



MOLECULE Formula Mazda Challenge Kicks Off Season at Soggy Infineon Raceway

Tuesday, February 17, 2009.
Sonoma, CA.

Making his debut with Dave Freitas Racing, Star Mazda Championship Masters Champion Chuck Hulse brought his Pro Formula Mazda to victory in the opening rounds of the 2009 MOLECULE Formula Mazda Challenge at a rain swept Infineon Raceway this weekend to kick off the championship's first season as an officially sanctioned NASA race group and the first weekend with Red Line Oil as an official series sponsor. Defending Standard Formula Mazda class champion, Bill Weaver, would start his 2009 campaign off on a winning note with a Valentine's Day victory as well.



The unseasonably dry Northern California winter gave way to torrential downpours, with the occasional sun burst, intensifying the drama that comes with the start of a new season, as drivers were forced to come to grips with changing track conditions as they shed the cobwebs of the offseason. Before the green flag even flew for Round One the drivers had to answer one of racing's most challenging questions – rain tires or slicks on a wet track with sunny skies.

Most of the field would make the switch to slick tires. Standard Mazda driver Jim Mali, who had started packing up when the rain came, bolted on slicks and lined up at the back of the grid, while the Standard class pole-sitter Shawn Westerhoff wavered before choosing the slicks and reported to the grid after the other cars had already taken to the track. Westerhoff said, "I kept going back and forth on slicks or rains and made a decision to go with slicks. In the end that was the right decision, I just made it too late to make the grid."

In the end, Pro Formula Mazda drivers Max Maxedon and Paul LaHaye were the only drivers to roll the dice and run on rain tires. On the opening laps it appeared that their gamble would pay off as front row starter Michael Guasch had his race cut short when he hit a weeper in turn eight that sent him off course and then a brief shower soaked the track again. Sean Prewett the 2008 SFR FA Champion said, "Max and Paul blew by us like we were standing still when the track conditions got wet."

The hopes of victory faded though when the sun returned and Hulse was able to open a gap on the pair that had been reeling him in during the rain. As the track continued to





dry, the racing slick-shod cars of Dave House, Larry Schnur and Stan Kohls were able to work their way past the duo before the checkered flag fell with Kohls setting the fastest lap of the race. Afterward LaHaye commented, "Max and I almost made the right decision staying on rains and it looked good for awhile. That was a fun race for all of us, and we're here to have fun."



In the Standard Mazda class local legend Bill Weaver was able to hold off Derry O'Donovan and Woody Yerxa for his first victory of the new year with Westerhoff working his way back up to fourth by the end of the event.

Sunday arrived and the challenging conditions had deteriorated further as monsoon type weather swept across the track. Following the opening session, the Standard Formula Mazda drivers agreed as a group to all drop the race. For the Pro Formula Mazda drivers it was determined that the normal rain tires might not be enough to handle the conditions so a team of mechanics was assembled to add additional grooves to the tires and it was announced that the starting grid would be set by points and the second session, originally scheduled for qualifying, would be an additional practice to allow drivers to adjust to the conditions.

Conditions remained treacherous as the field followed the NASA Mazda 3 pace car with second place starter House spinning on the pace lap while Kohls would spin not long after the green flag flew for the race. Hulse, under the watchful eye of Standing Start coach Dane Cameron, fresh from his recent run in the 24 Hours of Daytona, would steadily pull away for his second victory of the weekend. Fellow Standing Start coached drivers Kohls and House would complete the podium.

"Despite the conditions we are very pleased with how the opening weekend of the 2009 MOLECULE Formula Mazda Challenge," commented series administrator Ben Hettema. "The level of competition looks to be in high gear this year with top engineers such as Rick Cameron and Michael Doyle providing engineering expertise for teams along with championship winning drivers and coaches and new sponsors such as Red Line Oil. I also want to offer congratulations to Dave Freitas Racing for capturing two victories at their first weekend with the championship."

Competitors now have a month to dry off and regroup before the series returns to Infineon Raceway on March 21-22.

For more information please visit www.formulamazdachallenge.com.

