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-- CONCRETE MAKES THE MAN --

The rising stars, both men and women, of the Star Mazda Championship face the ultimate test of open-wheel mettle with this weekend's Milwaukee Mile test followed by three oval races in a row

The Milwaukee Mile (May 20, 2011) – Being fast on a road course or street circuit is an admirable - and necessary – quality in a driver intent on accelerating their career down the Mazda Road to Indy. But you'll



never have that career unless you can dive into a turn with the gas pedal flat on the floor, wheel-to-wheel with another car and just inches from the ultimately unforgiving concrete wall of an oval track.

And then do it again a few seconds later. And again. And again... until the world becomes a howling tempest in a teapot and the turns just keep on coming, seemingly forever.

When you can do that, when you come to enjoy it, to view it as an exercise in strategy rather than a test of courage, that's when you can hope someday to rise to the pinnacle of open-wheel racing and take center stage at the biggest race of all... the Indy 500.

In open-wheel racing, to paraphrase an old saying -- concrete makes the man. Or driver, to be more precise. And that's what the drivers, both men and women, of the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear are doing this weekend at the Milwaukee Mile. With not a fan in sight and nothing to be gained except that critical perspective that allows you to race on an oval instead of merely survive, they are testing their cars, their mettle and their faith in their engineer as they prepare for the first of three oval races in a row – the Night Before the 500 at Lucas Oil Raceway on May 28, the Milwaukee Mile on June 19 and Iowa Speedway on June 25; the latter two races are both on IndyCar weekends.

But before the racing comes an official series test to get veterans back up to speed and give rookies time to come to terms with the concrete at their own pace... before they have to deal with it for real in the heat of battle. The Star Mazda Championship last visited this demanding Milwaukee Mile track in 2009 as part of a weekend program on June 20 with the NASCAR Nationwide Series. On that occasion, it was Norwegian racer Anders 'the Viking' Krohn – now racing in Indy Lights -- who triumphed. But that starting grid also included Peter Dempsey, Jorge Goncalvez, Rusty Mitchell, Mikael Grenier, Joel Miller, David Ostella and 2010 Star Mazda champion Conor Daly – all of whom are now racing in Indy Lights.



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With qualifying for that event rained out, the starting grid was determined by lap times in practice and it was Englishman Richard Kent who started from the pole with a lap of 27.791 (128.705 mph). The Star Mazda race cars have evolved considerably since then and it's likely we'll see even quicker laps during this weekend's test... weather permitting, of course.

With the Star Mazda Championship being a prolific driver development series, it comes as no surprise that just about everyone who was on the Milwaukee grid in 2009 has moved up to other levels of racing, some open-wheel, some sports cars and endurance racing. Since there are no current drivers with any previous experience at this track that would give them an edge at this weekend's test, a look at the current crop of rising stars and their performance on ovals should yield a list of likely front-runners.

The Star Mazda Championship 2010 schedule included two oval races, the 'Night Before the 500' at the now-re-named Lucas Oil Raceway at Indianapolis, and the Iowa Speedway. And, despite his last-place finish at Milwaukee in 2009 (where he and his teammate tangled and crashed out in the first turn of the first lap), both of those oval races were won by the driver who would go on to win seven races total and the series championship, Conor Daly.

Next up, on the strength of past performance, and still competing in the Star Mazda Championship, is Brazilian driver Joao Victor Horto who qualified 3rd and finished 3rd at the 2010 Night Before the 500 and improved at Iowa Speedway (a much faster track) to qualify and finish 2nd. He finished 7th in the championship in 2010 and currently, two races into the 2011 season, is in a 3-way tie for 7th in the championship driving the #18 Juncos Racing / Programa Leilões Mazda.



"Last year was my first time racing in an oval and thanks to Mazda and Road to Indy it was amazing being part of the activities of the biggest race of America," says Horto, who changed teams between seasons to the drive for the championship-winning Juncos Racing. "All the activities provided to Star Mazda's drivers were very helpful to improve my driving on an oval track, especially the laps with Rick Mears teaching us at Indianapolis Speedway. An oval track is much harder than it looks. And Lucas Oil Raceway is a very technique and challenging track, since the faster line is very high and closer to the wall, which it makes important that you not make any mistakes."

Another returning driver who also changed teams between seasons is California racer Connor De Phillippi, currently 2nd in the 2011 Star Mazda championship driving the Team Pelfrey / Justice Brothers Products / Trademark Garage Floors Mazda; he won the final race of the 2010 season and the first race of the 2011 season, one a road course and one a street circuit. His oval record from 2010 includes qualifying 4th and



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finishing 7th at the Night Before the 500 and doing exactly the opposite at Iowa Speedway, qualifying 7th and finishing 4th. De Phillippi was the 2009 Skip Barber Pro Series champion and raced the 2010 Star Mazda season with scholarship funding from the Mazda Road to Indy program. This year, he drives for Team Pelfrey, formerly an IndyCar team from 1998-2001 noted for giving young drivers their 'big break.'

De Phillippi's Pelfrey teammate, Nick Andries, driving for another team, also ran most of the Star Mazda events on the schedule in 2010 including Iowa Speedway, where he started 12th and finished 6th. This season, driving the Team Pelfrey / Lithionics Battery / GS610 Brake Fluid / Trademark Garage Floors Mazda, he is 5th in the championship battle, starting from the pole in Round 1 and scoring a podium finish in Round 2. The team owner, Dale Pelfrey, recently sold his aerospace company and is focused on the talents of this hot young duo to help take his team back up to the IndyCar level.



Driving for the family-owned Linares Racing team, Venezuelan racer Carlos Linares had a problematic oval track debut at the Night Before the 500 in 2010, qualifying 8th but backing into the wall during the closing stages of the race to finish 12th, 23 laps down on the leader. But at the Iowa Speedway, though he started last, he worked his way up to finish 11th in the race. The entire Linares Racing operation has been revised during the off-season, including bringing in widely-experienced team manager Martin Bates. Under the new regime, Linares has had two excellent drives so far in 2011, finishing 6th at St. Petersburg and 5th at Barber Motorsports Park driving the #20 Linares Racing / Mindeporte Mazda. He is currently 4th in the championship and it seems reasonable to expect his oval track performance to improve accordingly.

Another driver to watch is the current Star Mazda Championship points leader, French racer Tristan Vautier. He finished on the podium in Round 1 of the 2011 season, and won from the pole in Round 2 driving the #5 JDC Motorsports / Cecibon / Circuit du Laquais Mazda. His first race on an oval last year, which must have come as a considerable shock after his extensive European open-wheel experience, saw him qualify 11th and finish 6th at Lucas Oil Raceway, followed by an 8th-place qualifying effort and an 8th-place finish at Iowa Speedway. Like many of the drivers, he changed teams in the off-season and is now enjoying new-found success with the championship-winning JDC Motorsports team and his vastly-experienced engineer, Rick Cameron.

"I am really looking forward to going back to the Lucas Oil Raceway this year and race on the Night before the 500," says Vautier. "This is a beautiful event that I really enjoyed last year, and I really want to come back and keep improving. I really like racing on ovals, it's a lot of fun and it's totally different from road courses in many ways. Since once on track, the window you have to adapt your driving style to the car



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balance is much smaller than on a road course, getting the perfect set up is even more crucial, and I know that my feedback and my work with the JDC guys is going to be an ever bigger key to succeed."



And now we come to the Star Mazda driver most likely to take issue with the statement (metaphor notwithstanding) that 'concrete makes the man' – Colombian racer Tatiana Calderon, the lone female racer in the series. A South American karting champion who ran with Juncos Racing before they moved to the U.S., 2010 was her rookie Star Mazda season and she ran a credible campaign to score six top-10 finishes and finish 10th in the championship. At the Night Before the 500 she started 13th and finished 11th and at Iowa started 13th and finished 12th. But in the off-season she embarked on a determined program of physical training with the Pit

Fit Training organization in Indianapolis and her 2011 on-track results have shown a marked improvement, including her first-ever podium finish in Round 2 at Barber Motorsports Park driving the #10 Juncos Racing / JAC Motors Mazda .

Which brings us to the Mazda Road to Indy graduates. With several of last year's Star Mazda drivers having now moved up to compete in the Indy Lights series, so have several of last year's USF2000 stars moved up to race in Star Mazda. In point of fact, Chilean racer Martin Scuncio, who finished 6th in the 2010 USF2000 championship ran the final race of the 2010 Star Mazda season, very nearly taking the pole and racing for the lead throughout the event. He has moved up to race full-time in Star Mazda in 2011 driving the #60 Juncos Racing / Bia Comunicaciones / Cable Del Pacifico Mazda and brings with him USF2000 oval experience that includes a 6th to 5th drive at Lucas Oil Raceway in 2010, and a 5th to 4th run at Iowa Speedway. He is currently third in the Star Mazda Championship with a pole and podium finish in Round 1 in the Grand Prix of St. Petersburg.

The leading contender coming up from USF2000 is the 2010 series champion Sage Karam who is racing the #88 Andretti Autosport / MAZDASPEED / Comfort Revolution Mazda in 2011 with scholarship funding from the Mazda Road to Indy program. In addition to winning the championship, he started from the front row and finished 2nd at the Night Before the 500 and won from the pole at Iowa Speedway.

"Last year the ovals were good to me," says Karam, a native of Nazareth, PA, hometown of the famed Andretti racing family. "Even at ORP [now Lucas Oil Raceway] with a less than perfect setup and zero experience, we still got a point for most laps led and finished in second place. On Iowa's oval we qualified pole, set track record, had fastest lap and lapped the whole field but one car, on our way to a victory. So I



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think we were pretty comfortable on the ovals last year. This weekend's testing will be the first time I ever take to the oval with a Star Mazda. It hasn't been difficult to remain humble this year, but I am anything but down. The upcoming three ovals will give me a new start and a renewed sense of optimism. Each of this year's three ovals will provide unique challenges. I think Iowa will present our best shot of winning - can't put my finger on why, I just have a feeling."



The final USF2000 graduate with oval experience now racing in Star Mazda is Patrick McKenna, one of a rare breed of racers – an Irish-born open-wheel racer on the road to Indianapolis. Only two others come to mind, Star Mazda standout Peter Dempsey, now racing in Indy Lights, and Derek Daly, the famed F1/IndyCar driver and noted motorsports TV broadcaster (also father of Star Mazda champion Conor Daly). In 2010, McKenna won from the pole in the USF2000 race at the Night Before the 500 and, after starting on the front row next to Sage Karam, finished 6th at Iowa Speedway. Now driving the #48 Team GDT / Motorsport Ireland / Irish Sports Council / General Data Tech Mazda in the 2011 Star Mazda Championship, McKenna started from the second row and finished 4th in Round 1, and again started 4th but finished a lap down in 13th in Round 2 after a late-race on-track altercation.

"For me, starting with this Milwaukee test and then moving on to the Indy 500 weekend and the Month of May in Indy is something special," says McKenna, winner of the prestigious Formula Ford Festival at Brands Hatch as well as the Martin Donnelly Trophy and the Dunlop Motorsport Ireland Young Driver of the Year award. "The Mazda Road to Indy summit activities are very beneficial to us as drivers and as for Oval racing itself, it's something I thoroughly enjoy. I have a particular affection with Raceway Park as we had a successful night there in 2010 so I will definitely be working hard to try and have another strong race this year in Star Mazda. Last year was also my first 500 and to be interviewed in Victory circle as one of the Winners of the weekend was an amazing experience. It's thanks to INDYCAR and Mazda for making these experiences possible for us."

The Star Mazda Milwaukee test begins Saturday, May 21 and schedule includes several open practice sessions; the first from 9:45 to 11:45 am and the second from 12:55 pm to 4:45 pm. A maximum of ten cars will be on track at any one time. The Star Mazda teams and drivers then pack up and move over to Lucas Oil Raceway and begin an extensive program of Mazda Road to Indy activities at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, beginning with an autograph session in Gasoline Alley on Wednesday, May 25 from 11 am - Noon.

Night Before the 500 activities begin with several practice sessions at Lucas Oil Raceway on Friday, May 27. Additional practice, qualifying and the race will take place on Saturday, May 28. Qualifying is scheduled



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for 4:30 - 5:30 pm and the 100-lap/45-minute Round 3 of the 2011 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear will take the green flag at 8:10 pm.

ABOUT MAZDA

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, Mazda2, Mazda3, Mazda6, RX-7 and other vintage Mazda models competing, because every Mazda has the Soul of a Sports Car. In fact, the largest road-racing class in the world is Spec Miata, with more than 2,500 first- and second-generation Miatas tearing up America's racetracks, making it the most-raced production car in the world. Mazda's involvement in motorsports extends to its relationship with Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca, one of the world's premier road-racing circuits, the Skip Barber Schools for driving and racing, and the Mazda Road to Indy.

Mazda North American Operations is headquartered in Irvine, Calif. and oversees the sales, marketing, parts and customer service support of Mazda vehicles in the United States, Canada and Mexico through nearly 900 dealers. Operations in Canada are managed by Mazda Canada, Inc., located in Ontario; and in Mexico by Mazda Motor de Mexico in Mexico City.

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About Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear

For 2011, the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear will be a major part of the Mazda Road to Indy and will feature a 10-weekend, 11-race schedule, all on major race weekends and most with IndyCar. Two weekends are with the American Le Mans series, and one is a double-header with Indy Lights. Rising stars from around the world will be watched by more than a million fans as they compete for prizes valued at \$1.5 million, including a scholarship to move up and race in the 2012 Firestone Indy Lights series. Drivers 16 and older are welcome to compete and the Star Mazda Championship also features the Expert Series for drivers 30 and older. The Star Mazda Championship features standing starts, wheel-to-wheel racing at 160 mph and budgets a fraction of other top open-wheel ladder series. For more information on the Star Mazda Championship please visit www.starmazda.com.

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 information, interviews and photos, please contact Star Mazda Communications Director Peter Frey at (818) 398-5733 or StarMazdaPR@aol.com.

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