

Life on and off the racetrack:

Insights gained at speed

By Joe Sage | Photos by Randall Bohl

Four celebrated race drivers, each of whom won the Indianapolis 500 over a four-decade span, took the stage at the Arizona Biltmore on Saturday, January 23, for a roundtable discussion hosted by the Arizona Concours d'Elegance the day before that event.

The event tied in with the buzz surrounding this year's 100th running of the legendary Indianapolis 500 Mile Race in May. The Indianapolis Motor Speedway opened in 1909 and held the first Indianapolis 500—the "Greatest Spectacle in Racing"—in 1911. The race has been held every year since, except during the world wars. The historic 100th running will take place on May 29.

Combined, the four drivers on the panel have won the great race seven times. Four historic Indy cars from the Speedway's Hall of Fame Museum and three from private collections were on display, as well as the Borg-Warner Trophy with the sculpted faces of every winning driver on its surface.

The gathering of Indy car legends also served as a preview for the sport's return to Phoenix International Raceway in 2016. Following an 11-year absence, the Verizon IndyCar Series will contest the Phoenix Grand Prix at PIR on April 1-2.

Meet the roundtable winning drivers:

TOM SNEVA, the 1983 Indy 500 winner, is a former Spokane schoolteacher and the first to clock an official lap at Indianapolis over 200 mph, in 1977. He now lives in Paradise Valley AZ.

ARIE LUYENDYK, two-time Indy winner in 1990 and 1997, is a Holland native now living in Fountain Hills AZ. Luyendyk has held the Speedway's official one-lap (237.498 mph) and four-lap (236.986 mph) speed records since 1996.

DARIO FRANCHITTI, three-time winner in 2007, 2010 and 2012, is a Scottish native who is also a four-time Verizon IndyCar Series champion from 2007, 2009, 2010 and 2011, before his retirement following the 2013 season.

RYAN HUNTER-REAY, winner of the

2014 Indy 500 and 2012 Verizon IndyCar Series champion, a Florida native, is the only driver ever to record wins in IndyCar, CART, Champ Car, American Le Mans Series and Grand-Am. He drives for Andretti Autosport in the Verizon IndyCar Series.

• Indy champs Johnny Rutherford, who won the 500 three times in 1974, 1976 and 1980, and Eddie Cheever, who won in 1998, were on the roster, but were caught up in an East Coast blizzard.

LYN ST JAMES: Panel moderator Lyn St. James raced seven times in the Indianapolis 500, was one of seven women to ever qualify, and in 1992 was the first female Indy 500 Rookie of the Year. She has two wins at the 24 Hours of Daytona, a win at the 12 Hours of Sebring, and has raced in the 24 Hours of Le Mans and the 24 Hours of Nürburgring, where her team placed first and second in class in 1979. St James founded the Women in the Winner's Circle Foundation in 1994 and is a motivational speaker living in Phoenix.

"We've assembled a terrific group of winners of the Indy 500 from different eras with unique stories," St. James said. "They're bright, they're interesting and they're diverse. This is an opportunity to delve into the personalities of the people who drive these exciting race cars."

Here is a sampling of the tales the five shared.

Ryan Hunter-Reay with the Andretti Autosport 2014 DHL Honda-Dallara DW12 he drove to Victory Lane in the 2014 Indianapolis 500, part of a seven-car display on the lawn of the Arizona Biltmore for the Third Annual Arizona Concours d'Elegance—four from the IMS Hall of Fame Museum and three from private owners.



LYN ST JAMES: QUESTION: *Indy is all about tradition—the kissing of the bricks, the drinking of the milk, the Borg-Warner Trophy. How do you feel about those rituals after all the intensity of the race?*

RYAN HUNTER-REAY It's an honor to me just to be on the stage with these guys. As a kid, it was always IndyCar for me. It was the fastest, and these guys might as well be wearing capes on their backs. Just to have the opportunity to drive these cars, to be in the Indy 500, to have a shot at winning, I'm just so proud of the whole thing. It was an amazing fight to the finish, a dream come true. And to have my family there with me—it didn't hurt that we had a kid in a matching firesuit. He got more PR points than I did.

DARIO FRANCHITTI: When you show up at these things, there are a lot of forms to fill out, and here's yet another—if you win, what kind of milk would you like? I told the lady give me 20-year-old yak's milk, and I'm fine with that. But they chill it, make it very, very cold, and it tastes great. (I think I went with 2%).

ARIE LUYENDYK: I don't understand why you throw it over your head. That's nasty.

FRANCHITTI: I did that only because I was told you're supposed to. Then I had the suit on for the whole press conference. That suit has never been washed, and now it's on a mannequin.

TOM SNEVA: I just remember it being real cold, and you're pretty excited at that time, so the milk tasted awfully good, but that was before kissing the bricks, so I haven't tasted the bricks.

FRANCHITTI: The bricks don't taste very good. I drank the whole bottle and said to the guy, can I have another one? He said no. But there's a cooler full of them still. No, that's for so and so, that's for so and so. But you do keep the bottle.

LSJ:Q: *The Borg-Warner Trophy started in 1936. I looked at the likeness of each of you, and it's good that they put the names on it.*

HUNTER-REAY: I remember going to Indy, all the way through karting and lower formulas. At

Moderator Lyn St James (left) shared stories with Indy 500 champs (right, from top) Tom Sneva, Arie Luyendyk, Dario Franchitti and Ryan Hunter-Reay.

the museum, you always look at this trophy. It's almost like it's unobtainable, the pinnacle of motor-sports. Even in a dark room, it's lit by a spotlight.

SNEVA: I guess I'm the only one on it with glasses. I was before we each got a Baby Borg. I was a little disappointed. The one they did give us was sort of a mini-half on a piece of plywood, and the plywood is starting to warp.

FRANCHITTI: It's an amazing trophy, the likenesses, go see if it you get a chance.

LSJ:Q: *In open wheel, your helmet is the only thing they see. It's a personal thing, but sometimes a sponsor thing. And yours?*

FRANCHITTI: Mine was always the same basic design. When I came to America, I made it a little more interesting but the same design. The only time I didn't wear a helmet with that design was one Indy qualifying in 2009 where Target had a competition for kids to draw a helmet. Even as a Scotsman, I wouldn't trade mine even if you offered me more money. It's very personal to me.

LSJ:Q: *What's your favorite era? The one you're in? One you haven't been in?*

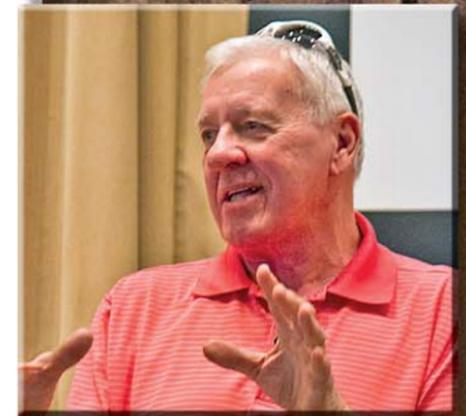
LUYENDYK: Crikey... that's tough...

FRANCHITTI: Let's be honest—all of them. Well, late '90s IRL cars were pretty ugly. Today's car is not particularly a good-looking car, but having driven them, they haul ass. I don't think these guys get enough recognition for the level of competition and the risks they take out there. The competition now, particularly in the Indianapolis 500, is as good as it's ever going to be.

HUNTER-REAY: The early to mid-'90s. I remember pressing my cheek up against the fence at Miami for the first time, and that was it.

SNEVA: I go back farther, but I think the '60s and '70s were really interesting times. There was a variety of equipment, and I could bring just about anything to the Speedway. You saw a lot of unusual stuff. I look back now and wonder, what were these guys thinking? Safety was not high on their list. The Speedway then would have 60 to 70 cars trying to qualify for 33 spots, and qualifying was pretty exciting. Today, the poor drivers have to go out a half dozen times to try to qualify.

HUNTER-REAY: Racing is always evolving, but you're still dealing with a racetrack with a concrete wall and a fence that only goes so high, so you can only go so fast. At some point, the tracks are going to have to keep up with the cars, and we're going to have to have some type of



change. We've discussed hundreds of ideas.

LUYENDYK: They try to deal with it by taking away downforce, then something happens and they have to put downforce back on the car. For the guys who make the rules, it's a very tough job, with what they have available to them, which is too much, basically.

SNEVA: They've figured out close racing is more exciting from a spectator standpoint, so they make the cars pretty equal and keep speeds down. We're just in the entertainment business, and there are so many forms of sports entertainment, you have to try to make yours more fun to watch.

LUYENDYK: As a driver, we all hate pack racing. It's so horrible to be involved in. You're just sitting there, you're driving 220, the guy next to you is doing that, the guy next to him is doing that, it's like highway traffic. The fans love it, but drivers hate it. IndyCar is stuck with this problem.

FRANCHITTI: With pack racing, you're not in control of your own destiny.

LUYENDYK: Back in the day, it was more mechanical. Today it's a data-driven sport. Your engineers are so focused on what's happening on the car, all the sensors, how the car reacts to changes.

LSJ:Q: Are you friends or competitors?

FRANCHITTI: I was very much from the European school, where your teammate is your biggest competitor, and so are the rest of the guys, and you just lived in your own bubble. I came to the US with that mindset. All these guys became a catalyst for hanging out together. We became really good pals off the track, but on the track you were very much racing against your pals, for bragging rights afterward.

LUYENDYK: Europeans always embrace

the US way. It's just a better working environment, not that cutthroat. You can be mates and buddies off the track and still drive hard on the track. I think the US way comes from being on the oval. You don't play games. Going into a corner together at 230, you don't show off. You have more respect for each other racing on ovals. On a road course you do show off a little bit, try to intimidate.

FRANCHITTI: I've never done that.

LUYENDYK: On the ovals, you don't mess with each other, or you end up in the grandstands.

LSJ:Q: So who's your fiercest competitor?

HUNTER-REAY: Anyone you have a season-long championship fight with.

LUYENDYK: You can be fighting one year, then the following year you're laughing at him or he's laughing at you. It depends upon so many factors. So much depends on your car, as well.

SNEVA: Mario Andretti gave it all he could, every lap, every corner, every day....

ST JAMES: My rookie year, I was trying to understand how to do an oval. I rode with Mario, and he never took the same corner the same way twice. I was never sure if that was his style or he was just messing with me.

LUYENDYK: He was just messing with you.

LSJ:Q: With the travel and danger involved, it's difficult to have a family...

HUNTER-REAY: I'm thrilled that I can share this with my kids. My son may not remember the moment, but it's made for some great memories. I just hope they're not race car drivers when they grow up. At some point, I will get him in a go-kart or something. I have to share my love of motorsports. But I hope he does something else

with his life. It's hard on the family to watch. Dario has said he didn't realize till he retired, sat in the stands and watched, and thought, that's nuts.

LUYENDYK: I get nervous for the guys I coach. I know when you hit the wall how hard you can hit and how bad it can hurt. When it's your kid, it's even worse. On the ovals, I'd stand in the pits with my knees just shaking when Junior was racing, with all that pack racing going on.

FRANCHITTI: My dad started the whole thing, and my brother drives, too, driving a little Ford GT this year, so my poor mom. Her thing was always to do the ironing and watch the races on TV. She's a great ironer. I remember I had an accident in Michigan, flipped in the air. I got to the medical center, and my parents were standing there. They looked 100 years old, and I felt terrible. Whether family or friends, it's tough.

ST JAMES: I had a bad crash, then found out my mom lit a candle every race and didn't blow it out till the race was over. I didn't know that till I retired. I said wow, mom, that's a lot of candles.

SNEVA: It's important to give family the opportunity, but they've gotta take it from there. The more things kids are exposed to, the better off they are. They get opportunities and make decisions and decide what they want to do.

FRANCHITTI: Mom never came to the Speedway till I retired. It was the first time I had ever walked through Gasoline Alley and looked at the crowd. Usually you try not to focus on the fact there are all these people there. So for her, it was the first time, but really for me, too.

ST JAMES: I only let my mom go to one race. She said, "I heard those guys talking—they're out to get you." I said, "I'm out to get them. Go away."

LSJ:Q: Do you have advice you would give to your young self?

LUYENDYK: Be more serious. At first, you're more playful, it's kind of cool to be a race car driver. Be more serious with your trade.

HUNTER-REAY: Coming out of go-karts, I would have been better, moving into cars, to get a handle on vehicle dynamics sooner and the setup. I didn't really saturate myself on the engineering side till three or four years into the cars. At times I would go fast, but I didn't know why, this change or that change. I was going more by the seat of my pants and natural talent.

FRANCHITTI: Good and bad, I learned from every experience. So just go with it. You learn from every situation. Some of the difficult things, you think this is terrible, but they all pass eventually.

SNEVA: I would be more patient. You're so competitive, and you expect so much out of yourself, you expect that out of everybody in your team or organization. Obviously I wasn't too good at that, because I was the only guy who's ever won two national championships in a row and got fired for it.

LSJ:Q: What are your favorite experiences outside of racing?

HUNTER-REAY: There are so many experiences, being on Letterman twice, all the promotional side of it. I spent a few days on an aircraft carrier off the coast of California. There are so many they'll keep coming to me, but it all goes with the thrill and being lucky enough to drive in motorsports.

LUYENDYK: The fans are really great, you run into the same fans and there is so much passion on their part, it's really amazing. Getting invited to drive in historic racing car events. Last year, we went to the Festival of Speed with all the Indy winners, 33 cars lined up on the hill at Goodwood.

FRANCHITTI: You get to meet so many incredible people from all walks of life. I could have never met so many people and got to be friends too.

LSJ:Q: Do you have any favorite cars, not racing? Do you collect?

SNEVA: I drove a restored '61 Corvette here. I have an '81 Buick, maybe the worst pace car ever. I think they just cut the roof off, didn't strengthen the frame, it just rattles like crazy. My wife didn't want all that pace car stuff on the side, so she had it taken off. Now I have a white Buick convertible.

LUYENDYK: I'm a Porsche guy. Dario, too. We should open a museum.

FRANCHITTI: You know people say if they won the lottery, they could never spend that money? I could spend it in one day on cars. If I bought just one car, I'd love a Ferrari 275 NART Spider.

LSJ:Q: What's your favorite place besides the racetrack?

FRANCHITTI: I had a beautiful stone house in Europe, but I had to sell it. The heating bill you would not believe. The tanker truck came so much, I had to have the driveway reinforced. I'd like to move back to Scotland. It's home.

SNEVA: We built the 500 Club here about 1989. I figured if I was going to be in the golf business, I needed to have the world's fastest golf cart, so I put in a 750 Yamaha with a 5-speed, nitrous, 6-point harness and a roll cage. You need a parachute in back to slow it down.

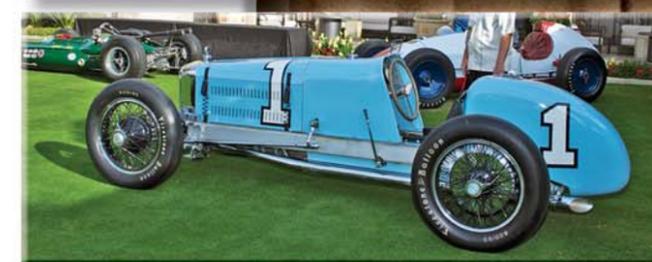
HUNTER-REAY: For me, living in south Florida, it's easy to go over to the Bahamas and back; by boat it's a 2-hour drive.

Q&A: How do you feel about coming back to PIR? Have you tested?

HUNTER-REAY: I'm a huge fan of coming back to Phoenix. It's one of my favorite forms of racing—short oval racing. Behind the wheel of an Indy car, it doesn't get much better than that. I'm really psyched to see this change on the schedule. I haven't been there since a road course in 2001.

LUYENDYK: It's a great track. The track has been changed, since we drove it. Turn 2 was a lot tighter, they've opened that up. When you open up a corner, you can just go in a lot harder, because you have so much more room at the exit, I think you guys are capable of going flat there now. ■

Indy 500 race cars on display at the Concours from the IMS Hall of Fame Museum included the Lotus Ford on facing page and (top to bottom below) | a 1914 Duesenberg driven at Indy by flying ace Eddie Rickenbacker (who later owned the track) in 1914 to a 10th place finish. | 1925 Miller Junior Eight, the first front-wheel-drive car to race in the 500, driven to a second-place finish by Dave Lewis in 1925 at an average speed just over 100 mph. | 1955 SAC Fire Bird Special, built from a 1950 Kurtis-Kraft KK3000 but with a Boeing gas-turbine engine, for promotional laps at the 1955 Indy 500. | Three others from private owners included Ryan Hunter-Reay's Andretti Autosport 2014 DHL Honda-Dallara DW12 shown on this feature's opening page, plus (continuing below) | a 1978 Norton Spirit Penske PC-6, owned by Tom Malloy, in which Tom Sneva was the first to exceed a 200 mph four-lap average (202.156 mph) during qualifying; he qualified on the pole but fell eight seconds short of the win. | Domino's Pizza-liveried 1990 Lola-Chevrolet Ilmor known as The Hot One, from Arie Luyendyk's personal collection, was backup to the one Luyendyk drove to victory in the 1990 Indy 500.



This Type 34 1964 Lotus Ford quad-cam V8 Indy race car, a project under Dan Gurney, Lotus chief Colin Chapman and Ford Motor Company, qualified on pole position with Jim Clark at the wheel in 1964, but a tire failure and suspension damage took it out of the race. The Borg-Warner Trophy, displayed in the Arizona Biltmore lobby.

