



▲ Ferrari's Formula One world champion Michael Schumacher leaps in the air after winning the San Marino Grand Prix in 2004.

TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY

Only the very best drivers and riders can win major motorsports races. The rewards are fame, fortune, excitement and glory, but the threat of danger is never far away. Motor racing is a sport, but it is far from a game. It is a potentially lethal activity, but this risk is part of its appeal for many drivers and spectators.

THE REWARDS

Motorsports offer many rewards, from the thrill of high-speed racing to the glory of the winner's podium. Many types of racing offer professional competitors an excellent living. In the wealthiest classes, such as NASCAR and Formula One, the drivers are multi-millionaires. Race winnings alone can total over US\$6 million (£3.5 million) in a NASCAR season, while Michael Schumacher's F1 contract with Ferrari is believed to pay him a round £20 million per season. In addition, the very best and most famous drivers can see their income soar through sponsorship, merchandizing and media opportunities.

HIGH-RISK RACING

Motor racing has always carried a high degree of risk. In 1898, the Marquis de Montaignac and his mechanic were killed during the Course de Périgueux. They were motor racing's first fatalities. Early races were deadly, with no crash helmets, few safety features and unmapped routes. Spectators would wander onto roads, causing accidents. Only the relatively low speeds kept death tolls from being much higher. Yet, as reliability, brakes and circuits improved, the risks changed in nature, with speeds hitting 200km/h in the 1930s. By 1971, it was estimated that 840 racing drivers had died.



◀ Incredibly, Geoff Bodine suffered only a broken wrist and ankle after this NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series crash at Daytona, USA, in 2000.



▲ MotoGP rider Alex Barros of Brazil crashes his Yamaha at high speed during the Australian GP in October 2005. He escaped with only minor cuts and bruises.



▲ British driver Dan Wheldon kisses the famous Borg-Warner trophy after winning the 2005 Indy 500.

▶▶ At Le Mans in 1955, Pierre Levegh corners in a Mercedes 300SLR shortly before his tragic crash. The race was continued in order to prevent spectators from leaving, which would have blocked all access roads and the ambulances.

Ascarì all occurred in the 1955 season. The worst accident of all in that tragic year came during the Le Mans 24 Hours. Pierre Levegh's Mercedes flew off the track, killing himself, over 80 spectators and injuring more than 100. Racing was then banned in France, Spain, Switzerland and Mexico (in Switzerland, the ban remains to this day). Mercedes withdrew from motorsport, not returning until the 1980s.

THE RISK REMAINS

Greater driver protection, better marshalling and fire precautions, safety barriers and improved cars and tracks have made some types of racing safer. Formula One has not had a fatality since the death of Ayrton Senna in 1994 (see pp72–73). Yet a serious risk remains, and a number of drivers, including Mika Hakkinen and Michael Schumacher, have since suffered severe injuries. The start of the 21st century has already seen a number of tragedies, including the deaths of MotoGP star Daijirō Kato in 2003, co-driver Michael Park at the 2005 Wales Rally Great Britain, and two F1 marshals (at the 2000 Italian GP and the 2001 Australian GP) killed by flying debris from crashes. Another marshal, this time at the 2005 Isle of Man TT, died as she crossed the circuit and was hit by rider Gus Scott, who also perished.

Being a skilful, experienced driver has never guaranteed protection against accident and injury, as is proven by the deaths of Jim Clark in 1968, Henri Toivonen in 1986 and Ayrton Senna in 1994. Marshall Teague, Neil Bonnet and Dale Earnhardt are just three of the NASCAR greats who have been killed at Daytona, a circuit that has seen 28 drivers lose their lives since 1959. Many spectators have also perished over the years. In 1928, Emilio Materassi crashed into the crowd at Monza, Italy, killing himself and 27 spectators. At the same circuit 33 years later, Wolfgang von Trips and 14 spectators were killed, an event that saw Ferrari withdraw from racing for the rest of the season. Forty-one drivers have been killed at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway during racing, qualifying or testing. A further 23 spectators, mechanics or track officials have also perished there.

A DEADLY SEASON

The tragic deaths of US sprint car star Mike Nazaruk, Indianapolis legend Bill Vukovich and the great Alberto

