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THE YOUNGEST SHALL BE FIRST – 17 YEAR-OLD TOM GLADDIS WINS FROM THE POLE IN STAR MAZDA RACE 1 AT THE MAZDA GRAND PRIX OF PORTLAND



Tom Gladdis, the 17 year-old racer from the English territory of Gibraltar, started from the pole and led a youth-fest to the top step of the podium in Race 1/Round 4 of the 2008 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear at the Mazda Grand Prix of Portland. Finishing second was 19 year-old Louisiana racer Alex Ardoin, who won the season-ending race in 2007 and scored his second podium of the 2008 season in the #51 Mundill / Oral & Facial Surgery Center / Twister Trailer Mazda. And rounding out the top-3 was 18 year-old Californian Billy Goshen, the first podium of his 4-race Star Mazda Championship career driving the #82 Goshen Motorsports / Merv Griffin Entertainment / Global Tracking Communications Mazda.

The top-finishing Expert Series driver (ages 30-44) was Vancouver native Chris Cumming, scoring his third class win (and finishing 6th overall) in the #16 World Speed Motorsports / Inviro Medical Mazda.

Winning the Master Series was Mike Guasch, driving the #91 Phenom Racing / Molecule Mazda. Guasch normally races in the West Coast Formula Mazda series and this is his first win as a Master Series driver in the Star Mazda Championship.

"My car didn't feel that great at the start of the race, but I started playing with the roll bars and it got better and I was able to push a bit harder," said Gladdis, driver of the #5 Andersen Racing / Law firm of Marrache & Co. / Allied Building Products Mazda. "When Charles had his mechanical problem and I was able to get by, I knew then that I had a chance. I knew Alex was behind me, and that he was quite quick, so the last part of the race was about managing my tires while still staying ahead. Fortunately, it worked out just right and I'm really pleased for my team and sponsors to be able to win my first race from the pole here with Star Mazda as the main event."

Notable races were had by several drivers, including one of the series' three female drivers, Texan Kristy Kester, who had her best race of the season so far, starting 9th in the #48 Kester Racing / Texas World Speedway / Unifirst Mazda and finishing 4th. The other half of the brother/sister Kester Racing Team, J.C. Kester, moved up from 17th to finish 9th in the #24 Kester Racing / Texas World Speedway / Unifirst Mazda. And Vancouver, B.C. racer Taylor Hacquard, who qualified 12th in the #15 World Speed Motorsports / Wolfe Auto Group Mazda, worked his way up to 5th at the finish.

When the lights turned green for the new standing start implemented by the Star Mazda Championship for the 2008 season, the cars appeared to get away cleanly... for the first few second, anyway. Then Round 3 winner and championship points leader Charles Hall was rammed from behind, turned sideways and hit the wall in his #77 Andersen

Racing / Blimpie / AccentBanking.com/Pardoes Solicitors / Allied Building Products Mazda. The contact ended his race and putting a serious dent in his championship hopes. It's likely that this will be the race he drops in the 'best 11 of 12' points total at the end of the season.

Also caught up in the melee were the #20 JDC Motorsports/Mazda/K&N Air Filters Mazda of MAZDASPEED Motorsports Driver Development Ladder racer Joel Miller, who's crew changed the entire right front suspension during the long full-course yellow. The heroic effort enabling him to re-join the race and record a 22nd-place finish. Also into the wall and out of the race was one of the three female drivers in the field, Natalia Kowalska, who had qualified #33 John Walko Racing / Natan Developments Mazda. She was followed into retirement on lap 6 by the other female racer in the field, Michelle Bumgarner in the #43 John Walko Racing / Spectrum-OSO Asia/Oakley/Philippines Dept. of Tourism Mazda. John Edwards, who qualified on the outside of the front row in the #7 AIM Autosport Mazda, also retired on lap 6 with mechanical problems.

In one of those odd sets of circumstances that happen in racing, Joel Miller came to Portland 2nd in the championship, got crashed out on the first lap, his crew passed a miracle getting him back into the race. He finished 22nd and came out of it all back on the lead of the championship with 142 points. Charles Hall, who came to PIR leading on the strength of his victory in Round 3, drops to 2nd with 140 points. Alex Ardoin, who was 4th, moves up to 3rd with 138 points and Billy Goshen, who was 5th, moves up to 4th with 123 points. Race winner Tom Gladdis, 13th in the championship at the start of the race, is now tied for 6th with Taylor Hacquard, each with 109 points. Chris Cumming, the Expert Series winner, is now 9th overall with 97 points.

Driver Quotes:

Alex Ardoin – "We lost most of the data from Friday due to a broken sway bar, but the team put in a great effort and I knew I'd have a really good car for the race. The car really came alive in the middle part of the race and settled in good. I saw that Peter Dempsey had a problem and that I was slowly catching Tom in traffic, but I just ran out of laps."

Billy Goshen – "Fourth was my best qualifying spot and it feels great to be on podium. I got a great start, almost got up to second and was running third during the long caution. I didn't get great re-start and the car started going off a bit toward the end so I couldn't really get through the back side of the course well. Now that we know what it feels like to be on the podium, and what it takes, I think we'll be a force to be reckoned with rest of season."

Chris Cumming – "I got a good start, avoided a couple of spinning cars in front of me and got up to 6th. And I got good re-start after the yellow, made a pass into chicane for 5th, but I looped it in turn 9, lost 5 or 6 spots and spent rest of race trying to regain what I lost. So it was an up and down race but I'm happy with result."

Mike Guasch – "It was an interesting weekend because we were fast right out of the box and spend the next two days going backward. But we finally got it sorted out and I was trying to be cautious at the start with cars going everywhere. I just kept my head down, and when I looked up, there were the two guys I had to beat right ahead of me. I was able to pick them off one at a time and score my first Master Series win."

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

Qualifying and race two (Round Five) take place 10:00 to 10:45 am Sunday, July 27, with the race scheduled to take the green flag at 2:00 pm (all times are West Coast). Both 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 and www.mazdausa.com. For interviews, photos, etc., contact Star Mazda Championship Communications Director Peter Frey at (818) 906-6997 / StarMazdaPR@aol.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:

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