

EPIC MAZDA MX-5 CUP VIR FINISH: FIRST TO FIFTH IN 0.15 SECONDS

NATHANIEL SPARKS EXTENDS BATTERY TENDER GLOBAL MAZDA MX-5 PRESENTED BY BFGOODRICH TIRES POINTS LEAD IN PURSUIT OF \$200,000 MAZDA ROAD TO 24 SCHOLARSHIP

ALTON, Virginia (August 28, 2016) – After a month off, the Battery Tender Global Mazda MX-5 Cup presented by BFGoodrich Tires jumped back into the season on a freshly paved track at Virginia International Raceway. Competitors had a lot on the line entering the home stretch of the season. Points from the weekend would be vital for those in the hunt for the \$200,000 Mazda Road to 24 scholarship entering the finale at Road Atlanta next month.

After the dust settled, Nathaniel Sparks, from Spanish Fort, Alabama, (No. 8 Sick Sideways) scored his first career MX-5 Cup win to extend his championship points lead. The margin of victory was 0.017 seconds while the margin from first to fifth was just 0.15 seconds.

Sparks summed up the race; “In the last lap, we all got bunched up under yellow and my team at Sick Sideways were one-two-three. When you have your teammates in that position, it’s always a difficult chess game to keep all three of us up there while defending your position. Coming into the last corner, we got a couple of bad runs and everyone was trying to make a mess out of it. I’m glad we made it through safely but that was one heck of a race. Going into Road Atlanta, being the points leader was not something I expected. I think working on my car keeps my head in the game, but by doing what I’ve been doing, I’ll be in good shape for the point standings.”

Race Recaps

The Saturday race was held in the early evening with a 6:15 p.m. start time. The newly paved track proved to be a double edged sword for competitors. The grip was fantastic, but an earlier storm in the day caused slippery conditions on the track and on the grass when wheels were dropped. John Dean II (No. 16 Sick Sideways) began the race on pole, but on-track contact resulted in a drive-thru penalty before returning to the race deep in the pack. This allowed teammate Nathaniel Sparks to jump into the lead but his lead would be short lived as Dean Copeland (No. 7 Copeland Motorsports) would retake the top spot before the race was slowed by a full course caution. Dean Copeland’s clean racing allowed him to move from 16th position to grab the top spot on the podium alongside his teammate Nikko Reger (No. 01 Copeland Motorsports) who took home third. Points leader Nathaniel Sparks took home second and stretched out his points lead at the end of Saturday’s race. For Copeland Motorsports, it was its fourth win of the season, three for Nikko Reger, and one for Dean Copeland.

Just 14 hours after the checkered flag dropped on Saturday night, the green flag dropped on Sunday morning. The first half of the race saw a close battle between John Dean II, Nathaniel Sparks, Ara Malkhassian (No. 11 ALARA Racing), Mark Drennan (No. 50 Winding Road Team TFB), Drake Kemper (No. 99 Sick Sideways), Dean Copeland, and Chris Stone (No. 12 ALARA Racing). Contact between Copeland and Stone resulted in Copeland spinning into the tire barrier and a full-course caution. Action resumed, but was again slowed for a final caution resulting in a two-lap sprint to the finish. Despite leading from the start, John Dean II saw a flurry of competition challenging that lead. The final dash to the finish line saw five cars covered by 0.15 seconds, the closest “pack-finish” in MX-5 Cup history. Sparks only led once, but did so when it mattered – the finish line. It was the perfect anniversary as Sparks had joined the Sick Sideways team four years ago at this race. He has scored multiple podium finishes, and thanks to consistency, entered the weekend as the MX-5 Cup points chase.

Podium performances: Joining Copeland on the Saturday podium was points leader Nathaniel Sparks in second and Nikko Reger in third. On Sunday, Sparks was joined on the podium by Chris Stone and John Dean II.

Qualifying: John Dean II set a new MX-5 Cup qualifying record with a lap at 2:10.254.

Dean scored both pole positions, but he had strong competition from Nick Bruni (No. 76 MEATHEAD Racing) and Chris Stone. 23 cars broke the previous MX-5 Cup qualifying record, set by Nathaniel Sparks in 2012 with the previous generation MX-5.

Fast Laps: Mark Drennan scored the fast lap on Saturday at 2:12.694 and Robby Foley (No. 63 Atlanta Motorsports Group) scored the fast lap on Sunday with a 2.10.926.

How close was it? The first race featured seven lead changes. The second race sprint to the finish resulted in a five-car last-lap battle that was separated by 0.15 second from first to fifth.

Who were the Battery Tender Hard Charger Winners?

On Saturday, Mike Collins (No. 76 MEATHEAD Racing) picked up 20 spots to score the Battery Tender Hard Charger Award. On Sunday, the big mover was Marco Gallaher (No 5 Winding Road Team TFB) moving up 12 positions from 24th to 12th position.

Who is leading the championship after 10 of 12 races?		
The top five overall in points are:		
1 Nathaniel Sparks, Spanish Fort, AL	Sick Sideways	501
2 Ara Malkhassian, Houston, TX	ALARA Racing	432
3 Dean Copeland, Bowie, MD	Copeland Motorsports	423
4 Nikko Reger, Houston, TX	Copeland Motorsports	398
5 Mark Drennan, San Jose, CA	Winding Road Team TFB	383
The top three rookies are:		
1 Mark Drennan, San Jose, CA	Winding Road Team TFB	383
2 Chris Stone, Salt Lake City, UT	ALARA Racing	320
3 Glenn McGee, Tampa, FL	Sick Sideways	315

All standings are provisional. Complete results can be found on www.MX-5Cup.com

What's next:

The first ever Global Mazda MX-5 Cup Invitational will be held at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca on September 9-11, 2016. This non-points race will include ten Americans and nine racers from Europe, Australia, and Japan. The final two rounds of the Battery Tender Global Mazda MX-5 Cup presented by BFGoodrich Tires will be held at Road Atlanta, on September 29, 2016.

About MX-5 Cup

The MX-5 Cup race cars start as complete MX-5 road cars from the Mazda Hiroshima, Japan factory before being transported to engineering development partner Long Road Racing in Statesville, North Carolina where they are produced into a race car. The process includes disassembly of the production car, welding and paint of a full roll cage and interior, and assembly of the race car, adding more than 250 motorsports-specific parts. Other components of the car, including the Mazda SKYACTIV 2.0 liter engine are sealed to ensure even competition and a cost-effective platform.

The Battery Tender Global Mazda MX-5 Cup presented by BFGoodrich Tires is the signature spec series for the Mazda Road to 24 (#MRT24), the sports car counterpart to the Mazda Road to Indy (#MRTI). On both paths, Mazda-powered champions earn a Mazda scholarship to advance their career. The MX-5 Cup champion earns a \$200,000 scholarship.

Information on the car is online at www.mazdamotorsports.com.

About Mazda Motorsports

Mazda Motorsports boasts the most comprehensive auto racing development ladder system of any auto manufacturer in the world. The Mazda Road to 24 program offers a number of scholarships to advance drivers up the sports car racing ladder, beginning with the Global MX-5 Cup series and culminating with the Mazda Prototype team. The Mazda Road to Indy is a similar program that includes Mazda-powered categories of USF2000, Pro Mazda and Indy Lights. In grassroots road racing, more Mazdas race on any given weekend in North America than any other manufacturer. Mazda is also the title sponsor of the renowned Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca in Monterey, Calif. Follow all of the latest news at MazdaMotorsports.com, @MazdaRacing on Twitter, and MazdaMotorsports on Instagram and Facebook.

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