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STAR MAZDA CHAMPION TRISTAN VAUTIER GRADUATES TO SAM SCHMIDT MOTORSPORTS

FOR 2012 INDY LIGHTS SEASON WITH SCHOLARSHIP FUNDING FROM THE MAZDA ROAD TO INDY

With scholarship funding from the Mazda Road to Indy, Tristan Vautier – winner of the 2011 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear -- will move up to Indy Lights for the 2012 season with the twice-defending champion team, Sam Schmidt Motorsports, in the team's No. 77 car.



Vautier stormed to the 2011 Star Mazda title with four victories and top-five finishes in each of the 11 races. He earned the promotion to Indy Lights as the next step on the Mazda Road to Indy ladder, and like Conor Daly this past season will run with SSM.

“Things moved pretty quickly in the last weeks and Sam offered me the best opportunity,” Vautier said. “Regarding the quality of his team, I didn't hesitate too long!”

Vautier tested for both Andretti Autosport and Team E at the recent Chris Griffis Memorial Road

to Indy test at Indianapolis Motor Speedway's road course, where he learned Team E's paddle-shift system on the first day and set the fastest time for Andretti on the second.

Schmidt's Indy Lights team has been the standard-bearer over the last decade, with five series champions emerging from SSM since 2004, the last two years with J.K. Vernay and Josef Newgarden.

“Tristan brings a wealth of experience and success to the team, and I'm excited to have him in the No. 77 car,” said Sam Schmidt Motorsports owner Sam Schmidt, whose team scored wins with four different drivers in 2011. “I look forward to working with another of the Mazda Road to Indy scholarship winners. It's a good program, and I'm proud to be a part of it.”

Vautier received a Mazda Road to Indy scholarship to advance to Firestone Indy Lights after he won the Star Mazda Championship this past season. The Mazda Road to Indy Program, in its third year of existence, aims to help talented young drivers advance their careers and ultimately move to the top level of open-wheel racing—the IZOD IndyCar Series.

“When Mazda established our ladder program in 2007, we had drivers exactly like Tristan in our minds—drivers that can get the job done in the car and out of the car,” said John Doonan, Director of Mazda Motorsports. “We are so proud to be associated with the IZOD IndyCar Series on the Mazda Road to Indy and Tristan will be a terrific representative in 2012.

Vautier spent two seasons in the Star Mazda Championship. In 2010, he won two races, finished on podium three times, had five top-five finishes, 10 top-10s and finished fifth in the championship. This past season, he had four wins and six podiums with JDC Motorsports and never finished outside the top five.



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“First off, I'd like to express how thankful I am to Mazda, INDYCAR and Sam Schmidt for giving me this opportunity of a lifetime,” Vautier said. “It's an honor to know that I will be representing the Mazda Road to Indy one step below the IZOD IndyCar Series next season, and I can't wait to be in the car. Knowing I will drive for a championship-winning team such as Sam Schmidt Motorsports makes it feel even better, and the guys can be sure I'll give it my all. Now, I have a lot of work ahead of me and tons of things to learn.”

Learning is something that Vautier has stressed as very important to him leading up to his first season in Firestone Indy Lights. He recently proved his potential in the larger, more powerful car in an open test at Indianapolis Motor Speedway in late October. When deciding which team to go to for the 2012 season, Vautier said that Sam Schmidt Motorsport's success in Indy Lights was not the only thing that attracted him to the team. He looked ahead to the future and what he hopes to one day accomplish in the IZOD IndyCar Series.



“Sam Schmidt Motorsports has a successful IZOD IndyCar Series structure, which makes me hope to be able to develop something on the longer term if I get strong results and do a good job out of the car,” he said.

Now that he has signed with a team, Vautier looks forward to focusing on other aspects of preparing for 2012. On his agenda is learning more about the car and building up his endurance for Firestone Indy Lights races, which are longer than races in Star Mazda. He can also take a second to realize how quickly his career has developed in such a short period of time.

“These two months went by really fast, and this strong ladder system makes things move very quickly for the championship winners,” he said. “It's only November, and I'm already signed at the next level.”

He came to the Star Mazda Championship with experience in the FIA Formula Two Championship and Formula Palmer Audi where he finished 4th in the 2009 championship. In 2008, he was the runner-up in the French Championship in Formula Renault 2.0 and in 2007 he placed fifth in the Formula Renault 2.0 Championship. He is a college student, fluent in French and English and enjoys all types of sports, especially fitness training, racing cycles and mountain bikes, running and cross-country skiing. He was born August 22, 1989 in Saint-Martin-d'Hères, Isère, France and currently lives in Grenoble, France and Bradenton, Florida.

About Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear

For 2012, the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear will be again be a major part of the [Mazda Road to Indy](#). The schedule has yet to be announced, but all races will be on major motorsports



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weekends and most with IndyCar. Rising stars from around the world will be watched by more than a million fans as they compete for prizes valued at \$1.5 million, including a scholarship to move up and race in the 2013 Firestone Indy Lights series. Drivers 16 and older are welcome to compete and the Star Mazda Championship also features the Expert Series for drivers 30 and older. The Star Mazda Championship features standing starts, wheel-to-wheel racing at 160 mph and budgets a fraction of other top open-wheel ladder series. For more information on the Star Mazda Championship please visit www.starmazda.com.

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.

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