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Mazda Road to Indy Takes to the Track at Barber Motorsports Park

- Proof of Concept: Mazda Road to Indy Succeeding on Multiple Levels -

IRVINE, Calif. (April 18, 2017) – Times are good for the Mazda Road to Indy (#MRTI), the most comprehensive open-wheel racing development program in the world. This weekend, an immense array of young racing talent from the #MRTI will be on display at the Honda Indy Grand Prix of Alabama in Birmingham. The event at Barber Motorsports Park is sponsored by another auto manufacturer, but the vast majority of on-track action will be all Mazda. The Indy Lights presented by Cooper Tire series and the Cooper Tire USF2000 powered by Mazda series will each feature two races. Those categories will be joined by the season-opening event for the Battery Tender Global Mazda MX-5 Cup presented by BFGoodrich Tires, and the sleek sports cars of the Prototype Challenge powered by Mazda series. Sunday morning's Indy Lights race at Barber will mark a milestone as the 400th race in series history.

A primary goal of the Mazda Road to Indy is to promote drivers, teams and crew to the top levels of the sport, and recent weeks have seen a number of Indy Lights graduates and past champions earn rides for the upcoming 101st running of the Indianapolis 500. (In last year's Indy 500, 25 of the 33 starting drivers had history in a Mazda-backed development series.) Juncos Racing, a long-time team in the MRTI, will also compete in its first Indy 500 in May.

Champions on each level of the Mazda Road to Indy earn a scholarship that allows them to move up the racing ladder. All three current Mazda scholarship-backed drivers won races at the season-opener at St. Petersburg last month - a first for the scholarship program. The event also saw 16-year-old Colton Herta, a second-generation racer, win the second of two Indy Lights races to become the youngest ever to reach the winner's circle in the series. (He has since turned 17.)



Heading into the Barber event, two of Mazda's scholarship drivers are brimming with confidence after securing victories at St. Pete.

"I have higher confidence now than at the beginning of the season," said Aaron Telitz, an Indy Lights rookie who carried Mazda's Soul Red color to a victory in his first-ever Lights race, driving for Belardi Racing. He is currently second in points behind Herta. "I knew our cars were going to be quick, but, being my first year in the series, you'd like to brag and say we're going to do super well, but realistically sometimes it doesn't happen that way. So, to start off as well as we did gives me super confidence and a great feeling going after more wins."

The newest Mazda scholarship driver is Oliver Askew, a young Floridian who leads the points in the USF2000 category after a victory and a second-place finish at St. Pete. The results were stunning, considering it was Askew's 15th and 16th car races ever, and his first time on a street circuit!

"I do have a ton of confidence after St. Pete with the race win and the points lead," Askew explained, as he heads into his second-ever MRTI event. "The car feels really good and the [Cape Motorsports] guys have done a fantastic job of helping me through my steep learning curve. I feel even more confident going into Barber because pre-season testing there went very well, and I'm very comfortable at that track."

Both drivers will battle with many talented competitors in addition to the difficult physical and mental challenges of the undulating 2.38-mile, 15-turn road course.

"From the standpoint of how fast these corners are and how long you're feeling the G-loads, it's pretty incredible," said the Wisconsin-native Telitz, who earned his Mazda scholarship and the step up to Indy Lights by winning last year's Pro Mazda championship. "The first long race run that I tried in testing in the Indy Lights car happened to be at Barber, and I was pretty well toast after the run. It really wears you out. I'm trying to stay in shape and hope to get to the finish without sweating too much."



“It’s exhausting mentally, too,” Askew said. “The corners are so fast and you have to be so precise on the turn-ins because some are completely blind. You have to know exactly where to turn in to come out on the outside curb. You have so many reference points on the track, it can be mentally draining. It’s extremely physically because of a lot of fast corners, a lot of compression and a lot of long-duration corners too. It’s definitely hard on the neck, so I’ve been training for that since the beginning of the year. I’ll be ready.”

IMSA Prototype Challenge presented by Mazda Set for Rounds Three and Four at Barber

The new-look series joins the action this weekend for two races toward the 2017 championship. At the season-opener at Sebring, Indy Lights racer Nico Jamin won both races in the new LMP3 category, while Kyle Masson did the same in the Mazda Prototype Challenge class. Masson is on a hot streak, as he also scored victories in the PC class at both the Rolex 24 at Daytona and the 12 Hours of Sebring (teamed with MRTI drivers Pato O’Ward and James French). A familiar face will make his LMP3 debut this week, as Kenton Koch, the 2015 Mazda Prototype Lites champ, will race with the P1 Motorsports team.

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, @MazdaRacing on Twitter, and MazdaMotorsports on Instagram and Facebook.

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