



JWR Wins Star Mazda Team Championship in First Season

TRAFFORD, PA (October 24, 2006) – While some members of the John Walko Racing team have been together for many years, 2006 marked their first together under the JWR banner. It would have been natural to envision a season involving a steep learning curve and the many pitfalls that are normally associated with a rookie effort; particularly considering the fact that the team barely pulled the pieces together in time to make it to the season opening race at Sebring.

No one apparently told this group though that a difficult season would not only be expected but acceptable to most. The result at the end of the final race at Laguna Seca was nothing short of astounding:

- 2006 Star Mazda Team Championship - John Walko Racing
- 2006 Star Mazda Rookie of the Year - Kevin Lacroix
- 2006 Star Mazda Championship - Second Place - Kevin Lacroix

According to team owner John Walko, the season was a dream come true.

"This was a great season for our young team! It was amazing that we even made it to Sebring, let alone compete for the Championship and win against such tough competition as World Speed. I want to congratulate the team and their driver Adrian Carrio, they truly deserved the Championship. Adrian is a really good driver and the team did a great job once again."

Despite the success, Walko knew the entire season would come down to the Star Mazda season finale at Laguna Seca this past weekend.

"There are so many good teams and drivers in this series right now that we knew everything would hinge on the final race. This is a tough deal that had me nervous right up until the very end with the points system the way it is. With someone as fast as Adrian in World Speed's car coupled with the bonus points awarded for only running a single car we had to continue to post two cars in the top ten in entrant points to hope to keep pace. We were the only team able to do that race in and race out."

Laguna Seca was no different and the team responded with another pair of top ten points finishes from Kevin Lacroix and Charles Anti, securing the Team Championship in the process. The race was stalled by several full course yellow flags that resulted in just six laps of green flag action.

Those six laps were all Lacroix needed to rebound from an uncharacteristic eighth place qualifying effort however.

"In the race we only ran six green flag laps so it was very hard to gain positions. But in six laps I moved from 8th to 4th. Maybe we could have had a podium but there just wasn't enough time. The car was very good, we were very fast but there was just not enough laps."

The qualifying issue was unfortunate according to Walko particularly in light of how fast Lacroix has been to that point despite not participating in the previous week's private test.

"Kevin was near the front the whole time, second or third quickest in each session just a tenth or two off. Until qualifications however, when a miscommunication resulted in sending Kevin on track with less fuel than we had planned. He missed three laps probably and that was enough to drop him to eighth on the grid."

For Anti, the event could not have gone any differently. After finding himself near the top of the charts in most sessions in the latter half of the season, Anti was mired in the bottom half of the time sheets in each practice session at Laguna Seca. The rookie driver ended up in the slow qualifying group as a result.

According to Charles the split groups finally gave him some clear track to work with.

"In practice every time I would get around slower traffic I'd catch another before the end of the lap. We did not have a single clean lap until qualifying when everything finally came together. I made a small mistake even on my fast lap; otherwise we may have started even further up the grid."

After finally turning things around in qualifying, Anti spent as much time in the race avoiding accidents as racing noted Walko.

"Charles set the pace in the first group by more than two seconds and was as fast as Kevin had run all weekend. It was awesome, all the sudden he was right there where we expect him to be. In all the craziness of the race Charles ended up thirteenth overall which was good for tenth in championship points. The cause of all the yellows seemed to be happening right in front of him. He was on the brakes hard and picking his way through the incidents and did a good job staying clear of everything and scored important points for us. He did a good job."

Russell Walker was on the move once again at Laguna Seca, running inside the top ten on race day before ending up in the middle of one of the yellow flag incidents.

"We were making excellent progress, absolutely. I think just about everyone in front of us was at the private test so we were doing well. I had a good start and a solid race car. I was in a chase for position, and I guess do to the nature of the race having so few green flag laps and so many cautions, I didn't want to hesitate when I had a chance to make a pass after being held up for a few laps. I made an aggressive move and unfortunately it cost me."

While the end result was not what he hoped for from a rapidly improving Walker, Walko was still impressed by his young driver's performance.

"Russell was in the top ten and passing another car when they made contact, ending his race. He was good again and improved every session. He just kept getting faster and faster and is constantly improvement. Russell is just a small step away from the podium and getting closer every time he runs."

Walker agreed and credited the JWR team with providing him the tools and expertise to make strides toward the front of the pack in their short time together.

"My time with the team and each member of the team providing their expert knowledge and attention to detail gave me the tools to develop my skills to be nothing less than a champion. We were so close to finding that final piece to finish on the podium. The team championship reflects that pretty well, it was a good year."

Lacroix echoed Walker's sentiments regarding what was essentially a total rookie season for all involved from the brand new team to three first year drivers.

"The season was very good even though we missed the first race. We won the team championship which was very good for John Walko Racing. The cars were getting better at every race which was why we were fast at Atlanta and Laguna Seca. The cars were going good and the team is getting better. It was a great learning year for the team and for me, a great first year for everyone."

According to Anti, his first year at this level of competition was a big adjustment but was made easier by the atmosphere at JWR.

"It was an incredible year, I learned so much from everyone on the team. The results weren't bad but they don't truly reflect how far we advanced as a team and how much I learned. The whole season was so much fun and I can't thank everyone on the team enough for how they helped me to grow and improve this season."

For Walko, the Team Championship was not only a reflection of his rapidly improving trio of young drivers but the team on the whole.

"We have just an incredible group of racers and I'm proud to be associated with all of them. Not only do they do their jobs well but each member of the team, regardless of which car they are assigned to works together. Winning the Team Championship our first year out of the gate is a testament to what this crew does all season long."

Walko also paid tribute to all of the drivers that the team had an opportunity to work with over the course of the season.

"I'd like to thank Kevin Lacroix, Charles Anti and Russell Walker and their respective families for a tremendous season. This is a very talented group of young drivers and it has been a lot of fun to work with them and watch their progress throughout the season. In addition to these three drivers I also want to say thank you to Ross Smith, Robbie Pecorari and Casey Neal, each of which helped to contribute to our success this season."

It is a short off season for the 2006 Star Mazda Team Champions as the off season testing schedule for John Walko Racing is set to kick off in just a few short weeks. Drivers interested in participating in the off season testing program are encouraged to

contact the team soon. Also, drivers interested in discussing their 2007 racing programs should contact John Walko Racing at info@johnwalkoracing.com . Additional team information can be found at www.johnwalkoracing.com.

Laguna Seca Results:

- 1 Ryan Justice
- 2 Mike Potekhen
- 3 Adrian Carrio
- 4 Kevin Lacroix
- 13 Charles Anti
- 36 Russell Walker

Star Mazda Driver Championship:

- 1 Adrian Carrio 433
- 2 Kevin Lacroix 394
- 3 Ryan Justice 366
- 14 Charles Anti 236
- 16 Russell Walker 222

Star Mazda Team Championship:

- 1 John Walko Racing 241
- 2 World Speed 227
- 3 Northwest Autosport 187
- 4 Apex Racing 174
- 5 Andersen Racing 154