

oneeleven*life*

tasty digital bits for Lotus enthusiasts | November 2007



## Tim and Kate Hanni - Andretti Winery – *Life in the Fast Lane of the Napa Valley*

*Mario Andretti was kind enough to set time aside for an interview with Sector111. We sent Master of Wine, Tim Hanni and his wife, Kate to meet with the man himself.*

The day my wife, Kate, and I were scheduled to interview Mario Andretti for this article also was my “custody” day to drive our Lotus Elise. I had just put on the hard top on the car this very morning. The official putting-on-of-the-top signifies the end of summer for me. I love having the top off. You know the wind-in-your-hair kind of thing. But also love the ominous, lurking looks of the car with the hardtop on. Befittingly, it was a cloudy and very cool day just after some early showers had pushed through the valley. Not good news for the vintners who had Cabernet Sauvignon and other late-ripening grapes still hanging on the vine.

Kate had been ambivalent about getting a sports car until we took delivery of our car in March of 2005, after over a year on the waiting list. She had no idea what all the hoopla was about. I, on the other hand, am a seasoned Lotus fanatic. At age 10, I sat in a Lotus Elan at the 1962 Miami International Auto Show. I was so smitten with the extraordinary feel of the car that I vowed to own one someday. Ten years later, I had my own 1967 Elan that I drove (and very often had to push) around from 1972 through 1978. The car played a serious part in my young adulthood. But I won't get into that...

We were scheduled to meet Mario at the nearby Andretti Winery. Being in the wine business and owning a Lotus, I have always wanted to meet him - the racing legend and winery proprietor. My other hope was that he would autograph our car seeing as he won the 1978 Formula One championship in a Lotus. The time was nigh.

I “put on” the Elise (a fitting way to describe getting my 6'1", 220 pound frame into the cockpit) and drove the 3 miles from my house to the Andretti Winery. We arrived amid an amazing buzz of activities. As we walked around the winery and across the terrace of the Villa we spotted Mario out in the vineyards with a film crew. Visitors were swarming in and out of the tasting room. Nearby there was loud talk and laughter from the lunch being served in the large Villa room for the crews and support teams. There were a couple of unmarked semi rigs jammed in around the winery facility and a huge, black BBQ rig was bellowing sweetly perfumed smoke in preparation for the Andretti Wine Club Harvest Celebration Dinner. We finally got our chance and guided Mario past the autograph and photo seeking crowd and headed for the garden.



Now it was our turn for photos, autographs and an interview. Life has its rewards.

It becomes immediately apparent that Mario Andretti is a man of pride, passion and deep commitment to his family. As we talk, our conversation has more twists and turns than the stretch of Highway 121 that runs through the mountains from Napa to Lake Berryessa. Turns out it is the favorite local road for both of us. We talk about wine, racing and a mutual love for Lotus automobiles, friends and family.

I start with a pretty predictable question taken from my copy of Wine Interviewing for Dummies; where did your interest in wine start?

“I’ve been fortunate to have traveled over the world and at the level that I’ve been traveling, I’ve had the opportunities to taste some great wines,” he starts. “I was a youngster back in the 70’s and I could understand Italian and French wines.

“But I was not one to really delve into it wines beyond that. Then I would find that I’m in a place like South Africa and you go to a great restaurant, you look at their wine list and somebody pops in with ‘why are you ordering French wines when we have great South African Wines?’ And all of a sudden you think differently. You are exposed to different things. It’s always like a work in progress.”

"I've reached a level now where I have my preferences, for sure, but any given day I might enjoy a wine that is outside the box. What I truly enjoy, beyond my appreciation of wines, have been great conversations. I always find that, for some reason, people who appreciate great wines, just have a greater dimension, they just have greater conversation, just somehow have something to me that is above the rest. Ultimately I just consider wine one of the beautiful things in life, that's what it is. You savor it in so many different ways."

Kate chimes in, "That's so beautifully put. When you say 'outside the box,' what do you mean?"

Mario responds, "For instance I'm not particularly fond of Zinfandels, and yet our Winemaker, Bob Pepi has been so awesome for me because his expertise is so great. In the beginning I was always so intimidated by his knowledge and I felt I always asked stupid questions. What the hell, I mean if I'm stupid, I'm stupid. That's how I'm gonna learn. So I asked the questions. He and I really agree on the styles of wine and what we prefer and we've had certain requests for Zinfandels so we've said let's have it, so we got this mix Zinfandel and the Italian grape Primativo. It's pretty damn good! That's what I mean outside the box for me. I don't have an absolute preference for Syrahs, That's not my palate. But will I enjoy it? Yes, occasionally, and that's what I mean by outside the box for me."

Kate asked, "What's outside the box for you in racing? Or do you have an outside the box?"

Mario says, "In racing, outside the box was getting into stock cars.

Outside the box for me is doing something that is not my specialty. My specialty was open wheel; [so] outside the box is sports prototypes. I've done a lot of outside the box stuff in my sport, but the oddest part for me was stock cars which I enjoyed to some degree. But there was no way I would have derived the satisfaction out of just driving Indy cars, Formula One or sports prototypes all my life. I appreciate a certain amount of finesse in driving that doesn't totally apply to a stock car. They require different skills levels and a different approach. They are different cars and they are not precise."

I ask, "Kind of like different approaches to wine? Some people go for intense, heavy-hitting styles and others look for more finesse."

"Yeah, that's a great analogy," he says. "It's like if you're trained as a fighter pilot you aren't going to totally appreciate flying a bomber."

My next question to Mario had to do with thinking outside the box in terms of wine and moving beyond his early Europe-centric values; "I heard a rumor that Ken Tyrell introduced you to Napa Valley wines. Is that right?" I was thinking to myself, "who better to introduce anyone to outside the box, seeing that Ken Tyrell turned the automotive engineering world on its ear with the six-wheeled P-34 race car."

Mario responded, "It's very true. I've told this story many times and it was very meaningful moment for me. We are in Newport Beach just at the eve of the Grand Prix of Long Beach 1976. I'm dining with a very international group and I'm hosting a table with a Frenchman, a Belgian, a Brit and me, the Italian. I'm ordering French wine which to me was the safest thing to do.

Ken Tyrell says 'Mario what are you doing ordering French Wine when we are in California?' I said, 'you do us the honors then.' And what I learned was that he was quite the connoisseur. He loved the American wines, so that's another fact that piqued my curiosity and told me that I needed to learn what's going on in the Napa Valley."

"So you tried them and liked them?" Kate asks.

Mario responds, "Yes, of course, and at the end of that season I came to Napa. I loaded up a private plane with some friends that would appreciate this kind of thing and flew up to Napa, and we just started. That's when I first met the Mondavis for instance. I went to Mondavi and Sterling winery first. And then I decided to do a pilgrimage to the Napa Valley at the end of every season and every season after that. We used to load the airplane so full of wine, the airplane could hardly take off, we had to adjust the load and get an extension every time to fly out of here. And so that's how I became affectionate to this area, through friendships. I met Jack Cakebread at a bar in Hong Kong when he was selling wine in Hong Kong and we come back here and we struck a very long friendship."

Since we are on the subject of the Napa Valley again I finally get to ask, "We have a burning question. We had our Lotus Elise on order for over a year. A number of people would tell us 'Oh yeah, we've seen one of those around driving around here.' So you had a silver Elise S-1. Did you have that prepared to bring over here?"

"Yes the first one to drive it," Mario explains. "It belonged to the Lotus factory, it was a press car. They brought it here, we did some photos. It was primarily for Motor Trend magazine, then for me to get any kind of feedback on the car. We'd take it to Lake Berryessa, and actually I've done that a dozen times. I'd drive the hell out of it, put it through the paces."

"You can't take your eye off of Lotus," Mario continues. "They are mavericks, they are not afraid to take risks every single time with their style and really go a little bit beyond. That's what makes them distinctive to the enthusiast, because that's an enthusiast's car and they know how to cater to the enthusiast. It's their style and grace. They are fun."



Photo Daniel Song

"If you look back historically on the road cars, they've never had the most powerful cars on the road, but you try to follow one and go through a highway like Highway 121 to Lake Berryessa, follow it with like an Enzo or a Murcielago and those cars won't be able to keep up. The Lotus is very nimble, a real drivers' car. A lesser skilled driver can really enjoy something like that because they cannot get in total trouble by not knowing how to use the power at the wrong time. They are very forgiving from that standpoint. Being forgiving makes them safer. So it's a very driver friendly car."

And then quicker than the tight, downhill switchback on Highway 121 near Wooden Valley Road, Kate turns the conversation to the Andretti family. "Your grandson, Marco, is really doing great," she interjects.

Mario really swells with pride and says, "He's doing really great"

"He's still a kid, he's still 19, but in that race car he's a man. He thinks like a man, his judgment is good, he's not hell bent and doing stupid things. I get a lot of the experts telling me 'he would have won (the 2006 Indy 500) if he would have looked in his mirrors.' They don't have any idea the judgment and restraint that it took for him to do what he did and not to block Hornish. They would have both ended up into the wall. It would have been a stigma for the rest of his life. He used judgment and he used smarts that many veterans don't possess. To me that was the best part of the race. I said 'Marco, you make me so proud. You did so right, you did so perfectly, because the judgment you used there you are going to have a long, wonderful career because you're not stupid.

I loved that you showed good judgment.' The biggest disappointment I can ever remember in my career is making a mistake and watching the other people finish the race knowing it was your fault. Bring that baby home."

We start to discuss family values and Mario continues, "I am welling up with pride because he gives me reason. This business has been fantastic to our family. But we paid the dues. My brother, Aldo, had the same dreams and same aspirations as I did. We are twins, and as kids we were both trying to pursue the same dreams. When he starting driving he drove with a cloud over his head. He was in a terrible accident that almost killed him at the end of the first season. He was in a coma for 84 days. It almost ruined his career and he raced for 10 more years but always with a cloud over his head. He almost lost it all in at the end of the season in Des Moines, Iowa, and he had to quit. For me, everything was going like a laser.

"My son, Jack, almost lost both of his legs in an accident that was no fault of his own – the wheel came off his car. When it's there you have a special appreciation for how precious it is. It is not a given"

I go back to my Wine Interviews for Dummies book to see what to ask next, "What was your most memorable experience with Andretti wine?"

The story he shares takes place shortly after the dedication of a monument to Enzo Ferrari on what would have been Enzo's 100th birthday. Mario later went to dinner with the principals from Fiat, who of course own Ferrari, including Umberto Agnelli, Gianni Agnelli (Fiat Chairman) and their wives.

"There was a dinner in Bologna at Primavera, one of my favorite restaurants. I brought 2 bottles of Andretti Sangiovese to the dinner. I know that Paolo, the owner of the restaurant, he loved the Sangiovese, he always had at least 3 different Sangiovese wines and I insisted on trying mine against the ones Paolo had selected for his restaurant. I was really very nervous about it, very proud of what we had. I didn't really sell wine in Italy, so this was about bragging rights. I suggested a blind tasting, because otherwise I don't think it would have been fair. I wouldn't be telling this story if the result had been anything other than positive o.k.?"

"I called Bob Pepi, our winemaker, and said 'Bob you have no idea what this does for my ego.' I was so proud. I came back and it was one of the most satisfying moments. I couldn't have designed it better than that."

"Sort of like winning the World Driving Championship?" I ask.

Mario responds, "Exactly the same. Actually, it was like winning the Italian Grand Prix. I won big that day."

**For information on Andretti Wines, visit: [www.andrettiwinery.com](http://www.andrettiwinery.com)**



Photo Daniel Song

## The Mad Flasher – An interview with Charlie Wallace, the man that “cracked” the Lotus ECU

Charlie Wallace, or “charliex” as you may know him on various car forums was kind enough to share with Sector111 some details about himself and his work. A Lotus enthusiast and programming visionary, this great Scot is the madness behind the method of Sector111’s ECU services. His involvement with Sector111 is just one of his many endeavors, about which we were lucky enough to learn.

### Where are you from?

Beith, Scotland. Those familiar with American history, i.e. no one from America, would know that John Witherspoon served as the local clergy for a few years there. He is one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. I grew up about 17 miles from where William Wallace was born.

### Where have you worked?

Digital Image Design, Team17, 3DO, Dreamworks SKG, Universal Studios, Disney, finiteMonkeys, Electronic Arts, JAMDAT, Hudson, Sega, Tecmo, SGI & THQ are all I can think of at this time, I’m a contract coder, a gun for hire if you will.

### What can you tell us about how you reverse engineered the ECU?

I wrote an emulation engine for the ECU, coupled with a very well known piece of software called IDA Interactive Disassembler (named after Ida Babbage, the world’s first computer programmer (apparently)). Then instead of driving my car around, I spent months going over the ins and outs of the system deciphering what each part did.

Each time I figured something out so that I felt I was ‘done’, someone else would come along and ask for something new, and at some point I’d invested so much time and effort into it, I thought, “What the hey, I’ve had a good life.”

Did you like how I didn’t actually tell you anything of value there?

### Do you have pets?

Yes I have a dog called Molly, who’s probably the most awesome dog in the world, she is a cross between a Pekinese and a Chow Chow. She was found abandoned in Santa Monica on Olympic Blvd, in a shopping cart as a puppy with her sister. She’s also my number one mechanic.

### What made you want to improve the ECU?

I wanted a forced induction system for my Elise, and I got talking to the chaps about the difficulties they’d been having with the ECU, so since I’ve never learnt to keep my big mouth shut, I said, “hey I know stuff about computers;” the rest is history.

### If you could own 1 car what would it be and why?

Williams / Renault Espace F1 Minivan. Because it’ll trounce almost anything, and still seat 6 comfortably. I’m also a fan of the Renault F1 team.

### If you could be passenger to any driver, who would it be and why?

Neil from Sector111, he is a great driver, and very focused and shares my passion for the brand, plus he likes the Renault Spyder too. Beyond that [I’d ride with] my other friend, Marcus, who’s also an excellent driver. They’re both happy to share tips and their experiences, plus Marcus has an Atom and a friend who owns a Renault Spyder.

### Is it true that you don’t you don’t drink water because fish swim in it?

Absolutely true, and neither should you!

### Do you own any other cars?

Yes. A 1991 Lotus M100, which I’ve heavily modified over the years and I adore it. It runs 18 PSI of boost, lowered, and all sorts of other modifications. The M100 people are a great bunch too.

### How many Lotuses do you own?

Two at the moment, A phantom black Exige S and the M100. In the past I’ve had a red Elise, yellow Elise, and a chrome orange Exige.

### Why the name ‘Gotham’ for the Exige S tune?

A stripper in Las Vegas at Starbucks said my car looked like the batmobile, since it’s a black Exige, and everyone says that.

Plus I’ve always liked the name. Some people are aware that Gotham is a code name for New York, a place I would never go, however fewer people are aware that Gotham is also a small village in England, and the name means Goat Ham, so it’s perfect for the car, also it’s famous for ‘The wise men of Gotham’, or the crazy men of Gotham, plus even more coincidentally there is a street called Wallace Street in it.

It’s also in Nottinghamshire, and not all that far away from Lotus HQ at Hethel, Norfolk, on top of all that I was born at Irvine Central in Ayrshire and the tales of The Mad Men of Gotham were exported to New York by Washington Irvine, they eventually became a basis for most commonly known version of Gotham, i.e. Batman, also Mike Wallace co wrote a book about New York early history called Gotham.

Some earlier stories accuse the Men of Norfolk to be the one’s who were truly mad, and as we all know Lotus is in Norfolk.

There is also a Gotham in Sussex, but we won’t talk about them here.

I bet you didn’t expect all that right?, maybe expecting “I dunno it sounded cool, snarf.”





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Photo Daniel Song