

# The Racing Pombos Are A Unique Family



◀ L-R Matthew, Pepe, and Mark Pombo.

Story & Photographs By  
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The huge crowd stood and cheered throughout the viewing area in Turns 10A and 10B as the silver Miata with the black-painted mustache braked hard coming down the back straight into this tricky chicane with a blaze-orange Miata glued to its rear bumper! Suddenly, probably by accident, the orange car hit the silver car enough to make it go sideways into the grass and dirt between 10A and 10B, and everyone knew it was the last lap of the race. Since the silver car had led most of the race, it seemed a shame for the driver to lose this way, but that's the nature of racing.



◀ The race for Turn 10A.

Instead of going into a spin, however, the driver kept his foot on the gas, miraculously held the bouncing Miata in a straight line, cut off Turn 10B, and though slowed considerably, returned to the racing pavement under the bridge in Turn 11 and just ahead of the orange car. Since the orange car was carrying more speed, it slammed into the rear of the silver car with enough force to give it a much needed push downhill toward Turn 12, the waiting checkered flag and another win for Matthew Pombo!

Without a doubt, the National Spec Miata race had been the best entertainment of the weekend at Road Atlanta. The Pombo brothers, Matt and Mark, had battled from the beginning with Pat Sandlin, and most of the time, only inches separated all three cars. In the end, however, Matthew Pombo won, Pat Sandlin was second, and little brother Mark Pombo finished third.

For 2006, the Pombo family joined forces with Bob Thornton's North Carolina-based, Race Engineering, to compete for the SCCA Spec Miata National Championship. Since Mathew Pombo won six of the seven races and the Southeastern Division championship, and Mark Pombo had one second place and five third place finishes, it appears that Race Engineering and Pombo Racing are a great marriage!

That the Pombo family is successful in racing is no surprise. They have been doing it for a very long time. In fact, Louis Pombo began their involvement by racing Model T Fords in Mexico City back in the 1920's. He was followed by Louis Pombo, Jr. with a fourth place finish in the 1954 Pan American Race driving a Buick Century with Luis Echevarria as co driver.

The father of Matt and Mark is Jose Luis Pombo, who is better known to American racers as Pepe. He began his racing career at 13 years old in 1956 by competing on motorcycles. In 1960, Pepe signed with Yamaha and raced flat track, scrambles, and road races, and in 1962 became the Mexican National 250cc Champion riding for Yamaha. Pepe came to the U.S.A. in 1965,

married Mrs. Pombo, moved to Atlanta, and got involved in SCCA racing at Road Atlanta. His accomplishments have included 40 National wins in 12 years, 2 National Championships, a 1988 Endurance Championship with Scott Sharp, and too many other podium finishes to list. Tragically, however, Pepe was diagnosed in December 1990 with lymphoma cancer, which by 1996 had deteriorated his eyesight so severely that he had to quit racing.

Despite all the wins, the legacy of Mr. and Mrs. Pombo is the wonderful family, their extended family of friends, and the two young men (Matt and Mark) who have practically dominated Spec Miata racing over the past few years. Even these fine sons, however, have been busy in and outside of racing.

At the age of 7, Matthew ran his first and last motorcycle race and won, but cars would be his future. So, by the time he was 10 years old, Matt began racing Quarter Midgets. He raced for 5 years and won many events, but was not able to compete for any championships due to his father's racing schedule. (Dad had to push the car to get it started).

During 1995, Matt was the Georgia State President of Beta Club and a National Officer, he was the leading soccer scorer for the state of Georgia, and was selected to the Georgia State All-Star soccer team. From 1996 to 1998, Matt attended Georgia Tech, majoring in microbiology, but during 1998, he was accepted to the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta, Georgia before graduating from Georgia Tech.

Matt kept in touch with racing by driving Legend cars at Lanier Speedway on weekends and compiling many wins while balancing internship and racing. He graduated from the Medical College of Georgia in 2002, and began his Orthopedic Surgery Residency at



Most of the Pombo family ► showed up at Road Atlanta for the race.

Wake Forest in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where he became the Team Doctor for the Wake Forest soccer team.

Despite his busy and successful schedule with SCCA racing in Spec Miata since 2003, Matt has continued his career as a Doctor. In fact, he has recently accepted a Fellowship for 2007 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania for Orthopedic Sports Medicine, and will take care of the Pittsburgh Steelers and all the other sports teams in that area, except the Pittsburgh Pirates.

Though Mark has also followed in Pepe's footsteps as a successful race driver, he has chosen a different path than that of Matthew in his private life. In 2002, after one year of college Mark decided to join the Army Reserves and left for Basic training in Fort Jackson and AIT training as a petroleum specialist. Even though he returned to college in January of 2003, Mark was called to active duty February 10th, and his unit left for Iraq in April. He was stationed outside the Green Zone where he delivered petroleum and water throughout northern Iraq.

During December, Mark came home for his two week leave and found a 1990 Miata in Maryland for his father to bring home and start building for him. He knew that racing was still in his future, and he would need that car.

While Mark was serving in Iraq, Mathew was back home racing in Spec Miata, and throughout the year Mark would call during each race weekend (staying up all night) to check on Mathew and how his car was handling. He was also very interested in what Mathew and his Dad were going to do to help Mathew's handling for each upcoming session. During each race that year Mark would call at

the beginning of the race and Pepe would hold the phone so Mark could hear the radio communication between Mathew and his Dad during the race. When the race was over, Mark was the first person Mathew spoke to on the phone, usually in victory circle.

Mark made everyone in SCCA proud by receiving several awards and medals for his outstanding service to our country. He continues to serve in the Army Reserve by reporting one weekend a month to his Reserve Unit in Athens, Georgia, and has 2 years of active Army Reserve duty and then 2 more years of inactive service until his 8-year commitment is fulfilled in 2010. He could still be called back to active duty at any time.

Despite being a little rusty when he returned from Iraq in 2004, Mark won the SARRC Spec Miata Championship in 2005. He continues to improve, and though this may be Matt's year, little brother isn't far behind!

As I told Mrs. Pombo at a family outing at Road Atlanta recently, I like so many others in SCCA, feel as though I'm a part of the Pombo family. They are professional with their cars, preparation, and racing, but will go out of their way to help another competitor. Despite their winning ways, the racing Pombos are a unique family, who bring far more to our sport than fast cars and great talent!

Bill Vanderford has won numerous awards for his writing and photography, and has been inducted into the National Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame as a Legendary Guide. He can be reached at 770-289-1543, at JFish51@aol.com, or at his web site: [www.fi.shinglanier.com](http://www.fi.shinglanier.com)