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GOSHEN MAKES OUTSTANDING RUN TO FINISH 7TH AT ROAD ATLANTA

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The semifinal race for the Star Mazda Series was held in conjunction with the ALMS Petit Le Mans event at the high speed 2.54-mile Road Atlanta course. Road Atlanta is located in the beautiful rolling hills of northeast Georgia, so the course has several elevation changes along with 12 challenging turns. The hilly terrain adds difficulty for the drivers, but also incredible views for the spectators, especially on “Spectator Hill” located at Turn 5.

The Goshen Motorsports Team was aware they would have some catching up to do as the two top teams had tested at Road Atlanta a few weeks earlier. Tuesday, September 30 was a test day with the first practice beginning at 8:00 A.M. under clear blue skies, which would last throughout the entire week. Billy Goshen drove his #82 car out of the pits excited to be making his first trip around the world-famous Grand Prix course.

At the end of the session, Goshen told the crew something was not right with the car. Only recording the 17th fastest time of 1:24.355, more than 4 seconds off the pace of the top 5 cars, substantiated his concern. The crew checked out the car, but was unable to determine the problem. Only 4 laps into the morning’s 2nd session it became obvious there was a major problem developing in the drive train. The crew radioed Billy to come in, ending practice before he had a chance to get up to speed.

His mechanics, Ed Graca and Kimball Williams, worked feverishly to get the repairs made in time for the last session of the day, which started at 3:00 P.M. With only limited data to work with, team engineer, Andy Tagg, had a good setup on the car and Billy put in a fast lap of 1:20.599 a reduction of almost 4 seconds from the morning session and only a second off the top five.

The team arrived at the track Wednesday morning looking forward to a better day, but more problems were on the way. The first practice started at 8:40 A.M. and midway through the session the #82 car began putting out oil. Fortunately, Billy noticed the oil pressure going down and shut the engine off and pulled off the track. After reviewing the data, Andy Tagg and crew chief Richie Hearn were confident no damage had been done to the engine, but it was another challenge to get the car cleaned and the oil line reengineered and installed for the afternoon session.

The afternoon practice began at 3:30 P.M. and after a few laps everything looked good and Billy started clicking off faster times. Midway through the session, Goshen went into the tricky Turn 1 a little too hot and went off course sliding into the tire barrier. Fortunately, the damage was restricted to the rear wing, but another session ended early. Before going off, Billy was able to record the 9th fastest time of 1:19.621, putting him in the fast group for qualifying.

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Thursday morning's qualifying started at 8:45 A.M. with the fast group out at 9:15 A.M. A little more than half way through qualifying, the rear of Goshen's car got loose going through oil that was on the track. Billy locked up the brakes and spun off the track flat spotting all 4 tires in the process. His early exit from qualifying left him with only the 12th fastest time of 1:19.713, but it did not matter as the decision was made to go with new tires requiring Goshen to start at the rear of the field.

By Friday morning, there already was a large group of spectators that had staked out their spots around the track. Throughout the day a steady stream of fans continued to arrive with their motor homes, campers, trailers, tents and easy-ups. By the 4:30 P.M. start for the Star Mazda Series eleventh race of the season, more than 90,000 spectators lined the Road America course. The Goshen Motorsports Team had another large group in attendance from their sponsor Global Tracking Communications, Inc.

As Billy sat at the rear of the 22 car field, the team could only wonder what more could go wrong, but Goshen was focused on what it would take to end up with a top ten finish. At the front of the field, it was Peter Dempsey, Joel Miller, John Edwards, and Alex Ardoin, the same order as the point standings. It would be an interesting race for all five, for some agony and some ecstasy, but definitely it would be the most exciting race of the season.

As the lights went green, Billy got a great jump and passed several cars going down the straightaway and into Turn 1. Meanwhile up front, Miller got a good start and beat Dempsey off the line and by the end of the first lap had a good lead. While Goshen was moving up through the back half of the pack, Dempsey had chased down Miller and took over the lead. On lap 14, Charles Hall went off the track coming out of Turn 1 putting his car in the tire barrier bringing out a full course caution for several laps. When the race went green, Billy got a great restart passing five cars coming down the hill and on to the straightaway. Up front, Dempsey and Miller went into to Esses side by side and off the track. They were able to get back on, but Edwards had taken over the lead with Dempsey 2nd, Ardoin 3rd and Miller 4th. On lap 19, one of the cars in the back went off and another car started dropping oil on the track creating another full course caution. With five minutes to go, the race went green and Billy was able to pass several more cars putting him in 9th place. With only one lap to the checkered, Dempsey running 2nd and Ardoin running 3rd, got together in the downhill Esses ending the race for Ardoin and putting Dempsey back to 14th.

It was a wild race, but a very satisfying one for Billy Goshen after all of the problems encountered up to race day. On his way to a 7th place finish, Goshen had to pass 15 cars in the 25 lap race. With the final results at Road America, Billy Goshen is assured of 7th in the Championship and narrowed the gap with Charles Hall for 6th. After the race Goshen said "It was a good race and I was happy with the finish because it was a tough week with all the problems we had and having to start on the last row." "I have to give a special thanks to everyone on the team for all their hard work throughout the entire week."