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Through The Esses - Road Racers Take 16 Spots On The AARWBA All America Team

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For 50 years now Motorsports in North America has been written about, photographed, chronicled and published by members of the American Auto Racing Writers and Broadcasters Association - the AARWBA. If it happened on the track, in the pits, behind the wall or anywhere in the paddock, professional members of the media were there to tell the world outside of racing what was going on inside the world of racing.

Founded in Indianapolis in August of 1955, by a core group of newspaper and magazine writers and photographers, the AARWBA membership roster today includes a varied number of professional broadcasters, writers, photographers, publishers and racing luminaries who all share a common interest in seeing Motorsports thrive. Members hail from several disciplines including newspapers, magazines, internet sites, television, radio and public relations. Well known names such as Dusty Brandel, Hector Cademartori, Chris Economaki, Joe Farace, Paul Glessner, Mike Harris, Tony George, Phil Hill, Mike Hollander, Bob Jenkins, Michael Knight, Linda Mansfield, Dick Mittman, Wally Parks, and Nancy Schilke all hold membership cards that attest to their professionalism and commitment to increasing Motorsports coverage in all forms of the media.

Each year since 1970, this national professional organization has selected members of an All American Auto Racing Team, with honorees coming from all the major racing series. In 2005, the AARWBA voters elected two drivers each to the First Team, Second Team or Honorable Mention, in each of seven categories - Open Wheel, Stock Car, Road Racing, Drag Racing, Short Track, Touring Series and At Large. 17 names were selected, making this year's First Team the largest ever. Overall, a total of 50 honorees were selected across the three teams. (Last year the AARWBA board decided that endurance racing co-drivers with virtually identical records would be listed on the ballot as one. There were three such pairings elected this year to round out the 17-driver First Team.)

While we salute all the winners for having been given this significant honor, we wish to concentrate today on the candidates from the road racing ranks who earned their place on the 2005 team. Ironically, drivers from both of the premier prototype sportscar / road racing series in North America - the American Le Mans Series (ALMS) and the Grand American Road Racing Association Rolex Sports Cars Series (Grand Am) - made the top two teams.

Representatives from the Grand Am series made the first team. The chosen ones were none other than



2005 Rolex Series co-champions in the Daytona Prototypes class, Max Angelelli and Wayne Taylor, and championship runners-up Scott Pruett and Luis Diaz.

Second team honors went to the top two pairings in the GT1 class in the ALMS - Oliver Gavin and Olivier Beretta, and Ron Fellows and Johnny O'Connell.

Those voted to Honorable Mention status included Champion Audi LMP1 class teammates Frank Biela and Emanuele Pirro from the ALMS, and Trans Am competitors Klaus Graf and Greg Pickett.

Within the First, Second and Honorable Mention teams, there is also an at-large position and again road racing pros pulled down a place in two of the three teams. ALMS GT2 class co-drivers Patrick Long and Jorg Bergmeister were on the First Team. Grand Am Cup drivers David Haskell and Sylvain Tremblay were voted onto the Second Team.

That makes a total of 16 drivers from 'our' form of Motorsports who were singled out by the professional observers within the AARWBA for this prestigious honor. Some of the best in sportscar racing have been so honored in the past, including such legends of sportscar racing as Mario Andretti, Al Holbert, Tommy Kendall, Geoff Brabham, Max Papis, Bill Auberlen, Boris Said, James Weaver, Alan McNish and Elliott Forbes-Robinson. A distinguished and accomplished group no doubt, and one that has grown by 16 members in a single year - the 50th year for the AARWBA.

Let's take a brief look back at the season each of our top 16 honorees enjoyed in 2005.

2005 marked the 50th year for the AARWBA and the 40th for the Trans Am series. **Klaus Graf** became the first German national to win the Trans Am Drivers' Championship and the first rookie to win it since Dorsey Schroeder in 1989. He also won the Rookie of the Year title, another first for a German driver. Graf ran the season in the #7 Jaguar R Performance XKR, picking up 4 wins.

Greg Pickett is a veteran of 175 Trans Am races. This year his #6 Cytomax / Muscle Milk Jaguar XKR finished on the podium in 7 of 8 races. His season had its finest moment at the Edmonton round with the wily veteran picking up his 16th career victory. The win made him the first Trans-Am driver to win a race in each of four decades.

Wayne Taylor and Max Angelelli started the 2005 Rolex Series off with a solid win in the Rolex 24 Hours of Daytona. The pair, driving the Sun Trust Pontiac-Riley Daytona Prototype would go on to take a total of 5 wins and finish on the podium in 10 of 14 races. No other team won more than 3 races all season or finished in as many podium places.

Scott Pruett and Luis Diaz joined forces to put the CompUSA Chip Ganassi with Felix Sabates Racing Lexus-Riley Daytona Prototype across the finish line first 3 times in 2005. The pair were season champion runner ups to Taylor and Angelelli, taking 8 podium places in 14 races. 2005 also marks the third year in a row that Pruett has been selected by the AARWBA members for this honor.

Grand Am President Roger Edmondson expressed his congratulations when he said, "We're obviously delighted that our drivers swept the Road Racing First Team. We strongly believe that the Rolex Series provides the closest and most competitive road racing anywhere in the world, and we are proud that the media has recognized that by honoring four of our drivers on the First Team. On behalf of the entire Grand American community, I extend my congratulations to Wayne, Max, Scott and Luis--as well as the other members of the All-America Team--on a job well done."

Frank Biela and Emanuele Pirro were behind the wheel of the all-conquering Champion Racing Audi R8 LMP1 class car that dominated the ALMS again this season. They took 4 wins, including three in a row (at Infineon Raceway, Portland Raceway and Road America) on the way to winning the class championship. They put a bow on their successful season with a win at the 1,000-mile Petit Le Mans at

Road Atlanta.

Patrick Long and Jorg Bergmeister won the ALMS GT2 championship in a Petersen Motorsports / White Lightning Racing Porsche. Long is a former winner of the Gorsline Scholarship (presented to him at the annual AARWBA awards banquet in 2001). Both Long and Bergmeister were touched by their selection.

Bergmeister: "I am really, really honored. I have never been given an award like this. I am really happy that other people recognized our season. We had a great year at Petersen/White Lightning and this is a great way to finish it. Before we started the year, I knew we had a very good chance to win races but I didn't dream we would win the championship. All the guys worked so hard to make it happen. It is the team that should be given this award because they are the ones that make this happen. Mike, Dale, Stefan and the whole team ... thank you. I don't know how to say what this means to me."

Long: "To be announced to the AARWBA All-American Auto Racing Team really is a dream come true for me. It caps off a dream season in the ALMS with Petersen Motorsports/White Lightning Racing. Anytime you can be listed beside the great names that are on this team is pretty special. This is one of the greatest honors of my career and I need to thank Jörg, (team owner) Mike (Petersen), (team manager) Dale (White) and all the guys on the team and at Porsche for making it happen."

Oliver Gavin and Olivier Berretta alternately chased and were chased by their Goodwrench Corvette teammates Fellows and O'Connell all year long. The "twin Ollie's" bested the rest of the GT1 class with 6 wins in 10 races and - teamed with Jan Magnussen - they took the win at the 24 hours of Le Mans. Fellows and O'Connell finished first in 3 of the remaining 4 races. (The other win went to David Brabham and David Turner at Sebring, in an Aston Martin.)

Ron Fellows and Johnny O'Connell were victorious at Road Atlanta, Mid-Ohio and Infineon Raceway in 2005. Iron Man Fellows has been selected for the AARWBA All America Racing Team every year since 2002. And he has never missed a start in the Corvette Racing GT1 Corvette since the team first entered competition in the ALMS. He won the ALMS GTS championship three straight years,

For his teammate O'Connell, this marks the first time that he has been selected for this honor by the members of the AARWBA. He won several championships in the International Motorsports Association (IMSA) GTO class (1991 and 1993) and was the IMSA GTS champion in 1995. He won three years in a row in the 12 Hours of Sebring (from 1993 to 1995), and was a class winner in the 1994 24 Hours of Le Mans.

David Haskell and Sylvain Tremblay competed in the Grand Am Cup series ST Class in the Speed Source Race Engineering Mazda RX-8, taking 5 wins and 6 podium places in 10 races. Tremblay is also the team owner and he was very pleased to have been selected for the All America Racing Team.

Tremblay: "I am extremely honored to be recognized. It shows that Grand-Am Cup gets a lot more media attention in the last couple of years than it used to. It's a real honor to be recognized for all that hard work. I would like to thank the automotive writers for providing all that coverage."

Haskell: "It was kind of unexpected I guess and great to be recognized by everyone in this organization. There are some pretty big names [that have won this award before] and it's an honor to be a part of that list."

All of the Motorsports greats selected for this year's AARWBA Auto Racing All America Team are also eligible for a shot at winning the Jerry Titus memorial award. This very special award - the first recipient was Al Unser, in 1970 - goes to the driver who receives the highest number of votes overall. The Titus award is as prestigious in the racing community as is the Heisman Trophy in football. Past winners with ties to road racing include Mark Donohue, George Follmer, Geoff Brabham and Mario Andretti.

Presentation of the AARWBA Auto Racing All America Team awards will take place at the AARWBA' S 50th anniversary banquet, to be held December 3rd in Indianapolis. The event is open to the public and all members of the Motorsports community are encouraged to attend. Ticket information is available from AARWBA directly by calling (818) 842-7005 or by visiting the [AARWBA website](#)

Our congratulations go out to all the winners and special thanks goes to the AARWBA members for formally recognizing and honoring 16 of the finest drivers in road racing today.