



Contact: Peter Frey / (818) 906-6997
StarMazdaPR@aol.com

Some Things the Same, Some Surprises In Final Star Mazda Championship Practice Session Before Sebring Qualifying This Afternoon

Sebring, FL (March 13) – The final 40-minute round of Star Mazda Championship practice prior to this afternoon’s qualifying session produced both familiar and different results. As previously, 2007 Skip Barber Champion and Star Mazda rookie Joel Miller set the pace with a lap of 2:00.332 (110.694 mph) in the #20 JDC/Skip Barber/K&N Mazda. In second, a little over 6/10ths of a second back, was Tom Gladdis, who turned a lap of 2:01.007 (110.076 mph) in the #5 Andersen Racing/Law Firm of Marrache & Co./Allied Mazda. And rounding out the top-3 was Peter Dempsey, who piloted his #21 Andersen Racing/Allied Mazda to a lap of 2:01.388 (109.731 mph).

That was the end of the predictable part of the session. Moving up into 4th after showing occasional flashes of speed earlier in the week was Brazilian Ernesto Otero, who turned a lap of 2:01.735 (109.418 mph) in the JDC Motorsports/Brazilian Green Beef Mazda.

“We went a completely different direction on the setup and it worked for me,” said Otero. “I was struggling over the bumps and with the turn in because the cars I drove in Europe are less sensitive and easier to drive aggressively. These cars with the new Goodyear radials require a much lighter touch, so my engineer made a change that made the car less sensitive to steering input and I felt more comfortable right away. I think there is much more time in the car and I’m looking forward to qualifying this afternoon.”

And rounding out the top-5 was another new name John Zartarian of Carlsbad, California, who ran two Star Mazda Championship races in 2007 and maintains his rookie status for 2008. Driving the #43 John Walko Racing Mazda, he turned a lap of 2:01.761 (109.395 mph). Also making an appearance nearer the top of the time sheets than previously was Jeffrey (J.C.) Kester, half of the series’ unique brother/sister driving duo. His lap of 2:02.069 (109.119 mph) in the #24 Kester Racing/Texas World Speedway/Unifirst Mazda was 8th-fast in the session.

Speaking of the Kester brother/sister team, both of whom are from College Station, Texas, Kristy Kester also put in her best showing of the week and for the first time was the fastest of the three female racers in the field. Her lap of 2:03.068 (108.233 mph) in the #48 Kester Racing/Texas World Speedway/Unifirst Mazda was good for 15th-fast.

Another driver moving up the order was Master Series (drivers 45 and older) racer Chuck Hulse, with a 17th-fast lap of 2:03.610 (107.758 mph) in the #12 JDC Motorsports/Silicon Salvage Mazda. And just 2/10ths back of Hulse was his JDC teammate and fellow Master Series driver Gerry Kraut with a lap of 2:03.867 (107.535 mph) in the #55 JDC Motorsports/Dougherty & Co./Dougherty Funding LLC Mazda. The quickest of the Expert Series drivers (30 to 44 years old), as he has been throughout the week so far was Vancouver, B.C.’s Chris Cumming. He turned a 23rd-fast lap of 2:05.546 (106.097 mph) in the World Speed Motorsports/Inviro Medical Mazda.

Qualifying to set the starting grid set will begin at 1:20 pm. The 45-minute Round One of the 2008 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear will begin with the series’ first-ever standing start at 2:50 pm Friday, March 14. The race will be broadcast on the SPEED Channel; for the exact air date and time, log on to www.speedtv.com/programs.

For more information on the Star Mazda Championship and its drivers, as well as the Mazda Motorsports ladder system, please visit www.starmazda.com and www.mazdausa.com.

On any given weekend, there are more Mazdas on the road-race tracks of America than any other brand of vehicle. At the track, you'll see MX-5 Miata, RX-8, MAZDA3, MAZDA6, RX-7 and other vintage Mazda models competing, because every Mazda has the Soul of a Sports Car.

For more information on the various Mazda spec series, visit:

www.champcaratlantic.com

www.starmazda.com

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Dean Case / Communications Officer / MAZDASPEED Motorsports
Office - (310) 755-7403 / Cell - (310) 318-4582 / E-mail: dean@RWB-LLC.com