



STAR MAZDA CHAMPIONSHIP ANNOUNCES 2009 SCHEDULE – 13 EVENT LINEUP INCLUDES MAJOR RACES ON OVALS

Road Atlanta / Oct. 3 - The Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear today released its 13-race 2009 schedule, beginning the season with its traditional date at the 57th annual Mobil1 12 Hours of Sebring on March 20 and winding up at the Monterey Sports Car Championships at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca on October 10.



The most substantial change to the schedule involves the series' return to ovals for the first time since 2006 with 100-lap events immediately before the NASCAR Nationwide Series race at the Milwaukee Mile on June 20 and under the lights with ARCA at

the 7/8-ths mile Iowa Speedway tri-oval on July 10.

The schedule includes 13 races on 11 weekends, with double-headers at New Jersey Motorsports Park on June 13-14 and a new addition to the schedule, the Autobahn Country Club in Joliet, Illinois on July 25-26. Both will be *MAZDASPEED* Motorsports weekends at which the Star Mazda Championship will be a featured race.

"A lot of thought and negotiation went into the creation of this schedule after the all the last-minute changes all the series had to do after the sudden unification of Champ Car and the Indy Racing League," says Star Mazda Championship President Gary Rodrigues. "We've eliminated the giant gaps that made the early part of our 2008 schedule difficult for teams and drivers, and, in recognition of the current open-wheel racing landscape and the career goals of many of Star Mazda drivers, we will once again provide them with experience racing on ovals. We will be sharing the spotlight on major race weekends with American Le Mans, Grand-Am, the Atlantic Championship, NASCAR Sprint Cup and ARCA, as well as two double-header *MAZDASPEED* weekends where Star Mazda will be the headline series. As in 2008, except for the ovals, we will have standing starts and our drivers will be racing for one of the most coveted prizes in open-wheel racing, the *MAZDASPEED* Motorsports Driver Development Ladder scholarship to move up and race in the 2010 Atlantic Championship Powered by Mazda."

The Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear is set to begin its 19th season as the most popular North American open-wheel driver development series and will feature an educational mix of circuits in both the U.S. and Canada, including eight road courses, two ovals and a street circuit. Drivers 16 years of age and older are welcome. All races will be broadcast during weekend prime time on SPEED TV.

Following the season opener at the hugely-popular Mobil1 12 Hours of Sebring on Saturday, March 20, Star Mazda Championship teams and competitors will head north to the scenic Virginia International Raceway for the Grand-Am weekend on Saturday, April 25. The next stop on the schedule is the wide-open spaces of Miller Motorsports Park for the American Le Mans Series Grand Prix of Utah on Saturday, May 16.

The Star Mazda Championship made its first visit to the brand-new New Jersey Motorsports Park this year for a *MAZDASPEED* double-header weekend in August; for 2009, the event will move to an earlier weekend with cooler weather, Saturday and Sunday, June 13-14.

Action heats up, both literally and figuratively, later in June with the first of two oval-track races on the schedule. Both will be 100-lap events with no scheduled pit stops. First up will be the Milwaukee Mile on Saturday, June 20, with the Star Mazda Championship open-wheelers taking to the track for the big crowd just before the NASCAR Nationwide Series main event. Then it's on to the 7/8ths-mile tri-oval at the Iowa Speedway, running under the lights in conjunction with the ARCA RE/MAX series on Friday, July 10.

Racing continues in the Midwest with the Star Mazda Championship's first visit to the spectacular new road course at the Autobahn Country Club in Joliet, Illinois on Saturday and Sunday, July 25 – 26. This will be another double-header MAZDASPEED weekend where the Star Mazda Championship will be a main event. With two weeks off in between, the Star Mazda Championship and the Atlantic Championship Powered by Mazda will share top billing on the legendary street circuit in Trois-Rivieres, Quebec, Canada on Sunday, August 16.

The Star Mazda Championship will wind up its 2009 season alongside the American Le Mans series, beginning with the Grand Prix of Mosport in Canada on Saturday, August 29, followed by the legendary Petit Le Mans at Road Atlanta on Friday, September 25. The final event of the season is the Monterey Sports Car Championships at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca on Saturday, October 10.

Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear 2009 Schedule:

Date / Location / Track Type / With

March 20 / Sebring, FL / Road Course / ALMS

April 25 / Virginia International Raceway / Road Course / Grand-Am

May 16 / Miller Motorsports Park / Road Course / ALMS

June 13-14 / New Jersey Motorsports Park / Road Course / Feature Race (2 races)

June 20 / Milwaukee Mile / Oval / NASCAR Nationwide Series

July 10 / Iowa Speedway / Oval / ARCA RE/MAX

July 25 – 26 / Autobahn, Joliet IL / Road Course / Feature Race (2 races)

August 16 / Trois Rivieres / Street Circuit / Feature Race w/Atlantic

August 29 / Mosport / Road Course / ALMS

September 25 / Road Atlanta / Road Course / ALMS

October 10 / Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca / Road Course / ALMS

"We're excited about our 2009 schedule and are already getting orders for new cars from both current and new teams," says Rodrigues. "We plan to start delivering new cars in December of this year, and they will include enhanced aerodynamics as well as improvements to serviceability and construction details. In keeping with the Star Mazda mission of keeping racing affordable, however, all upgrades will be available to bring current cars up to the new specs."

The Star Mazda Championship and Mazda North American Operations recently announced a 5-year extension of the automaker's title sponsorship of North America's most popular open-wheel driver development series. The agreement runs through the 2013 season and formalizes 23 years of continuous cooperation between Mazda and the Star Mazda Championship -- one of the longest-running and most successful motorsports partnerships in the history of the sport.

"It's hard to believe that the Star Mazda series is nearing their twentieth anniversary. The 2009 schedule will be a great driver challenge with the addition of two ovals. Given the Indycar successes of recent Star Mazda alums like Marco Andretti and Graham Rahal, this could lead to even greater opportunities for the next Star Mazda class as they will be showcased on ovals, road courses and street circuits," noted Jim Jordan, Alternative Marketing Manager, Mazda North American Operations.

Over the past 18 years, the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear has grown into one of the most prolific and successful open-wheel driver development series in all of auto racing. In 2008, the value of series prizes totals \$1.5 million and includes a full-season sponsorship from the *MAZDASPEED* Motorsports Driver Development Ladder for the Star Mazda series champion to move up and race in the Atlantic Championship Powered by Mazda. Plus, courtesy of Mazda, a full scholarship into the Star Mazda Championship is awarded to the champion of the 2008 Skip Barber National Series Presented by Mazda. The program continues unchanged for next year; drivers in the 2009 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear will be competing for a fully-sponsored drive in the 2010 Atlantic Championship Powered by Mazda.

Many top drivers began, or accelerated, their careers in the Star Mazda Championship. Recent alumni include such top open-wheel racers as IRL winners Graham Rahal and Marco Andretti, American ex-F1 driver Scott Speed and rising NASCAR Sprint Cup driver Michael McDowell (the 2004 Star Mazda champion), as well as both drivers of the Mazda-powered Lola LMP2 prototype being raced in the American Le Mans series -- Gerardo Bonilla and Ben Devlin. Also on the list are Grand-Am Rolex Series Daytona Prototype racers such as Joey Hand, Colin Braun (also running in the NASCAR Nationwide series) and Brian Frisselle.

2005 Star Mazda champion Raphael Matos, after moving up to Atlantic in 2006 and winning the championship in 2007, won the 2008 Indy Lights championship driving for Andretti Green Racing and co-drove the winning Daytona Prototype car Grand-Am Rolex Series season finale at Miller Motorsports Park.

The 2007 Star Mazda Champion, Dane Cameron, drove the #19 Genoa Racing/Mazda/Finlay Motorsports/Lynx Racing Swift 016.a in the 2008 Atlantic Championship with scholarship funding from the MAZDASPEED Motorsports Driver Development Ladder.

For more information on the Star Mazda Championship and its drivers, as well as the Mazda Motorsports ladder system, please visit www.starmazda.com and www.mazdausa.com. For information, interviews and photos, please contact Star Mazda Communications Director Peter Frey at (818) 398-5733 or StarMazdaPR@aol.com.

On any given weekend, there are more Mazdas on the road-race tracks of America than any other brand of vehicle. At the track, you'll see MX-5 Miata, RX-8, MAZDA3, MAZDA6, RX-7 and other vintage Mazda models competing, because every Mazda has the Soul of a Sports Car.

For more information on the various Mazda spec series, visit:

www.atlanticchampionship.com

www.starmazda.com

www.skipbarber.com

www.mx-5cup.com

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