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Karam Puts an Exclamation Point on His Title By Dominating Friday's USF2000 Race

BRASELTON, Ga., Oct. 1 — Sage Karam, who clinched the driver championship in the top class of the "Cooper Tires Presents the USF2000 National Championship Powered by Mazda" on Thursday, added to the high standard he has established for future champions by leading every lap of the season finale Friday morning at Road Atlanta.

It was his ninth victory of the year in the 12-race series that is part of both the Road to Indy and the MAZDASPEED Motorsports driver development program.

Joining the 15-year-old from Nazareth, Pa. on the podium, however, were two brand-new faces. Felix Serralles of Ponce, Puerto Rico finished second and Luke Ellery of Melbourne, Australia placed third in the 19-lap contest on the challenging 2.54-mile, 12-turn road course after a thrilling battle generated by a restart on lap 13.

Four different teams were represented on the podium. Karam drives for Andretti Autosport, Serralles was in a Liberty Motorsports car and Ellery was with JDC MotorSports for his first weekend of racing in the States. They were joined by Pabst Racing Services' J.R. Smart of Fitchburg, Wis., who just nipped the National class champion, Ardie Greenamyre of Louisville, Ky., for that class' victory Friday.

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Karam said his No. 8 Van Diemen Mazda, which is sponsored by the Michael Fux Foundation, Comfort Revolution, Bell Helmets, Alpine Stars, Walters Web and Artrotondo.com, was even better than it was yesterday when he dominated the first half of the double-header here. He had a 4.517-second margin over Serralles at the checkered and he set the fastest race lap with a time of 1:21.968 (111.556 mph) on lap 17, which was another new record for his bio sheet.

Serralles, who is sponsored by SS Discount Tire of Haines City, Fla., started second and ran in that position throughout the race except for lap 14, when Karam's teammate, Zach Veach of Stockdale, Ohio, blasted from fourth to second. Serralles edged ahead of Veach on the following lap although they were still very close. On the very next lap Ellery edged ahead of Veach too, relegating Veach to fourth place.

Serralles made two valiant efforts to make a pass of Karam stick but Karam held him off both times. The first time Serralles got really close was in Turn 1 on the single-file restart on lap 13, and the second time occurred later that lap in Turn 7. Serralles, who will represent Team U.S.A. in Europe later this year, received the \$200 Staubli award along with his runner-up prize money.

Third was the most hotly-contested position. It was held by four different drivers at one point or the other: Veach (three laps); the series' runner-up, Patrick McKenna of Dublin, Ireland (11 laps); Serralles (one lap) and finally Ellery (four laps). The latter had the most dramatic drive of the day and was recognized with the \$200 Tilton Hard Charger award for improving the most positions. He started eighth, but got seventh right away when one of his teammates, JDC MotorSports' Mikhail Goikhberg of St. Petersburg, Russia, went off in Turn 6 on the pace lap to bring out a caution on lap one.

Ellery passed another teammate, Raphael Abbate of Sao Paulo, Brazil, working lap three to move into sixth place. He got fifth by passing Matthew Powers of Danville, Calif. working lap six.

The event's second and final full-course caution occurred on lap 12 to retrieve Powers' Liberty Motorsports car, which stopped in Turn 6 while running sixth. The single-file restart on lap 13 really stirred things up, as Veach blasted from fourth to second and McKenna slipped from third to sixth. Ellery took advantage of it too, as he had moved into fourth by lap 14.

Serralles and Veach were battling each other for second on lap 15 with Ellery still in fourth, but Ellery passed Veach once more time working lap 16 to snare the final podium position.

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Veach, who was as high as second for one lap, ended up fourth for his sponsors: ADS, Retail Pro and Secure IT.

McKenna was in the thick of the fight for a podium finish for a long time too. His car, which is fielded by Cape Motorsports with Wayne Taylor Racing and sponsored by Willsborough Transport, Motorsport Ireland and the Irish Sports Council, ran in third from lap three through lap 13 but he wound up in fifth place.

Abbate (sponsored by Avery Dennison and Alphacolor); Cape Motorsports' Javier Barrales of Concepcion, Chile; Smart (sponsored by Smart Motors) and AcceleRace Motorsports' Greenamyer (sponsored by Bidazzled.com, Sabelt, Sube Sports, ChaseCam, MemeTech and NEXAIR) rounded out the drivers running at the finish. Powers, who is sponsored by the Ghilotti Brothers, ended up tenth and Goikhberg rounded out the field.

PFC gift certificates of \$100 and \$50 went to the two class winners, Andretti Autosport and Pabst Racing Services, respectively.

Mazda plans to offer live video streaming of the awards ceremony on Friday night when the Star Mazda, USF2000 and Skip Barber National champions are honored at the Chateau Elan Inn in Braselton. The Internet address is <http://www.justin.tv/a/mazdausa> and the coverage is slated to begin at 7:30 p.m. Eastern time.

The 30-minute USF2000 races were support events for Saturday's Petit Le Mans Powered by Mazda2, the season finale of the American Le Mans Series presented by Tequila Patron.

For more information on the USF2000 series, including details on the upcoming Cooper Tires Winterfest slated for Florida in January, see USF2000.com. The series' 2011 schedule will also be posted on that site when it is released.

The podium finishers' post-race quotes follow:

Sage Karam: "As the race progressed I was determined to get my lap times down to the 1:21s before the tires went away. I worked the bars and the Cooper tires didn't go away at all. The car was really hooked up! It was definitely even better today than it was yesterday.

"Felix tried to get me on the restart in Turn 1. We were side by side for awhile; it was fun!

"It's been a great year overall. I have to thank Andretti Autosport; Mazda; Cooper Tires; the Road to Indy and all my sponsors. I want to thank Dan Andersen and Michelle

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Kish and everyone else who helped put on the series too. I also want to thank Steve Knapp of Elite Engines for the wicked Mazda engines. This has been the best year of my life!"

Felix Serralles: "I'm doing double-duty here, as I'm also racing in the Skip Barber National series. It's pretty tricky to race two different cars twice on the same weekend, when you're going from no downforce to full downforce. It takes a bit to get confidence again with your USF2000 car.

"My car was incredible. I put a move on Sage on the restart, but I didn't want to take both of us out. Then in Turn 7 I was so close. I tried to get Sage, but I made a mistake in Turn 7 and couldn't get by him so I ended up second. The aero made me go way out, I hit the dirt and he pulled away.

"I only ran the Road America doubleheader and this doubleheader in USF2000 this year; I ran full-time in Skip Barber and now I'm going to Europe with the Team U.S.A. scholarship. I'm not really sure what I'm going to do next year, but I'm going to try to stay in formula cars in Europe."

Luke Ellery: "I have jet lag from the trip getting over here, but getting on the podium in my first event in the States is great! I'm feeling good now!

"At one stage we were three wide on the backstretch. Zach made it tough, which was good. I think if we'd started up front we would have had a shot at Sage. The safety car really helped me though. It was a dogfight!

"This racing is as good as racing in Australia. There were only about half the cars, but we were racing only inches apart.

"If I can get the funding I want to race in this series next year. I love the series and I love the JDC MotorSports team. This is an amazing series and I want to be back here next year!"

J.R. Smart: "It was very close. I made a pass on the penultimate lap when Ardie had a little problem and I went for it. I have to thank my girlfriend; Pabst Racing Services; my mentor, Tonis Kasemets; Mazda; Cooper Tires; the Road to Indy; VisitFlorida.com and the USF2000 series for putting on a fantastic show!"

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About Mazda:

On any given weekend there are more Mazdas on the road courses of America than any other brand of vehicle. MX-5 Miata, RX-8, MAZDA3, MAZDA6, RX-7 and other vintage Mazda models are all popular race cars because every Mazda has the soul of a sports car. In fact, the largest road-racing class in the world is Spec Miata. With more than 2,500 first- and second-generation Miatas tearing up America's racetracks, it the most-raced production car in the world. Mazda's involvement in motorsports extends to its relationship with one of the world's premier road courses, Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca in Salinas, Calif., and the Skip Barber Schools for driving and racing.

Celebrating its 40th anniversary in the United States in 2010, Mazda North American Operations is headquartered in Irvine, Calif. It oversees the sales, marketing, parts business and customer service of Mazda vehicles in the United States, Canada and Mexico through nearly 900 dealers. Operations in Canada are managed by Mazda Canada, Inc., located in Ontario. Operations in Mexico are managed by Mazda Motor de Mexico in Mexico City.

For more information see MazdaUSA.com.

About Cooper Tire & Rubber Company:

Cooper Tire & Rubber Company is a global company that specializes in the design, manufacture, marketing and sales of passenger car and light truck tires and subsidiaries that specialize in medium truck, motorcycle and racing tires. With headquarters in Findlay, Ohio, Cooper Tire has manufacturing, sales, distribution, technical and design facilities within its family of companies located in 10 countries around the world.

For more information visit Cooper Tire's Web site at coopertire.com.

About the Cooper Tires Presents the USF2000 National Championship Powered by Mazda:

Many top drivers in the IZOD IndyCar Series and endurance sports car racing honed their skills in F2000, and the Cooper Tires Presents the USF2000 National Championship Powered by Mazda is an important training ground for rising stars.

Debuting in 2010, it is the revival of the very popular USF2000 series of 1990 through 2006. Sanctioned by the Indy Racing League, it is the first step on its Road to Indy ladder system, preceding Star Mazda and Firestone Indy Lights.

It is also part of the prestigious MAZDASPEED Motorsports driver development program. The top driver in the series' Championship class earns a scholarship package from Mazda valued at \$350,000 to help him or her advance to Star Mazda the following season.

USF2000 races are contested on road courses, street courses and ovals in order to give the series' drivers experience on all the different types of tracks they will face as they proceed up the ladder.

For more information visit USF2000.com.