



Rookie Joel Miller tops the time sheet in Wednesday Star Mazda Championship practice at Sebring

Sebring, FL (March 12) -- The first 'official' practice session at Sebring, after two days of 'promoter testing' leading up to Round One of the 2008 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear, was mercifully free of incidents – just one short red flag in the 40-minute session, and a few spins, rookie mistakes and finger-wagging by officials.

When all the tire smoke cleared, the time sheet bore a remarkable resemblance to the promoter test times with rookie Joel Miller of Hesperia, California coming out on top – albeit with a slower lap time than he turned in the fast Tuesday morning session. Yesterday, a 1:59.653 (111.322 mph) in the #20 JDC/Skip Barber/K&N Mazda put him on top, but today it only took a 2:01.151 (109.945 mph) to take the top spot.

"It was a combination of factors that produced slower times for all of us," said the 2007 Skip Barber Champion who is racing with JDC Motorsports in the 2008 Star Mazda Championship courtesy of a full-season sponsorship from the MAZDASPEED Motorsports Driver Development Ladder. "It rained heavily last night, and yet the track was still quite dirty when we went out. And the wind has changed direction, so its blowing directly in your face as you go down the longest straight, so that slows you down a few miles an hour. I'm actually quite comfortable with the new Goodyear radial tire because there's a lot of front grip and it suits my driving style to carry a lot of speed on turn-in to the corners. I'm new to the Star Mazda Championship series, but I feel more comfortable each time I get in the car."

Turning the second-fastest time – by a margin of just 8/1,000ths of a second –with a 2:01.159 (109.938 mph) was 16-year old Andersen Racing driver Tom Gladdis, a native of Gibraltar, U.K. He has been quick in every session so far at the controls of the #5 Andersen Racing/Law firm of Marrache&Co./Allied Mazda.

Third on the time sheet was Lafayette, Louisiana native Alex Ardoin, a second-year Star Mazda Championship driver who won the final round of the 2007 season at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca. He, too, has been quick throughout early-week testing in the #51 Mundill Racing/Oral and Facial Surgery Center Mazda, turning a lap of 2:01.861 (109.305 mph) in today's session.

Irish driver Peter Dempsey, fastest in early-season testing at Sebring and fast again this week was fourth on the time sheet with a lap of 2:02.182 (109.018 mph) in the #21 Andersen Racing/Allied Mazda. And rounding out the top-5 was another second-year driver Nick Hays of Huntington Beach, California. He finished 4th in the Star Mazda Championship battle last year with a pair of podium finishes and a steady diet of top-5 and top-10s. He posted a lap of 2:02.454 (108.776 mph) in the #4 JDC Motorsports/Quantum Sphere/All-Star Ice Mazda.

As she has been in every session since testing began, the fastest of the three female racers in the field has been Juliana Gonzalez of Mexico City. Her lap of 2:03.999 (107.420 mph) in the #11 Andersen Racing/VisitMexico.com/Allied Mazda was good for 14th in the field of 27 cars.

Among the Expert Series (ages 30 to 44) and Master Series (45 and older) drivers, Chris Cumming of Vancouver, B.C. has consistently been the quickest Expert, and today put in a lap of 2:03.755 (107.632 mph), good for 12th overall, driving his #16 World Speed Motorsports / Inviro Medical Mazda. Less than 1/10th of a second behind him, in 13th overall, was Master Series driver Chuck Hulse, who obviously came to grips with his car overnight and turned in a vastly improved lap of 2:03.846 (107.553 mph) in the #12 JDC Motorsports / Silicon Salvage Mazda.

There is one more practice session, Thursday morning from 8:40 am to 9:20 am, and then the action gets serious with qualifying to set the starting grid set to 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

www.skipbarber.com

www.mx-5cup.com

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