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A DAY OF WIND, SUN AND SURPRISES AS DRIVERS IN THE STAR MAZDA CHAMPIONSHIP COMPLETE PROMOTER TEST DAY AT MILLER MOTORSPORTS PARK

Round Two of the 2008 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear this weekend at Miller Motorsports Park began with a windy, sunny and surprising 'promoter test day' on Thursday. Interesting results were the order of the day, some of them expected, some a total surprise, such as the performance of Irishman Peter Dempsey. He served notice of his speed with a 3rd-place finish in the season opener at Sebring but was able to run only a few laps during the series' two-day test at Miller last week due to budget constraints. Despite this handicap, he wound up at the top of the time sheets with a lap of 1:45.045 (104.458 mph) in the #21 Andersen Racing/Allied Mazda.

The occupants of the 2nd- and 3rd-fastest slots were surprising only in that they were handily at the top of the times during last week's testing. Rocket Rookie Joel Miller, winner of the Sebring season-opener and the 2007 Skip Barber Pro Series champion who won his ride in the #20 JDC Motorsports/MAZDASPEED/K&N Air Filters Mazda courtesy of the MAZDASPEED Motorsports Driver Development Ladder, was 2nd-fast (albeit by barely more than a tenth of a second on the high-speed, 3.4-mile Miller 'perimeter circuit) with a lap of 1:45.166 (104.338 mph). He was followed by Charles Hall, who was second at both Sebring and the series test in the #77 Andersen Racing / Pardoes Solicitors/Allied Mazda. Hall turned a lap of 1:45.644 (103.866 mph).

Perhaps the biggest surprise of the day came in the form of John Michael Edwards, a 17 year-old racer who ran last season in the Atlantic series with Forsythe Racing and sponsorship from Red Bull. When that program evaporated, along with so much else, in the wake of the Champ Car/IRL unification, he signed with AIM Autosport, a top Star Mazda team that had been planning to sit out the 2008 Star Mazda season and concentrate on their Grand-Am Daytona Prototype program. Instead, when Edwards became available, they 'threw together' a quick effort and Edwards, in his first day in the car, was 9th in the first session, 6th in the second session and set the 4th-fastest time in the final session of the day with a lap of 1:45.928 (103.587 mph)... an unexpected wild card in the 2008 Star Mazda Championship, and definitely a driver to watch.

Rounding out the top-5 was Taylor Hacquard, who was 2nd-fast in two of the day's three sessions and wound up 5th-fast for the day with a lap of 1:46.083 (103.436 mph) in the #15 World Speed Motorsports/Wolfe Auto Group Mazda/

Standout performances during the promoter test day included, Tom Gladdis, of Gibraltar, U.K., who was third-fast in the second session of the day, and in the final session turned a lap of 1:46.250 (103.273 mph) in the #5 Andersen Racing, Law firm of Marrache & Co./Allied Mazda. He finished 5th at Sebring and was 3rd-fast in series testing at Miller. In the 7th-fast slot was Billy Goshen with a 1:46.314 (103.211 mph) in the #82 Goshen Motorsports/Merv Griffin Entertainment/Global Tracking Mazda, followed in 8th by Brazilian Ernesto Otero in the #18 JDC Motorsports/ Brazilian Green Beef Mazda

(1:46.439 / 103.090 mph) and fellow Brazilian Caio Lara in 9th with a lap of 1:46.528 (103.004 mph) in the Mundill Racing Mazda. Rounding out the top-10 was Louisiana native Alex Ardoin, winner of the 2007 Star Mazda season-ender at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca, with a time of 1:46.547 (102.986 mph) in the #51 Mundill / Oral & Facial Surgery Center/ Twister Trailer Mazda.

Also worthy of note were the efforts of Chris Cumming and Chuck Hulse. Cumming, the Expert Series (for drivers 30 to 44 years old) winner at Sebring was 13th-fast with 1:47.138 (102.417 mph) in the #16 World Speed Motorsports/Inviro Medical Mazda. Hulse, the Master Series racer (for drivers 45 and older) who won his class at Sebring, was 14th fastest with a lap of 1:47.436 (102.113 mph) in the #12 JDC Motorsports/Silicon Salvage Mazda.

Round Two of the 2008 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear will take place at Miller Motorsports Park May 15 – 17. 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 8th in the championship.

In 2008, competition will take place on the 3.048-mile 'outer course,' beginning with a promoter test day on Thursday, May 15. Qualifying is scheduled to take place 9:25 – 10:10 am Saturday, May 17, with the 45-minute Round Two of the 2008 Star Mazda Championship taking the green flag at 4:15 pm that afternoon. The race will be broadcast on SPEED Saturday, May 31 at 3:00 pm Eastern.

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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