

## SEASON FINALE UP IN FLAMES AFTER GREAT RUN FOR MAZDA PROTOTYPES

### BOTH MAZDAS LEAD PETIT LE MANS RACE BEFORE TROUBLE STRIKES

BRASELTON, Ga. (October 2, 2016) – The Petit Le Mans at Road Atlanta was the season-ending 10-hour endurance race for the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship. For nine hours and fifty minutes, the No. 70 Castrol Edge/ModSpace Mazda Prototype team battled for the victory and a top-three finish. Unfortunately, ten minutes before the checkered flag, a broken fuel injector sent the Soul Red car into a ball of flames while racing in third place. Driver Joel Miller was uninjured as he steered the car toward the nearest fire safety crew before escaping. It was a toasty end to what had been a day of high hopes, high speeds and great racing for the two-car Mazda Prototype team in the finale for the 2016 schedule.

With an all-new rules package beginning next season, it marked the end of an era for the WeatherTech series. For Mazda, the two Prototype race cars were the final chassis to be designed by the famed British racing design and manufacturer, Lola Cars. Since the 1950s, Lola created some of the most beautiful and successful sports cars and open-wheel race cars. The finish of yesterday's race marks the final time a Lola chassis will compete in a professional category event. The Mazda team will race a new chassis next year, which is expected to be revealed next month.

After starting on the front row for the sixth time in the last seven races, driver Tristan Nunez and the No. 55 Mazda raced steadily in the opening stanza, staying near the front until taking the lead on lap 34. With eight hours remaining in the race, Nunez reported a misfire in the engine. It gradually worsened, causing a long pit stop as the team changed the ECU (engine control unit) and a fuel sensor. With driver Spencer Pigot now in the car, the No. 55 returned to the track for a short time before the gremlins returned, putting the car out of the race.

With the 55 car relegated to the sidelines, the focus turned to the No. 70 Mazda. Running amongst the top-five, the car continued to improve in the middle hours of the race, allowing drivers Tom Long and Miller to race hard with the leaders. After a balky pit stop dropped them to seventh place as Pigot, the IndyCar racer who is a four-time Mazda driver development scholarship winner, climbed in his second Mazda on the day. Pigot quickly began picking off positions, running third in a scintillating battle with Ricky Taylor until moving into second with less than two hours to go. With a super fast car and a strong fuel and pit stop strategy, Pigot took the lead of the race with one hour and fifteen minutes remaining. He handed the car over to Miller, who traded second and third-place in the final hour until the unfortunate fire ended hopes of a podium finish.

John Doonan, Director, Mazda Motorsports of North America

"There is a challenger spirit at the heart of the Mazda brand and in every team member of our Motorsports program. Unfortunately, when it comes to the season finale for the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship, that spirit was tested. I am so proud of every team member, the strategy decisions from the pit box and the amazing stints put in by our drivers. One of these days their efforts will be rewarded with victory, I am sure of it, and we will never stop challenging ourselves."

Tom Long, Driver, No. 70 Castrol Edge/ModSpace Mazda Prototype

*You had some superb stints in the early and mid-stages of the race. How was it from the driver's seat?* "Our Mazda program was stellar. It was so fun lapping Road Atlanta, and handling the many different things that came our way. A huge shoutout to the entire team on the set-up. We just nailed it this weekend. We were really able to have great confidence in traffic, and that's where we made our time. We could put the car anywhere we wanted to and catch our competitors."

Spencer Pigot, Driver, No. 55 and the No. 70 Castrol Edge/ModSpace Mazda Prototypes

*You did a brief stint in the No. 55 before it dropped from the race, and then turned in an impressive, lengthy drive in the No. 70 car where you drove it into the lead of the race.* "It was a joy to drive the car. Everything was

working great. The engineers did an awesome job with the handling, and the Mazda engine was working fantastic for me. I just had a lot of fun out there. I was able to battle with a lot of good guys – Simon [Pagenaud] and Ricky [Taylor]- back and forth a lot. It was clean, good hard racing. The team definitely deserved to be on the podium. They worked incredibly hard. It's a shame what happened to the 55 car early in the race but everyone was out supporting the 70 – and that's what Mazda's all about. It's a big family and I wish it had ended a little bit different."

*You passed your fellow IndyCar racer and new series champion Pagenaud twice in the race. That must have felt pretty good.* "Yeah, (wry chuckle) it was pretty satisfying! Especially passing him on the outside going into Turn 3!"

Joel Miller, Driver, No. 70 Castrol Edge/ModSpace Mazda Prototype

*We're glad you were uninjured in the fire that took you out of the race. How about the racing before the fuel injector failed?* "My first stint was fun. But the triple stint (three tanks of fuel) in the middle of the race was unreal – I've *never* had that much fun in a race car! We missed the tire pressure at first so I couldn't really attack. But they made the right adjustments for the next two and I had some great battles at the front with the 31 car [eventual series champions], the No. 2 car [finished second in the race], and the list goes on. I had a spirited battle with Ozz [Oswaldo Negri] in the [race-winning] number 60 as well. I think everybody knew the No. 70 Mazda was here to play! At the end, the Lola did well for its final race. She's a tired girl but she did well."

Tristan Nunez, Driver, No. 55 Mazda Prototype

*You qualified second and then raced at the front for the first two hours before the engine began suffering a misfire. How was it while the car was performing well?* "It was great being out there fighting for the lead, fighting at the top. It just shows you what we have in store for next year. Not the greatest end for either car, but you know it really showed what we can look forward to for next year."

Jonathan Bomarito, Driver, No. 55 Mazda Prototype

*With the troubles early in the race for the No. 55, you didn't get to complete a lap behind the wheel. Are there positives you can take away from this final race of the year?* "The weekend as a whole was good. We unloaded with two very competitive cars, and we did a great job working together on set-up, working with our engineers, and pushing each other forward. All of that's very positive within the program. Unfortunately, the 55 car went out early and the 70 car had a gut-wrenching podium pulled from them with 10 minutes to go. I feel for everybody involved in the program. But we have to move on. We have to be optimistic – the car ran perfect for 10 hours and we have to look at the positives and move toward next year. We have some exciting things coming up. I'm already motivated and looking forward to that"

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 (#MRT24) 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 (#MRTI) 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](http://MazdaMotorsports.com), @MazdaRacing on Twitter, and MazdaMotorsports on Instagram and Facebook.

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