



Calling all champions Formula champions to earn Indy Pro Series test

INDIANAPOLIS (Friday, Aug. 4, 2006) -- Calling all champions. That's the mantra coming from the Indy Pro Series headquarters in Indianapolis. As a top-level, open-wheel racing series designed to mold drivers for the IndyCar Series, the Indy Pro Series and Sam Schmidt Motorsports will provide a post-season test to champions of three other formula car series based in the United States.

The champions of the Cooper Tires Formula Ford Zetec Series, Star Mazda Championship and Formula BMW USA all will have the opportunity to test an Indy Pro Series car with Sam Schmidt Motorsports at the end of the season.

"In my own rise to IndyCars, I came through SCCA and what is now the Cooper Tires Series," said team owner Sam Schmidt, a former driver whose team won the Indy Pro Series championship in 2004. "It's a natural progression that we really need to be marketing ourselves to those series. They've got full fields. They've got great drivers. All of the up-and-comers go to one of those three series for experience.

"As the future strategy of the Indy Pro Series appears to be more of a combination of road courses and ovals, those series become more of a natural place to look for the future talent for the Indy Pro Series and the IndyCar Series."

Several drivers competing in the Indy Pro Series this season cut their teeth in those series. Points leader Jay Howard, who drives for Schmidt, won the Cooper Tires Zetec championship last year on the strength of nine victories. He also won his only Star Mazda start of 2005.

Bobby Wilson, who ranks second in points, and Wade Cunningham, the 2005 Indy Pro Series champion, finished first and fifth, respectively, in Zetec in 2004.

Raphael Matos, who swept the two races at St. Petersburg, Fla. in April, won last year's Star Mazda championship while Graham Rahal, who qualified on the pole and finished second in the Liberty Challenge on the road course at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, is a Star Mazda and Formula BMW graduate.

Several IndyCar Series standouts, including Indianapolis 500 and two-time IndyCar Series champion Sam Hornish Jr., 2005 Indianapolis 500 and IndyCar Series champion Dan Wheldon and 2004 Indianapolis 500 winner Buddy Rice are graduates of the Cooper Tires Series, while leading rookie Marco Andretti competed in the Star Mazda series in 2005.

"The Indy Pro Series continues to become more and more competitive," said Roger Bailey, executive director of the Indy Pro Series. "Much of that can be attributed to the high caliber of drivers coming from the formula series in the United States. Hopefully this testing opportunity will continue to give the top young drivers a chance to compete in the Indy Pro Series and develop into IndyCar Series drivers."

The Indy Pro Series is the premier ladder series for drivers, teams and sponsors striving to compete in the IndyCar® Series and the Indianapolis 500. The 12-race schedule in 2006 features six races on ovals and six races on road courses, including competing on both circuits at the famous Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Teams compete for \$3 million in prize money in cars that generate 420 horsepower and speeds in excess of 190 mph. The races are telecast to more than 88 million homes in the United States on ESPN2.

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