog, so he knew what he was doing. Andretti and all those guys crashed about that time. I still give him a hard time about that. He laughed about it and said, "Oh, I was sleeping." But he's a great guy. I think the world of Dan. I was invited back two or three times, but I said, "I went over there as a rookie and won. I don't need to go back." [Laughing.]

At Daytona in 1983, I was in an Aston Martin with Darrell Waltrip and Lyn St. James, and it blew up early. Then Preston Henn came over and said, "I want you to take my place in my car." I said, "Well, I don't really care to." He said, "I'd like you to get in at midnight." I said, "OK, but I've never driven a Porsche." So I sat in Bob Akin's Coca-Cola Porsche, which had already wrecked, to learn how to shift the gears. Then I got in at midnight and co-drove the rest, and we won going away.

I've always liked racing in the rain. It was kind of fun, but you've got to watch what you're doing. The car can get away from you real quick. Any time I ran in the rain, I used to get up out of the groove where there's more traction, and that helped me. The thing I didn't like was running 200 miles an hour at Daytona in all that spray, when you could hardly see. What I did at night was look down at the white lines on the track and hope nobody was in front of me.

What I remember most was, after the race, the press was asking Wollek, "Do you think he's still the driver they said he was?" I didn't know that Wollek had gotten mad that Preston put me in the car, and he said, "Who says he's a champion, who says he can drive a Porsche, blah, blah, blah?" They kept us apart probably because they were afraid I'd knock the hell out of him, which I probably would have. So after the race I heard him say, "Well, I guess he's the champion they say he is." So I asked, "What the hell are y'all talkin' about?" Then they told me he threw a fit and bad-mouthed me when Preston put me in the car. But we became good friends, and two years later we won both Daytona and Sebring together. —G.W.



<A.J. FOYT> <INTERVIEW>

Motor Trend Classic: Were you a troublemaker in school?

A.J. Foyt: I don't think so. I got along with everybody pretty good. But I did get in trouble for fighting. I just didn't put up with nothing. Still don't.

You inherited your love of racing from your dad. Was that an advantage?

Yes, to a point. My daddy had race cars and won a lot of midget races in Texas. He had a garage that I worked in as a kid. He had the stuff, and that's how I started.

Do you remember your first race?

I set a track record at Playland Park in Houston in Red Fondren's midget. I'd run stock cars some before that, but that was my first race in an open-cockpit car. I was 16 or 17.

Your first win?

My first was in stock cars. Then I won some midget races, and modifieds. I had my own Ardun Ford. I went to the Midwest and started running midgets in 1957, then a guy hired me to drive his sprint car.

Of all your wins, is any one your favorite?

Not really. Any race you win -- a little midget race or Indianapolis -- is a win, and you have a lot of fun, and I've been fortunate to win a lot of races. The biggest thing was qualifying for my first Indy 500, back when we had 50 to 75 cars, not like today, and a lot of guys went home. To someday race at Indy was the biggest thing in life that I wanted to do. Then somebody gives you a chance, and then being lucky enough to win it, that was great!

How did you get there?

Money didn't buy you a ride. You had to prove yourself and do it on what people thought of you, mainly the car owners seeing you race. Clint Brawner of Dean Van lines, who won three championships with Jimmy Bryan, watched me run the high banks at Salem, Indiana. If you ran real hard on the high banks, if you were crazy enough to be able to win there, they thought you might be a pretty good Indy driver. That was how I got my break.

About the only thing you haven't won is a CART (Championship Auto Racing Teams) race.

I was one of the founders of CART, but CART cars couldn't run Indy in 1996, the first year after the split with IRL. So I told them, "Kiss my ass, I'm out of here." Then we had a big lawsuit against them...Penske, Ganassi, and the whole board. I said, "I just want my franchise money back, because I'm going to run Indy." They said, "No, we want you to run the Michigan 500 on the same day."

There was an early IRL race where USAC screwed up the scoring. You said your drivers finished first and second, but they said Arie Luyendyk had won. And you famously slapped Arie and pushed him into a bed of flowers when he showed up in the Winner's Circle.

We were supposed to be two laps ahead, but they messed it up. I said, "I have the trophy, and I intend to keep it." Then we came back the next year and won again.

We recall you jumping out of your car and working on it yourself at one Indy 500.

The only time I worked on my car before a start was when Kevin Cogan was on the front row with me and Mario, and he lost control at the start and hit me and bent my steering arm. They stopped the race and allowed us to repair our cars before the restart, and we changed the steering arm. Then I led the race for 30 or 40 laps until I came in for a pit stop, and I couldn't get it out of gear. I was trying to get it out of gear.

OTHER VOICES

THROUGHOUT HIS LONG AND STORIED CAREER, A.J. Foyt has been known as much for his hot head as for his intense competitiveness and brilliant driving skills. Yet those who know him best also know him as a compassionate man who would do almost anything for a friend.

"I felt that A.J. helped me step up my game. When I broke into Indy cars as a rookie, he was five years older and at the top of his game, the yardstick at the time. If you were going to win any race, you had to deal with him. In that respect, he was also an inspiration to me.

"The thing that I respected most about him was that I never, ever worried about him doing anything stupid on the racetrack. A.J. was one of the best in the business to race against because he was always correct. As hotheaded as he could be when he was out of the race car, in the race car, he was totally calculating, no foolishness. Sometimes we were cross with one another on a personal level, but we didn't have any meaningful differences.

"A.J. was a very smart racer, and very versatile, because he loved racing, and that's what I did as well. Seeing what he was doing gave me an incentive to try to do him one better. Leading up to a champ car race, we would be running midgets on Friday, sprints on Saturday and champ cars on Sunday. You don't drive all those different disciplines unless you truly have a passion for driving, and he certainly did. He was one of those rare breeds in our sport who made a mark that is very, very special."

Mario Andretti

"Racing against A.J., you could trust him on the track. You could count on him not to put you in an extra-dangerous situation. As blustering and threatening as he might seem, he was fair and square on the racetrack. Which didn't mean he wasn't racing hard. He was.

"He was called 'Super Tex' and 'Cassius.' Cassius Clay, who became Muhammed Ali, had a great way with words, and A.J. was at least his equal. He could talk to captains of industry in a way that they couldn't help but like him. In the corporate automobile business, you have a lot of egos and big-time politicians, and A.J. could play them like a violin. He had rich friends whose respect he earned. And, like Cassius, A.J. could back it up. He wasn't just a windbag; he was very, very good, a genuine superstar. Forget driving for a moment; in terms of engineering, he was very cutting edge and knew what was going on.

"A.J. was also an excellent politician. I didn't always agree with him and his positions, but he was very accomplished in racing politics. And he managed a lot of difficult situations between Goodyear and Firestone. If you weren't on top of your game, those relationships could be big pitfalls, and he managed to pull them off.

"When we co-drove the Ford Mark IV at Le Mans, the perception was that we were the least likely to succeed. That was my 10th attempt there, and his first, so he said, "Dan, you set things up." I did, and we had the car working really well. And when he realized that it was easy for him to go the same speed I was going, I think he relaxed and decided that we were going to try to prove that all the people who thought we were the least likely to succeed were wrong. It was a great, smooth partnership."

Dan Gurney



Your last Indy 500 was in 1992. Did you know you were going to retire?

No. I came back when my legs healed up and qualified second in 1991—then got knocked out by flying debris from an accident—and finished ninth in 1992. The next year is when I quit. It was Pole Day in '93, we had been turning laps over 225 mph that morning, and I came in. Then Robby Gordon hit the wall for the second time in my other car. I said, "I can't drive and be the car owner that a young driver needs." Everybody said, "But we're quicker than anybody. We're going to win the pole." But I said, "I quit." And I haven't sat in an Indy car since.

You had some wrecks that tore you up pretty badly.

I got burned pretty bad at Milwaukee, but my most serious wrecks were mechanical failures, both of them brakes, on road courses. Riverside was in a stock car. Gurney was leading with five or six laps to go, and when I got to the end of the back straightaway, something fell off, and I had nothing. I elected to go down in a hole in the infield and flipped. Parnelli came along and cleaned my mouth out when I was trying to breathe. Super guy, and a great race driver.

Elkhart Lake was the other bad one. I went to go under Dominic Dobson in Turn 1, the fastest turn, and pushed the brake, and the brake pedal broke off. I was hoping to get into the sand pit, but the car got airborne, cleared it and went through an embankment down by the river. They were going to amputate my left leg.

After your fourth Indy 500 win, Tony Hulman rode around in the pace car sitting up on the rear deck with you. He had never done that before.

I hadn't realized how much weight he had lost, and he was weak. He said, "Hold onto me," so he wouldn't fall off. He was sicker than most people knew. Four or five months later, someone was giving me a welcome-home dinner, and he was coming in for that. But he had to go in the hospital, and he had an aneurysm and died.

Whom did you like as a co-driver in endurance races?

Dan Gurney. I got along with him. And Bob Wollek. He bad-mouthed me before I drove the car at Daytona, but we got past that and became great friends.

BELOW, Sam Sessions (number 67) in an Eagle 804 drives on the inside of A.J. Foyt in a Coyote 70 at the 1968 52nd Indianapolis 500. At right, Foyt sits in his Ford-powered Coyote awaiting the start of the 1969 53rd Indianapolis 500.



A.J. Foyt stands amidst the chaos of an active garage at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway during May. Foyt's ABC Supply Racing car driven by Takuma Sato qualified 23rd and finished 19th in the 98th running of the Indianapolis 500.

<A.J. FOYT> <INTERVIEW>



I'VE HAD A GOOD LIFE AND NO REGRETS. COMING FROM WHERE I DID, I WOULDN'T CHANGE ANYTHING.

What was the transition like from front- to rear-engine cars?

The front-engine car was heavy in front and had much heavier steering, so the steering wheel was probably three times as big. We had 16-inch tires on the front and 18s on the rear of the roadster, and those tires were real hard. On the rear-engine cars, you had 15s all around. You kind of slid halfway down into those, but that didn't bother me. The rear-engine car's handling was altogether different. You had to watch it, but if you're a race driver, you don't let the back end get away from you. I just tried to keep the ass end under me all the time.

In 1976, you let Janet Guthrie practice in your car to show that she was faster in it than in her own car.

She was getting up to speed, but Mr. Hulman wanted her to go out in one of my backup cars, so we elected to let her do that. As good as she ran in stock cars, I'd have to rate her as one of the top lady drivers that ever came along.

Of all the different kinds of cars you've raced, which was most fun?

A sprint car on a half-mile dirt track

In 1987, you set a speed record in the Oldsmobile Aerotech.

Dave Girard put that deal together, a super guy. Ed Welburn [now GM's VP of Global Design] designed the car, and he liked to s**t when I cut the fenders open, but it wouldn't run fast until I did. He said, "We spent over \$1 million on this car!" I said, "We've got to let the air out more." I drove it 267 mph at Fort Stockton, Texas, and the flying mile was 290 or something, with a little bitty under-2-liter motor. And that track wasn't a racetrack. It was a big tire-test oval with no guardrails...not a good track to run that kind of speed. And we had to run it backwards, because you had to run one way, then the other way within an hour for the record to count.

We heard you almost drowned a while ago when you were clearing some land next to a pond in a caged bulldozer.

I was doing some dozing work on my land, and the side of the bank fell off and I went upside down into the water. Everybody wanted to know how I got out. I said, "Well, I needed some air."

Anything you would like to do differently if you had a do-over?

No. I've had a good life and no regrets. Coming from where I did, I wouldn't change anything. I had fun in my day, I won my share of races, and I totally enjoyed it. Now I'm through, we're running a team, we've been able to win a couple of races, and I'm turning it over to my son Larry. I'm just kind of in

