



## **Dog Fight on Day One – Promoter Test Days at Sebring Produce Close Racing**

A dog fight is shaping up on day one of the promoter test days at Sebring leading up to Round 1 of the 2008 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear with the top drivers in the field separated by bare hundredths of a second in both the morning and afternoon sessions.

The first session, taking the green at 8:05 am with the sun just barely risen, was intended as a way for new drivers to feel their way around the track and take the measure of the brand-new Goodyear radial racing tires that are making their debut at this event. Instead, the young hotshoes had the pedal to metal pretty much from lap 1. After an hour of track time, and three red flags in quick succession in the closing laps, Nick Hays, the second-year driver who finished 4<sup>th</sup> in the 2007 championship, wound up on top with a lap of 2:00.141 (110.870 mph) in his #4 JDC Motorsports/Quantum Sphere Mazda.

Coming in second was Joel Miller, the 2007 Skip Barber Champion racing with JDC Motorsports in the 2008 Star Mazda Championship courtesy of a full-season sponsorship from the MAZDASPEED Motorsports Driver Development Ladder. He turned a lap of 2:00.927 (110.149 mph) in the #20 JDC/Skip Barber Mazda. Hot on his heels was Tom Gladdis, the 16 year-old European racer from Gibraltar who confirmed the speed he showed in early-season testing with a lap of 2:01.016 (109.439 mph) in the #5 Andersen Racing/Law firm of Marrach & Co. Mazda.

Rounding out the top-5 were Irish driver Peter Dempsey, a rookie to the Star Mazda series who also impressed in pre-season testing. His lap of 2:01.712 (109.439 mph) in the #21 Andersen Racing Mazda was good for fourth on the time sheet. Finally came Louisiana native Alex Ardoin, who won his first race in the final Star Mazda Championship race of the 2007 season at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca. He turned a lap of 2:02.208 (108.995 mph) in the #51 Mundill Racing/Oral and Facial Surgery Center Mazda.

The fastest of the three female racers in the field was Juliana Gonzalez of Mexico City, who was 8th fast with a lap of 2:03.056 (108.234 mph) in the #11 Andersen Racing Mazda. “We had a very good car in the morning, even though it was cold and the tires took a long time to come up to temperature. The team is working well together and we’re expecting the afternoon session to be much more physical as the temperatures and speeds come up.”

Occupying the 9th spot on the time sheet was Master Series driver (age 45 and older) Gerry Kraut, a co-owner of JDC Motorsports. He turned a lap of 2:03.895 (107.510 mph) in the #55 Dougherty & Co. and Dougherty Funding LLC Mazda.

The fastest of the Expert Series drivers (age 30 to 44) was Chris Cumming of Vancouver, B.C. with a lap of 2:05.659 (106.001 mph) in his #16 World Speed Motorsports Mazda.

The second one-hour session of the day took the green at 1:20 pm in the afternoon, and the names were familiar, but the order was dramatically different. Peter Dempsey, fourth in the morning session, moved to the top of the order with a lap of 2:00.141 (110.870 mph). "We should have been a second a lap faster, but I went out on the same tires we used in the morning session to gather some data about how the tires perform as they wear. We're happy with the car, and it will probably take another two seconds to get the pole when we finally qualify, so there's lots of room for improvement."

Tom Gladdis, third in the morning session, moved up to second on the time sheet with a lap of 2:00.177 (110.837 mph), just a couple of hundredths off the top pace. He swapped places in the order with Joel Miller, who put in a best afternoon lap of 2:00.491 (110.548 mph), almost half a second faster than the first session. Nick Hays, fastest in the morning, just missed the ideal setup and dropped to fourth in the afternoon with a lap of 2:00.969 (110.111 mph). Rounding out the top-5 was Eric Freiberg, 7<sup>th</sup> in the morning session, with an afternoon lap of 2:01.618 (109.523 mph).

Chris Cumming was the fastest Expert Series racer in the afternoon with a lap of 2:02.033 (109.151 mph), while Gerry Kraut maintained his position atop the Master Series time sheet, improving a few tenths with a lap of 2:03.763 (107.625 mph). Juliana Gonzalez remained the fastest female in the field with a lap of 2:03.054 (108.245 mph), though she dropped to 14<sup>th</sup> in the order.

With times so close at the front of the field, the second day of promoter testing promises even more excitement and close racing. There will be two 35-minute sessions on Tuesday, March 11, beginning at 10:05 am and 4:50 pm. Official practice begins on Wednesday, with qualifying scheduled for 1:20 pm to 2:05 pm Thursday, March 13. Round One of the 2008 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear is scheduled to take the green flag at 2:50 pm, Friday, March 14.