

Rob Bunker Road America and Mosport Reports

Road America

Rob Bunker has been out of school for the summer, but he hasn't stopped studying. The Bridgewater, N.J., driver had a difficult Star Mazda Championship race at Road America on Aug. 19, but he took it as a racing lesson.

Bunker started the No. 18 AIM Autosport Pro Formula Mazda 13th on the 39-car grid, with a qualifying lap of two minutes 5.957 seconds on the 4.048-mile road course in Elkhart Lake, Wis. He moved up in the first few laps of the race, but clipped a tire barrier and was forced into a long pitstop for repairs. He returned for the final race laps and finished 37th.

"Road America didn't go quite like we planned, unfortunately. We struggled to get the car into the top 10, but we did get to try a lot of new changes to the car. I think in the long run the weekend will really work to our advantage because I have such a better feel of what I want the car to do and what setup changes work best," he said.

"The race itself was pretty hairy. I normally do very well on starts but there just weren't any openings for me to pass people. We picked up spots here and there but my competition was unfortunately racing in his mirrors rather than worrying about the track ahead of him. Once I finally got that sorted out, I pushed the car too hard in Canada Corner and hit the inside tire barrier. The rear wing was ripped off, so I headed to the pits so my team could assess the damage. I'm thankful they actually got me back on track before the end of the race so I could score some points.

"Overall we had a lot of positives to take away from the event but we still struggle a little come race day. I still have a lot to learn as a driver, but I'm doing my best to make every race a learning experience."

Mosport International Raceway

Rob Bunker's lessons continued through a roller-coaster week at Mosport International Raceway in Bowmanville, Ont. The fast 2.459-mile road course and heavy rain suited his driving style, enabling him to grab third place at the start of the Sept. 2 Star Mazda Championship race, but the conditions also conspired to zap him out of the race early.

Bunker qualified the No. 18 AIM Autosport Pro Formula Mazda sixth on the 28-car grid with a lap of one minute 14.878 seconds, his best start position of the season. He vaulted to third on the first race lap and held the position until lap 12 of 21. Passing another car, he slipped off track, hit the wall and was out of the race. He was scored 27th in the final results.

"I went through turn three and the rain line involves taking a rim-shot around the outside of the track. I got a little too close to the edge, dropped a tire off and it literally shot me straight at the wall," he explained. "I'm okay and the car didn't sustain a lot of damage, but it's a big blow because we were right there. We've been waiting for a podium finish for awhile."

Despite the frustrating finish, Bunker was elated with his experience learning the track.

"Even after all that, it's definitely one of my favorite tracks. It's got a lot of big, sweeping turns and momentum. The fact that it's fun makes me go that much faster," he said. "When I first came to the track for a private test, to get myself to breathe coming over all the crests, I yelled in my helmet, like a roller-coaster! There was no other way to do it – otherwise, I would just hold my breath and I'd end up screwing up. I had to talk myself through the hills."

Bunker's next race is at another favorite track, Road Atlanta in Braselton, Ga., on Sept. 29.