



Pit Notes

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Honda Grand Prix of St. Petersburg – Friday, April 3 through Sunday, April 5, 2009

Honda Grand Prix to launch 2009 IndyCar Series season with assist from Shuttle astronaut

The Honda Grand Prix of St. Petersburg is set to launch the 2009 IndyCar Series season on April 5, but that effort will get some assistance this week when Space Shuttle Discovery lifts off Wednesday at 9:20 p.m. from the Kennedy Space Center.

Discovery Pilot Tony Antonelli, who spent a portion of his childhood in the Indianapolis area, will carry a Honda Grand Prix of St. Petersburg green flag with him when he flies STS-119 to the International Space Station. Antonelli, who considers Indy car racing one of his early influences and current passions, contacted Michael Andretti last fall to inquire about an item he could carry to represent part of his life. Andretti obliged with the offer of the green flag.

3 Questions with 2005 Indianapolis 500 and IndyCar Series Champion Dan Wheldon

1. The 2009 season finds you with a new team at Panther Racing. How refreshing and energizing is this new assignment and what can we look for from you and your team in 2009?

DW: *There is a very good vibe surrounding this team, it reminds me a lot of when I was at AGR and we were winning races quite frequently. I wouldn't be here if I didn't think we'd have a chance to win races and the Indianapolis 500, but the key for us is going to be consistency and opening the season very strong in the first four races. If we can do that, I feel like we're going to be a very strong contender for the championship.*

2. You have made St. Petersburg your home base in the U.S. What is it about St. Petersburg that you enjoy most.

DW: *I'd be lying if I said it wasn't the weather, but the entire city is very picturesque. St. Pete has everything a big city does, but it has a small town feel to it. There is very little traffic to deal with, it's very easy to get around and people are very nice. And, ultimately, this is where my racing career in America started because it's where my first team was based, so that has always made it a special place for me. My family really loves it here.*

3. You have some major changes in your life and career these days. Which keeps you up more at night, a new baby at home or a new team in the IndyCar Series?

DW: *You know, I saw (NASCAR driver) Jeff Gordon recently at a National Guard appearance and he didn't even say hello; he walked right up to me and said, 'Man, it's only going to get worse.' It's been great having Sebastian in our lives, but when people tell you before the baby is born to catch up on sleep, they're not joking.*