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Andersen Racing's Bonilla Wins 2006 Star Mazda Season Opener Friday at Sebring International

SEBRING, Fla., March 17 — Andersen Racing's Gerardo Bonilla drafted by his teammate, Brad Jaeger, and went on to win the first round of the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear Friday afternoon at Sebring International Raceway in the Skip Barber Racing School, Carmela Sausages and the BMS Group-sponsored Andersen Racing No. 9.

Both drivers got a great start in the race, which ended up being a 45-minute timed event. Polesitter Jaeger, of Cincinnati, got off cleanly at the start and led into turn one, but some of the drivers behind him ran askew. Luckily Bonilla wasn't one of them, and by the end of lap one Bonilla, of Orlando, Fla., had vaulted from fifth place at the start to second behind only his Andersen Racing teammate.

Bonilla passed Jaeger for the lead in turn one on a restart on lap four, and he was never again headed. Frankly, from that point on no one could even come close to catching Bonilla and his Andersen Racing No. 9.

Despite three more restarts Bonilla was able to pull away each time, and when the drivers behind him got caught up battling each other he was able to walk away even more quickly. He

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had a lead of a whopping 5.709 seconds over Daniel Herrington at the end of lap 15. His official margin of victory two laps later was 4.874 seconds over Herrington, with Adrian Carrio third.

"I think the key today was that I adjusted for this track and these track conditions," the ecstatic winner said. "That was the big difference.

"I was able to get a good start on the restarts because I understood the limits of my tires," he added. "You have to work within the level of the grip, and I think we did that today.

"It's my first race in this series, and to win it feels amazing," he added. "It's a result of a lot of hard work from the Andersen Racing team."

Although Jaeger stayed with Bonilla after the pass, unfortunately he wasn't able to dice with his teammate for long. The first time the Vanderbilt University engineering student really applied the brakes he discovered he had too much brake bias towards the rear. Although he didn't spin, he dropped back to 12th on lap four. Two laps later his car was hit in the side by another one driven by Brian Thienes, and Jaeger's day was done.

Rookie Ramiro Scuncio of Concepcion, Chile drove a clean race and almost made the top 10, finishing 11th in the Andersen Racing No. 22, which is sponsored by Sky Airline and DuFour Ultra Pura.

Charlie Hollings of Yorkshire, England had to start near the rear due to a problem in qualifying but he still advanced 22 positions to finish 14th in the field of 37 in the Andersen Racing/Hollings Pet Foods No. 4.

The race will be televised on SPEED on a tape-delayed basis on Sunday, April 9 at 4 p.m. Eastern time.

Andersen Racing's Web site is at andersenracingteam.com and the series' Web site is at starmazda.com.

Post-race quotes follow:

Gerardo Bonilla: "I've been teaching at the Skip Barber Racing School for so long and

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wondering when it was going to be my turn, and I'm finally getting my chance.

"Yes, I did drive the monorail at Disney World for awhile. When you're driving the monorail it gives you a lot of time to think about racing and to plan your moves and your attacks.

"I think the key today was that I adjusted for this track and these track conditions. That was the big difference.

"It's my first race in this series, and to win it feels amazing. It's a result of a lot of hard work from the Andersen Racing team. The Skip Barber Racing School taught me to drive, and Andersen Racing gave me the opportunity. It's great to be an instructor at Skip Barber; when you're teaching it's a great way for you to fine-tune your craft.

"We did an engine change right before qualifying, and we qualified fifth. That was great, but then it was time to get back to work.

"Andersen Racing is a great place to be. Today was another day at work for me. We're looking for additional sponsors for the year, and my management company told me we have a lot of prospects but I needed to start the season strong. I think we did!

"I was able to get a good start on the restarts because I understood the limits of my tires. You have to work within the level of the grip, and I think we did that today.

"At the start the second row didn't get quite the jump that we did, and they had that side-by-side battle in turn one. Ryan Justice and another car got close and spun. I felt bad for them for about a quarter of a second, and then I got back to work. I'm glad we were fortunate and weren't involved.

"At the restart when I passed Brad, I got close to him at the start and then I used the draft to get by him. I was convinced that I was going to make it happen, and it did."

Brad Jaeger: "Coming into the hairpin, Turn 7, Brian Thienes drove into the side of me. My car went up in the air on the left and it broke my suspension. I couldn't drive it back to the pits because the right-rear wheel was up in the air from the pushrod pushing into it, so the corner workers directed me to try to get off the course in Turn 8, and that's when I got hung up on the curb. That wasn't part of the accident.

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"The series had us switch brake pad compositions, and with the shortened qualifying session there wasn't enough time to sort out the brake bias, and during the race we had too much brake bias towards the rear. The first time I really applied the brakes the rear locked up immediately, so I had to be careful. Instead of spinning I just went off the course a bit to slow down, and then rejoined the field as quickly as I could.

"Gerardo's pass was clean. He just had to draft me, and he got around me going into Turn 1.

"I'm disappointed, but by getting the pole we showed people that we're here. It was unfortunate that someone hit me. Every point we can get is important. But it's the first race, and there are a lot of other races to show them that we're here."

Eliseo Salazar (speaking about **Ramiro Scuncio's** run): "With his limited experience, to almost make the top 10 in his first Star Mazda race is quite good. He was pretty happy; he was even singing on the cool-down lap, and his dad was pretty emotional too. It was more than what everybody expected, considering his limited experience.

"In one of the practice sessions he bent his suspension, but when it counted he did everything right. When it mattered in qualifying and in the race, he did well. We told him the first priority was to finish, and he did that. I think he was pretty mature and he did a good job."

Charlie Hollings: "I enjoyed it. This was my first time here and my first time with a rolling start, but I overtook a lot of cars, and some cars fell out. The problem was we spent a lot of time behind the safety car. We discussed it before the race and since we were starting so far back, our strategy was to wait until the race unfolds to try to make our charge, but it never seemed to get enough green-flag laps to do that.

"The car was good. The tires were still reasonably good too.

"I seemed to be close to a lot of incidents, but I wasn't involved in any. Once when I was overtaking three or four cars, it was close. It was generally good fun, even though the race was quite chaotic. It would have been nice to start at the front, but it was a good experience."