



Ryan Tveter takes a turn at Baltimore.



*Andres Méndez in action at Baltimore.
(Star Mazda photos by Eric McCombs)*

Team GDT's Méndez and Tveter Face Challenges at Baltimore

BALTIMORE, Sept. 3 — Rounds 13 and 14 of the 2012 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear on Saturday and Sunday were challenging for a number of reasons, and Team GDT left the Grand Prix of Baltimore presented by SRT with mixed results.

Ryan Tveter of Oyster Bay, N.Y. posted the best finish for the Dallas-based team this weekend when he turned an 18th-place starting spot into a tenth-place finish

in Saturday's race on the temporary street course at Baltimore's Inner Harbor.

Both Tveter and his teammate, Andres Méndez, also had 12th-place finishes here, as Méndez finished 12th on Saturday and Tveter placed 12th on Sunday.

Méndez, of Bogotá, Colombia, only completed one lap of Sunday's race be-

fore he was hit in the rear by another competitor in the chicane and was launched into the wall. He ended up 18th in the final rundown for that race.

The whole weekend was complicated.

Track time was at a premium here before a car turned a single lap due to a crammed schedule. After several cars got airborne going over some light rail tracks on the course, the event organiz-

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Photos may be downloaded off Star Mazda's Facebook page.



ers ordered some work done to the track surface and they eventually added a chicane to slow the cars down before they went over the railroad tracks. All of this trouble affected the Star Mazda action, and most of the drivers only got a handful of laps in during Friday morning's practice session before it was red flagged. Friday afternoon's qualifying session didn't go well either, so it was turned into another practice session and the starting line-up for Saturday's race was determined by the current point standings. That put Méndez's No. 53 sponsored by DataFile Internacional S.A. and Grupo Kriterion 12th on the grid. Tveter's No. 33, sponsored by new partner CIMIER Swiss Watches and Motorola Mobility LLC, had the 18th starting spot.

Set-ups were just educated guesses due to the lack of practice time, and some drivers, like Méndez, were still learning the course when the green lights went on for the standing start.

Even that was complicated, however, as there was a problem with the system that triggers the lights and the last set of lights came on 1 second before the other ones did. Tveter and two other drivers closest to those lights took off when they saw them go green, and were later issued drive-through penalties for jumping the start that they didn't deserve. Although the series' officials apologized afterwards, there was no way to rectify the situation for the drivers involved.

The event's first full-course caution came out before even a lap was in the books. Méndez was up to tenth at that point and Tveter was 13th.

Méndez tried to brake a little late going into Turn 3 on the restart but had a problem and slipped back to 15th shortly thereafter. Tveter stayed in 13th place

until Gustavo Menezes passed him working lap five to push him to 14th. The two Team GDT rookies switched positions working lap 7 when Tveter served his unwarranted penalty, right before another full-course yellow came out on lap 8.

There were about 7 minutes left in the 30-minute race when the green waved again on lap 11 with Méndez in 12th place and Tveter 14th. Méndez stayed in 12th place until the checkered came out on lap 13. Tveter moved up from 14th to 11th when the driver who was second, Sage Karam, crashed working lap 12; Carlos Linares crashed and Tveter passed Méndez. He took the checkered flag in 11th position but he advanced to tenth in the official order of finish after another driver was penalized for using a runoff area illegally.

Jack Hawksworth ended up winning Saturday's race over Connor De Phillippi and Gabby Chaves.

The starting line-up for Sunday's 40-minute race was established by each driver's fastest lap during Saturday's race, which put Tveter in 13th and Méndez in 16th in that starting line-up. Not wanting a repeat of the problem with the starting lights or the gearbox problems suffered by two cars during Saturday's standing start, the officials ruled that Sunday's race would begin with a rolling start instead.

The start of Sunday's race went well for both of Team GDT's drivers initially, but then things turned problematic. Méndez got a great start and passed several cars on the first lap, vaulting from 16th to 13th on the first lap. Unfortunately that was the only lap he finished on Sunday, because he was forced to retire after another driver hit him in the rear and propelled him into a wall working lap two. Luckily Méndez was-

n't hurt, but his car suffered extensive damage.

Before all that happened, Tveter was having his own issues. A driver ahead of him hit his brakes going into Turn 1 earlier than Tveter expected, and Tveter hit him in the rear. Tveter's car got airborne for an instant but the real problem was the damage to its front wing. He was forced to pit for a replacement, which dropped him back to 18th place, one lap down.

He got 17th when Méndez retired. He got 16th when he passed Walt Bowlin working lap 11. He got 15th on lap 15 after Martin Scuncio ran into problems. He got two more positions on lap 17 when Zack Meyer and Menezes dropped back. He advanced to 12th on lap 23 when Camilo Schmidt dropped back a few spots, and he finished in that position when the checkered waved on lap 25.

Karam led every lap to win Sunday's race, with Hawksworth second and De Phillippi third.

The Star Mazda set now heads for the West Coast for another doubleheader next weekend at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca in Salinas, Calif. Sept. 8-9.

The Baltimore Star Mazda races will be broadcast on the Mazda Motorsports Hour on the Velocity network at noon on Saturday, Sept. 29.

Fans can learn more about Team GDT on its Facebook page or through Twitter @TeamGDT.

Both Méndez and Tveter also have Facebook and Twitter accounts. Méndez's Website is at agMendez.com and Tveter's is at RyanTveter.com. The series' Website is at StarMazda.com.