

Sports Collectors Digest

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AUTOGRAPH DEALER

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OF WHA ARE A
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Miguel Ramos in front of his stand at a race.

Dealer packs a credibility punch with Muhammad Ali

The Champ lays foundation for Autographed Collectables, the world's premier autograph dealer for MotoGP

It was a moment that Miguel Ramos said felt completely surreal. Sitting behind the table in front of him wasn't just another professional athlete. This man was an iconic figure, who transcended sports, serving as a source of inspiration for millions around the world. His performance defined greatness.

And now Muhammed Ali was eyeing up Ramos' female friend, who accompanied Ramos to this private autograph signing in 1997.

"He said, 'You are too good looking to be with him,'" Ramos recalled with a wistful smile.

That one, half-hour meeting with The Champ changed the course of Ramos' year-old business. He became the exclusive

Australian distributor for Ali's signed merchandise, giving him instant credibility.

That relationship with Ali provided the foundation for his Anaheim, Calif.-based Autographed Collectables, which has become arguably the world's premier autograph dealer for MotoGP, the most technologically advanced motorcycle racing series.

Growing up in Adelaide, Australia, Ramos said he had no idea that there was such a thing as a collectibles market until he visited some relatives in Detroit in 1996.

But he was always a collector. As a teen, Ramos was an avid tennis player and often attended the Australian Open tune-up events held in his hometown. Ramos remembers hanging over the



A racer checks out autographs. PHOTOS: MIGUEL RAMOS

railing to get Boris Becker, Michael Chang and Pete Sampras to sign a ball or photo. He still has them in his private collection.

“I was always passionate about sports, and was a very active kid growing up,” Ramos said. “But when I bumped into the

industry in 1996, I immediately saw the opportunity to do the same in Australia.”

While visiting family in the United States, a friend suggested that they go to a memorabilia show. Ramos went and was hooked, and spent the next year traveling across the country attending shows to learn as much about the business before he tried to replicate in Australia what he saw here.

That’s how he bumped into the man that changed everything for him – Darren Prince.

Prince worked with some iconic athletes, including Dennis Rodman, Magic Johnson and Joe Frazier.

Ali, though, was Prince’s prize client, and Ramos worked out a deal to acquire pieces in quantity to sell back in Australia. In the following years, Prince invited Ramos to the Ali signing and events with many other high-profile athletes. Ramos still has some of the trunks, gloves and Olympic torches signed by Ali. A framed glove is currently being offered by Ramos for \$2,500.

But motorcycles were always Ramos’ passion, and it wasn’t long after his landmark meeting with Ali that Ramos headed to the race track.

In 1999, he signed his first rider, and it was a big one – Mick Doohan, an Australian rider who won five consecutive 500cc world championships from 1994-98.

With some help from a mechanic in the MotoGP garage, Ra-



Miguel Ramos with Muhammad Ali during an autograph-signing session.

mos was introduced to Valentino Rossi. Then 1987 500cc World Champion Wayne Gardner contacted Ramos to see if he'd be willing to market a signed piece. Ramos agreed. A business was born.



Marc Marquez and Valentino Rossi in "Clash of the Titans" autographed photo of the 2018 Argentine GP.



Valentino Rossi's autographed knee slider.

Now with a foot solidly inside the paddock, Ramos continued to use his connections to strike agreements with some of the top riders in history, assembling a stable of talent that have won more than 60 world championships.

Ramos' Autographed Collectables has become the exclusive source for Valentino Rossi autographed memorabilia.

Rossi, a seven-time MotoGP World Champion and 125cc and 250cc World Champion, was among Ramos' earliest signings, agreeing to a contract with Autographed Collectables in 2000.

Ramos currently has nine active MotoGP riders in his lineup, including Marc Marquez, the reigning MotoGP champion, and Alex Rins and Maverick Vinales, Suzuki and Yamaha factory riders, respectively. Ramos has also worked in Formula 1 since 2003 and lists Kimi Raikkonen, Sebastian Vettel and Mario Andretti as some of his clients.

Retired riders still sign for Ramos, too. Casey Stoner, Troy Bayliss, Wayne Rainey, Ben Spies, Freddie Spencer and Kevin Schwantz are among them.

Most of the items that Ramos' sells are signed photographs, but these are much more than 8x10s with a few black Sharpie scribbles on them. They are almost works of art, arriving in custom frames and mats often accompanied by engraved plaques detailing the rider's on-track exploits. Some even feature a link from the chain used on the rider's bike.

Ramos also works with a graphic artist to develop custom designs so he is not just selling run-of-the mill photographs.

Despite the high-quality of his items, he manages to keep them affordable with prices coming in between \$150-\$295.

Ramos does offer some track-worn items as well, but these are much harder to get as some riders' contracts with Dainese and Alpinestars – manufacturers of protective leather gear – do not allow them to sell their worn gear.

Ramos does have some framed gloves signed by current LCR Honda rider Cal Crutchlow, retailing for \$695.

Occasionally, Ramos is able to get his hands on a full leather suit. He recently obtained one from Ducati factory rider Danilo Petrucci. Most of the time he gets these in inventory, it is to fulfill a client request. They are very difficult to obtain, and come at a pretty steep price, starting at \$7,000, Ramos said.

The most common race-used items that Ramos sells are signed knee sliders, which are big chunks of plastic that Velcro onto a leather suit, protecting the riders knees as they lean through the turns.

These come mounted to graphic art worked and framed in a shadow box, retailing for between \$350-\$1,300.

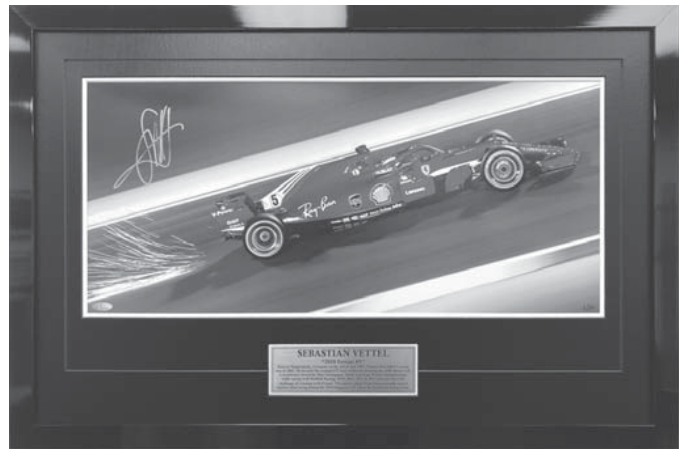
All of his items are accompanied by a photo of the rider signing what has been purchased. A Guarantee of Authenticity is also included. It has the signing date, location and how many were signed in the edition.

Ramos travels to select races during the season to have all of his items signed in person, which he also witnesses.

Ramos does have a few signed motorcycle fairings (the shell that goes over the frame) to sell as well, but he said these are by far the hardest for him to get. Most manufacturers



Charles LeClerc autographed photo.



Sebastian Vettel autographed photo.



Kimi Raikkonen autographed photo from 2018 Austin victory.



Marc Marquez autographed photo with race-used chain link.

destroy unused parts at the end of the season for tax purposes, he said.

Ducati is the only one that sells its carbon-fiber bodywork. But Ramos has to obtain those from a secondary source.

And with so few signed fairings in circulation, the price is steep. Ramos has a genuine signed and used Rossi Ducati tail piece that has a \$15,000 price tag.

After close to two decades of working in the paddock, Ramos has developed a close relationship with MotoGP, and knowing the quality and authenticity of his items, Autographed Collectables now has a place on the official MotoGP website.

In 2020, Ramos hoped to open an office in the UK to continue expanding the business, but that has been put on hold because of the coronavirus. He will reassess things in June.

Most of his business, though, is done through setting up a stand at the races and motorcycle shows around the world. He ships items worldwide, too. On his website (www.signedandauthentic.com), Ramos touts Autographed Collectables as the world's leading motor-racing memorabilia company, but he also offers a little bit of memorabilia from boxing and other sports,

thanks to his industry connections over the years.

While the collectibles market might not be at the level it was during the late 1990s and early 2000s, Ramos said his business is as strong as ever.

"I've seen many companies come and go over the past 20 years. I am very proud that Autographed Collectables has stood the test of time," Ramos said, "and 23 years later, we are still providing products which are unquestionably 100 percent authentic." ■