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**-- STAR MAZDA REPLACES CHAMP CAR AT PIR --**

**The Mazda Grand Prix of Portland is a brand-new kind of racing weekend showcasing the Star Mazda Championship and a variety of modern motorsports**

Rounds 4 and 5 of the 12-race 2008 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear take place July 25 – 27 at Portland International Raceway under... unique circumstances. Not only is the series embroiled in one of the hottest championship battles in recent years with three different winners in the first three races, but, with the Champ Car/IRL unification scrambling the schedule, the Star Mazda Championship becomes the main event at this weekend's Mazda Grand Prix of Portland.

The Star Mazda Championship race at PIR race in 2007 was a rainy affair that saw a first-lap, first-turn accident take out both top qualifiers, including Dane Cameron, who went on to win the 2007 championship. Rookie Devin Cunningham won splashed his way to victory in the #33 AIM Autosport/Discovery Channel Mazda, followed by Natacha Gachnang and Ron White.

This year's PIR weekend will be vastly different than any before, and presents a unique opportunity for the Star Mazda Championship to take center stage as the main event of the weekend. The Mazda Grand Prix of Portland will showcase an extraordinarily diverse variety of racing, including a Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear double-header as well as the Playboy Mazda MX-5 Cup. Also on the schedule are the Oregon Brewers Festival, bicycles, drag racing and motocross, as well as a huge 'cruise in,' drifting and a 'time attack.'

The Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear will race twice, once on Saturday July 26<sup>th</sup> and again on Sunday July 27<sup>th</sup>. On both days the race, featuring the series' new standing start format, will take place from 2 – 3 pm.

Joel Miller dominated the season-opener at Sebring, winning from the pole in the #20 JDC Motorsports/Mazda/K&N Air Filter Mazda. Round 2 at Miller Motorsports Park surprised everyone with a dominant victory, again from the pole, by last-minute entrant and ex-Red Bull/Forsythe Atlantic racer John Edwards in the #7 AIM Autosport Mazda. And although Alex Ardoin, winner of the 2007 season-ending race at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca sat on the pole for Round 3 at Watkins Glen, it was Charles Hall – who finished 2<sup>nd</sup> at Both Sebring and Miller – who crossed the finish line first in the #77 Andersen Racing/Blimpie/ AccentBanking.com/Pardoes Solicitors/Allied Mazda... and took over the lead in the driver championship points battle with Miller in second just two points behind, 124 to 122.

Among the 30+ field of Star Mazda Championship cars drag-racing into Turn 1 is a remarkable diversity of drivers, including competitors from U.S., Canada, Mexico, Brazil, U.K., Ireland, Gibraltar and Poland -- as well as drivers ranging in age from 16 to 50-something, company CEOs, a brother/sister team and three fast female racers.

Drivers on the 'ones to watch' list include Irishman Peter Dempsey who has finished in the top-4 at all three previous events and is currently 3<sup>rd</sup> in the championship with 105 points driving the #21 Andersen Racing / Center Jewellers.ie / Quayside.ie / Allied Mazda. Dempsey will debut a new sponsor at PIR, LotusWorks, a global provider of technical, construction and management services. Its customers include a range of process manufacturing industries, commercial and industrial construction companies, electric utilities, power project developers, financial institutions and installation contractors around the world.

"LotusWorks is happy and excited to support Peter Dempsey in the Star Mazda Championship," said Steve Ostrowski, president of LotusCM, the construction management division of LotusWorks, and president of LotusGroup's North American operations. "We view this as an excellent opportunity to get involved with a young and talented Irish driver. It is also a great way to thank all our customers for being part of LotusWorks. We would like to wish Peter the best of luck."

Alex Ardoin, the Louisiana native who won the 2007 Star Mazda season-ender at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca started from the pole and finished 3<sup>rd</sup> at Watkins Glen and comes to PIR 4<sup>th</sup> in the championship with 98 points. And serving notice that he has stepped up his game with a standout 5<sup>th</sup>-place finish in Round 3 is Billy Goshen in the #82 Goshen Motorsports/Merv Griffin Entertainment/Global Tracking Mazda. Goshen is 5<sup>th</sup> in the championship with 86 points.

Of the three female racers in the field, Kristy Kester, half of the brother/sister Kester Racing team, is setting the pace. The 19 year-old biomedical science major at Texas A&M scored an impressive 8<sup>th</sup>-place finish at Sebring in the #48 Kester Racing/Texas World Speedway/Unifirst Mazda. Unable to qualify at Watkins Glen due to a mechanical problem, she started dead last and raced her way to a 12<sup>th</sup>-place finish and currently sits 9<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/Spectrum-OSO Asia/Oakley/Philippines Department of Tourism Mazda. Natalia Kowalska of Biesiekehrz, Poland, is a karting champion who has raced in the European Formula Renault series. She made her Star Mazda Championship debut in Round 3, where she finished 12<sup>th</sup> in the #43 John Walko Racing/ Natan Developments Mazda.

In the Expert Series (drivers 30-44), the current class championship leader with two class victories and one 2<sup>nd</sup>-place finish is Vancouver, B.C. native Chris Cumming, driver of the #16 World Speed Motorsports / Inviro Medical Mazda. He finished 10<sup>h</sup> overall at Watkins Glen. Leading the Master Series (drivers 44 and older) is Californian Chuck Hulse, driver of the #12 JDC Motorsports/Silicon Salvage Mazda, with two class victories.

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 2004 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.

The Mazda Grand Prix of Portland at Portland International Raceway, July 25 – 27, is a 'double-header' weekend with two qualifying sessions and two races. On track activities begin with a Promoter test day on July 24, followed by official practice on July 25. Qualifying for the first race (Round Four) will take place 10:00 to 10:45 am Saturday, July 26, with the race scheduled to take the green flag at 2:00 pm (all times are West Coast). Qualifying and race two (Round Five) take place at precisely the same times on Sunday, July 27. The races will be broadcast on SPEED, on August 9, Round four at 12 noon (ET) and round 5 at 1:00 pm (TV times are Eastern Time).

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). For interviews, photos, etc., contact Star Mazda Championship Communications Director Peter Frey at (818) 906-6997 / [StarMazdaPR@aol.com](mailto:StarMazdaPR@aol.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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