

AMERICA'S SPORTS CAR KINGS

⑥ Phil Hill

He won the first sports car race he entered in 1949 and would become the USA's signature driver during its post-war love affair with motorsports.

To start, the Florida-born, California-bred Hill scored three wins at a lethal Le Mans from 1958-'62 - which on its own deserves a place among America's greats. But add in his other feats from the same period, including a trio of Sebring wins from 1958-'61, and his brilliance is truly amplified. Hill's 1961 is unparalleled: Le Mans and Sebring winner - oh, and

America's first Formula 1 World Champion.

A hero in Ferrari sports cars and prototypes; a factory driver for Carroll Shelby and Ford (one of the precious few to race the GT40 *and* the Shelby Cobra Daytona Coupe), and a winner in Jim Hall's Chaparrals, Hill was American sports car racing until his retirement.

Fittingly, he bid farewell to sports car racing with a win in his final event, the 1967 BOAC 500 at Brands Hatch, where he flew the high-wing Chaparral 2F to victory. All hail the great Phil Hill.



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(RIGHT) Phil Hill sips the champagne as he celebrates a second 24 Hours of Le Mans win with Belgium's Olivier Gendebien in 1961. Victory number three came a year later (ABOVE RIGHT).



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What attributes and achievements should be used to distill the six greatest American sports car drivers from dozens of plausible candidates? Is it the number of wins? Quality of competition? Quantity of big victories? How many championships they earned? Career longevity? Did they strike fear in their opposition? Or how about the era when a driver competed, and the relative danger or safety they faced while amassing their stats?

And then you have the tent pole argument. As in, would replacing any of the drivers in the top six cause the list to crumble? With those questions as a general guideline, separating the great from the good involved using a variety of filters and miniature arguments to apply some semblance of logic and science to an incredibly subjective task. Let the arguing begin...

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(LEFT) As an engineer, as well as a potent racer, Al Holbert took Porsche's 962 and made it even better through constant evolution. (BELOW LEFT) Celebrating the '85 IMSA GTP title with Derek Bell.



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⑤ Al Holbert

If any American driver can be credited for continuing the legacy that Mark Donohue started, it's Pennsylvania's Al Holbert. The young Penske Racing mechanic learned his trade from Donohue - carrying on the driver/engineer/designer tradition - and used an incredible work ethic to become the best America had to offer in sports car racing before his untimely death in 1988.

Holbert's wasn't an innate driving talent, yet he honed his craft until wins in Porsche 911s and Lola Can-Am cars signaled he'd arrived. Two IMSA GT driving championships, plus three GTP

championships, from 1976-'86 set him above the rest, and his 49 IMSA wins continue to stand as the series record.

Holbert was Porsche Motorsports in America, developing the 962 into a world beater, and earning consecutive wins at the Daytona 24 Hours, plus two at Sebring.

He's also peerless among his countrymen at Le Mans. From seven starts, Holbert finished inside the top six an amazing six times, winning three of the 24 Hour contests in a span of four years.

Al Holbert: the humble inspiration; the indomitable champion.



④ Mark Donohue

Few have achieved so much in such a concentrated timeframe. Considering Donohue's life ended in 1975, aged 38, one can only imagine what the New Jersey native would have achieved if he'd been blessed with the longevity that propelled Scott Pruett, Mario Andretti and Hurley Haywood to unfathomable heights. Beyond his success in open-wheel racing, Donohue's short, intense window of sports car domination continues to

serve as one of the single greatest eras produced by any driver in any category. A product of SCCA club racing, Donohue went on to capture the SCCA's biggest professional titles, with two USRRRC championships, three Trans-Am crowns, and a Can-Am championship, all from 1967-73. Six sports car titles in seven years - and Donohue's Can-Am coronation was earned in one of the most fearsome racecars ever built, the Porsche 917/30.

Between those titles, he also anchored an unbelievable come-from-behind win at the '69 Daytona 24 Hours. Tied to racing maven Roger Penske, Donohue took the nascent Penske Racing from its infancy to become one of the sport's global benchmarks before his death. In the USRRC's greatest era, Trans-Am's defining time, and Can-Am's pinnacle, Mark Donohue was the lone master and conqueror.

Mark Donohue (LEFT) won six-straight races in the 1973 Can-Am Challenge with Penske Racing's awesome 1,100hp (make that nearer to 1,600hp in high-boost qualifying spec) Porsche 917/30 (ABOVE).



③ Hurley Haywood

Like Pruett and Andretti, Haywood used remarkable skill and longevity to his advantage. But while those all-rounders plied their trade in everything from stock cars to F1, this Chicagoan could be regarded as America's greatest pure sports car pilot. Haywood dabbled in Indy car racing, making five starts, including the 1980 Indy 500, but he's forever linked with fendered cars - with Porsche, Brumos Racing, Can-Am, Le Mans, IMSA, and the 24 Hours of Daytona. Active through approximately 450 sports car races from 1969-2012, Haywood won in Porsche 911s, 914/6s, 911 Carrera RSRs, 917s, 934s, 935s, 936s, 956s, 962s, and DPs that used the German marque's powerplants. Outside of his Porsche opportunities,

Haywood won IMSA GTP races for Jaguar in Group 44's XJR-5s and XJR-7s; raced Lola and March GTPs and Nissan's GTP ZX-T; won the 1988 SCCA Trans-Am for Audi in its unforgettable 5-cylinder, turbo 200 Quattro; raced the IMSA GTO Ferrari F40; bridged the 1990s in IMSA and ALMS, then continued winning in a Porsche-powered Fabcar when Grand-Am's Daytona Prototypes arrived in the early 2000s. Haywood's final win in 2009, driving a Riley-Porsche DP, was a deserving crown placed atop five overall wins at Daytona, three overall wins and six podiums at Le Mans, plus a pair of Sebring victories. His modest title tally aside, among Americans with prestigious wins at the world's biggest sports car races, there's Hurley Haywood, and Haywood alone.

(ABOVE, center) The first of Hurley Haywood's three 24 Hours of Le Mans wins with Porsche came in 1977, racing a 936 with Jürgen Barth and Jacky Ickx.



② Mario Andretti

As a Formula 1 champion, Indy 500 winner, and four-time Indy car champ, the transplanted Italian is most often associated with his open-wheel career. But the naturalized American's body of work in sports car racing makes it easy to place him among the all-time greats. A factory driver for Alfa Romeo, Ferrari, Ford, Jaguar and Porsche, Andretti was our most sought-after gun for hire. With sports car victories coming from the late 1960s to the mid-1990s, including three victories at the 12 Hours of Sebring in just a six-year span, plus a win in the 1972 Daytona 6-Hour Continental with Jacky Ickx, Andretti's

reign continued long after many of his contemporaries retired or struggled to capture their former glory. In 1995, at the ripe old age of 55, Andretti added a class win at the 24 Hours of Le Mans to his résumé... A victor in Ford's GT40 MkIV, Ferrari's glorious 312s and 512s, and Alfa Romeo's T33, Mario was also entrusted to race the very first Porsche 962. Whether it was at home or abroad, Andretti authored some of the most memorable winning sports car drives, all while piloting iconic cars in woefully dangerous times. For five decades, if it was a prestigious sports car event,

(LEFT) Andretti didn't capture a Daytona 24 Hours win, but he and Jacky Ickx out-ran a quality field to win the 6-Hour Continental for Ferrari in 1972. (RIGHT) First of three Sebring wins in 1967.



Andretti was a go-to driver for American, British, German and Italian factories. Andretti's farewell to sports cars came at Le Mans in 2000, as he pursued the overall victory missing from his honor roll. An Indy 500, Daytona 500, three-time 12 Hours of Sebring and big-time Daytona sports car winner (albeit not in 24-hour guise), the French daddy of all enduros is the only major international event lacking Mario's name among its first-place finishers. Other Americans may have won a greater number of sports car races and championships, but they would never be confused with having more talent or ability than that man Mario Andretti.



(LEFT and BOTTOM LEFT) Scott Pruett earned pole and his fifth win at the 2013 Rolex 24 at Daytona. (BELOW LEFT) Pruett was a multiple IMSA and Trans-Am champ with Roush-built Fords in the late 1980s, the formative seasons of his long, successful - and ongoing - career.

① Scott Pruett

At 56, the Californian continues to bolster a career that started much later than one might expect. His first sports car championship came in 1986 at the age of 27 - and that IMSA GTO title, achieved in a Jack Roush Ford Mustang, was significant in another way, too: It was Pruett's first full season of professional auto racing. That same year, he also won his first GTP race, in a Porsche 962.

To fully appreciate Pruett's age-defying success, his first sports car victory came behind the wheel of an IMSA GTO Ford Thunderbird, Sept. 8, 1985; his most recent win was secured in an IMSA Prototype class Ford EcoBoost DP, Sept. 19, 2015. In the intervening 30 years and 11 days, he stockpiled 75 sports car wins, 45 second-place finishes, and 32 thirds, making over 150 podium visits.

Those wins came in factory tubeframe SCCA Trans-Am and IMSA GTO/GTS cars from Ford, Jaguar, and Nissan; GTP prototypes in the 962; the Panoz GTR-1; a variety of Riley Daytona Prototypes, and in production-based GTs with the factory Corvette Racing team.

A five-time winner at the Rolex 24 at Daytona; a 24 Hours of Le Mans class



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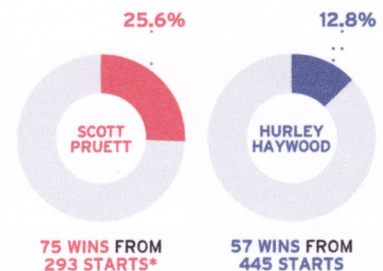
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winner; a two-time 12 Hours of Sebring winner (class and overall); a five-time Grand-Am Daytona Prototype champion; a three-time Trans-Am champion, and a two-time GTO champ, Pruett is the gold standard for American sports car drivers.

In every discipline, at the greatest events, and for multiple marques, Scott Pruett's accomplishments representing the red, white 'n' blue over four decades of sports car competition have no equal.

SCOTT vs. HURLEY - THE HIT RATES

As noted, winning percentages aren't everything, but here's a comparison of Scott Pruett's vs. Hurley Haywood's anyway...



* As of March 2016. Still active