



## **Soares, Yost and Smith Test with Star Mazda Champions JWR Off Season Testing Program Continues at Carolina Motorsports Park**

TRAFFORD, PA (December 11, 2006) – The John Walko Racing crew was on the road again recently, testing not once but twice at Road Atlanta. In four days of testing, five different drivers took turns behind the wheel of one of the Star Mazda machines.

Among the drivers enjoying the opportunity to test with the defending Championship winning team were Brazilian Douglas Soares and American drivers Taz Smith and Jordan Yost. In addition, 2006 JWR teammates Charles Anti and Russell Walker continued their preparations for the 2007 season.

The team was able to log both wet and dry practice time as the weather changed several times throughout the tests.

Soares, who is coming off of a runner-up finish in the highly competitive Brazilian Formula Renault Championship, took advantage of a briefly dry track to run an impressive stint.

According to team owner John Walko, Soares was impressive in his first turn behind the wheel of a Star Mazda car.

"Douglas immediately was on pace as soon as he got in the car. He was fast from the get go and his feedback was excellent. Unfortunately we were hit with a huge rain a short time in to his test and he decided not to run in wet conditions. He felt confident he could easily adapt to wet conditions in this car and didn't feel it was worth the risk of crashing in the preseason. I commend him for his maturity in the situation and the confidence that he demonstrated in his own abilities. I look forward to working with him again hopefully as he was very impressive in just a handful of laps really."

Also making his first appearance in a Star Mazda car was Yost. He raced Thunder Roadsters this season, most recently coming off of a second place finish in the World Finals, and is frequently on track in a variety of machines as a driving instructor at the Spring Mountain Motorsports Ranch. While it was a first run in an open wheel machine the caliber of a Star Mazda, Yost is no stranger to being on track this year.

"It was a first time experience at Road Atlanta and the first time in a Star Mazda car. It was an eye-opener, you just can't make a mistake there ever or it is going to be big! The team was great; they were everything I was looking for. Caleb was an amazing mechanic and the communication while working with John and was excellent. They are just an all around great team."

Walko was impressed by the maturity Yost displayed throughout the test.

"Jordan went quite well despite the car being an adjustment for him. It was his first time at Road Atlanta as well so it took a little bit of time to adjust to the car and track but he made consistent improvement throughout the day. One thing that impressed me most was the way he adapted to changes we threw at him that surprised him a little. He was able to make the proper adjustments and immediately made progress in the afternoon. He never put a tire wrong and made consistent improvement all day. I think if we had a second day with Jordan he would have been on pace with our regular drivers. He was smooth, mature and a really good guy to work with. I hope we have a chance to run some more with him."

Taz Smith was the third new Star Mazda driver to take to the track in the JWR machines. Walko noted that Smith was very quick despite limited experience.

"This was the first full fledged test in this caliber of car for Taz yet his pace was very good for the level of experience he has. Unfortunately one small mistake took him off track and his day was cut shorter than planned."

Teammates Walker and Anti took advantage of the wet track as well as the dry, turning in some blistering times along the way. In fact, Anti turned times in less than ideal conditions that would have been second fastest at the Star Mazda event a few months ago.

"We were really fast on old tires and unfavorable conditions really. It was colder in general - I was cold, the track was cold and the fast lap didn't even feel that fast so it was a surprise to see the times pop up on the dash. I'm trying to be in the car at least two days a month during the off season so we will keep up with the testing program. Compared to last season we are pretty far along as we didn't do any fall testing really.

Walker was happy to take advantage of the wet testing, an area of his program that he was hoping to develop in what is shaping up to be an aggressive off season schedule.

"It rained for a day and a half so we had extremely good rain testing, close to 250 miles worth, which was very important for me. I'm getting really comfortable with the rain set-up, driving in the wet and working with the team in this situation which is important going in to the season for me. I'm also driving every week that we aren't testing. Our goal is to try to outwork everyone and be ready to go when the season starts."

Walko was thrilled with what both of his drivers were able to accomplish in the varying conditions.

"Charles and Russell were both fast in the wet as well as the dry. Charles was unbelievable, he was a full second faster than he had ever gone here and he did within the first six laps. Now that the pressure is off and he is returning to tracks he knows he is just plain fast. He proved again he is awesome in the wet, running 40 plus laps in solid rain and never putting a tire wrong, no issues at all. I was blown away. Russell had very little dry track time but was able to match his speeds from the race weekend right away. He also worked incredibly hard in the rain, an area where he did not have much experience previously. He constantly improved both on the track and in his communications with the team, a very impressive test for him."

Overall, the performance of the rookies and JWR veterans exceeded what Walko anticipated heading in to preseason testing.

"One thing I noticed in our preseason testing here is the pace, we are fast everywhere we go. Whether it is part of the learning curve or that our cars are that much more developed, we are miles ahead of last year's program. Even when we put rookies in the car, we are quick."

Next on the agenda is a trip Carolina Motorsports Park in Kershaw, South Carolina on December 20-21 for a test on the 2.3 mile, 14 turn road course facility.

Drivers interested in participating in the Carolina Motorsports Park test or other upcoming tests 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](mailto:info@johnwalkoracing.com). Additional team information can be found at [www.johnwalkoracing.com](http://www.johnwalkoracing.com).