



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of JUAN PABLO MONTOYA



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Off-track Grinning

By Ernie Masche

Colombian-born Juan Pablo Montoya has raced against some of the greatest drivers in motorsports around the world. From seven-time F1 World Champion Michael Schumacher to four-time National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) Champions Jeff Gordon and Jimmie Johnson, Juan has cut his teeth against the best.

He has wheeled high-performance racing machines in Formula 1 (F1), CART (Championship Auto Racing Teams), NASCAR, and Formula 3000 (F3000). But when Juan is away from the track, and even when he's at the track relaxing in the motor coach area, he pours his passion and energy into Radio Control. It gives him an adrenaline rush that is similar to that he enjoys while racing.

"Racing cars is my profession but flying RC is where I have fun," he said recently at the Flying Aces Pilots Association airfield near the Charlotte Motor Speedway in North Carolina.

Juan has been racing at a fast-and-furious pace since his dad, Pablo, taught him karting techniques at a young age. Juan competed in his rookie season of F3000 in 1997.

Not only did he win Rookie of the Year honors, but he also finished second in the point standings. Juan followed that the next year by winning four events on the way to claiming the 1998 F3000 Championships.

After a driver swap between Formula 1 owner Frank Williams and CART owner Chip Ganassi in 1999, Juan competed in his rookie season on the CART circuit, winning seven races and the CART Championship. In 2000, he crossed over to the Indy Racing League and won the Indianapolis 500 after leading a record 167 of the 200 laps.

In 2001, Juan returned to Williams, then powered by BMW, to compete for the F1 World Championship. Although he never won a championship, he was the top driver and quickly made his presence known as a fast qualifier. In addition to seven victories, he tallied 13 pole positions and visited the podium 30 times throughout the next six years.

In 2002, during his European F1 years, Juan's wife, Connie, gave him a present that sparked a new passion.

"My wife gave me a trainer for Christmas and I've still got it," he said.

She gave him a Hobbico *Avistar 40*, and a new Radio Control pilot was born. He taught himself to fly by practicing with his airplane and a simulator.

Shortly thereafter, Juan bought a few other aircraft, including a 36% *Extra 330*, but his interest in aeromodeling and the time he has to fly have grown more rapidly in the last two years. In 2006, Juan's father gave him a turbine that sat virtually unused for three years.

"It was ready to go, but I was in Europe racing," he said.

After returning from Europe and his F1 career, Juan rekindled his desire to fly Radio Control. Since then, he obtained his turbine waiver from the AMA and flies every chance he gets.

"Jets are pretty cool," he said.

Juan has 12 airplanes, 3 jets, and 5 helicopters in his "hangar" at home in Miami, Florida. He prefers to fly his aerobatic aircraft, but he has developed more of an interest in jets and helicopters.

When Juan finishes a day at the track, he likes to go back to his motor coach and sharpen his skills on a Radio Control flight simulator or pilot on of his small airplanes for helicopters in the parking lot. He even ventures out to a local hobby shop from time to time and finds someone there with whom to go flying.

When Juan is at home in Miami these days, he and some of his friends get together and fly at one of the nearby fields. He spends every free moment he has building and flying his Radio Control airplanes, jets, and helicopters.

Juan enjoys the freedom he gets from taking break from racing to build and fly his newest Radio Control toys. And his son, Sebastian, sometimes accompanies him to the field.

In recent years, Juan has shared his experiences with three of his friends who wanted to learn how to fly Radio Control. He has instructed them to get a flight simulator and have someone show them the basics.

"Get a trainer and with a little help you can fly solo on your first day," he said. "Learn to line it up with the runway and you're pretty much golden."

Similar to his moves throughout the world's biggest racing series and the skills he uses when driving various cars, Juan realizes that each model is different and requires different techniques. He advises fellow pilots to "be prepared."

"I'm a decent pilot but I always want to do more," he said.

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