

Rob Bunker Petit Le Mans Race Report

October 1, 2006. Some athletes carry lucky charms or talismans in competition; Rob Bunker carries his objectives. The Bridgewater, N.J., teen tried a new tactic for the Sept. 29 Star Mazda Championship race at Road Atlanta in Braselton, Ga. He recorded his goals for the race, tucked the note in the pocket of his driver suit and went on to post a strong result on the demanding 2.54-mile road course.

"I wrote down what I wanted – to get to the front and do what it takes to get there. I wrote it down, put it in my pocket and raced with it. The theory is if you don't write down your goals, you have a 10 per cent less chance of reaching them. If you do write them down, you have a much greater ability to achieve them," he explained.

Bunker started the No. 18 AIM Autosport Pro Formula Mazda 30th on the 33-car grid because of an off-track excursion in heavy rain during the previous series race, at Mosport International Raceway in Bowmanville, Ont. Series rules require competitors to forfeit their qualifying position at the next race if their actions result in a full-course caution.

"I was racing in the rain at Mosport and had an 'off'. Because I caused a full-course yellow, I had to start at the back," Bunker acknowledged. "But we went out in qualifying anyway to show where we were supposed to be."

He started near the back at Road Atlanta, but didn't stay there long. Charging through the field, he gained 19 positions during the 27-lap race to finish 11th.

"The race was strong. I did a lot of mental imagery before the race, visualizing passing cars," he said. "I was running the same [lap] times as the guys in fourth or fifth. Everyone between me and them was a second slower! I drove clean and very smart, probably my smartest race. You have to drive using your head and be willing to put everything on the line."

Bunker attributes his progress during his rookie Star Mazda season to the team's philosophy of constantly improving, even through adversity, and to his relationship with his race engineer, Ian Willis.

"We know there's always something good to take away from every race," Bunker noted. "And Ian has taught me a lot about how to communicate with an engineer to get the most out of the car."

The final 2006 Star Mazda Championship race is set for Oct. 21 at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca in Monterey, Calif.

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