



JWR Stretches Team Championship Lead at Road Atlanta

TRAFFORD, PA (October 2, 2006) – With a recent private test under their belts at Road Atlanta, the John Walko Racing team looked forward to the eleventh race of the season as part of the Petit Le Mans event in conjunction with the American Le Mans Series. The anticipation was rewarded with another pair of top ten finishes and a firm grasp on the Team Championship.

"Coming down early for the test was a huge help for me getting comfortable here," noted Russell Walker. "It was a great weekend if you take out the one lap in the final practice. The car felt great from the opening practice and just kept getting better."

Road Atlanta proved to be a breakout event for Walker although the results didn't truly reflect his speed on the 2.54 mile circuit. The Dallas, Texas racer started practice seventh on the charts and moved up to second quick by the final practice before misfortune struck as team owner John Walko explained.

"Russell was amazing! We had a good setup on the car and when he showed up he was awesome from the time he got there. He had a problem with turn one though late in the final practice, caught the curb and backed in to the wall hard. This was after setting the second quick time of the final session."

The car was damaged too badly to repair in time for qualifying. According to Walko the team was confident enough in their young driver though to secure another car despite having to qualify without ever turning a lap in the car previously.

"We rented a car from another team and Russell spent qualifying in the rain getting comfortable with the car. In the race though he was back! It was like he was in the last practice session, running competitive times and passing cars every lap in to turn one. It was fun to watch."

Walker qualified 23rd after just a handful of laps in qualifying but rebounded nicely under the circumstances.

"The race was slow going thanks to starting so deep in the field but I was able to work up to eighth picking up a position or two almost every lap. It was still a very good weekend though and I look forward to getting back on track at Laguna Seca for the season closer."

Kevin Lacroix, currently second in points, also benefited from the testing which resulted in his leading the opening practice. After that point though, Lacroix was forced to battle with an underpowered race car. A situation that the team rectified before the final practice as Walko noted.

"The engines haven't been that consistent. At Road America and Mosport we had a really good handling car but just didn't have the lap times. Our other cars have been killing Kevin on the straight despite not carrying as much exit speed. We finally decided to put a new engine in and it made a big difference as we led that practice. The car was a whole lot better."

In the race Lacroix moved in to the top three early and held on to the spot for his first podium finish since Portland, a result good enough to clinch the 2006 Star Mazda Rookie of the Year title.

"We swapped the engine for the race and, although it was still tight, it was much more powerful. I overtook two positions on the first lap and was looking to take the lead but could not find any room," Lacroix stated. "That was my season, staying out of trouble and carving my way up in the standings instead of taking chances. I still have one left in Laguna, the track where I was most successful last year in BMW. With a healthy car, I will give my best shot to finish my season with a flash!"

Charles Anti was the lone driver of the JWR trio that was unable to attend the Road Atlanta test. Despite a bigger learning curve at the start of the event, Anti found himself right back in the top ten just a few laps in to the race. Unfortunately for Anti though his day ended early with a rare mechanical DNF.

"I never really felt up to speed all weekend until the rains came for qualifying. I thought that would be the equalizer for me, and it was, up until the track started to dry out. We slipped a little further down the charts each lap it seemed as it dried. I was in the top ten early in the race though, hoping to capitalize on other's mistakes as the race progressed. A hole in an oil line developed though and sidelined us early."

The team now moves on to Laguna Seca where they not only look to clinch the Star Mazda Team Championship but hope to secure that elusive first win.

"This past race gave us a huge jump in the points. We have the biggest lead in the Championship that we have had all season," noted Walko. "So I'm looking forward to Laguna Seca to see if we can win the Team Championship in our first season. It should be a good weekend as all three drivers have experience there and they all really like the track. We are all looking forward to this race!"

The twelfth and final race of the 2006 Star Mazda Championship Series takes place at Laguna Seca on October 21-22.

Road Atlanta Results:

- 1 Ron White
- 2 Mark Wilkins
- 3 Kevin Lacroix
- 8 Russell Walker
- 27 Charles Anti

Star Mazda Driver Championship:

- 1 Adrian Carrio 395

2 Kevin Lacroix 360
3 Ryan Justice 322
14 Charles Anti 211
15 Russell Walker 210

Star Mazda Team Championship:

1 John Walko Racing 223
2 World Speed 208
3 Northwest Autosport 159
4 Apex Racing 154
5 Andersen Racing 154

Contact info@johnwalkoracing.com for more information regarding testing programs available for the 2006 season. Additional team information can be found at www.johnwalkoracing.com.