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JUSTIN PISCITELL WINS MAZDA MX-5 CUP SHOOTOUT SIGNS WITH ALARA RACING

-- Mazda Helps Another Young Driver Move into Pro Racing --

March 19, 2009 (Sebring, Fla). Justin Piscitell has one of the shortest resumes ever for someone who will be making the jump to professional motorsports in 2009. Justin has a total career of just 16 races, but from those 16 races he has seven wins and 15 podium finishes. How did he do it? He impressed a panel of judges and professional racers that he has the greatest potential to succeed as a professional driver. Justin will spend his 2009 racing season competing in the SCCA Pro Racing Playboy Mazda MX-5 Cup.

In the weeks following the December 2008 shootout, Justin talked with the leading MX-5 Cup teams before deciding upon ALARA Racing. Justin will make his debut as a professional race driver the first weekend in May, at the Classic Motorsports Mitty '09 at Road Atlanta.

At Sebring this week, Justin is meeting his fellow MAZDASPEED ladder grads for the first time, and learning about the other rungs on that ladder.

Justin is the third driver to win the Mazda MX-5 Cup shootout, following in the footsteps of Andrew Caddell, and Brad Rampelberg.



The eleven eligible Mazda powered 2008 champions were as follows:



- Dean Copeland NASA Spec Miata Teen Challenge (East)
- Mark Eaton Formula Enterprises-Mazda
- Eric Foss SCCA Spec Miata (Mazda MX-5 Miata)
- Franklin Futrelle SCCA Formula Mazda
- Rick Harris SCCA E Production (Mazda MX-5 Miata)
- Todd Lamb NASA Spec Miata (Mazda MX-5 Miata)
- Joeseeph McClughan SCCA Showroom Stock C (MAZDA3)
- Justin Piscitell Skip Barber MAZDASPEED Challenge Series
- Jesse Prather SCCA F Production (Mazda MX-5 Miata)
- Scott Shelton NASA PTD (Mazda RX-8)
- Tyler Vance NASA Spec Miata Teen Challenge (West)

Note: Eight drivers competed in the shootout. Eric Foss forfeited his invitation as he had already won the 2008 Playboy MX-5 Cup Championship to secure his Mazda factory-supported ride in the 2009 SPEED World Challenge with Tri-Point Motorsports. Rick Harris and Jesse Prather declined to compete.

The criteria: Given that each of the drivers had proven themselves on the track to win a championship, the criteria to move up needed to be more encompassing. To succeed on the professional level requires a balance of both on-track and off-track skills including the following:

- Driving ability – fast laps
- Driving ability – consistent laps
- Technical feedback – Understanding of vehicle dynamics and suspension
- Technical feedback – Ability to evaluate vehicle handling
- Technical feedback – Ability to analyze data
- Technical feedback – Ability to improve vehicle handling
- The business of motorsports – Sponsorship proposal
- The business of motorsports – Media interview

The judges: The judges brought a wealth of both on-track and off-track expertise.

- Brad Rampelberg - 2007 MX-5 Cup Shootout winner, 2008 MX-5 Cup race winner
- Sylvain Tremblay – Owner/Driver/Engineer, SpeedSource Engineering
- Jason Saini - 2007 MX-5 Cup Champion, 2008 SPEED World Challenge Rookie of the Year
- Charles Espenlaub – Professional Mazda racer, SPEED World Challenge/GrandAm GT
- Dan Edmunds – Editor, Edmunds.com, Club Racer

The tally: After a full day of driving and classroom activities, the five judges scored the eight competing drivers in eleven categories, resulting in 440 scores! When the numbers were tallied, and compared against the subjective gut-feel of the expert panelists, the answer was very, very close – so close that the judges debated for several hours before deciding in favor of Piscitell.

Justin's prize package: The total prize package is valued at over \$70,000, and is the largest prize in Club Racing. Justin will be receiving:

- \$50,000 for the running of his car for the season
- \$10,000 in parts support
- One Sparco driving suit and helmet
- Ten sets of tires, one per race
- Ten entry fee waivers (Courtesy of SCCA Pro Racing)

The quotes:

Justin Piscitell – “Winning the shootout has opened up the world to me. As a 19 year old boy from Patterson NY, who has only been racing for one year, I was elated to even have the opportunity to attend the *MAZDASPEED* shootout. Winning it is beyond comprehension. The greatest thing about the Mazda Ladder is that it gives a novice racer like me something to strive for and the opportunity for advancement. It provides an organized sequence and opportunity to advance a racing career. If I win the Playboy MX-5 Cup, I can automatically move up to the SPEED World Challenge Series with a factory supported ride from Mazda. Mazda has given me the chance to pursue my dream of racing in a Pro series. I selected ALARA as I see them as a team that is dedicated to winning the Playboy MX-5 Cup, and also in advancing my skills as a driver. It is a very competitive series and is going to take a lot of hard work and commitment, but it is what I have always wanted and I am dedicated to the challenge and opportunity that I now have. I couldn't imagine doing it any other way.”

Steve Sanders – *MAZDASPEED* Competition Manager: “The feedback from the judges was great. They noted that the overall quality of the contestants was excellent. Many of these drivers have the potential to make it on a professional level. The key word of the shootout was ‘potential’ and the judges saw a great deal of that in Justin. We look forward to working with him in 2009.”

Charles Espenlaub – Third year judge: " Wow! I am amazed more and more every year. Having been involved with the Mazda MX-5 Cup shootout since the beginning.... The results speak volumes.... The talent is deep. The *MAZDASPEED* Ladder system works. And it becomes more and more difficult to determine a winner every year. What a great program, everyone should be proud of their efforts, what they learned from the experience and new friends made.... I know I am! "

Ara Malkhassian - Principal, ALARA Racing: “We are very excited that Justin has selected ALARA Racing as his team for the Playboy MX-5 Cup series. Justin quickly impressed us with his natural speed and smoothness in his first test with us. Under Ken Murillo’s tutelage, he continues to strengthen and mature as he goes through ALARA Racing’s pre-season development program. We expect him to be a strong contender for the championship this year”.

Mazda is the brand of choice for road-racers across North America. More than 9,000 grassroots racers compete in various classes with the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) and the National Auto Sport Association (NASA). Racers who are years away from earning a driver’s license can now begin their professional motorsports careers in the Mazda family. A driver can begin in karts and progress through the Skip Barber series, Club Racing Formula Mazda, professional Star Mazda and finally to Formula Atlantic, all with Mazda. No other car company has ever connected the dots this way.

On any given weekend, there are more Mazdas on the road-race tracks of America than any other brand of vehicle. At the track, you’ll see MX-5 Miata, RX-8, MAZDA3, MAZDA6, RX-7 and other vintage Mazda models competing, 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 1,500 first- and second-generation Miatas tearing up America’s racetracks, making it the most-raced production car in the world. Mazda’s involvement in motorsports extends to its relationship with Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca, one of the world’s premier road-racing circuits, and the Skip Barber Schools for driving and racing.

Headquartered in Irvine, Calif., Mazda North American Operations oversees the sales, marketing, parts and customer service support of Mazda vehicles in the United States, Canada and Mexico through more than 850 dealers. Operations in Canada are managed by Mazda Canada, Inc., located in Ontario, Canada, and in Mexico by Mazda Motor de Mexico in Mexico City.

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