



Anthony "Andy" Granatelli

Is there a race fan in this country that doesn't have at least one of this man's stickers? The one that's red with three letters on it?

It's probably vintage and likely reads with either "The Racers Edge" or "Indy 500 Winner" under the famed initials. Whatever the case, you can hardly look at an STP sticker without also picturing one of the most influential pitchmen in motorsports.

Anthony Vincent "Andy" Granatelli was born in Dallas, Texas, on March 18, 1923, the son of a well-respected Sicilian-born grocer and his wife. Sadly, Andy's mother died when he was just twelve years old. With his father Vincent and his brothers Joe and Vince, Andy moved to Chicago, due to the hardships of The Great Depression. Out of financial necessity, Andy admits that he quit school at the age of 14, his third year of high school. Tireless workers in their youth, the Granatelli boys did odd jobs and dove into various efforts, as a delivery boys, grocery store clerks, and auto mechanics.

Andy Granatelli began his career in 1943, at the age of 20, when he and his brothers pooled their meager resources to purchase a Texaco gas station on the north shore of Chicago, which he called "Andy's Super Service." Two years later, in 1945, Andy and his brothers formed the Granatelli Corporation, naming their business "Grancor Automotive Specialists," and began mass-merchandising auto-related performance products. At Grancor, Andy built and sold hundreds of Ford V-8 flat-head motors to customers in the Southeast and throughout the United States.

In 1946, at the urging of master promoter Al Sweeney, Andy and his brother Joe converted the '34 Floyd "Pop" Dreyer-built, Ford-powered Don Hulbert Special into a "rocket car," complete with eight JATO rockets. It was driven by Andy himself, promoted as "Antonio the Great," and it was seen on the Midwestern and Southern fairgrounds circuit. To this day, that day in 1946, when he circled the Nashville Fairgrounds oval at 108 miles per hour amidst great noise, smoke and dust, remains one of the consummate showman's most cherished memories.

In 1947, he founded the Hurricane (Hot Rod) Racing Association at the quarter-mile Soldier Field track. Ironically, this sanctioning body was his response to getting banned from the midjet car ranks at the historic arena. Hurricane was a hot rod class, which combined street racers, professional drivers and crowd-pleasing theatrics. On the maiden voyage of the group in 1947, his brothers Vince and Joe fielded cars, but Andy stood by as the pit steward. When the last turnstile was spun that day, the headcount was 24,962. Things grew from there and a racing promoter of hot rod and stock car races was born.

In 1946, the three brothers entered the first of several Indianapolis 500s, as the Grancor racing team. They did their own mechanical work and brought innovations like fully independent suspension, yet never made it to "Victory Lane." In

1948, Andy decided to try to qualify as a driver, and nearly did so, but a horrendous crash during his qualifying run ended that part of his career.

By 1952, the president and CEO of Grancor Automotive Specialists was actively involved with NASCAR, California Muffler Sales, Hurricane Hot Rod Racing Association, Half Day Speedway drag strip in Libertyville, Ill., and Chicago Auto Racing.

In 1958, Andy and his brother Joe bought Paxton Products, a floundering engineering firm which manufactured superchargers. They turned it around with aggressive, innovative advertising and sales promotion techniques.

Following the lucrative 1961 sale of Paxton Products to the Studebaker Corporation of South Bend, Ind., Andy became a vice-president and personally directed engine and chassis development, setting many new world land-speed and endurance records at places like the Bonneville Salt Flats and the El Mirage Dry Lakes.

By 1963, Andy became president and CEO of Studebaker-Packard's partially-owned subsidiary, the Chemical Compounds division in St. Joseph, Mo., whose lone brand was STP ("Scientifically Treated Petroleum") Oil Treatment. It didn't take Andy long to change the ten-year-old company name from Chemical Compounds to the name of the product, the STP Corporation.

Granatelli eventually became very visible in the racing world in the 1960s as the spokesman for STP oil and gasoline treatment products, appearing on its television and radio advertisements as well as sponsoring race cars. He clad his pit crews in white coveralls with the oval STP logo scattered all over them, and once wore a suit jacket with the same STP-laden design.

If a race was coming to a particular locale, Granatelli made sure folks knew the proverbial circus was in town with his "Welcome Race Fans" banners and other trappings, all with the STP logo prominently displayed. As for the STP stickers, "I printed 100,000,000. There were 30,000,000 on cars," Granatelli has said.

After two "near wins" at Indy in 1967 (with Parnelli Jones) and '68 (with Joe Leonard), even the casual fan will recall the images from 1969 of Granatelli in Victory Lane kissing his driver, Mario Andretti. Mario said recently, "As long as I live, people are going to link me to that brand, that logo, and, of course, Andy kissing me in Victory Lane."

It was in the early part of the Sixties that Granatelli brought a new level of professionalism to racing. Teams with matching crew uniforms, driving suits, all in line with the logos and colors of the car, were his doing. And then there were the things for the fans. Hats, t-shirts and other novelties with the familiar oval on it were precursors to the motorsports marketing tools of today.

As to his sprint car involvement, Granatelli

mentions the names of Clarence "Mutt" Anderson and Bruce Bromme, Sr., right away, as he proudly sponsored both of their cars. STP can also be spotted on old photos of the sprinters of Greg Weld and Jerry Richert, Sr. From the early 1960s to the early '70s, STP was a major sponsor of Richert and the International Motor Contest Association (IMCA), and Weld and the United States Auto Club (USAC), respectively. In fact, in 1970, then STP Corporation president Andy Granatelli provided 100 fitted, fire-proof racing uniforms to the IMCA sprint car drivers.

In the 1970s, Andy Granatelli purchased the small automotive repair chain TuneUp Masters, quickly renaming it Andy Granatelli's TuneUp Masters. In less than a decade he had grown it from 18 locations to 278 company-owned locations, prior to selling it to Carquest Auto Parts in 1986.

In 2009, modern day sprint car racing paid tribute to that famous first win for Granatelli as an owner at Indy, with Andretti behind the wheel forty years earlier, when Tony Stewart Racing and the Armored AutoGroup unveiled a paint scheme commemorating the "Hunter Red" STP car. Donny Schatz proudly put that car in Victory Lane at the Knoxville Nationals, his fourth consecutive win in the most prestigious sprint car race in the world.

Last weekend, for the 66th year in a row, the former president and CEO of STP made a pilgrimage to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and helped it celebrate 100 years of glory. He fielded cars in the Indy 500 until 1991. Anthony "Andy" Granatelli was inducted into the National Italian American Sports Hall of Fame in 1980, the International Motorsports Hall of Fame in 1992 and the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America in 2001.

This weekend, the red, white and blue logo oval logo of STP returns to NASCAR with STP-sponsored races at the Chicagoland Speedway. Nearly thirty years of memories of "King" Richard Petty's half-Petty-blue, half-STP-red number 43 machine will abound.

Asked today to pick a favorite racing memory, be it as a driver, owner, sponsor or any other fashion in which he participated in the sport, the Montecito, Calif., resident and author of "They Call Me Mister 500" does not even pause. "It's all been a pleasure. I love racing; it's been in my blood." And surely that blood is STP red.

By Bill Blumer Jr.

Photo credit: Granatelli Family Collection

Congratulations To All The Inductees!!

Bowling Motors & R.V. Sales

Hwy. 63 N., Airport Exit • Ottumwa • 800-246-5497 • www.bowlingrvs.com