



## **STAR MAZDA 2007 -- ANOTHER STEP UP THE LADDER**

2007 was another banner year for the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear. The deep talent pool included drivers from four continents and seven countries, with eight different winners in twelve races and just four points separating the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>-place finishers in the championship. Records were set, including the first-ever back-to-back podium finishes by a female driver in the series. And, claiming the champion's share of a prize fund approaching \$1.5 million, another rising star took his next step up the Mazda Motorsports Ladder.

### The Champion

Dane Cameron, a 19-year-old series rookie from Sonoma, CA, won the 2007 Star Mazda Championship – becoming only the second rookie champion in the 17-year history of the series (Ian Lacy won in his first season, in 1998). Driving the #19 JDC Motorsports/Finlay Motorsports Mazda, he clinched the championship in Round Eleven at Road Atlanta on his way to a record of three wins, six pole positions, and seven top-5 finishes, including five podiums. Cameron will follow the path established by 2005 champion Raphael Matos and 2006 winner Adrian Carrio, moving up the Mazda Motorsports Ladder to a full-season drive in the Cooper Tires Presents the Champ Car Atlantic Championship Powered by Mazda.

### The Winners

In addition to Cameron's three victories (Houston, VIR and Toronto), seven other drivers also stood on the top step of the podium in 2007. Ron White of Santa Clara, California (#69 Wunder-Bar Mazda) drove for three teams during the season, starting out with Team G.FRO, moving to Maxwell Racing mid-season and fielding his own car for the last two races. He scored back-to-back wins for at Road America and Trois Rivières, finishing third in the championship. Also scoring two wins (Salt Lake City and Road Atlanta) was Burnaby, B.C. driver Lorenzo Mandarin. He finished 8<sup>th</sup> in the championship driving the #15 Team G.FRO/Newway Forming Mazda.

Single-race winners included Australian racer James Davison, who finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in the championship. He won at Mosport in the #7 Velocity Motorsports/Easternats Mazda. Jonathan Goring of Norfolk, CT finished 5<sup>th</sup> in the championship and won at Cleveland in the #14 Andersen Racing/Skip Barber Racing Mazda. Sixth in the championship, and winning his first race of the season in the final round at

Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca driving the #51 Mundill/Oral and Facial Surgery Center Mazda was Lafayette, Louisiana native Alex Ardoin.

Saint-Bruno, Quebec's Devin Cunningham won the 2006 Discovery Channel 'Star Racer' competition to find Canada's next open-wheel racing star, and won in the rain at Portland in the #33 AIM Autosport/Discovery Channel Mazda. He finished 7<sup>th</sup> in the championship. Rounding out the list of 2007 race winners was Toronto's Marco Di Leo; he qualified on the front row for more than half of the races, won the season-opener at Sebring and finished 9<sup>th</sup> in the championship driving the #21 Maxwell Racing/Nugget Mazda.

While it is not known at this point how many of these drivers will return for another season of Star Mazda Championship racing in 2008, those who do and finished in the top-10 will get to use that number on their car. If the driver moves on to another series, the team that fielded the car will retain the number.

### Expert and Masters Series

The Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear is one of the only open-wheel racing series in the world to feature a championship-within-a-championship for more mature drivers in whom the competitive fire still burns brightly. The Expert Series, for drivers aged 30 to 44, was won by Dallas, Texas racer Dan Tomlin III. Driving the #56 Team Tomlin Mazda, he scored three class wins, including the season finale at Mazda Raceway (where his father, Dan Tomlin Jr., won the Master class event), and four class top-3 finishes. The Master Series for driver 45 and older, was won by Steve Hickham of Corpus Christi, Texas. Racing the #17 Maxwell Racing/HB Turbo Mazda, he compiled a record of five class wins and six top-3 class finishes.

### The Prizes

With the 2007 prizes approaching \$1.5 million, Cameron claimed the lion's share; including a Mazda-sponsored 2008 season in the Cooper Tires Presents the Champ Car Atlantic Championship Powered by Mazda. Cameron has elected to race with the 2007 championship-winning Sierra Sierra/ProWorks team. He also collected \$100,000 and a new Mazda RX-8 for winning the championship and \$10,000 for winning Rookie of the Year. The rest of the \$500,000 in cash prizes was paid deep into the field, from \$70,000 for 2<sup>nd</sup>-place to \$10,000 for 15<sup>th</sup>.

The season-ending banquet, ably hosted by SPEED Channel commentators Brian Till and Calvin Fish, included not only championship prizes for the top-15 drivers, but also a number of other awards:

The Team Championship for the Star Mazda team scoring the most points based on finishes throughout the season by their top two cars: **JDC Motorsports** (\$10,000)

Racing for Kids Award for the driver making visits to children's hospitals and scoring the most points at designated Racing for Kids events: **Alex Ardoin** (\$1,000 and \$1,000 donated to the hospital of his choice)

Quartermaster Clutch Performer Award for the driver gaining the most positions in the championship during the final six races of the year: **Dan Tomlin III** (\$5,000 and trophy)

BBS Hard Charger Award for the driver who gained the most places from start to finish in every race of the year: **Ron White** (Custom-made coffee table and set of BBS road wheels)

VP Fuel Most Improved Driver Award, a consensus award among all series participants for the individual who has shown the most progress as a driver from the beginning to the end of the season: **Alex Ardoin** (\$5,000 and trophy)

Performance Friction Crew Member of the Year Award, a consensus award for the most valuable member of a particular team who's efforts have also benefited other teams and the series: **Kate Gundlach of John Walko Racing** (\$1,500)

President's Cup / The Spirit of Star Mazda, a consensus award for the person who best typifies the qualities and character that represent the Star Mazda Championship: **Dan Tomlin Jr.** (\$2,500)

### Records and Notable Achievements

Natacha Gachnang of St. Gingolph, Switzerland, set a series record for female racers with back-to-back podium finishes driving the #35 AIM Autosport Mazda. Gachnang only ran seven of twelve races, but still finished 15<sup>th</sup> in the championship.

Nick Haye, the Hollywood, California-based driver of the #37 JDC Motorsports/Quantum Sphere Mazda, had an up-and-down season that included two 15<sup>th</sup>-place finishes, but also two podiums, two top-5s and five top-10s. He finished 4<sup>th</sup> in the championship and is planning a return to the Star Mazda Championship in 2008 with his eye on the big prize.

At Trois Rivières, a street circuit barely two race cars wide in most places, Dallas, Texas driver Russell Walker, put on an aggressive and substantial display of car control in the #29 Pavecon/John Walko Racing Mazda. He turned only one lap in

qualifying, started last and was still able to slice and dice his way up through the field to finish 4<sup>th</sup>. And in the same race, Quebec newcomer Yannick Hofman, driving his first-ever Star Mazda race after two seasons in Formula BMW, showed he will be a force to be reckoned with when he joins the series full-time next season after qualifying 8<sup>th</sup> on the starting grid and finishing 5<sup>th</sup> in his #00 Jig-A-Loo/Andersen Racing Mazda.

### Graduates on the Gas

After 17 years as one of the premier open-wheel driver development series in North America, the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear can lay claim to a long and distinguished list of alumni, including the America's most recent F1 driver, Scott Speed, rising Champ Car star Graham Rahal, and IRL standout Marco Andretti. 2005 Star Mazda champion Raphael Matos won the 2007 Champ Car Atlantic championship with Sierra Sierra (which got its start as a Star Mazda team) and will be moving up to Champ Car in 2008.

And such is the quality of education provided by the Star Mazda championship that the 2004 champion, Michael McDowell, after racing both Champ Cars and Daytona Prototypes, has moved over to NASCAR and is making his mark there as well. In 2007, his rookie year in the ARCA RE/MAX series, he scored nine pole positions, led a series-high 822 laps, scored fifteen top-10 finishes and won four races on his way to a 2<sup>nd</sup>-place finish in the championship. He has signed to race in the Nextel Cup series for Michael Waltrip and ran his first Craftsman Truck race at Martinsville on October 20<sup>th</sup>. His race was cut short by an accident on lap 181 of the 200-lap event, but he still finished ahead of former Formula One World Champion Jacques Villeneuve, Indy 500 winner Dario Franchitti and Grand-Am Rolex Series 'phenom' Colin Braun (another Star Mazda Championship graduate).

### Other Feet on the Ladder

Cameron, Matos and McDowell aren't the only Star Mazda Championship graduates taking another step up the ladder this year. A number of drivers are taking advantage of career opportunities resulting from their performance in the Star Mazda Championship.

In partnership with Star Mazda sponsor Performance Friction, Walker Racing (which runs both Team Australia in the Champ Car World Series and a Champ Car Atlantic team) tested Star Mazda drivers Ron White and Alex Ardoin at Putnam Park Road Course in Mount Meridian, Indiana in late September. And James Davison recently bested four other hot young drivers -- including an A1GP pole winner and the IMSA Lites champion -- in a two-day Indy Pro Series test at Sebring International Raceway with Sam Schmidt Motorsports.

Also, just as some of the Star Mazda Championship drivers climbing the ladder, some Star Mazda teams are moving on to other forms of racing. In previous years, the Atlantic championship-winning Sierra Sierra team started in Star Mazda, as did B-K Motorsports, the team currently fielding the Mazda-powered American Le Mans series LMP2 prototype. For next year, Hickham Motorsports, which fielded the father/son team of Steve Hickham Jr. and Steve Hickham Sr. (the Masters Series champion), will move up in 2008 to a Mazda RX-8 endurance racing effort. The duo hopes to make their debut as co-drivers at the Rolex 24 at Daytona in January.

### New Stars Begin to Shine

Even as this year's rising stars begin to shine in new directions, the light from a new set of stars is beginning to illuminate the 2008 Mazda Motorsports Ladder.

Joel Miller, the 19-year-old racer from Hesperia, California, who scored five wins and finished on the podium in all 14 of the 2007 BFGoodrich/Skip Barber National Presented by Mazda Series races, has won a fully-sponsored ride in the 2008 Star Mazda Championship. He has already tested with one top team, is talking with others and will make his decision in the near future.

And two standouts from the 2007 Snap-On Stars of Karting Presented by the Indy Racing League, Tyler Dueck and Scott Jenkins (who won the overall Stars of Karting championship) have both been awarded tests later this year with a top Star Mazda Championship team.

While plans are still being finalized, there will be both new teams and new sponsors coming into the Star Mazda Championship in 2008, as well as a number of talented new drivers. This, in addition to changes announced at the season-ending banquet regarding the series' switch to new Goodyear radial racing tires and the implementation of standing starts next season, makes it clear that 2008 will be another step up the ladder for the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear.