



Patrick O'Neill Sweeps Rounds Two and Three at Thunderhill Raceway Park

Bill Weaver Victorious in Standard Formula Mazda Category

May 4, 2008. Willows, California. Driving the #64 O'Neill Construction Pro Formula Mazda, Patrick O'Neill, from San Francisco, California, captured Rounds Two and Three of the MOLECULE Formula Mazda Challenge at Thunderhill Raceway Park. Tackling the reverse direction for the first time, affectionately known as Lihrednuht, (Thunderhill backwards), O'Neill led flag to flag in both races to score his second and third victories of the season in the Pro Formula Mazda class. Bill Weaver, of Fresno, California, captured the Standard Formula Mazda class victory on both race days.

"Running Thunderhill backwards is a blast," O'Neill exclaimed afterwards. "The track is really quick going this direction and it was like racing on a roller coaster. My crew did a great job getting the car working here and has helped me jump out with a great start to the season."

Joining O'Neill on the podium in both races were series rookie Kevin Woods, in the #77 World Speed Motorsports Entry, and Michael Guasch in the MOLECULE Phenom Racing Mazda. Starting from the third spot on the grid on Saturday Woods was able to jump inside Guasch in the first corner and was able to hold him off throughout the event with the pair racing nose to tail. "I was able to get a good jump on the start and get inside of Michael in the first corner," Woods explained. "Patrick opened a bit of a gap but we were fighting the whole way. I knew he would try to make a move on the restart but was able to hold him off and maintain second place."

The race was slowed for several laps in the middle when Jim Mashburn and Stan Kohls tangled as they came onto the front straight at the start of lap five, bringing out the caution for several laps. "I had closed up on Jim as we were going through the final corner and had committed myself to the outside line when he started to spin," Kohls explained. "His momentum carried him in the same direction and there was nowhere to go unfortunately."

In the Standard Mazda class Weaver had opened up a comfortable lead as Stew Tabak and series newcomer Matt Trudell were battling for the second step on the podium. In the end Tabak would take the spot by a slim 2 second margin with Trudell taking the third and final podium position in the class.

Sunny skies continued on Sunday for the second day of racing and while O'Neill and Weaver once again rolled to victory, second and third place in both classes were hotly contested. Following Saturday's race Guasch had vowed to protect his position at the start of Sunday's affair and kept his promise with a strong start, sliding in behind O'Neill as Woods slipped past Kohls into third place. The three drivers would remain in these positions for the remainder of the event.

"There aren't a lot of passing opportunities going the reverse direction on this track as I found out yesterday when Kevin got the jump on me at the start," Guasch commented. "Even though I felt I had the faster car in the race I couldn't get back by him and I told myself that wouldn't happen again in this race. I got a good start this time and was able to open a gap while chasing Patrick."

In the Standard Formula Mazda class it initially appeared that Saturday's second and third place drivers Stew Tabak and Matt Trudell had swapped positions for Sunday's podium, with Trudell edging out Tabak by less than a second, however a blend line violation cost Trudell one finishing position making Sunday's podium a duplicate of Saturday's.

This weekend's event marked the first time the MOLECULE Formula Mazda Challenge has participated with NASA this season and drivers and teams all commented on the efficiency of the sanctioning body. "We really have to thank NASA, Trackmasters and Thunderhill for making this event so successful," Series Administrator Eric McCombs commented. "Everyone is looking forward to our next event here in June."