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## CHAMPIONSHIP LEADER VAUTIER QUICK IN STAR MAZDA FRIDAY TESTING FOR THIS WEEKEND'S INDY GRAND PRIX OF SONOMA

Infineon Raceway, Sonoma, CA / August 26, 2011 – French racer Tristan Vautier, the current points leader in the 2011 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear, set the quick time in both of today's pre-

qualifying practice sessions for Round 9 at the Indy Grand Prix of Sonoma. Vautier, who has won two races so far this season, stepped up the pace from his 2nd-fast time in Series testing earlier this week to record a 1:28.878 in the #5 JDC Motorsports / Cecibon / Circuit du Laquis Mazda.



He was one of just two driver to break into the '28s, the other being Brazilian driver João Victor Horto, who turned a lap of 1:28.901 in the #7 Juncos Racing / Programa Leilões Mazda. Horto, who like

Vautier, is a second-season driver in the Star Mazda Championship, won his first race in Round 6 at Mosport and is 4th in the championship.

Rounding out the top-3 with another 'step-up' performance was California driver Gustavo Menezes who set a time of 1:29.248 in his #28 Juncos Racing / Truecar / Safety Park Mazda. Menezes -- the second-youngest driver in the series -- who moved directly from the top ranks of international karting to the Star Mazda Championship, has been consistently in in the top-10 in practice and qualifying throughout the season, including a podium on the oval at Iowa Speedway in Round 5.

Menezes' time was just a hair – literally – quicker than the 1.29.94 (.048 gap) turned by the only three-race winner in so far in the 2011 season), Californian Connor De Phillippi in the #11 Team Pelfrey / Justice Brothers Products / Trademark Garage Floors Mazda. De Phillippi is second in the championship points battle. He was followed – closely – by his teammate, Florida Driver Nick Andries, who is currently 3rd in the championship, with a lap of 1:29.428 in the #81 Team Pelfrey / Lithionics Battery / GS610 Brake Fluid / Trademark Garage Floors Mazda.

Places 6-7-8 are interesting because they involve significant drivers in the series; 6th-quick was the lone female driver in the series, Colombian racer Tatiana Caldron, with a 1:29.699 in the #10 Juncos Racing / JAC Motors Mazda. She scored her first podium finish in Round 6 at Mosport and is currently 7th in the championship.



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7th-quick in today's testing was Sage Karam, the 2010 USF2000 champion who is racing in the 2011 Star Mazda Championship with scholarship funding from the Mazda Road to Indy driver development program. Karam, the youngest driver in the series, a 2-race winner this season and the quickest driver in pre-race testing earlier this week, turned a lap of 1:29.897 in the #88 Andretti Autosport / MAZDASPEED / Comfort Revolution Mazda. And 8th-fast was Zach Veach, a driver making his debut in the Star Mazda Championship at Infineon. Veach, a top competitor in the USF2000 championship, set a time of 1:30.286 in the #77 Andretti Autosport / Team Zakosi Data Backup / Retail Pro / ArtRotondo.com / ADS IT Solutions Mazda.

The top driver in the Expert Series (for racers 30 and older) was Patrick O'Neill, the lone driver in the field who was also on the grid the last time that the Star Mazda Championship raced at Infineon Raceway. His lap of 1:30.641 in the #64 O'Neill Racing / O'Neill Construction Mazda was good for 10th-quick on the time sheets. Larry Pegram (left), the AMA Superbike racer who also drives in the Star Mazda Championship turned the 12th-quick time of 1:30.30.786 in the #72 AIM Autosport / Tampa Bay Jaw Surgery / Foremost Insurance Mazda. He has already raced at Infineon this season, finishing 9th in the West Coast Moto Jam AMA Superbike race on May 15.

The last time the teams and drivers of the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear raced at the 2.52-mile, 12-turn Infineon Raceway road course was in 2005 – and the grid for that long-ago double-header weekend included Marco Andretti, Graham Rahal, Raphael Matos (the driver who eventually went on to win the championship) and James Hinchcliffe, the winner in Sunday's Race 2, his first-ever Star Mazda win. All are now racing in IndyCar.



Qualifying to set the grid for Round 9 of the 2011 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear is scheduled for 9:50 am – 10:35 Saturday, August 17. The 1-hour race, Round 9 of the 2011 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear season, is scheduled to take the green light at 5:00 pm Saturday afternoon.



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For more information on the Star Mazda Championship and its drivers, as well as the Mazda Road to Indy, please visit [www.starmazda.com](http://www.starmazda.com) and [www.mazdausa.com](http://www.mazdausa.com). For information, interviews and photos, contact Star Mazda Communications Director Peter Frey at (818) 398-5733 or [StarMazdaPR@aol.com](mailto:StarMazdaPR@aol.com).

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