



## **TEAM SETS SIGHTS ON LONE STAR GRAND PRIX OF HOUSTON AFTER CONCLUDING MID OHIO TESTING**

TRAFFORD, PA (May 4, 2006) – It has been a long two months since the opening round of the STAR Mazda Championship Series. However, the John Walko Racing crew has not been letting any of that down time go to waste. With three new drivers for the 2006 season, two of which are rookies, preparation, testing and coaching has been in full swing.

Team owner John Walko indicated the testing sessions serve a much greater purpose than just the track time alone.

“Our drivers completed over 3000 trouble free miles of testing in total over the last few sessions. The momentum just builds and builds the more you run.” Walko also noted that the benefits aren’t just relegated to the drivers, “When the guys on the crew see the cars run mile after trouble free mile and watch their drivers improve with each session, it inspires confidence. It is an intangible value that should help the whole team climb to the next level.”

Most recently, the JWR hauler rolled out of the Mid Ohio Sports Car Course following two more days of intensive testing. All three drivers participated in the test on the newly repaved 2.25 mile track alongside drivers from AIM Autosport and Phenom Racing. Newcomer to the team Kevin Lacroix set the pace for the JWR trio with Ross Smith close behind.

Smith’s confidence and speed is as high as it has ever been thanks in part to the rapport he is building with his crew, “I love working with my engineer Eric, we are really meshing well and the communication between he and I and Scott is getting better and better.”

Charles Anti has also shown tremendous strides in the last two tests, particularly at Mid Ohio where the Series races in just two weeks. Success at Mid Ohio is not new to Anti however, “I’ve run this course in the Skip Barber cars and have won three races there previously.”

Adding to the momentum the team is building on their own, JWR has been fortunate to acquire the services of much sought after driver coach Mike Zimicki. Zimicki has a long history as a coach with everyone from the Skip Barber Series to his current role as a driver coach to Rahal-Letterman Racing and Graham Rahal.

Walko is ecstatic about the addition and feels the impact will be realized immediately, “It is a real feather in our cap that Mike chose to work with us. He will be invaluable in helping to sharpen the learning curve, particularly with our rookie drivers.”

This slate of testing culminates with a stretch of three races in four weeks starting with the Grand Prix of Houston May 13-14 followed by a return trip to Mid Ohio the following weekend. A much needed weekend off is then followed by the lone oval on the schedule at the fabled Milwaukee Mile.

The street race at Houston is new to all three drivers but each has had a degree of experience in similar situations. Anti likened his experiences at Watkins Glen, where he is a two time race winner, with the tight quarters racing that is expected at Houston, "The closest thing I've done to a street race is running Watkins Glen where the walls are just a few feet from the track. The competition level is elevated in this series though and the track time is limited so we have to be up to speed right away. That is one thing I have been working on in testing."

Smith ran Montreal last year and anticipates the same feel to the event, "This should be very similar, concrete barriers and not much run-off. I expect a lot of traffic and probably a lot of yellows so getting up to speed quickly and qualifying well are going to be very important."

While he has just one street race under his belt, last season's Formula BMW race in Denver, Lacroix is looking forward to his first race with JWR, "I think we learned a lot last year in what to expect at these events and I know what I need to work on. I'm excited about my first race with the team in Houston."

All of the hard work recently hopefully will pay dividends soon according to Walko, "The miles and miles of testing our drivers have turned, the solid cars are crews continue to turn out and the addition of Mike Zimicki as driver coach should help us move up the charts in the coming events."

Contact [info@johnwalkoracing.com](mailto:info@johnwalkoracing.com) for more information regarding testing programs available for the 2006 season. Additional team information can be found at [www.johnwalkoracing.com](http://www.johnwalkoracing.com).