

Rain Can't Dampen Walker's Run at Portland

TRAFFORD, PA (June 11, 2007) – While the weather and track conditions varied widely for the fifth round of the Star Mazda Championship from Portland International Raceway, the performance of the John Walko Racing machines remained consistent throughout the weekend.

Whether it was overcast skies in the opening practice session, sunny and warm temperatures in the second session or cold and rainy conditions in qualifying JWR's Russell Walker and Charles Anti consistently put themselves near the top of the time sheets.

The weather conditions in the race proved to be no different as the cars came to the start with little visibility thanks to a combination of rain coming down from the skies and a mist rising from the pack of cars. For the JWR team, the conditions at the start resulted in vastly different outcomes as John Walko noted.

"Coming in to the chicane at the start it was mist everywhere and the visibility was next to nothing. The car in front of Charles had a rain light that wasn't working and he couldn't see that car until he was about to hit it. Rather than ram the guy he jerked the wheel to the left and spun off track."

While the opening lap incident took Anti out of the race courtesy of damage to the cooling system, the chaos at the start allowed Walker to advance several positions.

"Russell stayed out of trouble at the start and came out of the other side of the opening lap crashes in eighth. He worked really hard from that point on, getting more comfortable in the wet, and brought it home fourth. It was a fantastic race for him, he learned a lot. It was a shame for Charles though as it could have been his day to shine. He is fast in the rain and our wet set-up is solid."

While the end result was mixed for the defending Star Mazda Team Champions, the sessions leading up to the race offered a glimpse at a return to the results they expect according to Walko.

"We started off with Russell being really quick again and Charles was back to the level we have come to anticipate from him. He was at the track early and ready to work from the very start. The cars were pretty good, we weren't lacking in the setup department and the cars were working well. There were a few places that both drivers were working on such as attacking the chicane a little more and carrying more speed through some of the momentum turns. It is a small but tricky track. We didn't test here like some of the other teams so we were learning on the fly and still finishing near the front in all of the sessions."

Qualifying did not go quite as well as hoped but both drivers still ended up close to the top ten.

"In qualifying we were kind of caught out, it was misting, half-raining. The guys were moving up the charts but the red flag came out. Neither driver got back to the speeds in the beginning of the session once the track went back to green though."

The John Walko Racing crew looks to build on the momentum from Portland in the next round. The team also hopes for some hometown advantage as the Star Mazda Series competes in the Grand Prix of Cleveland just a few hours from the team's base in Trafford, PA. The race is also close to home for JWR driver and Pittsburgh native Charles Anti.

Team Quotes

Eric Langbein, Engineer for Russell Walker:

"A great weekend! Russell did fantastic early on in the dry but caught some bad breaks with traffic and mixed conditions in qualifying. We went in to the race just looking for a solid finish. But he survived the first lap melee and found himself in eighth. From that point all the pressure was off and his performance was one of his best yet. He reaffirmed he can run with the leaders in the dry and now knows he can run as quickly as them in the wet as well. I really want to thank driver coach Ross Bentley this weekend. He was instrumental in working Russell through this weekend. It was like he was in the car with him; he knew exactly what was happening."

Russell Walker:

"Portland was fun. We were fast in the dry, third and fifth, and still working at it and keeping a good attitude about it. The rain came and we threw the whole rain set-up on for the first time this year. They gave me a really good car and with a little bit of luck in the first corner we were right in the hunt. It went really well, a fourth place never felt so good. This gives us even more momentum going in to Cleveland; we're ready to attack that runway. Our cars are always good on high speed, full tilt corners so it should be good."

Steve Dreizler, Engineer for Charles Anti:

"I thought we made progress and that was the key thing. I think had Charles survived that first lap deal he would have had a good chance to win. Those were his kind of conditions, he is so good in the wet, and the eventual winner started alongside him. It's a shame, for as hard as he worked this race, being there early, watching video and reviewing data he was really primed for a good finish. There was definite progress made though so we'll just move to Cleveland and work to put it all together in the same weekend."

Charles Anti:

"The car in front of me didn't have his rain light on. We went in to the first turn and I slowed down with the line alongside me and then all of the sudden the slower car just appeared in front of me out of nowhere it seemed. We had run well, top ten all weekend so everything was going well. We'll just have to keep our heads down and look toward Cleveland."

Portland Results:

- 1 Devin Cunningham
- 2 Natacha Gachnang
- 3 Ron White
- 4 Russell Walker
- 26 Charles Anti

Championship Standings:

- 1 Dane Cameron
- 2 James Davison
- 3 Marco Di Leo
- 9 Russell Walker
- 11 Charles Anti

Drivers interested in joining JWR for 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 . Additional team information can be found at www.johnwalkoracing.com.