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Vautier Samples a Firestone Indy Lights Car While Karam and McKenna Test Star Mazdas With Andersen Racing Friday at Sebring

SEBRING, Fla., Oct. 30 — It was low key to the casual observer, but Road to Indy drivers made some important strides again Friday as Andersen Racing concluded a test at Sebring International Raceway.

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On Wednesday Conor Daly of Noblesville, Ind., and Nick Andries of Pinnellas Park, Fla., tested the Palmetto, Fla.-based team's Firestone Indy Lights cars for a half-day, with Daly returning for a full day of testing on Thursday thanks to funding from Performance Friction and the Star Mazda series. Daly is the reigning driver champion in the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear. Andries concentrated on the Skip Barber National series this year and drove in selected Star Mazda races for Andersen Racing. Daly, 18, drove for the team in the Star Mazda series in 2009, but he couldn't test a Firestone Indy Lights car with the team until now due to that series' age requirements. As one of the leading development teams in North America, Andersen Racing routinely tests its full-time drivers at the next level in the off-season, and it was making good on its promise to give Daly a Firestone Indy Lights test when he was eligible.

Similar tests continued on Friday. Twenty-one-year-old Tristan Vautier of Corenc, France, who finished fifth in the Star Mazda series this year with Andersen Racing, got to drive a Firestone Indy Lights car for the first time on Friday just like Andries did earlier in the week.

In addition, the top two drivers in the top class of the "Cooper Tires Presents the USF2000 National Championship Powered by Mazda" also got to sample the division they hope to advance to in 2011. The champion, Andretti Autosport's Sage Karam of Nazareth, Pa., tested a Star Mazda car for the second time in his career, while the runner-up, Cape Motorsports with Wayne Taylor Racing's Patrick McKenna of Dublin, Ireland, got to experience a Star Mazda car for the first time ever.

Andersen Promotions, a sister company to Andersen Racing that is also based at Andersen RacePark in Palmetto, Fla., administers the USF2000 series. The team, which is sponsored by Allied Building Products Corp., is the reigning Star Mazda team champion.

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Vautier went out first in a Firestone Indy Lights car.

"It went really well," Vautier said Friday evening. "It was cool getting in this big car. It was a good experience. I got up to speed pretty quickly I think.

"We had a mechanical issue when an input shaft broke in my third run in the morning, but the team did a great job to fix the problem," he said. "I didn't crash when it broke; I was able to pit. While we made the repairs I waited for the USF2000 guys to do their test in the Star Mazda cars, and then I did more runs after that.

"A Firestone Indy Lights car is really different from Star Mazda," Vautier continued. "Braking requires a very special technique, but once you get it, it is really good fun. I have to thank my sponsors and especially Andersen Racing, which provided this test. It was very cool to be in the car. I think I did about 45 laps in all. Hopefully I can be in Firestone Indy Lights next year."

The USF2000 drivers were equally enthusiastic about testing a Star Mazda car.

"Testing a Star Mazda car was a totally new experience for me," Karam said. "The car was great. I am definitely looking forward to the season. We have a lot to learn and it's going to take time, but we can do it. I have to thank Andersen Racing for the test. Everything was great!"

As part of his winnings, Karam, 15, earned a scholarship from Mazda valued at \$350,000 to help him advance to the Star Mazda series next year.

It was McKenna's first experience driving a Star Mazda car ever.

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“I loved the car; it’s fantastic!” McKenna said. “With a bit more power and downforce it really suit my style, and I enjoyed driving it and working with the team.

“It was quite a solid day; we didn’t put any wheels wrong,” McKenna added. “We got down to a 62.5 and then I went a little slower in the heat of the day. I was able to set my fastest lap in the last session even though the tires had about 130 miles on them, so I was happy about that. It was a half-day test but it was spread over the day, so it was about 60 laps in all.

“I enjoyed working with the team and I want to thank Andersen Racing for giving Sage and I the opportunity to test their Star Mazda cars. It was a great opportunity to sample the car. It was my first time in a Star Mazda car and my first time at Sebring.

“I enjoyed working with the team; we worked well together,” he added.

“I’d like to try to do Star Mazda next year, and hopefully this is a good step towards that goal,” McKenna concluded.

McKenna, 23, was recently named the Dunlop Motorsport Ireland “Young Driver of the Year” for the second consecutive year.

“It was a really good test; we got a chance to see what the top two drivers in the USF2000 Championship could do with a car on the next level,” said Geoff Fickling, Andersen Racing’s Star Mazda team manager/engineer. “It was pretty neat to see their learning curve, and how well prepared they are as young drivers. They both did a really good job, and it was a pleasure working with them.

“All five drivers who did this test are all really talented, and it’s really neat to see their progression,” Fickling added. “It was neat to see all three steps on the Road to Indy ladder system, and how it is working to develop young drivers.

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“USF2000 drivers who are in a Star Mazda car for the first time have to learn how to utilize the added downforce to their advantage — most importantly in the braking zones,” Fickling continued. “They have to learn how to maximize the car under braking as well as their down-shifting; that’s the biggest thing they have to come to grips with early on.

“The Star Mazda drivers who were driving the Firestone Indy Lights cars had to get used to the size and weight of the Indy Lights car and learn how to utilize that weight to their advantage,” he said. “You have to induce it to rotate it. It doesn’t stop as well and it doesn’t turn as well as their Star Mazda cars, but it has more power.”

For more information see andersenracing.com, andersenkarting.com, andersenracepark.com, indy.car.com/lights, starmazda.com and usf2000.com.

The 2011 schedules for Firestone Indy Lights and Star Mazda have not yet been announced, but the USF2000 season opener is a doubleheader March 17-18 at Sebring as preliminary events to the Mobil 1 Twelve Hours of Sebring, the premier event of the American Le Mans Series.

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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. 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 andersenracing.com, andersenkarting.com, andersenracepark.com and usf2000.com.