



Contact: Peter Frey / (818) 906-6997
StarMazdaPR@aol.com

PREPARING FOR BATTLE – STAR MAZDA CHAMPIONSHIP TEAMS AND DRIVERS TEST AT MILLER MOTORSPORTS PARK

Nearing the end of a two-month 'hiatus' resulting from races canceled in the wake of open-wheel racing's 'unification,' teams and drivers of the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear participated in a two-day test session at Miller Motorsports Park in preparation for Round 2 of the 2008 schedule next weekend.

The test, arranged by Andersen Racing and attended by all of the top teams, both confirmed the talent displayed by drivers in Round One at Sebring and displayed some new and developing drivers who seem certain to play a significant role in the outcome of the 2008 Star Mazda Championship.

Day One of testing on Monday, May 5, took place on the Miller 'perimeter' circuit that will be used for the upcoming race rather than the 24-turn configuration used in previous years. Twenty cars took to the track on a day that was cloudy with temperature in the high 70s and wind picking up in the afternoon. The morning session saw Sebring winner Joel Miller set the pace in his #20 JDC Motorsports/MAZDASPEEDIK&N Air Filters Mazda, followed closely by Andersen Racing driver Charles Hall in the #77 Pardoes Solicitors/Allied Mazda.

The afternoon session saw the rest of the field catch up to the morning times set by Miller and Hall in the morning. 2007 Star Mazda Champion Dane Cameron, now driving for Genoa Racing in the Atlantic Championship Powered by Mazda, attended the test as driver coach for both the JDC squad and Patrick O'Neill. He did nine laps in O'Neill's car during the last 20 minutes of the day and was immediately 7th fast.

At the end of the day, timing showed Miller comfortably fastest with a lap of 1:45.952, followed by Hall at 1:46.533. Third on the time sheets was another Andersen driver, Tom Gladdis, who turned a lap of 1:46.714 in the #5 Law Firm of Marrache & Co./Allied Mazda. Rounding out the top-5 were Ernesto Otero in the #18 JDC Motorsports/Brazilian Green Beef Mazda with a 1:46.772 and newcomer Valle Maleka of Finland who will drive several races for Andersen Racing toward the end of the season. His time of 1:47.036 at the wheel of Peter Dempsey's #21 Andersen Racing/Allied Mazda was good for 5th on the time sheets.

Day Two of the test, Tuesday, May 6, took place in substantially different weather conditions, mostly sunny with a high temperature in the 80s. The track was faster in the cool of the morning, with Miller and Hall fighting for the top slot on the time sheets, posting times within a few tenths of each other. Finally Miller brought the hammer down with a lap 4/10^{ths} faster than the previous day (1:45.303), a time that was never seriously challenged for the remainder of the day. Most teams sat out the 30 minutes before and after lunch due to the increased track temperatures.

During the afternoon session, Irishman Peter Dempsey (who finished third at Sebring), took his #21 Andersen Racing/Allied Mazda back from Valle Maleka and posted a top-3 session time (6th-fastest overall for the day) with just nine laps in the car.

Standout performances during the second day included Billy Goshen who was 4th-fast in the #82 Goshen Motorsports/Merv Griffin Entertainment/Golbal Tracking Mazda, as well as two of the Star Mazda Championship's female drivers; Juliana Gonzalez dropped more than two seconds from her first day time (1:50.007 to 1:47.867) in the #11 Andersen Racing/ VisitMexico.com/Allied Mazda and Kristy Kester, half of the brother/sister Kester Racing team, improved from 1:49.071 on Monday to a 1:48.028 on Tuesday in the #48 Kester Racing/Texas World Speedway/Unifirst Mazda.

Also running at the sharp edge of the field were Mundill drivers Alex Ardoin (the Louisiana native who won the 2007 Star Mazda season-ender) in the #51 Oral & Facial Surgery Center/ Twister Trailer Mazda and Brazilian Ciao Lara in the #19 Mundill Racing Mazda.

The final results for Day Two of the Miller Motorsports Star Mazda Championship test showed Joel Miller again fastest with a 1:45.303, followed by Charles Hall at 1:45.720 and Ernesto Otero with a 1:46.186. Billy Goshen was fourth with a 1:46.465 and Tom Gladdis rounded out the top-5 with a 1:46.675. Less than a second separated 3rd from 8th (Vancouver B.C.'s Taylor Hacquard at 1:46.988 in the #15 world speed Motorsports/Wolfe Auto Group Mazda) and one more second covered 9th (Patrick O'Neill at 1:47.310 in the #64 World Speed Motorsports/O'Neill Construction Mazda) through 17th (Chris Cumming in the #16 World Speed Motorsports/Inviro Medical Mazda). Cumming was the Expert Series winner – for drivers 30 to 44 – at Sebring. Chuck Hulse, the Master Series winner at Sebring, was 13th-fast at the Miller test with a lap of 1:47.689 in the #12 JDC Motorsports/Silicon Salvage Mazda.

“We started with a good basic setup for the car and worked from there, but it was definitely a big help that I was able to drive the Miller track last year in the Skip Barber Pro Series race,” says Miller, the 2007 Skip Barber champion who is racing in the Star Mazda series with sponsorship from the *MAZDASPEED* Motorsports Driver Development Ladder. “This year’s track configuration is very physical, with lots of long, fast, high g-force corners that you take in 3rd or 4th gear; I’ll need to hit the gym hard this week to get ready for the race. The other big factor for me was that my teammate, Ernesto Otero, is really coming to grips with the car and our driving styles are similar, so we’re able to work off each other really well. Charles Hall was again my main competition as he was in Sebring, so it looks like a JDC Motorsports vs. Andersen Racing battle shaping up for the 2008 season.”

Round Two of the 2008 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear will take place at Miller Motorsports Park May 15 – 17. The inaugural event in 2006 was won from the pole by Adrian Carrio, who took the checkered flag 4.153 seconds ahead of second place finisher Ron White... and went on to win the championship with just two wins to White's three victories. In 2007, Lorenzo Mandarino scored one of his two victories at Miller, on his way to 8th in the championship.

In 2008, competition will take place on the 3.048-mile ‘outer course,’ beginning with a promoter test day on Thursday, May 15. Qualifying is scheduled to take place 9:25 – 10:10 am Saturday, May 17, with the 45-minute Round Two of the 2008 Star Mazda

Championship taking the green flag at 4:15 pm that afternoon. The race will be broadcast on SPEED Saturday, May 31 at 3:00 pm Eastern.

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.

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Dean Case / Communications Officer / MAZDASPEED Motorsports
Office - (310) 755-7403 / Cell - (310) 318-4582 / E-mail: dean@RWB-LLC.com

