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EXPERT AND MASTER SERIES RACERS TO SHARE THE SPOTLIGHT WITH RISING STARS IN 2008 STAR MAZDA CHAMPIONSHIP

Pacoima, CA (January 2, 2007) – The Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear is the only open-wheel racing series that not only provides a high-profile launching platform for young drivers on the way up, but also an arena for the skills of more mature drivers in which the competitive flame still burns brightly. Every driver in the race is in competition for the best finish, the most points and the biggest share of the almost \$1.5 million prize fund, but there are also ‘races within the race.’

Every Star Mazda Championship race field includes drivers racing in the open series (which includes every driver 16 and up) as well as Expert (30 to 44 years old) and Master (45 years and older) series. Beginning with the first race of the 2008 season at Sebring on March 14, the Expert and Master Series winners will join the top-3 open series finishers on the podium for presentation of trophies, media interviews and the traditional ‘hat dance’ photos session and spraying of champagne.

“The Expert and Master Series have always been a valuable part of the Star Mazda Championship, but it’s always been a kind of low-profile thing with part-time ‘gentlemen racers’ competing against each other,” says Star Mazda Championship President Gary Rodrigues. “But it looks like we’re going to have a fair number of Expert and Master drivers in 2008, and these guys are pretty racy. Our 2007 Master Series champion, Steve Hickham, finished 14th overall in the championship and we’ve had several Experts and Masters score top-10 finishes. With that in mind, we decided it was time for these guys to start getting some recognition for their efforts and skill so we’re going to have five drivers on the podium at all our races in 2008. We’re also working to make them a regular part of our SPEED Channel race broadcast and there will be a year-end bonus fund for them as well.”

The top three finishers in each series, Expert and Master, will participate in a year-end bonus fund that will pay \$10,000 each to the first-place Expert and Master, \$5,000 for the second-place finisher in each class and \$2,500 for the third-place finishers. This is in addition to whatever prize money they win for their overall finish in the open series championship where the top fifteen drivers share a \$500,000 year-end cash prize fund, with the series champion guaranteed \$100,000, plus other prizes.

Recognizing the reality that Expert and Master Series drivers are typically successful businessmen with big companies to run, the best results from 10 of the season’s 12 races will count toward each driver’s points total. This will make allowance for the occasional, inevitable schedule conflict without compromising their championship hopes. Expert and Master Series drivers who do run in all 12 races will be allowed to discard their two lowest-finishing events. Expert and Master Series drivers race in the same championship series, driving exactly the same high-tech, open-wheel, Mazda-powered race cars as the young hotshots running in the Pro Series, and their overall results count just like the other racers.

“I’m personally excited by the recognition being given to the Expert and Master drivers in 2008; it will make the Star Mazda Championship a better series overall with bigger fields and better competition,” says Master Series racer Gerry Kraut, co-owner of championship-winning JDC Motorsports as well as Chairman and CEO of Dougherty & Co. and Dougherty Funding. “And I think counting ten of the twelve races toward the championship is a great idea because it helps

me balance out the demands of my professional life and a hobby about which I'm really passionate. I had to cancel out on some races at the last minute last year for business reasons, but with this new points structure I'm planning to battle for the Master Series championship."

The Expert and Master Series categories within Star Mazda Championship events also produce some interesting 'family racing' scenarios. For example, Dan Tomlin Jr. who finished 2nd in the Masters Series in 2007, is the father and business partner of Dan Tomlin III, who won the Expert Series championship. This dynamic and competitive father/son duo from Texas are the principals behind Tomlin Investments, which oversees a land investment and development portfolio valued in excess of \$450 million, including a 4,500-acre master planned community called "Lone Star Ranch" located north of Dallas. Even with this much on their plates, both are planning to run the full 12-race 2008 Star Mazda Championship season.

Entering its 18th year in 2008, the Star Mazda Championship has become one of the most high-profile, prolific and valuable open-wheel driver development series in North America and is an integral part of the *MAZDASPEED* Motorsports Development Ladder that reaches all the way from karting to Champ Car. Graduates include America's most recent F1 driver, Scott Speed, Champ Car standout Graham Rahal, IRL rising star Marco Andretti and hot NASCAR newcomer Michael McDowell. The total prize fund for the coming season approaches \$1.5 million, including a full-season sponsorship in the 2009 Champ Car Atlantic Championship Powered by Mazda for the 2008 Star Mazda Champion.

The 12-race season includes events in the U.S. and Canada, all on major Motorsports weekends with Champ Car, the American Le Mans Series and Grand-Am. All races are broadcast on the SPEED Channel. Significant changes for 2008, in addition to the emphasis on the Expert and Master Series, include standing starts at all races and new radial racing tires developed specifically for the Star Mazda Championship cars by Goodyear.

For more information on the Star Mazda Championship and its drivers, as well as the *MAZDASPEED* Motorsports Development Ladder, please visit www.starmazda.com and www.mazdausa.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:

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