

# NEWS from TEAM

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**Andres Méndez (No. 53) and Ryan Tveter (No. 33) take a turn at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca.**

*(Star Mazda photo by Eric McCombs)*

## Team GDT's Méndez and Tveter Learn a Great Deal at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca

SALINAS, Calif., Sept. 11 — Team GDT's rookies, Andres Méndez and Ryan Tveter, gained a wealth of experience last weekend as they both made their first starts ever at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca, considered by many to be among the most challenging road courses in North America. They were both very respectful of the demands posed by the elevation changes and the technical aspects of the 11-turn, 2.238-mile road course as well as cognizant of their learning curve. That attitude paid off

when they both finished Saturday's 30-minute race and Sunday's 45-minute contest in the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear.

The series hasn't been on a permanent road course since its visit to Barber Motorsports Park five months ago, and Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca makes different demands on drivers than the two oval tracks and four street courses the series has appeared at since it was in

Alabama this spring. It was especially challenging for Tveter, since he's only doing a partial schedule this season and he was competing on a permanent road course in Star Mazda for the first time.

Despite the challenges, both drivers bettered their starting positions in each race.

Méndez, of Bogotá, Colombia, started 18th on Saturday in the No. 53 sponsored by DataFile Interna-

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



cional S.A. and Grupo Kriterion and finished 15th. He started one spot further back on Sunday but got the same result, as he again placed 15th in that race.

Tveter, of Oyster Bay, N.Y., started 17th on Saturday in the No. 33 sponsored by CIMIER Swiss Watches and Motorola Mobility, and went on to finish 16th. He started 18th on Sunday but he was able to work his way into the top 10 until another competitor hit him in the rear and damaged his car's suspension. He held on and finished that race in 14th position.

Tveter started one position ahead of Méndez in Saturday's race. Other when Carlos Linares and Zach Veach got between them in the early going, Méndez was behind Tveter on the scoreboard until the very end.

There was only one full-course yellow that lasted just one lap (lap seven), so the field got a bit strung out as the race progressed. At the halfway point time-wise on lap nine there was just 0.496 of a second between Team GDT's rookies, who were in 17th and 18th position. They both moved up one spot on the following lap when Camilo Schmidt fell out. They both got one more position working lap 16 when Zack Meyer also retired, which put Tveter in 15th place and Méndez in 16th.



**Andres Méndez.**

*(Star Mazda photo by Eric McCombs)*

They switched places working the very last lap, lap 21, when Tveter spun in Turn 6 and continued.

Jack Hawksworth led every lap of Saturday's race to secure the victory and the driver championship for himself and the team championship for Team Pelfrey. Gabby Chaves finished second and Connor De Phillippi placed third.

Both Méndez and Tveter had great standing starts in Sunday's race. After a yellow on lap one, Tveter had already vaulted from 18th to 13th and Méndez had advanced from 19th to 15th. Bruno Palli passed Méndez working lap four, but Tveter stayed in 13th place and Méndez in 16th for the first 12 minutes. Martin Scuncio passed Méndez to push him to 17th on lap eight. Tveter moved up to 12th on lap 10 when Gustavo Menezes dropped from sixth to 15th. Walt Bowlin got

around Méndez on lap 11 to push him to 18th, but Tveter moved up to 11th when Sage Karam dropped from third to 19th after a half-shaft broke after contact with Hawksworth.

Tveter broke into the top 10 on lap 14 after the driver who had been right in front of him, Ashley Freiberg, fell out. As the torrid pace continued

he found himself playing defense against an aggressive Menezes, who was 11th. Tveter went from tenth to 14th working lap 18 after Menezes hit him in the rear in Turn 5 and damaged his car's suspension. Tveter slipped one more spot to 15th a bit later but he passed Kyle Kaiser working lap 20 to regain 14th. Kaiser got by him working lap 24 to push him to 15th place, but Tveter got 14th once more working lap 27 when another driver who had been in the top five, Zach Veach, fell out due to a pushrod failure.

While all this was going on Méndez ran in 19th or 18th position. He lost some time when he was forced to pit after a tear-off from someone's helmet got stuck in his car's oil cooler fence, which made the oil side overheat. Once the debris was removed he returned to the fray. He got 17th working lap 15 when Freiberg dropped out, and he moved back

into 16th place due to Karam's departure. He got 15th on lap 28 when he passed Bowlin, and he took the checkered in that position on lap 31.

Chaves led every lap of Sunday's race, with Hawksworth second and De Phillippi third.

"I finished both races and learned a lot," Méndez said. "In the first race we had some understeer, but it was a lot better on Sunday. I had to make a pit stop during Sunday's race due to an issue with the oil cooler, but Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca is an awesome track and I hope we can come back here again sometime. I want to thank Team GDT and all my partners and the people who support me."

"Despite the challenges, this weekend was an excellent learning experience for me," said Tveter. "The speed, elevation changes and incredibly fast corners at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca are intimidating to some of the best drivers in the world, so I felt really good about being able to increase or maintain my lap times when the track was slower for other drivers, including the leaders. P16 and P14 are not horrible results for my first time on a permanent circuit but no doubt I could have done better with a little more experience and no hits from behind. Having to fight even harder for position and defend for so long on such a high speed and complicated circuit was also really great experience for developing my race craft. In that respect, I achieved my goals for this weekend. My lap time

improvements and data were very strong.

"I am extremely grateful to my marketing partners, CIMIER Swiss Watches and Motorola Mobility, LLC, not only for their support but also for their amazing encouragement," Tveter added. "I am so lucky to have such quality partners and to be driving for Team GDT."

The 17th and final race for the series in 2012 is scheduled for Oct. 17-20 during the Petit Le Mans at Road Atlanta in Braselton, Ga. Qualifying is tentatively set for 4:40 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 18 with the 50-minute Star Mazda season finale at 4:10 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 19.

Team GDT will also participate in the Chris Griffis Memorial Test on the road course at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Oct. 10-11. One or two seats may be available for funded drivers for that test; interested drivers should contact team manager Paul Mata through the team's Facebook page or its Twitter account @TeamGDT.

Last weekend's races at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca will be broadcast on the Mazda Motorsports Hour on Discovery's Velocity chan-



**Ryan Tveter leads a pack of cars down a hill at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca.**

*(Star Mazda photo by Eric McCombs)*

nel at noon Eastern time on Saturday, Oct 13. For information on the Canadian broadcasts on Rogers Sportsnet and the ESPN International broadcast times, see the series' website at StarMazda.com.

The Baltimore doubleheader will be shown on the same networks; in the United States it is scheduled to air at noon Eastern on Saturday, Sept. 29 on Velocity.

Méndez's website is at [agMendez.com](http://agMendez.com) and Tveter's is at [RyanTveter.com](http://RyanTveter.com). Both have Facebook and Twitter accounts too.