

Rob Bunker Petit Le Mans Preview

September 25, 2006. Rob Bunker returns this week to the scene of success. He scored his best finish of the 2005 season at Road Atlanta – fourth, in a Formula BMW USA Championship race – and he's hoping for another strong result this year, in the Sept. 29 Star Mazda Championship race on the sweeping 2.54-mile road course in Braselton, Ga.

"We've had a few weeks off, so I need a little bit of action! That's definitely the track to get it," he said. "It's one of those tracks you just get a good vibe from. The track's been good to me in the past and it's a lot of fun. It's a lot about momentum and planning ahead – both of those things I'm very good at doing."

Bunker, of Bridgewater, N.J., will drive the No. 18 AIM Autosport Pro Formula Mazda this week. Although the car has more horsepower and downforce than his Formula BMW FB2, he thinks the track references will be similar.

"It's not the first time we've been there, so we have a pretty good idea for reference points for braking and turn-in. I'm not going to have to change too much between cars, so that will benefit us," he said. "Part of what makes the track so cool is the high-speed sections. Its size definitely makes it more fun and the extra bit of downforce will also help. Now we just get to amplify the fun factor even more."

In addition to his Star Mazda duties, Bunker will pay close attention to the American Le Mans Series drivers as they prepare for the 1000-mile Petit Le Mans, set for Road Atlanta on Saturday. He noted, "Just getting in the mindset, getting ready to race and watching them put a million-dollar car on the line for a pass in practice gets your blood pumping."

Bunker will also be working the paddock, continuing to meet team owners, with an eye to the future. Although job searching isn't high on most teen lists of fun things to do, he isn't fazed by the business of racing. He knows his presentation is as important as track results.

"We've been putting a lot of time off-track into getting back on-track, talking with teams, trying to find rides," he acknowledged. "Composure matters a lot – stand up straight, make sure you have a strong walk, don't slur your words, just be as professional as you can. At this stage of a racer's career, where he's still young, it's hard to come across. So that little bit of professionalism helps get the foot in the door."