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Andersen Racing's Vautier Wins Star Mazda Season-Opener; Grenier Finishes Fourth, Krohn Fifth

SEBRING, Fla., March 19 — Tristan Vautier's racing accomplishments are too numerous to call it beginner's luck, but the 20-year-old from Corenc, France won his first race in the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear Friday at Sebring International Raceway. It was also his first race ever at this track or even in this country, and it was also his first race as a member of Palmetto, Fla.-based Andersen Racing.

Vautier started third in the 22-car field. After a tussle on the first lap he settled into second place on lap two, trailing only the driver who had started fourth, Conor Daly.

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By lap three Daly had a 2.135-second lead over Vautier but the Frenchman had cut Daly's advantage to 0.810 of a second by lap six. Daly was 0.548 of a second ahead on lap 10 of what turned out to be a 21-lap race, but on the next lap Vautier passed Daly with an inside move in Turn 14 to take the lead.

Vautier had built up a 3-second lead over Daly by lap 15 but that was wiped out by a full-course yellow on the following lap. The green flew again on lap 17 with 8 minutes remaining in the 45-minute race.

On the next lap Daly lost second to a rapidly approaching Jorge Goncalvez. The latter had closed to within 0.175 of a second when Vautier took the checkered to earn the series' first Visit Florida trophy for his sponsors, Moulin T.P., Cecibon, Circuit du Laquis and Fontanel Promotion.

Another Andersen Racing driver, Mikael Grenier of Stoneham, Quebec, started second and led briefly during the wild first lap only to slip to fifth by lap two. He passed David Ostella for fourth place with six laps down, but then fell back to fifth again with 15 laps down when Goncalvez got by right before the full-course caution. His teammate, polesitter Anders Krohn, who had held third or fourth position since lap two, dropped from fourth to sixth with 19 laps down, which gave Grenier fourth place again. Grenier was still in fourth when he took the checkered two laps later in his No. 17, which is sponsored by NAPA Auto Parts, HS Telecom and Desharnais.

Although Krohn was sixth on the white-flag lap, the Norwegian driver who now lives in Houston nailed down a top-five finish on the final lap by passing Joao Horton. Krohn, who smashed the track record here in qualifying yesterday, also set the fastest lap of Friday's race when he was timed in 1:59.527 (111.440 miles per hour) on lap seven while he was running third, trying to catch Vautier while simultaneously holding off Grenier.

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Krohn's car is sponsored by Trallfa Industries, Colosseum Dental, Norse Cutting & Abandonment, Bring Logistics US Inc., SR Transport, ZATGraphics.com, Rioja Tapas Restaurant, Eagles Canyon Raceway and Repcon Media.

Another Andersen Racing driver, Dom Bastien of West Palm Beach, Fla., started 19th and finished 15th overall and second in the Masters class.

A fifth Andersen Racing entry in this race was driven by Court Vernon of Key Biscayne, Fla., who is sponsored by Mangroove Boats and Capt. Harry's Fishing Supply. He started 12th and was up to ninth as early as lap four, but his car developed a problem with its fuel pump around lap 14 which pushed Vernon to 21st in the final rundown.

The next Star Mazda race is coming right up next Saturday, March 27, as part of a busy weekend of action on the street circuit in St. Petersburg, Fla. Bastien doesn't plan to compete in that event but Vautier, Grenier, Krohn and Vernon will be joined by Nick Andries of Pinellas Park, Fla. for that challenge.

Andersen Racing's Firestone Indy Lights team will also be in action at the St. Petersburg event with rookie Carmen Jorda. Its sister company, Andersen Promotions, will also administer the season-opening doubleheader of the USF2000 National Championship presented by Cooper Tires and powered by Mazda at that event.

Andersen Racing, which is sponsored by Allied Building Products Corp., has its own 1-mile road course test track at its headquarters in Palmetto, Fla., Andersen RacePark. It also has a professional karting team in addition to its Star Mazda and Firestone Indy Lights programs. Five of its karting drivers — Andrew Palmer, Andy Dunne, R.C. Enerson, Jeremy Kane and Michael McCarthy — are competing in a Florida Winter Tour event this weekend at the Ocala Gran Prix course in Ocala, Fla.

Andersen Racing's Web site is at andersenracingteam.com. The Star Mazda series' Web site is located at starmazda.com.

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Post-race quotes follow:

Tristan Vautier: "I passed Conor for the lead on the straightaway between Turns 12 and 14. He did a small mistake so I could get close. We were side-by-side in Corner 14 but I was on the inside and took the lead. He raced fairly and for that I am thankful.

"I got a good start at the beginning of the race too.

"This is good for my sponsors and for the team. I'm very happy. We wanted to finish one-two-three-four, but it didn't work out that way.

"I was quicker than I expected to be in the race. The Goodyear tires stayed quite consistent. After the full-course yellow we couldn't warm the tires up so after the restart the car was harder to drive because of that, but I still had a good car at the end.

"When I got here and drove on the course and discovered how bumpy it was, I said, 'Oh, what's happening?' It's much harder to set up the car when it's such a bumpy track. But the team did a very good job and gave me a very good car.

"I raced once before on a street course, so I'm looking forward to next week's race at St. Petersburg. This was a great way to start the year!"

Mikael Grenier: "The team had cars to win; Tristan proved that. I would say that we didn't work as a team, and that's why we didn't have more cars on the podium.

"I had a good car. It's hard to pass here. I drove really hard at the beginning of the race and I used up my tires by the end. The next time I need to be more patient during the first laps so I can push at the end.

"I was in a street race before; I finished fourth at Trois-Rivieres last year, so I'm looking forward to St. Petersburg next weekend. We just need to work as a team better."

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Anders Krohn: "I'm disappointed because I had hoped for at least a podium. I think we all screwed each other up on the first lap and were over-aggressive. I guess we were all trying too hard. I am not happy how that went, but what's done is done and we'll have to work together better and do better at St. Petersburg.

"I was still able to run fast laps. In free air my car was OK, but I had problems when I was running behind somebody."

Dom Bastien: "My day was excellent. The car was excellent; we had one problem with the rev light though. It went out, and with all the noise you can't tell what gear you're in so the whole field went by. Then I started to deal with it better, and was able to anticipate my gear switches better, and I caught up with the other guys.

"I picked up some rubber debris under the full-course yellow that affected me too. I went on the rev limiter in Turn 16 once and that killed my exit speed so I lost a spot or two.

"But for the first time out, I feel good. The race was much more tiring than practice and qualifying. It was very intense. But I was getting better and better at the end, so I feel good about the whole experience. This is a very good team, and I'll be going for that Masters win the next time."

Court Vernon: "At first the car was great. I was gaining on the people ahead of me. But then about halfway through the race the fuel pump failed. We had to come in to reset the master switch every lap.

"I kept coming in and going out because I wanted to stay out to get some points. I'm entered in the championship. I'll do the St. Pete race with Andersen Racing next week. Hopefully that will give me the time to find the sponsorship I'll need for Laguna Seca.

"I really want to thank Dan Andersen for letting me be on his team."

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The team's race results:

1. Tristan Vautier
4. Mikael Grenier
5. Anders Krohn
15. Dom Bastien
21. Court Vernon

About Allied Building Products Corp.:

Allied Building Products Corp., headquartered in East Rutherford, N.J., is one of the largest roofing and siding distributors in the United States. Founded in 1950 with five employees and two trucks, today it is a \$1.8 billion building material distribution company with over 3,500 employees, more than 200 branches in 30 states, well over one million square feet of office and warehouse space, and an inventory of approximately 85,000 products, from residential roofing and siding to doors, windows, waterproofing, manufactured stone, interior products and commercial roofing systems. For more information see alliedbuilding.com.

About Andersen Racing:

Andersen Racing strives to provide the best and most comprehensive training possible for future open-wheel superstars while giving its marketing partners media exposure and hospitality opportunities at some of the most prestigious events in North America. It provides a unique program utilizing multiple entries in three different platforms: karting, Star Mazda and Firestone Indy Lights.

A sister company, Andersen Promotions, administers the USF2000 National Championship presented by Cooper Tires and powered by Mazda. It is part of both the Indy Racing League's Road to Indy program and the MAZDASPEED Motorsports driver development system.

Andersen Racing is sponsored by Allied Building Products Corp. and Lafarge North America. The team is headquartered at Andersen RacePark, an 18-acre facility in Palmetto, Fla. that includes a 1-mile road course test track. For more information see andersenracingteam.com, andersenkarting.com, andersenracepark.com and usf2000.com.