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Andersen Racing's Bonilla Clinches Star Mazda's Expert Series Championship Friday at Road Atlanta

BRASELTON, Ga., Sept. 29 — Andersen Racing's Gerardo Bonilla finished seventh in Friday's Star Mazda race at Road Atlanta Motor Sports Center to clinch the series' Expert point championship with one race remaining. The Orlando, Fla.-based driver of the Skip Barber Racing School No. 9 also moved from fifth to fourth in the overall championship, which is presented by Goodyear.

Bonilla improved his position by seven places in Friday's 45-minute race, as he started 14th in the 35-car field.

Unfortunately Bonilla's Andersen Racing teammates didn't fare as well as he did on Friday.

Phil Saville of Oak Brook, Ill., had a rough trip both in qualifying and in the race. He was running sixth in qualifying on Thursday when he spun and hit the wall, but the Andersen Racing mechanics quickly made repairs to his No. 99, which is sponsored by New York Jewelers of Chicago, NVG Residential and Mac Marketing & Advertising Corp.

That crash forced Saville to start at the rear of the field in Friday's race, which supported the Petit Le Mans American Le Mans Series event. He was running well in the race until he was involved in another accident with 23 laps complete. His official finishing position was 25th.



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Brad Jaeger, who was returning to the series after missing five races due to an accident in Montreal in June, was involved in an accident today too. Luckily no one was hurt in this one, and the Cincinnati-based driver was still pleased with the weekend overall. "I feel good because I know I'm back; it was just a racing accident" he said afterwards. He qualified the best of the Andersen Racing quartet and started 13th, right in front of Bonilla, but finished 33rd.

The Fairfield, N.J.-based team's fourth driver in the race, Chris Meredith of Potomac, Md., was competing in his first Star Mazda race ever here. He moved from 16th to 13th until a suspension piece broke on his Meredith International/Bertil Roos Racing School-sponsored car with five laps complete in the 45-minute, 27-lap race. He ended up 35th.

Bonilla had a lot more fun than his teammates did on Friday. He passed two cars at the start and by the end of lap two he was in 11th place. He stayed there until lap seven, when he moved into tenth by passing Doug Peterson. He got ninth two laps later when Daniel Herrington, who had been fifth, spun.

Bonilla was still in ninth when the wreck that Jaeger was involved in occurred with 10 laps down. Peterson was involved in that too, which gave Bonilla eighth and brought out the first full-course yellow with 13 laps down. He got around Ryan Justice for seventh the lap after the restart. He passed Dan Di Leo with a nifty move in Turn One on lap 19 to grab sixth place, but then another full-course yellow waved on lap 20 when Dan Tomlin III got pushed into a spin on the frontstretch, tearing down four signs in the process.

Di Leo got Bonilla back on the restart on lap 22 to push him back to seventh, and then the yellow waved again on lap 25 after the crash that Saville was involved in occurred on lap 24. Only a few minutes remained at that point and the event ended under yellow.

It rained for qualifying, but Friday's race conditions were perfect.

The Road Atlanta race, which was won by Ron White over polesitter Mark Wilkins and Kevin Lacroix, is scheduled to be shown on SPEED at 1 p.m. Eastern time on Oct. 14.

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The season finale is Oct. 19-21 at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca in Monterey, Calif. That race is scheduled to be shown on SPEED at 3 p.m. Eastern time on Oct. 29.

For more information see the team's Web site at andersenracingteam.com and the series' Web site at starmazda.com.

Driver quotes follow:

Gerardo Bonilla: "I had lots of great battles; it was one of the most fun and the best races I've had all year. That was partly due to circumstances because we started in 14th due to the rain in qualifying, but today it was seriously fun. I had dices with all sort of people: Mike Potekhen, Ryan Justice, Logan Gomez, Brian Thienes, Doug Petersen and Dan Di Leo.

"The battle with Di Leo was really good. I passed him in Turn One, and then he got me back in Turn One when I missed an upshift on the restart.

"I had a close call with Poteken when his engine broke and once with Ryan Justice when he was a bit defensive on the frontstretch and I had to check up. I was very close to other people but those were close moments, not close calls.

"My car was awesome. Remi [Lanteigne, his engineer], is the genius. Remi always knows what to do for the race.

"The track conditions weren't bad. Turn Seven was the hardest due to the lack of grip there. I think they put new concrete down there, because it's been that way all weekend.

"With this finish I moved from fifth to fourth in the point standings and now we're really close to third too, so that's good. We clinched the Expert Series too."

Phil Saville: "Mark Patterson and someone else got together at the exit of 10B. The driver that I don't know rolled back into Mark. I came onto them and I slammed right into Mark's car's nose. Luckily no one was hurt.

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“The car was good before that. It was tough starting way back though, and the track was a little greasy for some reason even though it wasn’t that hot today really.”

Brad Jaeger: “It happened in Turn Seven. I followed Doug Peterson for about a lap and a half, but then I had to back off because he and Gerardo were going at it back and forth.

“I was trying to get a run on him. Everything was fine, but then he had to check up at the apex of the turn because the cars ahead of him were dicing. He hit the brakes so he wouldn’t hit them, and there was really nothing I could do. He went to the brakes and I ran right up over his rear tire and rear wing.

“It bent the suspension on my car and I couldn’t get back into the pits to get a new wing.

“What’s important is that I personally improved this weekend. A very realistic goal would have been to finish sixth, or at least well into the top 10. I was faster than that whole group ahead of me.

“It was just a racing incident. He had to get on the brakes to avoid the other people.

“The most important part to me is knowing that I’m back. The fact that we had a good lap in a wet qualifying session was important. Then, today in the dry in the race, we just had to put forth the best performance possible. The last two practice sessions, qualifying and the race helped me get back into my usual racing mindset of total concentration and driving the car at its limit. It’s a shame for the team and me too. I could feel that everyone on the team was excited that I was back, and in the race I was driving the car like I was supposed to. Both the team and I deserve a better result, but that’s racing. I’m just happy to know that I’m back.”

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Chris Meredith: “A bolt broke in the right-front suspension, and I parked it on the frontstraight.

“Before that the car was good. I got around a lot of people while I was out there. The start was crazy though. Two rows ahead of me the cars were four wide at the start, which is real dangerous.

“I leaned a lot about the Star Mazda series, its cars and its tires, which was good, and it’s always nice to race at Road Atlanta.”

The stats from Road Atlanta:

Promoter Test Session 1 (Tuesday):

1. Adrian Carrio, 1:20.908, 113.017 mph
7. Gerardo Bonilla, 1:22.000, 111.512 mph
10. Phil Saville, 1:22.619, 110.677 mph
14. Chris Meredith, 1:22.917, 110.279 mph
27. Brad Jaeger, 1:26.458, 105.762 mph

Promoter Test Session 2 (Tuesday):

1. Mark Wilkins, 1:21.531, 112.154 mph
10. Gerardo Bonilla, 1:22.242, 111.184 mph
19. Phil Saville, 1:23.125, 110.003 mph
21. Chris Meredith, 1:23.535, 109.463 mph
24. Brad Jaeger, 1:24.070, 108.767 mph

Promoter Test Session 3 (Tuesday):

1. Ron White, 1:21.065, 112.798 mph
4. Gerardo Bonilla, 1:21.809, 111.773 mph
11. Phil Saville, 1:22.271, 111.145 mph
12. Chris Meredith, 1:22.378, 111.001 mph
28. Brad Jaeger, 1:25.203, 107.320 mph

Combined Times for Tuesday:

1. Adrian Carrio, 1:20.908, 113.017 mph
7. Gerardo Bonilla, 1:21.809, 111.773 mph
14. Phil Saville, 1:22.271, 111.145 mph

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- 15. Chris Meredith, 1:22.378, 111.001 mph
- 26. Brad Jaeger, 1:24.070, 108.767 mph

Official Practice Session 1 (Wed., 8:30 a.m. to 9 a.m.):

- 1. Kevin Lacroix, 1:21.125, 112.715 mph
- 12. Gerardo Bonilla, 1:21.897, 111.652 mph
- 18. Phil Saville, 1:22.586, 110.721 mph
- 19. Chris Meredith, 1:22.690, 110.582 mph
- 32. Brad Jaeger, 2:08.946, 70.913 mph

Official Practice Session 2 (Wed., 2:45 p.m. to 3:15 p.m.):

- 1. Adrian Carrio, 1:20.960, 112.945 mph
- 7. Gerardo Bonilla, 1:21.660, 111.976 mph
- 13. Chris Meredith, 1:22.133, 111.332 mph
- 17. Phil Saville, 1:22.474, 110.871 mph
- 23. Brad Jaeger, 1:23.073, 110.072 mph

Combined Times for Wednesday:

- 1. Adrian Carrio, 1:20.960
- 11. Gerardo Bonilla, 1:21.660
- 13. Chris Meredith, 1:22.133
- 18. Phil Saville, 1:22.474
- 24. Brad Jaeger, 1:23.073

Official Practice Session 3 (Thurs., 9:15 a.m. to 9:45 a.m.):

- 1. Daniel Herrington, 1:20.507, 113.580 mph
- 11. Gerardo Bonilla, 1:21.577, 112.090 mph
- 21. Chris Meredith, 1:22.202, 111.238 mph
- 22. Phil Saville, 1:22.335, 111.058 mph
- 28. Brad Jaeger, 1:23.114, 110.018 mph

Qualifying (Thurs., 4 p.m. to 4:45 p.m.; rain):

- 1. Mark Wilkins, 1:30.107, 101.479 mph
- 13. Brad Jaeger, 1:33.192, 98.120 mph
- 14. Gerardo Bonilla, 1:33.202, 98.109 mph
- 16. Chris Meredith, 1:33.272, 98.036 mph

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30. Phil Saville, 1:38.669, 92.673 mph (accident; lost all times due to causing red flag during qualifying)

Race (Fri., 12:45 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.):

1. Mark Wilkins
7. Gerardo Bonilla
25. Phil Saville
33. Brad Jaeger
35. Chris Meredith

Top Five in Point Standings After Road Atlanta (Unofficial):

1. Adrian Carrio, 395
2. Kevin Lacroix, 360
3. Ryan Justice, 321
4. Gerardo Bonilla, 310
5. Ron White, 301

Expert Series Point Standings After Road Atlanta (Unofficial):

1. Gerardo Bonilla, 196
2. Brian Thienes, 152