



KANSAS LEGEND BIOGRAPHY

Rick Mears (1951 – Present)

“Rocket Rick” Mears may be one of the most successful motorsports drivers in racing history, but it was the competition, rather than the speed, that Mears loved most. In fact, he won an Indianapolis 500 race at an average speed of just 144.809 miles per hour, after running a lap in the race at a record 220.453 miles per hour. Mears spent more than a decade driving and winning, even if it wasn't always at top speeds.



Rick Ravon Mears was born in Wichita, Kan., but moved to Bakersfield, Calif., just a few years later. Mears' father, Bill, drove race cars himself and ran Mears Excavation, a backhoe construction company. By age 11, Mears began showing interest in racing, both racing toy slot cars and soon riding dirt bikes in the desert. However, Mears' mother convinced her son to begin racing dune buggies as a safer alternative.

Mears and his brother, Roger, dominated the off-road races in which they competed during their spare time. Mears was also working for the family excavation company, and considered racing simply a hobby. He won the Firecracker 250 off-road race in 1972 and scored seven off-road wins the following year before taking an interest in racing cars.

In 1976, Mears won the Formula Vee and Super Vee nationals of the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) and later drove the Formula 5000. He was named the United States Auto Club Rookie of the Year. From here, Mears' would only become more successful in racing.



By 1978, Mears had joined the Penske racing team, with Roger Penske as one of Indy car racing's most successful owners. Mears served as Mario Andretti's understudy and drove only when Andretti was busy racing Formula One events. He competed in his first Indy 500 race that year, finishing 23rd and earning Rookie of the Year honors for his efforts. Within a year, Mears' talents had already surfaced, and he became the team's top driver in 1979.

In his first full season on the circuit, Mears won the CART national championship. He also won the pole and the race at Indy for the first time in his career, finishing a full lap ahead of A.J. Foyt, the driver to take second. Mears' success continued as he won the CART championship back-to-back in 1981 and 1982, and lost the '82 Indy 500 by just .16 seconds.



Mears won his second Indy 500 in 1984 before suffering two broken feet in a race later that year, nearly ending his racing career. Mears spent two years before recovering fully and returning to the sport full time. He captured the pole in 1986, 1988, 1989 and again in 1991, winning his third and fourth Indy 500 races in two of those four years.

As one of just three men to have won four Indy 500 races and the current record-holder with six poles, Mears officially retired from the sport in 1992 with 29 career victories and having won more than \$11 million in prize money. He is a member of both the International Motorsports Hall of Fame and the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America.

