



## **A TRIO OF STAR MAZDA GRADUATES IN THE FIELD FOR THE INDY 500 – MARCO ANDRETTI, GRAHAM RAHAL AND FASTEST ROOKIE RAPHAEL MATOS**

Demonstrating once again that the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear is a critical rung on the ladder that drivers must climb on their way from karting to the pinnacle of open-wheel racing – the Indy 500 – this year's starting field includes a trio of top contenders, including Graham Rahal (4th), Marco Andretti (8th) and Raphael Matos (12th), the fastest rookie in the Indy 500.

Remarkably, all three were competitors in the Star Mazda Championship during the 2005 season. And they're part of the closest qualifying field in Indy 500 history; Helio Castroneves won the pole with a 4-lap average speed of 224.864 mph and Ryan Hunter-Reay's speed of 220.597 mph earned him the 33rd-spot in the field. From the fastest to the slowest, the field is separated by just 4.267 mph and 3.0967 seconds.

"It makes us very proud to see our graduates moving up in the racing world and nothing would please us more than to see one win the Indy 500," says series founder and President Gary Rodrigues. "We designed the Star Mazda Championship to be the most competitive, educational and affordable driver development series in the world and success stories like these prove that we're still on the right track. Like the Indy 500, we had a 33-car field for our most recent race and the talent pool this year is both deep and very diverse with drivers from seven countries. We have every expectation of seeing some of those names listed among the qualifiers for future Indy 500s."



Raphael Matos, a Brazilian racer from Belo Horizonte, was the 2005 Star Mazda series champion with wins in the first four races of the season (Sebring, Road Atlanta, Mid-Ohio, Montreal), three poles and seven podium finishes during the 12-race season. As the first graduate of the prestigious MAZDASPEED Motorsports Driver Development Ladder, Matos went on to race in the Atlantic Championship Powered by Mazda in 2006, returning in 2007 to win the series championship. In 2008, he won the Indy Lights championship in his rookie year; that same year he co-drove the winning GT class car in the Rolex 24 at Daytona and the winning Daytona Prototype in the Grand-Am Rolex Sports Car Series season finale at Miller Motorsports Park.

Matos was signed in late 2008 by the Luzco Dragon IRL team, co-owned by Stephen J. Luczo and Jay Penske, son of legendary team owner Roger Penske. He posted a four-lap average of 223.429 mph in the No. 2 Air Force Luczo Dragon Racing car to qualify 12th

and earned the "Fastest Rookie Award" presented by the American Dairy Association of Indiana.

Graham Rahal, son of Indy 500 winner Bobby Rahal was a contemporary of Matos' during the 2005 Star Mazda Championship season, winning one race (Portland) and scoring five podium finishes on his way to a 4th-place finish in the point battle. His victory in Portland made him the youngest race winner ever in the history of the series at the age of 16. Like Matos, he moved up to compete in the Champ Car Formula Atlantic Championship in 2006, finishing second in the points and becoming the youngest winner ever of an Atlantics race. His accomplishments also included the record for most race wins, with five victories, most laps led, most fastest race laps (five events), highest ranking prize money winner, best average qualifying position, posted new qualifying lap records at three events, and new lap records at four tracks. That year he also competed in final three rounds of inaugural season of A1 Grand Prix with A1 Team Lebanon, and raced in his first endurance sports car race ever when he was the youngest driver in the 2006 Rolex 24 Hours of Daytona at the age of 17.



In 2007, Rahal made his debut in the Champ Car World Series with Newman/Haas/Lanigan Racing; he finished second in only the third race of the season, again making him the youngest ever podium finisher in Champ Car history. With the unification of Champ Car and the IRL in 2008, he drove the No. 06 Hole in the Wall Camps entry and became the youngest winner in IndyCar Series history when he drove to victory in his series debut in St. Pete at the age of 19 years and 93 days old. For the 2009 Indy 500 he posted a four-lap average of 223.954 mph in the No. 02 McDonald's Newman/Haas/Lanigan car to qualify on the inside of the second row.



Marco Andretti finished 5th in the 2005 Star Mazda Championship, with results that included a podium finish at Infineon Raceway, three top-5s and eight top-10 finishes. It was a busy year as he also competed in six Indy Lights races, starting from the pole twice and winning three. He graduated to the Indy Racing League in 2006, scoring his first career victory at Infineon Raceway and becoming the youngest driver (19 years, five months and 14 days) to win a major open-wheel race. He finished second in his first-ever Indy 500 (the second-closest finish in the event's history) and won the IRL 'Rookie of the Year' award. In 2007 he led 13 laps at the Indy 500 and finished 11th in the championship with a pair of podium finishes and four top-5 results. In 2008, Andretti became the youngest pole position winner in Indy-car history when he turned the top time in qualifying at Milwaukee, the same track where his father, Michael Andretti, earned his first Indy Car pole. He led 15 laps at the Indy 500 and finished third. Broadening his

resume, Andretti also competed in the A1 GP and ALMS series, including the remarkable achievement of running both an ALMS race and an Indy Car race on the same day. For the 2009 season, he is currently 7th in the overall points standings, just 27 points behind championship leader Tony Kanaan, and put the No. 26 Venom Energy car 8th on the grid on his second qualifying attempt with a four-lap average of 223.114 mph.

Providing compelling testimony to the 'gateway' nature of the Star Mazda Championship, providing an entry to many forms of racing, seven of the drivers in Friday's Freedom 100 Indy Lights grid – nearly one-third of the field, are Star Mazda Graduates, including Jay Howard, Daniel Herrington, James Davison, Andrew Hinchcliffe, Andrew Prendeville, Michael Potekhen and Pablo Donoso.

Other graduates of the series include 2004 champion Michael McDowell, who went on to race Grand-Am prototypes, Champ Cars and is now competing in NASCAR. 2007 Star Mazda champion Dane Cameron (right)



competed in the 2008 Atlantic championship and is currently co-driving the full 2009 Grand-Am Rolex Sports Car Series GT season in the No. 30 Racers Edge / Marquis Jet / Total Petroleum / Piloti Mazda RX-8. 2008 series champion John Edwards, now leading the 2009 Cooper Tires Presents the Atlantic Championship Powered by Mazda as driver for the No. 36 MAZDASPEED/ Nuclear Clean Air Energy/Entergy machine fielded by Newman Wachs Racing. Swiss racer Natacha Gachnang, who made Star Mazda series history with back-to-back podium finishes in 2007, is again breaking new ground as the first female racer in the new 2009 FIA Formula Two Championship. She will be joined on the grid by the youngest driver on the grid in the 2008 Star Mazda season, Tom Gladdis.

For 2009, the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear features an 11-weekend, 13-race schedule on major race weekends with American Le Mans, Grand-Am, the Atlantic Championship, NASCAR Nationwide and Craftsman Truck Series. Prize money is \$1.5 million, including a scholarship to drive in the 2010 Atlantic Championship courtesy of the MAZDASPEED Motorsports Driver Development Ladder. Drivers 16 and older are welcome to compete and the Star Mazda Championship also features Expert (30 to 44) and Master (45 and older) classes for more mature racers. The Star Mazda Championship features standing starts, wheel-to-wheel racing at 150 mph and budgets a fraction of other top open-wheel ladder series.

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

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