



Rossi, Bell, Watkins, Gurney, Loeb enter the Motor Sport Hall of Fame 2016

The Motor Sport Hall of Fame awards took place at a star-studded evening at the Royal Automobile Club's Woodcote Park estate in Surrey on May 31. More than 25,000 votes were casted by members of the public, to decide which great figures from the worlds of Formula 1, sports car racing, rallying, US motor sport and motorcycling. Some of the categories were closely fought, particularly the sports car polling, while others lead the race with an overwhelming majority. The Motor Sport Hall of Fame inductees for 2016 are as follows:

Motorcycling: Valentino Rossi

The Motorcycle category included fellow nominees Joey Dunlop and Mike Hailwood, but Italian maestro Valentino Rossi romped home with an overwhelming number of votes.

Valentino Rossi was officially inducted into the Motor Sport Hall of Fame by racing legend on four and two wheels – John Surtees CBE.

Speaking from the Yamaha motorhome at the Spanish Grand Prix Rossi said: "Hi to everybody and I am very happy and very proud to enter into the Hall of Fame. It is a great shame that I cannot come over there with you, but I wanted to say thank you, thanks a lot. I am so happy – I will put the prize in my bedroom so we can sleep together!" Talking of the founding member on the trophy he said, "Being with these important names of motor sport is fantastic. Thank you to everybody and I hope to see you next time."

With 114 Grand Prix wins (and counting) Rossi's mercurial talents have done much to raise the profile of his sport. As well as winning world championship titles a remarkable nine times, Rossi is the only rider ever to wear all the 125cc, 150cc, 500cc and MotoGP crowns. Saluti!

US Racing: Dan Gurney

The new US Racing category introduced this year included nominees, Dan Gurney, Roger Penske and AJ Foyt.

Dan Gurney was officially inducted into the Motor Sport Hall of Fame by his close friend Sir Jackie Stewart OBE.

Dan Gurney was the only racing personality to feature in two Motor Sport Hall of Fame categories this year after being nominated in both US Racing and F1. The Californian is renowned for inventing the traditional champagne celebration as well as the 'Gurney flap', but it's his record as one of the greatest sport's all-rounders that surely swung the vote his way from Indycars, NASCAR, Trans-Am, Can-Am, sports car to F1 – he was a winner in all of them.

Jackie Stewart was on hand to present the award to his great friend. Whilst Dan couldn't make the evening he left a heartfelt message: "Motor Sport Magazine, the green one that I remember Jenks used to write... Well, certainly I am touched to be considered to be a part of this group listed on the trophy, people that I have looked up to all my life, some that I raced against. I appreciated the fans, if there was a vote and they voted me in I say 'thank you very much!' I am glad that I have managed to get in and I want to thank everyone from the bottom of my heart."

Rallying: Sébastien Loeb

The popular rally category included Richard Burns, Hannu Mikkola and Sebastien Loeb.

Sébastien Loeb was officially inducted into the Motor Sport Hall of Fame by Mini rally legend Paddy Hopkirk.

Originally a gymnast, Loeb quit the parallel bars and switched to rallying in 1995. Gymnastics' loss was motor sports gain. 20 years on, Loeb has become the most successful driver in World Rally Championship history winning the title a record nine times in a row. He holds several other WRC records, including most wins, most podium finishes and most points. After a brief dalliance with touring cars, Loeb is now back, doing what he does best – using the handbrake and thrilling crowds – in this season's World Rallycross Championship.

Gracing the awards venue was the 2016 Peugeot-Hansen 208 World Rallycross car which Loeb will be competing in on his first full season back in Rallycross. He is no stranger to this arm of motor sport, having already won a Rallycross gold medal at the 2012 X Games in California. The Peugeot boasts a 2-litre turbo four putting out 600bhp and capable of hurling the 4WD machine from 0-100kmh in two seconds.

Formula 1: Professor Sid Watkins

The F1 category included nominees Gilles Villeneuve, Cosworth (Mike Costin and Keith Duckworth) and Professor Sid Watkins. But it was the wry doctor from Liverpool that gained the most public votes for his services to motor sport safety.

The 'Prof' was officially inducted into the Motor Sport Hall of Fame 2016 by McLaren Chairman Ron Dennis. Ron Dennis presented the award to Watkins' wife Susan and son.

Professor Sid Watkins was at the forefront of Formula 1 safety for more than 30 years until his death ages 84 in 2012. He played a key role trackside in the aftermath of many accidents, but it was his insistence on a number of structural safety improvements in the sport that will be his lasting legacy.

Sports Cars: Derek Bell

Derek Bell's record speaks for itself, he won the Le Mans 24 Hours five times, the World Sports Car Championship twice and the Daytona 24 Hours three times, having previously raced in Formula 2 and F1. Bell was a top-line star from the days of the Porsche 917 through to the McLaren F1 and was always a fans favorite, as the votes emphasise again. Runners up in the sports car category included Pedro Rodríguez and Brian Redman.

Derek Bell was officially inducted into the Motor Sport Hall of Fame 2016 by Tom Kristensen. There was clearly plenty of respect between these two (who have 14 Le Mans wins!) and Derek paid respect to those who chose sports car racing as a career over F1.

During the event Derek Bell also got behind the wheel of the Porsche 962 that he took to second at La Sarthe in 1988. In its famous Dunlop livery, it was the last he raced at Le Mans as a factory Porsche driver. The sound of it roaring up Captain's Drive twice during the day was a sight to behold.