

Transcript for:

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH AL UNSER, JR.

**Accession
2009.113.1**

Interview conducted 6 December 2009
Unser Racing Museum
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Interviewed by
Barry Hurd, for The Henry Ford

Source:
Al_Unser_JUNIOR_Full-Interview.mp4

Running Time:
01:08:11

Time	Comment
00:00:00	Graphical Information
00:00:08	Barry Hurd So, you really get all your material from your dad?
00:00:11	Al Unser, Jr. He gets it from me, thank you very much! (laughter)
00:00:14	Barry Hurd (laughter) I had to, I had to ask that... (laughter) Let's talk about some of the people, when you, or how you got into racing, some of the people that inspired you. Obviously, people in the family, so tell me a little bit about your parents and that, uh, uncles and...
00:00:27	Al Unser, Jr. Well, every, everybody in the family of course inspired me. There was really the- the whole racing fraternity, it just wasn't you know, my family. My family was racing before I was born. So, my first memories actually of racing were at Pikes Peak, and- [clears throat] Excuse me. And they had to do with um-, sugar doughnut and hot chocolate at-, at Glen Cove, which is halfway up the road, halfway up the mountain.
00:01:02	Al Unser, Jr. And so, that's pretty much my first memories of racing.
00:01:09	Barry Hurd Were you bitten by the bug then, or when did you sort of say, "Hey, I want to jump in a car and do this?"
00:01:13	Al Unser, Jr. When I was old enough to jump in a car (laughter) and do it!
00:01:16	Al Unser, Jr. When I was nine years old, I started racing go-karts, and- and I raced every summer until I retired in 2004.
00:01:26	Barry Hurd So obviously, your family members were inspirations because they're right there. Let's talk about some of the other people that- that you ran across, and what's your impression of these people, like Michael Andretti. Tell me a little bit about your impression of Michael.
00:01:41	Al Unser, Jr.

	Michael Andretti is- is my direct contemporary in- in the auto racing world. He comes as his dad, as a famous race car driver, and-, and we're six months apart in age, and-, and we pretty much did everything growing up. We would [go] snowmobiling together and- and then racing together, and all that. So... And we were-, we were big competitors on-, on the racetrack.
00:02:20	Al Unser, Jr. Some people may have called it a rivalry, but mainly we were friends and because we did share that common bond, which was growing up in the shadow of-, of a great race car driver.
00:02:36	Barry Hurd But you still wanted to beat each other, didn't you?
00:02:38	Al Unser, Jr. Well, you wanted to beat whoever was in front of you in order to win the race, whether it be your father, or your friend, or your- or your cousin, whoever it is.
00:02:49	Al Unser, Jr. So, you know, the object is to win the race, and you need to pass whoever it is.
00:02:56	Barry Hurd What about Rick Mears?
00:02:58	Al Unser, Jr. Rick Mears is-, Rick Mears is a legend. He won the Indy four times; he's a very modest man, a lot like my father. He was somebody that really wasn't a full generation in front of me. He was like a half generation in front of me.
00:03:22	Al Unser, Jr. Rick Mears came on the scene I believe in 1978 or '79, and he-, he was somebody that won the race, for me, Rick Mears won his first Indy 500, and, I went, "Who?" (laughter) because you know, my- my heroes were Gordon Johncock, Johnny Rutherford, A.J. Foyt, um, my dad and my uncle Bobby, Mario Andretti.
00:03:58	Al Unser, Jr. I mean, these were common people that I had watched win the Indy 500 in the early 70s, which was when I pretty much fell in love with the sport. I guess- is when-, when I watch my dad on close-circuit TV here at the Tingley

	Coliseum here in Albuquerque, and-, and I watched him win his first 500 in 1970.
00:04:32	Al Unser, Jr. I was eight years old, and the car was just beautiful, that-that blue and yellow Johnny Lightning, you know, and it was huge! It was big because of the big screen, and we were sitting right up front, and it was just uh... I'll never forget that day.
00:04:51	Barry Hurd Magic moment, ay?
00:04:52	Al Unser, Jr. It was... It truly was.
00:04:55	Barry Hurd Now, were you allowed to sort of come down and see the car or go to the track and...
00:05:00	Al Unser, Jr. No, not really. We were- when- when I say "we," my sisters and I, I was the youngest of the three; I had two older sisters. And the racetrack was a place of business for my father. It wasn't a recreational place.
00:05:19	Al Unser, Jr. And so, my first Indy 500 was in 1973, and then I didn't go back again. The main reason I didn't go back again is because I started racing go-karts right then, and so you know, um...
00:05:38	Al Unser, Jr. But then we were- we were starting to get old enough. Anything before that like in 1970, the reason why we weren't there is because we were too young and so- and my dad had a job to do.
00:05:52	Al Unser, Jr. And so, I understood it later on when I started racing when- and I had children.
00:06:01	Barry Hurd Uh, other names: Bobby Rahal.
00:06:01	Al Unser, Jr. Bobby Rahal. He's more my generation. He came into it I believe in 1982 - [clears throat] - excuse me- when I was a rookie in 1983.
00:06:16	Al Unser, Jr.

	Bobby, again, he's a legend. He's-, he's a great race car driver. We-, we had a lot of great races together. He's a former teammate of mine, and-, and we worked really well together, so yeah, he's a good driver.
00:06:35	Barry Hurd Ok, now you talked about him before; we're going down to Midland to see Jim Hall. Tell me about your impressions of Jim.
00:06:40	Al Unser, Jr. Jim? Jim's-, Jim's an innovator of racing. He-, he's the first one that-, that really did serious things with aerodynamics. He was really a pioneer in aerodynamics on race cars. He's the first one to ever come up with ground effects for an automobile, you know, ahead of Formula One ahead of anybody. And-, and then they made rules based on his innovations and uh...
00:07:20	Al Unser, Jr. Really, I would say not what to do, but to control the speeds and the safety aspect of it, not- not the innovation, not the inventions, I think. It was just a matter of safety really.
00:07:41	Barry Hurd We're also later this week going to talk about A.J. Foyt. Tell us a little bit about...
00:07:45	Al Unser, Jr. A.J., you're going to love A.J. A.J.'s just full of stories and he's a big ol' teddy bear that-, that's a wonderful human being, and I think you know, when you really start meeting different race car drivers, you'll see that-, that the most successful ones are the ones that are mostly down to earth, and very modest, that it's not them; it's a team effort that put them in- into their success.
00:08:20	Al Unser, Jr. And, you know, A.J. definitely you know, he's-, I think he was truly the first one to be raised a race car driver. I think he was at Indy when he was 21 years old, and, you know, he's got the most consecutive starts there, something like 36 or something. I mean, huge number that-,

00:08:43	Al Unser, Jr. And he's won the championship-, the national championship seven times. I mean, he's-, he is the king of...really of the Indy 500 and so on.
00:08:57	Barry Hurd Well, let's talk a little bit about growing up in this racing family. Does that make things, you think, easier to be a race car driver, harder, are there rivalries? I mean, you raced against your dad. Just talk in general about how that all works within a family.
00:09:10	Al Unser, Jr. Quite honestly, being born where I was born into a-, a successful, legendary racing family was-, was definitely made it easier to go racing, you know?
00:09:26	Al Unser, Jr. There were-, there were doors there that were put in front of me that had I not been born where I was born, would not have been put in front of me.
00:09:38	Al Unser, Jr. But then after I say that, it takes me to walk through that door. And so, you know, my father, he- he really-, he helped me in- in all areas of life, mainly in the racing and, and-, you know, his words were- were really good words in the timing of them were really good, you know?
00:10:06	Al Unser, Jr. When I first started racing professionally sprint cars on the dirt, and it was my first professional racing, the press and so on, you know, started comparing us and started asking questions about that, and, you know, Dad pulled me- pulled me aside right away one evening and just said, you know, "I don't care what you do for a living," you know?
00:10:33	Al Unser, Jr. "You can be a doctor, a lawyer, a race car driver. I don't care. The only thing that I care about is you put your best effort towards that, and that's all I care about." And that took so much pressure off of me to you know, when the press would then ask me, "Well, you know, your dad did this and your dad did that; what are you going to do?" "I'm going to do my best. That's what I'm going to do."
00:10:58	Barry Hurd You didn't have the sense that you had to like...

00:11:00	Al Unser, Jr. So, I did not have to live up to my father. My father just took the pressure off of me straight away and then it was pressure I put on myself, you know?
00:11:14	Al Unser, Jr. And that's what again, any successful race car driver does. He puts his own pressure on him, and, you know... the desire, the sacrifice, everything that it takes to win.
00:11:28	Barry Hurd But you actually raced on the track against your dad. Tell us about some of those encounters.
00:11:32	Al Unser, Jr. Racing Dad on the track was both fun and scary. The fun part about it was passing him of course. (laughter) That was the fun part!
00:11:46	Al Unser, Jr. The scary part was when you come around the corner and you see that a car has had an accident, and I couldn't recognize the car. And so, I didn't know who was in the car.
00:12:01	Al Unser, Jr. So that's when I would call in on the radio and ask my crew, you know, "Has anybody seen Dad lately?" You know, "Has he gone by?"
00:12:12	Al Unser, Jr. And-, and within a few minutes, you know, you know thank God, they always came back with... "Yes, he just went by, great." Ok, good.
00:12:23	Barry Hurd Compare racing family – your dad – against racing a body, somebody you knew. Was there a different attitude, or...
00:12:30	Al Unser, Jr. Um, no, it wasn't. I- you know, I knew who was in the car, and every driver knows who's driving the car; that they're either ahead of or trying to pass.
00:12:43	Al Unser, Jr. And every driver... You know, there's good ones; there's bad ones; there's ones that don't know, you know, and so on. And Dad was-, was another car I had to pass in order to win the race.
00:12:57	Al Unser, Jr.

	And-, and the one thing Dad had on me, he did definitely have an advantage on me because my father taught me everything I knew in racing, but he didn't teach me everything he knew in racing.
00:13:17	Al Unser, Jr. And you know, when people would ask me if I had a wish, what would that wish be, that wish would be, "Give me the- the laps that my dad has around Indianapolis," you know? "Give me the experience he has," and if I could have that, I could go out and do my job better.
00:13:35	Barry Hurd What's the story about- you finish, there's one-point difference between the two of you. Tell me that story again.
00:13:40	Al Unser, Jr. In 1985, it was-, it was the closest finish in the history of national championship in Indy car racing. It was, I led most of the season. I even broke my leg at-, at Elkhart Lake that year and-, and raced two weeks later in Pocono.
00:14:07	Al Unser, Jr. And it was something, it was-, it was just a-, a year that was my best year in my career, which was you know, my third year racing. And-, and like I said, I led most of it all the way up until two races to go at Phoenix.
00:14:27	Al Unser, Jr. My dad took the lead with three points or something like that, and-, and then the last race of the season was in Miami, Florida. And, all's I had to do was finish one car in front of him, and I finished third that day, and Dad being as smart as my dad is, waited until- oh, something like six or seven laps until the end of the race to pass fourth place.
00:15:00	Al Unser, Jr. So basically, I led the championship all day until six laps to go in the race, and he made his move and won the championship.
00:15:11	Al Unser, Jr. And it was great; it was a wonderful feeling. It was- it was- I was both, happy and sad, you know, before the race after we left Phoenix, Arizona, him and I were the only ones that were in contention to win the championship.
00:15:34	Al Unser, Jr.

	<p>So, when we left Phoenix, Arizona, we knew for sure that an Unser was going to win the national title. It was just depending on who it was going to be: Dad or myself, and- and so that was the great thing about it, you know? Uh, the not-so-great thing about it is I lost, you know? But I won because my father won. And any time my dad won, I won, and so I felt bad for my team, you know, uh, Domino's Pizza was my sponsor. My crew was- the team was owned by Doug Shierson, you know?</p>
00:16:15	<p>Al Unser, Jr. All of them, they wanted it so bad. I wanted it so bad, you know? But you know, he was-, he was able to go and pass the car and win the championship, so it was- it was mixed feelings, but I was again- like I was saying, I was so proud, you know, just to be part of it. And that was great!</p>
00:16:42	<p>Barry Hurd Let's pause for a just a second, please. I'm going to check to see how...</p>
00:16:52	<p>Barry Hurd Tell us a little bit about the risk and the danger of it. I mean, this is not like a Sunday drive, it doesn't seem like literally what we think of. How do you keep doing it when the injuries, relatives being hurt, killed, you know?</p>
00:17:03	<p>Al Unser, Jr. Well, auto racing can be a dangerous sport, you know? It-, I've seen people die at the racetracks at-, that have just been in a meeting with, and-, and yeah, it weighs on you. It's something that-, it's a part of our business, and it's the-, it's the ugly side of our business, you know?</p>
00:17:31	<p>Al Unser, Jr. And-, but-, you know, it's the-, it's the part of our sport that-, that demands attention. It demands innovations, you know?</p>
00:17:45	<p>Al Unser, Jr. It-, the one thing about auto racing is, and that's been a parallel with the technology of speed, is the technology of safety, and it has to be in balance with each other. And when it gets out of balance, like when the speed starts getting more technology to it, then the safety, then drivers, people, get hurt. And-, and when that happens, the speed</p>

	needs to be brought down or the safety technology needs to be brought up.
00:18:23	Al Unser, Jr. And-, and the one thing about the Indianapolis Motor Speedway is they're the leader in safety technology. They-, they developed the absorbing wall, you know? They developed really the first trauma paramedics were at Indianapolis and developed from Indy, about getting to the accident as quick as they can.
00:18:53	Al Unser, Jr. There's-, there's all kinds of safety items that have been developed from racing at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.
00:19:02	Barry Hurd And some of those wind up in our passenger cars, didn't they?
00:19:06	Al Unser, Jr. Most of them wind up in our passenger cars, you know? 1911, the rearview mirror was invented at Indy with Ray Harroun.
00:19:17	Al Unser, Jr. And then later on came the seatbelts. Later on, came the-, came absorbing materials for when the car does have an impact, that the car takes most of that energy.
00:19:34	Al Unser, Jr. And all of that technology is being- has transferred directly from the racetrack to your and my-, everyday passenger car.
00:19:46	Barry Hurd What about you personally? I mean, you said you've seen people "We've just been in a meeting with," die on a race track. I mean, it doesn't make you say, "Well, maybe I should you know, not go back out there?" I mean, you don't have a second thought, or how do you handle that?
00:19:57	Al Unser, Jr. No, my- I love racing and, you know, the drivers that I have seen uh, pass, they loved what they were doing when they passed and you know, it was something that again came from my father, my father's advice, you know? That

	that was... you know, he lost a brother before I was born. My Uncle Jerry died at the- at the 500 during practice and you know, it was really in the family from that- from that time forward, you know?
00:20:36	Al Unser, Jr. He loved what he was doing when he died, and you know not a whole lot of people can really say that when they- when they pass, that they were doing what they loved. And-, and my Uncle Jerry was doing that and so were all the other drivers that I've seen pass in my sport, so...
00:21:00	Barry Hurd So that's just what goes with the game, eh?
00:21:02	Al Unser, Jr. It's, like I said, it's the ugly side of our business, but it's also one that has made you know, racing safer, you know? It-, it- you know, the- the HANS device was technology that was being brought into our sport when Dale Earnhardt, Senior passed, and-, and so you know, it would have helped him, you know, had he... had he had it on, but these are things that sometimes, freak things happen and when Dale Senior passed, you know...
00:21:40	Al Unser, Jr. He was a good friend of mine; we raced against each other in the IROC series and had wonderful races, and he was a great human being too.
00:21:50	Al Unser, Jr. And, you know, it was-, it was a very sad day when he passed, but...
00:21:58	Barry Hurd Let's talk a little about some nicer memories, you know? Maybe- your races, which one is the most memorable? Are there- is there one that stands out?
00:22:06	Al Unser, Jr. Well, of course the two Indy 500 wins. I mean... and each one for its own reason.
00:22:14	Al Unser, Jr. The first one because it was the first one, you know, and it really took all of the pressure off of me that I had put on me to win that race, you know? It was something that-, it's- it's like hallowed ground for me and, you know, it was a dream from when I could remember dreams was to be

	like my father and win the Indy 500, and just competing there when I was a rookie in '83 was a dream come true, and racing in the race is a dream come true. And then winning it was the final dream that came true, and-, and all the pressure was off of me, you know?
00:23:03	Al Unser, Jr. I could-, somebody said something to me. Now, I can sit around the dinner table at Thanksgiving and hold my head up. (laughter) You know, it was-, it was one of those.
00:23:16	Al Unser, Jr. And then the second time I won it was surely the effort that went beh- that went behind that victory, which was- it was an experimental engine that they were developing, and it was in a car that we were developing with Roger Penske. And so, you know, the 209 Mercedes, and it had more horsepower than all the rest of the competitors, and the thing was to make it live. And you know, my dad... It was one of the things dad really helped me out was-, was- I kept remembering it that day, especially that day, was, "The only lap you want to lead is the last one." And that's the one that pays the money, and gets the trophy, and all that.
00:24:10	Al Unser, Jr. And so, that's what we pretty much did my whole career was-, was at- that was the main goal, to lead the last lap.
00:24:20	Barry Hurd Well, talk to us a little bit about winning and what it takes to win. We know it's a team effort, but what's your take on all that? I mean, there's the car; there's the driver; there's the- all those things involved. What do you do to stay on top and be a winner consistently in the race game?
00:24:35	Al Unser, Jr. You just got to work at it all the time, you know? It's- it's a 24/7 business, you know, especially for the drivers, the engineers, you know, they're constantly thinking.
00:24:48	Al Unser, Jr. You- you need to be, you know, innovators in your field. And in order to do that, with the competition, as quick as it goes from side to side, it's highly competitive, and so you need to always be working at it.
00:25:08	Al Unser, Jr.

	And you may have an innovation or something that you got a little edge on. You've only got it for probably 24 hours before your competitor has it.
00:25:20	Al Unser, Jr. And so, it's something you just got to always work at.
00:25:24	Barry Hurd So is it a mental attitude? (coughing) Is it a... Does somebody get up and make a speech? I mean, take us inside... How does that work?
00:25:32	Al Unser, Jr. It's not about speeches or anything. It's just about desire really what it comes down to it and, you know, the will to sacrifice anything, you know?
00:25:47	Al Unser, Jr. I said it pretty much in '89 when- when Emerson and I- Emerson Fittipaldi and myself were coming down to the finish of the '89 Indy 500, and we had a little over a lap to go, and we touched in turn three at Indy, coming around to get the white flag, which means the last lap.
00:26:12	Al Unser, Jr. And when we touched, I went into the wall; he continued on. And-, and really, the best way to put it was- I said it after the race in my interview that you know, there's a time in a race that the only thing that matters is winning, you know? Your life doesn't matter. Sure enough, no one else's life matters if your own doesn't. Money doesn't matter, prestige, nothing- nothing, you know? It's all about winning, and that's the only thing that matters.
00:26:55	Al Unser, Jr. And basically, that's what was going on between me and Emerson Fittipaldi when we went into that corner, is we both wanted to win, and we both put everything on the line that we had. And, you know, two cars went in, one came out, and it happened to be Emerson, not me.
00:27:18	Al Unser, Jr. And I know Emerson as a-, as a human being. He's a- he's a very, very passionate, loving Brazilian. I mean, he's-, he was and still is a very good friend of mine.
00:27:36	Al Unser, Jr.

	And, you know, but at that time, no, not even your own life matters. You know, you want to win, and that's basically the way it is.
00:27:49	Al Unser, Jr. You know, Uncle Bobby, he can talk about desire and all that kind of stuff. It's-, it's all those things encompassed in- in the will to win.
00:28:04	Barry Hurd Okay, we were talking earlier. You talked about your most memorable races, the two Indy victories. But what about accidents on the track? You have a memor- you have a memorable wreck? It's hard to say, "Memorable wreck."
00:28:13	Al Unser, Jr. Memorable wreck? Um, in '85, I broke my ankle at Elkhart Lake, leading the race. We were leading the championship, all that kind of stuff. That was the first time I had really broken a bone in my body of any kind, of doing anything was-, was in that race that day.
00:28:37	Al Unser, Jr. And the only other time really was, I broke the same ankle in 1999, you know? And that's about it.
00:28:51	Barry Hurd It's memorable. What about- we've been asking drivers about fans. Fans are obviously a big part of the business.
00:28:57	Barry Hurd Sometimes, you get to know them, or can you think of a memorable incident with a fan or maybe somebody who's followed you or become a friend, or...
00:29:05	Al Unser, Jr. Fans are truly the backbone of our racing, and I learned that when I was racing sprint cars and-, and I had an accident a week before, and I had my first concussion. And I was racing the very next weekend, and I wasn't really feeling all that well, and I wasn't out signing autographs like I normally did.
00:29:35	Al Unser, Jr. And my mentor at that time, his name was Walter Judge, here from Albuquerque and he told me, he said, you know, "Get out here and sign these autographs." And I went, "Why?" You know, and he said, "You wouldn't have a job if

	the fans didn't come to the race." And I thought about it a minute, and I went, "You know, he's right!"
00:30:03	Al Unser, Jr. You know, if the fans didn't come, I wouldn't have a job. There wouldn't be sponsors; there wouldn't be anything if it wasn't for the fans. And-, and from that day forward, I realized that and-, and so..., yeah, I've got- I've got all kinds of favorite fans.
00:30:23	Al Unser, Jr. I mean, there's a lot of them that are very good friends of mine that I met through racing and as it started out them being fans of mine and wanting my autograph and so on, and-, and then we'd kick up a conversation...
00:30:41	Barry Hurd Is there one you know by name that you could tell us about?
00:30:43	Al Unser, Jr. Andy Gilbert. He-, he lives in Indy and, he's my age, we play racquet-ball all the time. Doctor Mac out of Toledo, Ohio, who's older than I am. I mean, he's-, he's a wonderful man and has a great family.
00:31:04	Barry Hurd Alright, let's talk a little bit about- when you got in the business, you said there were some doors there that- maybe you got to the doors a little easier because of where you came from.
00:31:10	Al Unser, Jr. Definitely.
00:31:11	Barry Hurd ...But there were still barriers to entry. Now, I want you to tell me about how things have changed, and the barriers maybe to the next generation, and maybe your son, Andretti's son...
00:31:24	Al Unser, Jr. I guess the best way to talk about getting into the business and becoming a successful race car driver, when I started racing, really Michael Andretti and myself were really the first generation to be raised as race car drivers, you know?
00:31:50	Al Unser, Jr. Our fathers were very successful at it. Safety, the technology of safety had come to where, you know, when

	my dad first started in the early '60s, one out of every seven race car drivers died. They were considered daredevils; they were considered crazy guys that drove fast race cars.
00:32:14	Al Unser, Jr. And then, in the '70s, when I was 10-11 years old, the safety had reached a point where, you know, drivers- they didn't win the Indy 500 and immediately retire. They had longevity to their careers, and so um, you know, Michael and myself were raised as and to be race car drivers.
00:32:46	Al Unser, Jr. And so, as we have gone on in our careers and had long careers, our kids have grown up now, and they've been raised as race car drivers too, but so has a lot of other people.
00:33:06	Al Unser, Jr. And, simply put, racing is a science that can be taught, and so that's why you see Danica Patrick, females, being successful at racing. Gender, it's- it's non-discriminational (<i>sic</i>). Racing, auto racing, if you have the desire and the will to lay everything aside and work hard for it, it's a science, and it can be taught.
00:33:39	Al Unser, Jr. And so, with that and with the safety technology, you know, and the money that is being dispersed, you can make a very successful career at it.
00:33:54	Al Unser, Jr. So, parents you know, across the country are raising soccer players, football players, basketball players, baseball players, and race car drivers, and so there's a whole new generation. And what that has done to our sport is when I came up and when my dad was young and he started racing, it was the talent of the driver that got him into the race car, ok?
00:34:25	Al Unser, Jr. The owner of a race car would come up to a race car driver and say, "I want you to drive my race car because you can win!"
00:34:33	Al Unser, Jr. Today, there's so many talented race car drivers of all races, all genders, and so, the owner, the car owner, is

	saying, "Which one can bring me the most money?" (laughter) And that's what, who decides on getting in the car.
00:34:55	Al Unser, Jr. And also, the other factor is the technology of the car.
00:35:00	Al Unser, Jr. We've got- when I started as a- as a rookie, there was no laptop that was com-, that was plugged into my car, so when I would come into the pits and talk to my engineer, he would ask me what the car is doing and how can we fix it, where today, the engineer really doesn't talk to the driver. He plugs his computer in, downloads the computer, downloads what the car is doing, and then he'll ask the driver, "How can I make the car more comfortable for you to go through the corner at a faster speed?" And you know, because....
00:35:44	Al Unser, Jr. With all of the technology of the readings of the car, the- the throttle, the brake, the steering, the roll, how much- how much downforce is it creating, everything like that, it's reached a point where a young driver who doesn't have any experience, and you take the older driver who has great experience and he's running faster lap times, the engineers can download everything that that older driver is doing: the steering, the gear, the brake, everything and overlap it to the- to the younger driver.
00:36:28	Al Unser, Jr. And the younger driver can see where he's losing time, how he's losing that time, and why he's losing that time.
00:36:39	Al Unser, Jr. And so, the next time he goes out and drives a car, he knows on the track where he's to the-, to the experienced driver, and so it- the- the learning curve is just, "Bam!" He's just...
00:36:55	Al Unser, Jr. Now, and it's really the engineers that taught him, not the experience of the older driver and so on or his own experience.
00:37:04	Al Unser, Jr.

	And that's really the biggest difference between my dad's generation, my generation, and the younger generation, you know?
00:37:14	Al Unser, Jr. You never had a rookie win the Indy-500. It was- there was a one-off back in the '50s, but in the history, it went all these years, and then in 2000, you know- you had Montoya win it, you know, his rookie season.
00:37:30	Al Unser, Jr. You had Helio Castroneves win his first two tries! He won back-to-back in '01 and '02, and it's because the engineers were able to overlap all of their- all of their- their past information to where he could see it and so on.
00:37:52	Barry Hurd But if- if money's the big issue, which driver can get you the most money? Isn't there an advantage having the Unser or Andretti name?
00:38:00	Al Unser, Jr. Yes, there is an advantage to have- you know, it was definitely an advantage for me when I was coming up, and- and yeah, the history dictates that, that- yeah, it- it's a benefit to have that-, those names, but the name doesn't drive the car, and so um...
00:38:26	Al Unser, Jr. In today's competitive market, I mean, you know... When I was a rookie and- and being brought into this sport, the number of talented race car drivers were very few that were in line with me if I was to be put in a line.
00:38:47	Al Unser, Jr. And today, my son's line is five times as long as mine was, and so um....
00:38:59	Al Unser, Jr. Yeah, it helps with the name and all that sort of thing and- but it-, it's become big business, and it became big business when I was a rookie and so on because when I was a rookie, cable television came on. ESPN came into auto racing right at the- in the early '80s when I started. And that's what brought all the money, you know, because of all the- all the advertising and the benefits from it, so...
00:39:37	Barry Hurd

	You know, since it- (coughing) you said it's a science to be taught. You're talking about all the technology. Wouldn't this be a great time for young people to be interested in racing, because of what they could learn from it, the science of it, engineering potential? You could train people...What's your take for young people?
00:39:55	Al Unser, Jr. My take on really racing and it's a lot of the reason why the Unser Racing Museum exists, you know, because my father- my father's vision really is one that has to do with the technology.
00:40:16	Al Unser, Jr. It-, it goes from aerodynamics, to geometries, engineering in all fields, you know, advertising, you know, away from the car, having to do with the car itself, the tire technology. It just goes on, and on, and on, and on, and you know, it's- it's just a wonderful, fascinating industry that- that brings in all kinds of people that- that have a common goal, you know?
00:40:56	Al Unser, Jr. They want to be competitive. They want to beat the best, win when they're at their best, and yet, if anything was to go wrong, they'd be the first one there to help you out, to back you up, and so on. So, it's-, it truly is a wonderful industry.
00:41:18	Barry Hurd You think it's still as exciting as was before? Do you think young people....
00:41:21	Al Unser, Jr. It's more exciting. It's- it's more exciting because of all the- all the different avenues that the automobile has developed, you know? It's not just four tires and an engine and lucky to get it started and that sort of thing. I mean, it-, the automobile is really going to transform you know, everything that has to do with- with racing, and transportation, and all that. It's-, it's great!
00:41:59	Barry Hurd So, if- if you had some young people here and you're interested in getting them into racing, not necessarily as drivers maybe, but what opportunities do they have to get in? What do you do?

00:42:07	Al Unser, Jr. Oh, there's- there's so many opportunities, you know?
00:42:12	Al Unser, Jr. You could start with advertising and, you could go all the way to- wha- how the race car's built, you know, the- again, the geometries of the suspension, how it operates, the engine, how it operates, the fuel that it burns, you know?
00:42:34	Al Unser, Jr. You could- in today's world, you know it's all about clean energy and you know, one of these days, we're going to have automobiles that are racing at Indy that have zero emissions, you know, that leave no carbon footprint. They could be electric; they could be hydrogen; they could be anything, you know?
00:42:57	Al Unser, Jr. Truly, like I said, it's- it's so big, the opportunities that any individual-, young person could have. I mean, they could go into building bridges and the geometry that- that it takes to do that can be applied to an automobile.
00:43:24	Barry Hurd Ok, let's just pause for a second here while we uh...
00:43:29	Barry Hurd ...Dirt tracks, right?
00:43:30	Al Unser, Jr. [clears throat]
00:43:31	Barry Hurd And then you have to go to pavement, and how do you make that transition with different kinds of cars and everything? Is it just something that the driver's a driver, or is there a learning curve, or....
00:43:40	Al Unser, Jr. When I first started racing, I was in a- I started in a go-kart that raced on an asphalt road course go-kart track, and then I went from that to a sprint car, which raced on the dirt oval, and I spent three years doing that.
00:43:58	Al Unser, Jr. And so, then I started driving a Super Vee, which was really a mini Indy car and-, and started getting into the

	aerodynamics. It was the first car that I drove that had wings on it and so on.
00:44:21	Al Unser, Jr. And so, we started doing that and really, as I drove the different cars, I would need to adapt to whatever that car needed and so, in order to run good, so...
00:44:38	Barry Hurd But it's this, I which- "I had to adapt," not everybody can do that. I mean...
00:44:43	Al Unser, Jr. Well, I was-, I think, I was very fortunate in the aspect that I could, you know, and maybe that's what separated me from a person who-, who didn't-, wasn't as successful as myself, racing. Maybe they didn't have that ability, you know?
00:45:06	Al Unser, Jr. I don't know I-, I felt that truly the more different automobiles that I drove in competition, the better race car driver I was going to be at the Indy 500.
00:45:23	Al Unser, Jr. That was my goal; that was everything encompassed the Indy 500. Everything was- in the nucleus was the Indy 500: the oldest race in the world, you know, the one that has developed all these great things and so on and really the proving ground of the automobile, you know?
00:45:49	Al Unser, Jr. The Indy 500 paid the most to win, it meant the most; you practice there for three weeks leading up to the race, so every competitor that is in that race every year is the best that they can be.
00:46:07	Al Unser, Jr. They- they've had more practice time. The engineers, the car owners, the sponsors, everybody had put everything that they have into it to win that race, and so everything I did from-, from a young person to an adult was all around the Indy 500.
00:46:30	Barry Hurd You raced, you said every... Getting a little loud? Do you mind waiting for a few minutes?
00:46:37	Barry Hurd You kept it up for so long, over twenty years, right?

00:46:44	Barry Hurd Tell us how you kept racing and stayed motivated for over twenty years into your forties.
00:46:49	Al Unser, Jr. How I stayed racing for so long is, is - two reasons: the safety aspect that the cars were safe to drive, and I loved racing. I loved the sport, and so, it was something we truly enjoyed doing.
00:47:09	Al Unser, Jr. And-, and so as long as there was a car for me to drive, I was going to drive it. And so...
00:47:15	Barry Hurd But how do you know when it's time to- to not drive anymore?
00:47:18	Al Unser, Jr. When you're getting beat all the time! (laughter) That's how you know it's time to put your spurs up on the wall is... when you, you know...
00:47:29	Al Unser, Jr. Yeah, when the- the younger generation comes in, which happened, and it was time to bring on the next generation, which- which is what we're doing now is bringing A3 up.
00:47:44	Barry Hurd Well, tell me a little about A3 and his career.
00:47:47	Al Unser, Jr. A3 is doing- he's doing ok, you know? It's-, it's very competitive out there, very competitive market let's say, and so we're doing what we can to raise sponsorship to-, to have him go racing. And so we, my father and I, feel that he's got it -- what it takes to be successful at it -- and so we're doing everything we can to make that happen.
00:48:21	Barry Hurd What are some of the things that it takes? I mean, if you're a young guy or a young woman and you wanted to become a race car driver, you said it's a science that could be taught. But don't you have to physically have a certain stature, or....
00:48:34	Al Unser, Jr. Racing is very physical, and that's something that-, that is kind of a misconception of automobile racers, is you know,

	most people think you get in it, and you drive it like your passenger car.
00:48:50	Al Unser, Jr. And then when you truly think about what a race car driver's doing, you know, he's sitting there, his feet are working the pedals, and you know, he steering about that much to go around Indy and that's it!
00:49:06	Al Unser, Jr. And when in reality, because of how fast you're going, because of the competitiveness of your competitors and so on, and making your-, what we call line or your pattern on putting the car where it's supposed to be takes a lot of concentration, and- and our heart rates are over 180 beats per minute.
00:49:38	Al Unser, Jr. And so, it's very exhausting in the aspect that it's more mental than it truly is physical, and the heart rates are compared to a bicyclist, you know, a Lance Armstrong or a Tour de France bicycle rider is what our heart rates... are really directly compared to, and-, and it's-, most of it's mental.
00:50:08	Barry Hurd What about being able to think quickly? It seems like going those speeds, you'd want to be able to...
00:50:12	Al Unser, Jr. Well, going the speeds that we go, over two hundred miles an hour, if you react to an accident, you're already in it.
00:50:23	Al Unser, Jr. So you have to anticipate what's going to happen in front of you, because you're travelling a football field per second, and so it's all about anticipating what's going to happen in front of you and-, and knowing what's going to happen before you get there. And that's really the- one of the key things to being an automobile driver, you know?
00:50:52	Al Unser, Jr. As I've grown up, and you know I'm forty-six today, and watching my dad's generation, my generation, and the- and the young generation that's racing today, the one thing that I've noticed is the age of the race car driver has consistently come down.
00:51:15	Al Unser, Jr.

	When I started racing when I was a rookie, I was twenty-one years old. The average age of the driver at Indy was like thirty-five to thirty-eight, right in that area, and today, your average age is twenty-five.
00:51:34	Al Unser, Jr. So, it has dropped considerably as time has gone on, and a lot of the reason why that is, is again, the technology of the car has changed, and what I call the formula of what we're racing today is far different from when my dad was a rookie for example in 1965.
00:52:02	Al Unser, Jr. The cars were-, it took a different style of driving. It took a bigger man, you know, to-, to handle the car (cough) excuse me... because of the weight of the car was much heavier, the steering was much heavier to turn, so it, you needed a bigger-build person.
00:52:27	Al Unser, Jr. Today's race car driver is much lighter, much smaller, um, not so big in the shoulders and so on because again, technology has made the steering lighter and um, and um, you know, the- the- the cars are a little bit lighter from- from where they were when my dad was a rookie and so on in the '60s.
00:52:57	Al Unser, Jr. And so, it's all the formula; the formula has changed. The-, really the fundamentals of racing, to be a successful race car driver, the desire, the will to win, that's the same, you know, that I've noticed, you know?
00:53:16	Al Unser, Jr. A driver that was successful in the '60s, that same man, reduce his size, and his weight, and his age, and he would be successful today in today's car because he had the desire to win and do whatever it took to pass the guy in front of you in order to win the race.
00:53:43	Al Unser, Jr. And so, you take today's driver and put him into the '60s or her into the '60s, you know, you'd have to be much stronger and-, and- but your successful drivers, they would be. They would be bigger; they would be stronger, because that's what it took to win. So.
00:54:07	Barry Hurd

	OK, well, you stopped racing, and you said you brought up A3 and got the museum going. What other projects or things are you involved in?
00:54:15	Al Unser, Jr. Myself right now, I'm-, I'm an official for the Indy racing league, and I love it. I love doing it.
00:54:22	Al Unser, Jr. I'm there at the racetracks for, really, I'm more of a consultant than anything else.
00:54:30	Al Unser, Jr. I'm there for any driver to come up and talk to me, any mechanic, any engineer. I'm available for them to talk to.
00:54:43	Al Unser, Jr. During the actual race itself, I'm in- [clears throat] Excuse me- I'm in race control, and I'm helping the chief steward call the race, so it's something that I truly enjoy doing. I love it!
00:55:00	Barry Hurd What do you see for the Indy race, for the future? Is it going to stay a big race? Is it going to be moved from Indianapolis? What's going to happen?
00:55:09	Al Unser, Jr. I don't know!
00:55:10	Barry Hurd I'm searching for the answer, but what do you think's going to happen?
00:55:12	Al Unser, Jr. The racing in the future is- is going to continue to do what it's been doing its whole life since 1911, and that is develop the automobile and develop everything that's around the automobile: the engineering of it, the mechanical side of it...
00:55:35	Al Unser, Jr. You know like for example, a shock absorber. The way a shock absorber works is fluid passing through a certain-sized hole. And if you put thinner fluid in a big hole, it'll travel through it quicker. If you use thicker fluid in a smaller hole, then it's much harder for it to go through. It has to do with hydraulics.
00:55:58	Al Unser, Jr.

	And, so, that's just one example, the shock absorber that was developed as a racing piece, which then transferred over into your everyday passenger car.
00:56:13	Al Unser, Jr. The future of the Indy 500, it's going to continue to run. It's the oldest race in the world. It's the most prestigious. Everything about it is-, is going to continue, and it's going to continue to-, to have innovations to it and so on that on all sides of- of racing, on the competition side of it as well as the safety side of it.
00:56:45	Barry Hurd Where are most of the innovations coming from with the race cars nowadays?
00:56:50	Al Unser, Jr. Most of the innovations really are..., they're coming out of just sheer competition of your- of your fellow driver, fellow team, you know, and it also comes from the sanctioning body, the- the IRL, who makes the rules.
00:57:12	Al Unser, Jr. And-, and so, innovation's really, is- is- what you can think of that-, that you can apply to your area of the sport. It can be in advertising; it can be in the actual performance of the car; it can be in the actual safety of the car.
00:57:38	Al Unser, Jr. Firestone, for example, you know, they're working on the tires. How do we make the tires safer, and have more grip, and allow the driver to go through the corner more comfortable, which will directly translate over to your passenger car (laughter).
00:57:59	Al Unser, Jr. So, in advertising, it's all about, how do we get the sponsor-, more people seeing the sponsor on our car? You know, How can we get our product to the consumer better than what we're doing today? And-, and auto racing is a great avenue for-, for any company, for example, to take.
00:58:27	Barry Hurd Indy is like the American race, internationally known as you said, but is there something still about America that- is it still the land of innovation when it comes to cars, and you think there's some future to that? What's your sense of that?

00:58:38	Al Unser, Jr. I don't know. The automobile has- is such a necessity in our life for every individual that it's become a world-, companies around the world have- are producing automobiles, you know: Japan, Germany, America. It's not just, the Americans that are producing the automobiles. It's- it's a world thing, and the Indy 500 is an American race that's internationally known and has been for a very long time, you know?
00:59:21	Al Unser, Jr. Mercedes came over in the- in the '30s, and then the next time they came back was '94 with me, when I won the race.
00:59:30	Al Unser, Jr. Graham Hill, Jimmy Clark... Gosh, there's Emerson Fittipaldi. There's been all through the history of-, since 1911, there's been European automakers, and drivers, and teams, crews that have come and raced the Indy 500.
00:59:53	Barry Hurd Do you think for innovation in general maybe that America is still a good place for that?
01:00:00	Al Unser, Jr. America is you know, the land where American dreams happen, you know? Yeah, the answer is yes. I mean, you know there's challenges in the market of- of-, you know, in the world today, and it'll always be that way, you know? It-, it's just getting more competitive, and with the internet, the computer, the world's getting smaller, and smaller, and smaller, and that's what makes each individual have to work harder and harder to be successful at whatever field they're going after, so...
01:00:45	Barry Hurd Let's, um, some personal items for a moment here. We've talked about some of your accomplishments. You mentioned the two races, obviously memorable. But from a standpoint of pride, what have you done that you're most proud of?
01:01:00	Al Unser, Jr. The things I've done in my life that I'm most proud of are my four kids, you know? My son Al... I've got two daughters, Cody and Shannon, and then another younger

	son, Little Joe, and those are my- those are my most pride, yeah.
01:01:19	Barry Hurd Ok, and although you're a fairly young man, I mean, we always ask people a hundred years from now when people look back, you're obviously a famous racer, and your name will be still well-known...
01:01:29	Barry Hurd What would you like them to think about you, I mean if you had to...
01:01:35	Al Unser, Jr. Um, I don't know. I-, I'm-, I guess when-, when you win the Indy 500, you-, you become a part of history that's going to be there forever, and ever, and ever, and my name is- is the first son of a winner to win the Indy 500.
01:02:05	Al Unser, Jr. And, you know, a hundred years from now, when they're looking at the names like I did when I was a kid and I was looking at the names, "Who was the first one to win it two times in a row?" "Who was the first one to win it three times?" "Who was the first one to win it four times," you know, and then, "Who was the second one to do that," and then, "Who- who was-, who's- who's the son," you know? I mean, 'cause it-, 'cause [clears throat] really, Borg Warner says, you know, "Al and Bobby Unser" on it, and then it gets to Al Unser Jr, and so that must be Al Unser's kid and so...
01:02:47	Al Unser, Jr. You know, hopefully there can be an Al Unser 3. Hopefully, there can be a Joe Unser, you know, and so on! I hope that-, that the Unser name continues to be the first family of auto racing.
01:03:05	Barry Hurd Ok, suppose we had a bunch of young kids here starting out life, starting to think what they were going to do. What are the lessons from your life that you could give them, things that they should look forward to try to become more successful?
01:03:20	Al Unser, Jr. I guess the young kids that- that I would have advice to or so on from my life is-, you know, have-, have passion for

	life. Have something that-, that you can get out of bed and look forward to doing, you know?
01:03:44	Al Unser, Jr. Live to work, don't work to live. And if you can do that and truly enjoy what you're doing, you know, it makes for a much more satisfied life.
1:04:00	Barry Hurd Ok, we asked your dad this, but we're going to ask you as well: How- how come you guys never became team owners? You're race drivers, why not team owners?
1:04:07	Al Unser, Jr. Why didn't we become team owners? I have no idea. I simply can't answer that question. I-, my dad and my uncle chose not to own their cars, and- and I would love to own a car, you know, but things went different for me in my life, and so, you know, jumping into it now would be a big mistake, so...
1:04:38	Barry Hurd Why would it be a big mistake?
1:04:39	Al Unser, Jr. Because it costs too much money! (laughter)
1:04:45	Barry Hurd Ok, let me show you- we have some pictures here. I want to show them to you, and I'm sure you can recognize them. Tell us what's happening and the memories they may evoke. Here's the first one.
1:04:57	Barry Hurd Also, after you look at it, show it to the camera so we know what you're talking about.
1:05:00	Al Unser, Jr. That's- that would be me in my go-kart and my father and uh... Yep, that's where my racing started: right there.
1:05:10	Barry Hurd Where were you? How old?
1:05:12	Al Unser, Jr. I'm about, probably ten years old at that- ten or eleven-years old right there.
1:05:16	Barry Hurd Now, can you- when you pick up that picture, can you feel being there?
1:05:20	Al Unser, Jr.

	Yeah! Oh, yeah! The memory's still there. Yeah, it was..., uh, yeah... I just see an Elvis look-alike right there. That's what I primarily see.
1:05:34	Barry Hurd Ok, well, let's try another one then! Here you go, take a look.
1:05:40	Al Unser, Jr. Yep, this would be my first victory at Portland, Oregon, and I didn't even know I was leading the race, the whole race. Then I came around, and it looked like the flagman gave me the white flag, and so I went around that lap and I couldn't wait to get back around to see if he was still waving the white flag, or if he was going to present me with the checkered, and he presented me with the checkered, and I was so happy, both hands went up.
1:06:16	Barry Hurd Here's- I think this is the last one, perhaps. Take a look at that one.
1:06:23	Al Unser, Jr. This one is taken in Denver, Colorado, at a sprint car track, a dirt oval. Now, we've got some legends of the sport right there. Yep!
1:06:38	Al Unser, Jr. This was in Denver, Colorado. I was sixteen years old right there and it was with some of the legends of- of really of sprint car racing.
1:06:51	Al Unser, Jr. The one standing closest to me is Steve Kinser... One of the founders of the World of Outlaws, Ted Johnson, right here... Um, their first World of Outlaws' champion, Rick Ferkel, right here. Um, the other two guys I know, but I- I can't think of their names right now.
1:07:09	Barry Hurd Did you say how old you were and what you were doing there?
1:07:11	Al Unser, Jr. I was sixteen years old, and we were racing. We were racing sprint cars on the dirt.
1:07:20	Barry Hurd Now, let me ask you this: I might've- we might've been talking about this before, we gave everyone a chance.

	Throughout your, speckled career, is there anything you'd like to correct? Um, maybe some-, some mis-, you know, misidentification of something...
1:07:35	Al Unser, Jr. Actually, I don't... believe it or not. I'm very-, very proud of- of what, you know, personally I've accomplished in my life and the lessons I've learned and so on.
1:07:50	Al Unser, Jr. Some of them have been easy, some had been hard, and-, but you know, I'm very proud of all of my children, you know? And, so, uh, no, I'm pretty happy.
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