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Moore knew hazards of high speed

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FONTANA, Calif. — Two days before his death, Greg Moore talked about the hazards of racing at 230 mph.

"The cars are as safe as they can be," the 24-year-old Canadian driver said. "It's just that you'll never be able to make race cars completely safe. Things happen at speed."

On Sunday, Moore was killed during the Marlboro 500 at California Speedway. For a reason that might never be known, he lost control of his Reynard-Mercedes and crashed into a concrete wall at more than 200 mph.

Only minutes before, Richie Hearn crashed in almost the same spot at about the same speed, but walked away without injury.

It appeared that Moore's head, poking out of the open cockpit of his Champ Car, slapped the wall after the car dug into the infield grass and flipped.

At that point, the blue car broke in two, spraying parts and shards as the cockpit spun wildly four times. Moore was pounded into

the ground several times before the cockpit came to rest.

Few drivers knew what had happened as they raced toward the checkered flag. Afterward, there was no traditional champagne, only tears.

Moore was the second CART driver to die this season. Rookie Gonzalo Rodriguez of Uruguay was killed during practice Sept. 11 in Monterey.

Another young driver, Jeff Krosnoff, died during a race in Toronto in 1996. Krosnoff was the first driver to die in a CART race in 14 years, a fact that may have lulled many into a false sense of security.

"We keep working on the safety, finding more and more ways to protect the drivers and the crews and the fans," team owner and former driving star Bobby Rahal said. "You go months, then years without anything serious and, bang, all of a sudden, somebody is hurt badly or

killed and everybody questions how it happened.

"Well, drivers accept the fact that you can get hurt or killed in a race car because nobody can ever make them perfectly safe. When something like that happens, you just have to assess it, try to fix the problem if you can and go on."

Mario Andretti, a retired open-wheel star, began racing in a more perilous era.

"I buried a lot of my friends in Formula One," he said. "Back then, the cars were just plain dangerous."

"Now, drivers expect to have long careers and retire with everything intact," added Andretti, whose two sons followed him into racing. "Now we have fuel cells and crushable sidepods and improved helmets and lots of other things for the safety of the drivers."

"But the human body was never meant to be smashed into walls at high speed. With everything that's being done to protect them, drivers are still only human and vulnerable."

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