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ANOTHER FLYING FINN – PETRI SUVANTO SETS FAST TIME IN STAR MAZDA SERIES TESTING AT LUCAS OIL RACEWAY IN PREPARATION FOR ROUND 5 OF THE 2012 SEASON AT THE 'NIGHT BEFORE THE 500'

Lucas Oil Raceway / Indianapolis / March 3, 2012 – Conventional wisdom would seem to dictate that the driver with the most experience in a particular type of car, driving on a particular track -- particularly an oval – would be the quickest.

That wisdom, however, fails to take into account the depth of talent in this year's crop of Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear drivers – and the strength of their determination to win the Mazda Road to Indy scholarship funding to move up and race in Indy Lights next year.



It's a potent mix that led to interestingly mixed results in this weekend's official Star Mazda series test at Lucas Oil Raceway in Indianapolis. This test, providing for many drivers their first-ever experience on an oval, is the prelude to two oval races in a row, beginning with the Night Before the 500 on May 26, followed by Iowa Speedway on June 22-23.

Finnish rookie Petri Suvanto – who won here in USF2000 last year -- set the quick time in both the 3-hour morning session and the 2-hour session later in the day, in the heat of the afternoon.

Suvanto, 19, from Nurmo, Finland, turned the fastest lap of the test on Lap 56 of the morning session, 20.236 (122.040 mph), driving the same #81 Team Pelfrey / Mazda Road to Indy Mazda he used to score a podium finish in Round 2 at the Grand Prix of St. Petersburg. Suvanto is the reigning USF2000 champion and is racing in the Star Mazda Championship this year with scholarship funding from the Mazda Road to Indy. He has scored one podium finish so far in 2012, and three top-5s, placing him 6th in the championship.

"I had one of the best races of my career here last year, so I feel I know the track like the inside of my pocket," says Suvanto, who is currently serving his obligatory two year enlistment in the Finnish military. "The Star Mazda car is different, more powerful and faster, but if the team gives you a good car and you drive very smoothly, it is not so difficult to adjust. My season so far has not gone quite as I hoped; the competition here is very strong and even a small mistake costs you many places, so I'm still learning, and in the next two races, both ovals, it is critical to drive perfectly... and that is my goal."



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In the final two-hour afternoon session, saving the best last, he posted a lap of 20.348 as the clock expired on the final session. His final flyer earned him top-of-the-time-sheet honors over Sage Karam, who had led most of the second session with a fast time of 20.393 in his #88 Andretti Autosport / Comfort Revolution Mazda. Karam, the 2011 Star Mazda Rookie of the Year, won two of the three ovals on last year's schedule. Karam was the 2010 USF2000 champion and raced in Star Mazda last year with Mazda Road to Indy scholarship funding; he finished 3rd at the 2011 Night Before the 500.

Karam's performance very nearly put conventional wisdom back in charge, until you consider that it was English rookie Jack Hawksworth, who set the overall 2nd-fast time of 20.299 (121.616 mph) on Lap 73 of the morning session. Hawksworth, a two-time race winner so far this season and currently leading the championship driving the #82 Team Pelfrey / TORGOEN Swiss Watches / EXA Networks Mazda, is new to oval racing. He slipped to 4th in the final session, but only by 0.173-sec. – but it should be noted that, in both sessions, the top dozen cars were all within one second of each other.... a reliable indicator that the Night Before the 500 will feature some intense, wheel-to-wheel action.

And what of the most experienced driver in the series, and winner of last year's Night Before the 500 (as well as this year's Round 1 at St. Petersburg),



Connor De Phillippi? He was 6th fast in the morning session with a lap of 20.581 (119.994 mph) in the #2 Juncos Racing / ModSpace Racing / One24 Mazda, and followed that up with a 5th-fast run in the afternoon, 20.601 (119.878 mph).

“Today was a productive day of testing with the team,” said De Phillippi, who set the Star Mazda track record of 19.999 at Lucas Oil Raceway in 2011. “We are still working on improving many areas of the car to put it up front for the race this month. A big thank you to Juncos Racing and ModSpace Motorsports for getting me on track. Now we are onwards and upwards for the Night Before the 500.”

Other interesting results: Italian F3 and GP3 veteran Gabby Chaves was 3rd-quick in the morning with a lap of 20.446 (120.786 mph) in his #19 JDC Motorsports / OMP Mazda, but slipped to 10th in the afternoon. Gustavo Menzes, who finished 7th in the race last year, was 5th-fast in the morning with a 20.524 (120.327 mph) in the #83 Team Pelfrey / TrueCar.com Mazda; he fell to 8th in the afternoon. Zach Veach, on the other hand, was 7th-fast in the morning, but improved to 3rd-fast in the afternoon with a 20.483 (120.568 mph) in his #77 Andretti Autosport / Zakoski Data Backup Mazda.





Official Test Session #1

Pos No.	Name	Best Tm	Best Speed	In Lap	Diff	Gap	Sponsor
1	81 Petri Suvanto	20.236	122.040	56			Mazda Road to Indy
2	82 Jack Hawksworth	20.299	121.661	73	0.063	0.063	TORGOEN Swiss Watches/ EXA Networks
3	19 Gabby Chaves	20.446	120.786	43	0.210	0.147	OMP
4	88 Sage Karam	20.464	120.680	59	0.228	0.018	Comfort Revolution
5	83 Gustavo Menezes	20.524	120.327	43	0.288	0.060	TrueCar.com
6	2 Connor De Philippi	20.581	119.994	40	0.345	0.057	ModSpace Racing / One24
7	77 Zach Veach	20.613	119.808	67	0.377	0.032	Zakosi Data Backup / ADS IT Solutions
8	9 Juan Piedrahita	20.771	118.897	65	0.535	0.158	Petrosur / GFK Motors
9	57 Diego Ferreira	20.799	118.736	87	0.563	0.028	Team Viso Venezuela
10	22 Martin Scuncio	20.809	118.679	44	0.573	0.010	Pullman Bus
11	66 Zack Meyer	20.829	118.565	38	0.593	0.020	Partners III
12	91 Ashley Freiberg	20.852	118.435	64	0.616	0.023	TRUECar.com
13	15 Bruno Palli	21.180	116.601	44	0.944	0.328	Team Viso Venezuela
14	53 Andre Mendez	21.316	115.857	124	1.080	0.136	GrupoKriterion.com / DataFile.com.co
15	20 Carlos Linares	21.574	114.471	88	1.338	0.258	Mindeporte
16	21 Camilo Schmidt	22.111	111.691	121	1.875	0.537	

Official Test Session #2

Pos No.	Name	Best Tm	Best Speed	In Lap	Diff	Gap	Sponsor
1	81 Petri Suvanto	20.348	121.368	116			Mazda Road to Indy
2	88 Sage Karam	20.393	121.100	62	0.045	0.045	Comfort Revolution
3	77 Zach Veach	20.483	120.568	62	0.135	0.090	Zakosi Data Backup / ADS IT Solutions
4	82 Jack Hawksworth	20.521	120.345	34	0.173	0.038	TORGOEN Swiss Watches/ EXA Networks
5	2 Connor De Philippi	20.601	119.878	71	0.253	0.080	ModSpace Racing / One24
6	57 Diego Ferreira	20.718	119.201	85	0.370	0.117	Team Viso Venezuela
7	15 Bruno Palli	20.819	118.622	86	0.471	0.101	Team Viso Venezuela
8	83 Gustavo Menezes	20.822	118.605	78	0.474	0.003	TrueCar.com
9	22 Martin Scuncio	20.824	118.594	67	0.476	0.002	Pullman Bus
10	19 Gabby Chaves	20.844	118.480	55	0.496	0.020	OMP
11	66 Zack Meyer	21.007	117.561	95	0.659	0.163	Partners III
12	9 Juan Piedrahita	21.108	116.998	74	0.760	0.101	Petrosur / GFK Motors
13	53 Andre Mendez	21.246	116.238	85	0.898	0.138	GrupoKriterion.com / DataFile.com.co
14	20 Carlos Linares	21.398	115.413	8	1.050	0.152	Mindeporte
15	91 Ashley Freiberg	21.635	114.148	15	1.287	0.237	TRUECar.com
16	21 Camilo Schmidt	21.712	113.744	65	1.364	0.077	

Sixteen Star Mazda drivers and cars participated in the test, as well as the Mazda Road to Indy activities that took place the day before, Friday, May 4, at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. There more than 50 drivers from Star Mazda, Indy Lights and USF2000 attended the second annual Mazda Road to Indy Oval





Clinic. Hosted by INDYCAR’s Director of Grassroots Initiatives Jason Penix and led by multiple driving champion and USF2000 driving coach Gerardo Bonilla, the clinic covers all aspects of oval racing with the intricacies supported by video footage. A panel of experts shared their oval racing knowledge, including INDYCAR President of Competition Beau Barfield, IZOD IndyCar Series driver and team owner Ed Carpenter, former Indianapolis 500 Rookie of the Year and Elite Engines owner Steve Knapp, Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing team owner and former Indy 500 winner Bobby Rahal, and former driver, INDYCAR race steward Johnny Unser.



The off-track driver education program that is an integral part of the Mazda Road to Indy continues in the days leading up to the Night Before the 500 with the second half of the Indy Summit; the first half, including a media training, a Business of Racing presentation by Mazda Motorsports executives and a social media presentation by Star Mazda graduate and 2011 IndyCar Rookie of the Year James Hinchcliffe, took place during Round 1 at St. Petersburg.

Summit activities surrounding the Indianapolis 500 include an autograph session on Community Day, a shop tour of Andretti Autosport hosted by Michael Andretti, track laps at the famed Brickyard, a driver fitness and wellness course by PitFit Training, a meet-and-greet with IZOD IndyCar Series and Firestone Indy Lights team owners as well as the opportunity for the winners of the “Night Before the 500” in USF2000 and Star Mazda and Firestone Freedom 100 races to be interviewed on the Victory podium minutes before the start of the Greatest Spectacle in Racing.

Round 6 of the 2012 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear, the Night Before the 500 at Lucas Oil Raceway, begins with a three hour test session from 6-9 pm, Friday May 25. Practice continues on Saturday, May 26 with sessions from 12:05-12:35 pm and 1:20-1:50 pm. Single-car qualifying will take place from 4:55-5:40 pm, with the 45-minute/100-lap race scheduled to take the green flag at 8:25 pm.

Star Mazda Championship races are broadcast tape-delay on Discovery's Velocity Channel; click [here](#) to search for broadcast dates, times and channel in your area.

About Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear

For 2012, the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear is again a major part of the [Mazda Road to Indy](#). The 2012 schedule includes 17 races on 10 weekends, most with IndyCar and featuring a mix of road courses, street circuits and ovals. Rising stars from around the world will compete in front of more





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than a million fans as they battle for prizes valued at \$1.5 million, including a scholarship to move up and race in the 2013 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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