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Andersen Racing's Star Mazda Drivers Have a Rough Trip Saturday at Lone Star Grand Prix

HOUSTON, May 14 — The streets of Houston were none too kind to the three Andersen Racing drivers who competed in the Star Mazda race presented by Goodyear yesterday.

The 45-minute event was a support race to the Lone Star Grand Prix on the 1.69-mile temporary street circuit set up around Reliant Stadium. Like most street circuits it was bumpy and conducive to accidents, as drivers who got even a little off line quickly faced one of the concrete barriers that surrounded the course.

Unfortunately all three Andersen Racing drivers were among those whose cars tasted the concrete, and the series officials dealt harshly with anyone who brought out a full-course caution. Brad Jaeger of Cincinnati and Ramiro Scuncio of Concepcion, Chile had to start the race from pit road when they were penalized for hitting the wall in quals. They fought their way back up through the field and finished 18th and 23rd in the race, respectively.

Gerardo Bonilla of Orlando, Fla. ended up losing the most when he crashed on a restart on lap 10 while battling Tom Sutherland and Jason Bowles for a top-10 spot. He had qualified fourth and was as high as second early in the event.

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His race-ending accident occurred as he was coming onto the frontstretch. He not only didn't finish and had a crashed race car at the end of the day, but he was told by series officials that he can't participate in the race at the Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course this coming weekend because he was the cause of a full-course yellow on Saturday in Houston.

It was a hard hit all around, and after the race Bonilla was examined at a local hospital as a precaution.

Being forced to miss the Mid-Ohio race will be a set-back in his pursuit of the championship too. He was the point leader going into Saturday's race, but his official finishing position Saturday was 34th in the 37-car field.

Polesitter Ryan Justice led every lap of the 45-minute race. Kevin Lacroix finished second after Daniel Herrington's car didn't pass the post-race technical inspection, which also moved Mike Potekhen up to third.

The race is scheduled to be televised on SPEED at 5 p.m. Eastern time on Sunday, May 28.

The team's next race is this coming Saturday, May 20, at the Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course in Lexington, Ohio.

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

Quotes follow:

Brad Jaeger: "I had to start the race from pit road because I was penalized for bringing out a yellow in qualifying. I went over a pretty big bump in qualifying, spun, and went into the wall. Ramiro had to start from pit road too. His car was pushing and he just barely clipped the wall, but he brought out a caution too so we both started the race on pit lane behind each other.

"Given the circumstances and on street circuits like this, there are going to be wrecks. That's racing.

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"We had a fairly good race set-up. We had a limited number of green-flag laps in the race, but we were still able to make up some ground and we gained some valuable points for the championship."

Ramiro Scuncio: "The team did a good job; I am very pleased with the mechanics and engineers and the work they did. I hope to do better at Mid-Ohio. We had a good test there, so hopefully we'll do better next weekend."

Gerardo Bonilla: "Andersen Racing again gave me a great car, but setting it up for the Houston street circuit bumps was really tough. We finally got it right for qualifying, allowing me to push hard for a fourth-place grid position. We could have won, but more likely had a top-three."

"In the race I floated too much speed at the first turn at the start, and later I crashed hard on a restart. The crash was bizarre. I can usually see this sort of thing happen before it does happen and pull out of it."

"We knew tough times would come, and we're sure to emerge stronger for it. It was a great effort by all on the team."

Dan Andersen (team owner): "The team did an amazing job. We had about an hour and a half between qualifying and the race to fix the two cars that hit the wall in qualifying, and we did it. I'm very proud of the effort the team put forth here. Unfortunately the street circuit bit us a couple times. We're confused about the penalties over what was essentially an accident, but we realize that the decisions of the officials must be followed."

Stats from Houston:

Thursday Practice (12:15 p.m. to 1 p.m.)

1. Ryan Justice, 1:10.654 (86.110 mph)
10. Gerardo Bonilla, 1:12.072 (84.416 mph)
11. Ramiro Scuncio, 1:12.268 (84.187 mph)
15. Brad Jaeger, 1:12.604 (83.797 mph)

Friday Practice (11:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.)

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1. Ryan Justice, 1:09.207 (87.910 mph)
13. Brad Jaeger, 1:11.124 (85.541 mph)
19. Gerardo Bonilla, 1:11.585 (84.990 mph)
23. Ramiro Scuncio, 1:12.269 (84.185 mph)

Saturday Qualifying (12 p.m. to 12:45 p.m.)

1. Ryan Justice, 1:09.340 (86.73 mph)
4. Gerardo Bonilla, 1:09.777 (86.19 mph)
28. Brad Jaeger, 1:13.869 (81.42 mph)
38. Ramiro Scuncio, no time.

Saturday Race (2:15 p.m. to 3 p.m.)

1. Ryan Justice
18. Brad Jaeger
23. Ramiro Scuncio
34. Gerardo Bonilla.