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## **DUELING FOR DOMINANCE -- Two drivers have dominated the first two races of the 2008 Star Mazda Championship and bring their battle to The Glen this weekend**

It's unusual in a 'spec' series like the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear where all the cars are identical for a driver to dominate a race -- and still more unusual for it to happen twice, with two different drivers. But so it has, and those two drivers will continue their battle this weekend as a lead-in to the Sahlen's Six Hours of The Glen.

Round One, the season-opener at Sebring in March, was a showcase for the talent of Joel Miller, the *MAZDASPEED* Motorsports Driver Development Ladder driver who qualified on the pole and won the race by the unheard-of margin of almost seven seconds. Not that his victory was unexpected; Miller dominated the 2007 Skip Barber Pro Series and his prize for winning the championship was a fully-sponsored ride, paid for by Mazda, in the Star Mazda Championship. He had a more problematic race at Round Two at Miller Motorsports Park three weeks ago, when a rear-wheel hub failed causing him to crash in qualifying -- though he still started 2<sup>nd</sup> and finished 3<sup>rd</sup> -- but he comes to Watkins Glen still leading the championship and looking to re-establish his winning ways in the #20 JDC Motorsports/Mazda/K&N Air Filters Mazda.

"We had some small mechanical issues, and one large one, at the last race that kept us from performing up to the level we know we're capable of, but we've got all that sorted out and were consistently fastest at the Road America test last week," says Miller. "I haven't raced at The Glen before but I've done lots of laps on the simulator and I'm excited about racing there because it's one of the world's legendary racetracks. The championship battle has obviously gotten a lot more competitive with Edwards joining the series and I'm really looking forward to getting back on top this weekend."

The star of Round Two was John Edwards, a last-minute entry driving for a team that had planned to sit out the 2008 season. Edwards, who raced in the Atlantic Championship Powered by Mazda last season but lost his ride in the fallout from the unification of Champ Car and the Indy Racing League, signed with the Toronto-based AIM Autosport team and arrived at Miller Motorsports Park with little more than a few shakedown laps in the car. His steady march up the time sheets during testing and practice culminated in him taking the pole with a lap 0.691 seconds clear of the second-place car of Miller, then going on to win the race by a margin of 14.514 seconds in The #7 AIM Autosport Mazda. Again, not an unexpected victory given his experience in the bigger, more powerful Atlantic cars, and he certainly ranks among the favorites this weekend at The Glen.

"I haven't raced at the Glen, although I did do some driver coaching there for the Skip Barber series last week so I've at least seen the track," says Edwards. "It's an awesome place with all the elevation changes and different kinds of turns. Like a street course, the walls are close to the track in most places, so any mistake carries high consequences. Fortunately I have a fair bit of street course experience and I really like

that kind of racing, so hopefully that will give me an advantage... which will be good since I haven't been in the car since the Miller race three weeks ago."

This is not to say that any of the other drivers in the series has even remotely thrown in the towel; there will be 25 or more Star Mazda Championship cars participating in the series' debut at this legendary race track this weekend and the talent pool is both deep and diverse. Included in the mix are racers from the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Ireland, Gibraltar and Poland, as well as drivers ranging in age from 16 to 64, a father/son team, a brother/sister team and three fast female racers.

Other drivers on the 'must watch' list include Andersen Racing driver Charles Hall who finished 2<sup>nd</sup> at both Sebring and Miller in the the #77 Andersen Racing/Blimpie/AccentBanking.com/ Pardoes Solicitors/Allied Mazda. Irishman Peter Dempsey who finished 3<sup>rd</sup> at Sebring and 4<sup>th</sup> at Miller running on an extremely tight budget, is also a contender in the #21 Andersen Racing/ Center Jewellers.ie / Quayside.ie / Allied Mazda.

Alex Ardoin, the Louisiana native who won the 2007 Star Mazda season-ender at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca and finished 4<sup>th</sup> at Sebring in the #51 Mundill/Oral & Facial Surgery Center/Twister Trailer Mazda persevered through an incredible run of mechanical misfortune at Miller but will be a challenger once his luck turns around.

Serving notice that they have stepped up their game with standout performances in Round Two were Vancouver B.C. native Taylor Hacquard, who finished 6<sup>th</sup> in the #15 World Speed Motorsports / Wolfe Auto Group Mazda, 7<sup>th</sup>-place finisher Eric Freiberg in the # 14 World Speed Motorsports / Collision Damage Experts Mazda and Billy Goshen who finished 8<sup>th</sup> in the #82 Goshen Motorsports/Merv Griffin Entertainment/Global Tracking Mazda.

Of the three female racers in the field, Kristy Kester, half of the brother/sister Kester Racing team, scored an impressive 8<sup>th</sup>-place finish at Sebring in the #48 Kester Racing/Texas World Speedway/Unifirst Mazda and currently sits 10<sup>th</sup> in the championship points battle. Michelle Bumgarner, a 19-year old native of Manila, Philippines is an international karting champion and Formula BMW graduate who scored a top-20 finish in Round Two driving the #33 John Walko Racing/Specturm-OSO Asia/Oakley/Philippines Department of Tourism Mazda. New to the Star Mazda Championship grid at The Glen is Polish driver Natalia Kowalska, a karting champion who has raced in the European Formula Renault series. She will drive the #43 entry from John Walko Racing.

For the younger drivers on their way up the Motorsports ladder, the Star Mazda Championship – now in its 18<sup>th</sup> year as one of the most prolific and successful open-wheel driver development series in auto racing today -- is the college basketball, the triple-A baseball, the Junior A hockey of auto racing, a high-speed training ground for future stars of the sport, such as the most recent American Formula One driver Scott Speed, Indy Car stars Marco Andretti and Graham Rahal and prototype phenom Colin Braun as well as the newest addition to Michael Waltrip's NASCAR Sprint Cup team, Michael McDowell, who won the 2005 Star Mazda Championship.

For more mature drivers in whom the competitive fire still burns brightly, the Star Mazda Championship provides a high-profile stage in the form of the Expert (drivers 30 to 44 years old) and Master Series (drivers 45 and older). Expert and Master drivers compete

for points and prize money right along with the young hotshoes, but are also competing among themselves for a place on the podium with the top-3 finishers as well as their own year-end championship.

Leading the Expert Series battle is another Vancouver, B.C. driver, Chris Cumming, who won his class at Sebring and finished 2<sup>nd</sup> at Miller in the #16 World Speed Motorsports / Inviro Medical Mazda. Chuck Hulse, of Yorba Linda, California, leads the Expert Series with a victory in Round One and a 2<sup>nd</sup>-place finish in Round Two. He drives the #12 JDC Motorsports / Silicon Salvage Mazda.

All of the drivers will have an unusually level playing field in the early part of the 12-race season due to technical changes that took place during the off-season. The basic format remains the same – all drivers compete in identical high-tech open-wheel cars with a carbon fiber chassis, fully-adjustable ‘pushrod’ suspension, and 6-speed sequential gearbox. Power is provided by Mazda’s legendary ‘Renesis’ rotary engine that produces 240 horsepower, top speeds of over 160 mph and 0 to 60 mph acceleration of 2.8 seconds.

But new for 2008 are standing starts (like Formula One races) and an all-new Goodyear radial racing tire designed specifically for the Star Mazda Championship cars. This last factor will be the greatest ‘equalizer’ as the new tires completely change the ‘setup’ (spring rates, shock absorber settings, etc.) of the car from what has been used in previous years. Teams and drivers had their first experience with the new tire at Sebring, and those best able to adapt and find the right setup quickly will have a major advantage in the early races of the season.

Round Three of the 2008 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear will take place at Watkins Glen International, June 6 – 7, during the Sahlen’s Six Hours of The Glen Grand-Am weekend. This is the Star Mazda Championship’s first visit to Watkins Glen. On-trace action begins with testing sessions Wednesday, June 4 and Thursday, June 5. Qualifying takes place from 4:10 pm to 4:55 pm, Friday, June 6, with the 45-minute Round Three of the 2008 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear scheduled to take the green flag at 9:05 am Saturday, June 7. The race will be broadcast on SPEED Saturday, June 21 at 11:00 am 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](http://www.starmazda.com) and [www.mazdausa.com](http://www.mazdausa.com).

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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:

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