



## **JWR to Top of Team Championship After Top Fives for Anti & Lacroix at Portland**

TRAFFORD, PA (July 24, 2006) – Following the season opening race at Sebring, the John Walko Racing team found themselves tied for seventh in the Team Championship standings. While this was not a bad start for a young team that featured two rookies among three drivers, it was not a position that the team intended to stay in for long.

The addition of Kevin Lacroix was the first jolt that the team needed as the Canadian rookie reeled off a string of six straight top six finishes. With each event, the team crept closer to the top until fellow rookie Charles Anti provided another boost with three top ten runs in a row over the last three races.

The culmination of the turnaround came this past weekend at Portland International Raceway where Anti scored a career best fifth and Lacroix matched a season best with a second place finish, his fourth top three points finish in just six tries this season. As a result JWR found themselves in first place in the Team Championship standings - a six position gain in just six races. Making the rise that much more impressive was the fact that JWR did so without the benefit of the five bonus points available to single car teams. A loophole that some teams were able to utilize to garner as much as 35 additional points so far this season.

Team principal John Walko was understandably thrilled with the performance of his drivers and his crew.

"I am very proud of what this group of people has been able to accomplish in such a short time. Despite many members of the team having a long history together, John Walko Racing is truly a brand new team. To be in this position so soon is a testament to hard work and determination they display whether they are at the track or in the shop."

Anti's fifth place finish was a season best and helped him move to ninth in the Championship. The surging driver gives credit to the team while noting that he is now delivering results on his end as well. Sometimes the improvement involves off track driving as well!

"We had another crazy first lap incident; I just drove off in to the grass and somehow managed to miss almost everything. I feel like I'm improving each week though. The team has been together since the start but it has taken awhile for me to acclimate myself to this level of competition and the new environment."

"Charles just keeps improving. He gets better every time he steps in the car," noted Walko. "And what can I say about Kevin, he was never worse than fourth all weekend."

While Anti's performance can easily be measured in the standings, Lacroix has also shown measurable improvement according to Walko.

"We qualified and finished pretty much in the same position with Kevin. Only this time we closed the gap from seconds per lap from the leader to tenths of seconds per lap at most. In the case of both drivers, credit needs to be given to Eric Langbein who is normally the engineer on our third car. Eric coached the drivers while observing from different spots around the track. They each responded well to Eric's input and it really showed in the results."

Langbein was available in this capacity due to the unfortunate loss of driver Ross Smith to an ankle injury at the previous race. The relationship with the Smith family continued however, as the team entered a third car for driver Russell Walker. Walker ran solidly in or near the top ten in practice, eventually qualifying fourteenth. His race day would end prematurely however after becoming involved in the opening lap accident that unfolded directly in front of him.

Lacroix moved solidly in to third place in the points following his second straight second place finish. He also maintains the highest average finishing position in the series at 3.3. There is just one step remaining on the podium for Lacroix to conquer and he would like nothing better than to do just that when the series returns to his native Quebec.

"I am confident for my next race that will be held at Trois-Rivières in two weeks. As far as the season progresses, I keep getting good results. I can't wait for my first victory in Star Mazda Series. My team John Walko Racing is doing a great job."

The Grand Prix of Trois Rivieres is the scene for the eighth round of the Star Mazda Championship Series. This event, in the town of Trois Riviere, Quebec, puts the Star Mazda series in the spotlight as one of the headlining events in a diverse schedule of events culminating with the August 6<sup>th</sup> race.

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).