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## **UNEXPECTED PROMISE THOROUGHLY FULFILLED – NEWCOMER JOHN EDWARDS WINS POLE FOR STAR MAZDA ROUND TWO AT MILLER**

Newcomer John Edwards, the 2007 Atlantic Series racer who joined the 2008 Star Mazda Championship just in time for Round Two at Miller Motorsports Park thoroughly fulfilled the unexpected promise he showed in testing with a pole-winning performance in the #7 AIM Autosport Mazda during Saturday morning qualifying. His lap of 1:43.650 (105.864 mph) was more than 1.5 seconds faster than his best test time and .691 seconds ahead of the 2<sup>nd</sup>-place qualifier, Sebring winner Joel Miller.

“The AIM team gave me a car so easy to drive that it took hardly any effort to set the pole time,” said Edwards. “I did my pole time on my third lap on a set of brand new tires and immediately pitted to see if anyone could beat it, which they didn’t. So I’ll be starting the race with tires that have only three laps on them, which is a huge advantage. The improved lap times were in part due to the car and in part due to the track being faster with lots of ALMS rubber laid down. It may be a little slower in the heat of the afternoon, but we’re feeling confident of our chances in the race.”

Joel Miller, starting on the outside of the front row with a lap of 1:44.341 (105.163 mph), suffered a suspension failure on the #20 JDC Motorsports/Mazda/K&N Air Filters Mazda and made heavy, head-on contact with the end of the tire barrier in Turn 8 during the closing minutes of the 45-minute qualifying session. Though unhurt, Miller’s car had the suffered right front suspension and will keep the crew busy re-building it right up until race time this afternoon.

“I had a minor tire vibration on the second set of tires, but it wasn’t bad and we elected to stay out and try for a time,” said Miller, the 2007 Skip Barber Pro Series Champion who won his 2008 Star Mazda ride courtesy of the *MAZDASPEED* Motorsports Driver Development Ladder. “I went into the braking zone for Turn 7 and the car just turned right into the barrier. We’re not sure exactly what happened, but the JDC crew will have the car good as new for the start of the race. The situation is pretty much the reverse of what I had in Sebring where I was much faster than the second-place guy, and Edwards is really quick, but it’s a long race and a long season with a lot of races to go.”

Starting third on the grid with a lap of 1:44.799 (104.703 mph) will be Brazilian driver Ernesto Otero, who qualified third at Sebring in the #18 JDC Motorsports/Brazilian Green Beef Mazda but wound up with a DNF after colliding with another car on the opening lap. Rounding out the top-5 on the starting grid are Tom Gladdis, of Gibraltar, U.K., who turned a lap of 1:44.887 (104.615 mph) in the #5 Andersen Racing/Law firm of Marrache & Co./Allied Mazda, and Irishman Peter Dempsey, who actually turned the 6<sup>th</sup>-fastest time but inherited the 5<sup>th</sup>-spot on the grid due to a penalty imposed on fellow Andersen driver Charles Hall. Dempsey turned a lap of 1:45.020 (104.483 mph) in the #21 Andersen Racing/Center Jewellers.ie/Quayside.ie/Allied Mazda.

Master Series driver Chuck Hulse, who won the class for drivers over 45 in the season-opener at Sebring, was the leading Master qualifier in this morning's session with a lap of 1:46.068 (103.451 mph) in the #12 JDC Motorsports/Silicon Salvage Mazda. His time will have him starting 15<sup>th</sup> on the grid.

"There was more in the car, and in me, but we lost a couple of flying laps due to the red flags," says Hulse. "But this is the kind of a track where you know if you have a good car, and I have a good car. We were about 8/10ths faster this morning than our best time yesterday, and I did that on cold tires, so I'm really looking forward to the race. I figure I'll let the kids go in the early laps, wear themselves out and then hunt them down."

The leading qualifier in the Expert Series (drivers between 30 and 44) was Phil Fogg, Jr. with a lap of 1:46.411 (103.117 mph) in the #29 Northwest Autosport/Consonus Health Services Mazda. He will start from 18<sup>th</sup> on the grid. The top-qualifying female racer in the field was Kristy Kester, who drove to a well-deserved 8<sup>th</sup>-place finish in the season-opener at Sebring. Her lap of 1:47.074 (102.479 mph) was good for the 21<sup>st</sup> starting spot on the 29-car grid.

Round Two of the 2008 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear will take the green flag at 4:15 pm this afternoon, Saturday, May 17. The race will be broadcast on SPEED Saturday, May 31 at 3:00 pm Eastern.

This is the Star Mazda Championship's third visit to Miller Motorsports Park, with the event this year taking place on the 3.048-mile 'perimeter course.' The inaugural event in 2006 was won from the pole by Adrian Carrio, who took the checkered flag 4.153 seconds ahead of second place finisher Ron White... and went on to win the championship with just two wins to White's three victories. In 2007, Lorenzo Mandarino scored one of his two victories at Miller, on his way to 8<sup>th</sup> in the championship.

For more information on the Star Mazda Championship and its drivers, as well as the Mazda Motorsports ladder system, please visit [www.starmazda.com](http://www.starmazda.com) and [www.mazdausa.com](http://www.mazdausa.com).

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