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Karam Shows the Way In Practice at Autobahn Friday

JOLIET, Ill., July 30 — The drivers of the USF2000 National Championship, which is presented by Cooper Tires and powered by Mazda, continued to chase point leader Sage Karam's red No. 8 Friday at the Autobahn County Club during two practice sessions in preparation for a doubleheader here Saturday and Sunday.

Karam, 15, of Nazareth, Pa., topped both USF2000 practice sessions for the event, which is called the Harrah's Autobahn Grand Prix Presented by Mazda. It will be shown live on HDNet from 12:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. Eastern time both Saturday and Sunday.

Karam set the fastest lap of the day for the series in the morning session when he ran a 2:15.718 for the 3.56-mile, 19-turn road course for an average speed of 94.431 miles per hour.

He topped the charts in the afternoon too when the Andretti Autosport driver was timed in 2:16.354 for an average speed of 93.991 mph. His car is sponsored by the Michael Fux Foundation, Comfort Revolution, Bell Helmets, Alpine Stars, Walters Web and artrotundo.com.

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The same four drivers, representing four different teams, took the top four spots in both sessions. In the morning session Martin Scuncio was second for Fuerza Chile Motorsports/Cape Motorsports with Wayne Taylor Racing. The driver from Concepcion, Chile was only 0.482 of a second off Karam's time. Raphael Abbate of Sao Paulo, Brazil was third in the morning for JDC MotorSports, while veteran Tonis Kasemets of Mundelein, Ill. was fourth for Pabst Racing Services.

In the afternoon Abbate posted the second-fastest time followed by Kasemets and Scuncio.

Mikhail Goikhberg of JDC MotorSports was fifth in the first session while one of his teammates, Martin Sala, just edged him for that position in the afternoon.

Although Karam made it look easy Friday, he said it was not without a lot of hard work from his Andretti Autosport team.

"We struggled a lot here yesterday in testing, but my team stayed late last night and got here early this morning, working on the overall balance of the car, and it was a lot easier to drive today," Karam said. "I'm just thrilled that I'm with a team like Andretti Autosport that is committed to working hard so we can go for the overall championship.

"We tested here a week or two ago, but I've never raced here before," Karam added. "It's a very technical track and one of the most physical tracks we'll race on this year. I can't say it's my favorite track because it's not like Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca or anything, but I like it. We've been getting better and better every session, and I'm satisfied with how things are going."

Qualifying for Saturday's race is slated for 8 a.m. Central time Saturday, with the 30-minute race following at 1:05 p.m. Central time. In addition to the live TV coverage on HDNet, live timing and scoring will be available on usf2000.com.

The starting grid for Sunday's race will be established by each driver's fastest race lap Saturday. There is a 15-minute warm-up at 8 a.m. Central time Sunday followed by that day's race, again at 1:05 p.m. Central.

The USF2000 drivers also attended a marketing and public relations seminar presented by MAZDASPEED Motorsports at the track Friday. The series is part of that program, which will give the USF2000 champion a scholarship valued at \$350,000 to help him advance to the Star Mazda Championship in 2011.

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The series is also part of the Indy Racing League's Road to Indy program.

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.