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36th Atlantic Championship Season Gets Underway This Weekend in Sebring

SEBRING, Fla. (March 17, 2009) – The 36th anniversary season of the Cooper Tires Presents The Atlantic Championship Powered by Mazda gets underway on Friday at Sebring International Raceway as part of the American Le Mans Series Mobil 1 12 Hours of Sebring presented by Fresh from Florida festivities.

This weekend's race is the first of 12 for the Atlantic Championship in 2009, with a \$1 million payday awaiting the series champion at season's end and a \$50,000 prize for this weekend's race winner. The entry list features 21 cars and a deep and talented field of drivers ready for battle.

If times from Tuesday's promoter test day at Sebring are any indication, 2008 Star Mazda champion **John Edwards** may be the man to beat on Friday afternoon. Edwards topped the Tuesday time charts with a best lap at 1:53.957 in the No. 36 MAZDASPEED Motorsports Development/Nuclear Clean Air Energy/NEI/Entergy machine for Newman Wachs Racing. The 18-year-old from Cincinnati, Ohio returns to the Atlantic Championship this season after a one-year absence during which he claimed the Star Mazda title. Two years ago, Edwards became the youngest driver in Atlantic history at the age of 16 and scored a career-best result of second at Toronto.

Edwards is joined on the two-car NWR team by defending Atlantic champion **Markus Niemela** in the No. 1 Mr. Jones/Nuclear Clean Air Energy/Entergy/NWR machine. Niemela posted the sixth-quickest time in Tuesday testing, but the Finnish racer will undoubtedly be heard from frequently throughout the weekend and the entire season.

The driver who finished just behind Niemela in the 2008 championship standings is also back in Atlantic this season, as American **Jonathan Bomarito** will once again pilot the familiar black and yellow No. 26 machine for Mathiasen Motorsports. Bomarito led the series last year with three victories and looks to be back on pace for the season opener with a second-quickest lap at 1:54.255 in Tuesday's test.

As is always the case in the Atlantic Championship, the 2009 field features a number of talented rookies looking to make names for themselves in North America's longest-running open-wheel driver development series. Belgian **Frederic Vervisch** is one such driver. The former champion of ATS Formula 3 and Asian Formula 3 posted the third-quickest time of the test at 1:54.296 aboard the No. 17 Genoa Racing entry.

Vervisch was the first of three rookies to crack the top five in testing. Running the fourth-quickest lap at 1:54.510 was Latvian **Harald Schlegelmilch** in the No. 21 Conquest Racing machine at 1:54.510. Schlegelmilch brings previous experience from International Formula Masters, the Formula 3 Euroseries, German F3 and German Formula BMW among other series with him to the Atlantic series.

Series newcomer **Borja Garcia** of Valencia, Spain completed the top five in Tuesday testing with a lap at 1:54.873 in the No. 6 CJ Consulting entry from Condor Motorsports. Garcia—who previously competed in GP2, the World Series by Renault and Superleague in Europe—quickly got the attention of his fellow Atlantic competitors last week in testing at Palm Beach International Raceway, where he topped the time charts for all four sessions in the two-day test.

Just behind Niemela, who posted a time of 1:55.020, was another driver returning to the Atlantic Championship after a one-year absence, **Matt Lee** of Syosset, N.Y. Lee turned a best lap at 1:55.157 in the No. 2 machine for Jensen MotorSport.

American standout **Jonathan Summerton**, who finished third in the 2008 Atlantic Championship standings with a pair of victories, wrapped up a deal with Genoa Racing over the weekend and got his first seat time in an Atlantic machine since last year's season finale at Road Atlanta in Tuesday's test sessions. He was eighth fastest on the day at 1:55.283 in the No. 19 machine.

Team Stargate Worlds teammates **Simona De Silvestro** and **Frankie Muniz** completed the top 10 in testing. De Silvestro, who opened the 2008 Atlantic campaign at Long Beach by becoming the second woman in series history to win

a race, was ninth fastest at 1:55.537 in the No. 78 Stargate Worlds/Cheyenne Mountain Entertainment/FireSky/Cardinal Technologies machine. Muniz was 10th in the No. 77 Stargate Worlds/Cheyenne Mountain Entertainment/FireSky/Cardinal Technologies entry at 1:56.086. Both drivers are entering their third season of Atlantic competition.

British racer **James Winslow**, who was announced as driver of the No. 12 Conquest Racing entry on Monday, posted the 11th-fastest lap of the test at 1:56.904. It was the first time in an Atlantic machine for the former Australian Formula 3, Formula Renault V6 and Asian Formula 3 champion.

Garcia's Condor Motorsports teammate, French rookie **Max Lefevre**, was 12th in testing at 1:57.395 in the No. 7 DOTMOBIL machine. Lefevre won the 2008 West European Formula Renault Challenger Cup title, as well as the 2007 French Formula Ford championship.

Rounding out the field of Mazda-Cosworth/Swift 016.a/Cooper drivers in the test was rookie **Michael Nacol** in the No. 3 Jensen MotorSport entry at 2:02.932. Nacol, a native of Houston, Texas, is making his professional racing debut in Friday's Atlantic season-opener.

One driver who did not participate in the test but will be participating in the race this weekend is three-time Atlantic race-winner **Tonis Kasemets**. The Estonia-born racer—who finished third in both races of a doubleheader last season at Road America in his lone Atlantic weekend of the year—will drive the No. 35 Polestar Motor Racing machine. The No. 8 Condor Motorsports entry and the No. 18 entry from Genoa Racing are still listed with drivers to be announced.

The 2009 Atlantic season-opener will also feature five C2 class entries, all coming from the Swan Racing stable in Kansas City, Kan. and all but one carrying sponsorship from Everclear Specialty Lubricants. All cars in the C2 category are previous generation Swift 014.a chassis.

The quickest of the C2 entries in Tuesday's test at Sebring was team owner/driver **Mirl Swan** in the No. 88 machine at 1:58.532. Swan was followed by **Sadat Yelkin** at 2:00.339 and **Chris Lee** at 2:04.510. **Ahsen Yelkin** was fourth in C2 at 2:05.659 in the No. 29 machine followed by **Mike Mallinen** at 2:07.323 in the No. 71 Mallinen Properties machine.

Each entry will ride on Cooper Atlantic racing slicks and rain tires. The official race weekend schedule features practice and qualifying on Wednesday and Thursday, with the 45-minute season-opener slated to roll off from a standing start at 2:00 p.m. ET on Friday afternoon.

COOPER TIRES PRESENTS THE ATLANTIC CHAMPIONSHIP POWERED BY MAZDA MOBIL 1 12 HOURS OF SEBRING PRESENTED BY FRESH FROM FLORIDA PRE-RACE NOTEBOOK

- **Big Money On The Line:** The 2009 Cooper Tires Presents The Atlantic Championship Powered by Mazda will feature a \$1 million prize for the series champion and \$50,000 to win this weekend's race at Sebring International Raceway. Second place in the championship standings is now worth \$500,000, with \$200,000 going to third place in the season standings. Last year's champion, Markus Niemela, won \$300,000 for taking the title.
- **Everybody Gets A Mulligan:** The 2009 Atlantic Championship features a new wrinkle in the way the championship will be decided, as all drivers will earn points from their best 11 finishes in the 12-race season.
- **On The Road Again:** The 12-race 2009 Atlantic Championship schedule brings the series to many of North America's most revered road racing circuits. The series shares seven race weekends with the American Le Mans Series at Sebring International Raceway, Miller Motorsports Park, Lime Rock Park, Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course, Mosport International Raceway, Road Atlanta and Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca. The Atlantic series is the "headline" attraction in Trois-Rivieres, Quebec and in doubleheader weekends at New Jersey Motorsports Park and Autobahn Country Club in suburban Chicago.
- **Atlantic Returns to Sebring:** While Sebring International Raceway has long been a favorite testing location for Atlantic Championship teams; this weekend's race will be just the second in the 36-year history of the series at Sebring. Scott Harrington won the lone previous Atlantic race at the Central Florida circuit in 1988, which Steve Shelton started from the pole.
- **International Flair:** This weekend's race will feature drivers representing 10 different countries. The United States is best represented with a total of 10 drivers with one each from Finland, Spain, France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Latvia, Turkey, Estonia and Switzerland.

- **Rookies Aplenty:** This weekend's field will include 11 drivers making their first Atlantic Championship appearance this weekend. The first-timers are Michael Nacol (No. 3 Team Jensen), Borja Garcia (No. 6 CJ Consulting), Max Lefevre (No. 7 DOTMOBIL), James Winslow (No. 12 Conquest Racing), Frederic Vervisch (No. 17 Genoa Racing), Harald Schlegelmilch (No. 21 Conquest Racing), Ahsen Yelkin (No. 29 Everclear Specialty Lubricants), Chris Lee (No. 68 Everclear Specialty Lubricants), Mike Mallinen (No. 71 Mallinen Properties), Sadat Yelkin (No. 75 Everclear Specialty Lubricants) and Mirl Swan (No. 88 Everclear Specialty Lubricants).

**MOBIL 1 12 HOURS OF SEBRING PRESENTED BY FRESH FROM FLORIDA
SEBRING INTERNATIONAL RACEWAY
FAST FACTS**

WHAT: Mobil 1 12 Hours of Sebring presented by Fresh From Florida

WHERE: Sebring International Raceway – Sebring, Fla.

ATLANTIC CHAMPIONSHIP EVENT SCHEDULE (All times local, ET): WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18 - Practice, 9:45 – 10:30 a.m.; Qualifying #1, 3:50 – 4:30 p.m. THURSDAY, MARCH 19 – Qualifying #2, 12:50 – 1:30 p.m. FRIDAY, MARCH 20– Race, 2:00 – 2:45 p.m.

TRACK LAYOUT: 3.7-mile Permanent Road Course

RACE LENGTH: 45 minutes

RACE ROUND: Round 1 of the 12-race 2009 Cooper Tires Presents The Atlantic Championship Powered by Mazda

ROAD ATLANTA HISTORY

Year	Race Winner	Pole Winner
1988	Scott Harrington	Steve Shelton