

Caddell takes second in MX-5 Cup series

SCCA STAFF REPORT

TOOELE, Utah — Andrew Caddell of Graham, 2006 Spec Miata Runoffs champion, battled back from a poor start to win his second SCCA Pro Racing SIRIUS Satellite Radio MX-5 Cup race of the season and secure second in the championship.

Bob Michaelian of Seal Beach, Calif., and Todd Buras of Melbourne, Fla., completed the top three in the final MX-5 Cup race of the season on Sept. 15, part of the Sunchaser 1000 weekend at Miller Motosports Park.

Starting from his second pole of the season, Caddell's race got off to a rough start when he missed a shift in his No. 30 Team MER-AimSport-Pinnacle Mazda MX-5 and fell back to fifth on the opening lap.

"I missed a shift on the start and I think I might have caused that wreck on the front straightaway. I got the third gear shift and then the third to fourth gear shift didn't go in. It was a fight from there, I was all the way back to fifth."

Caddell was lucky however, compared to Jesse Combs, of Woodlands, Texas, in the No. 7 Coolgas Ltd.-Alara Racing MX-5, who made heavy contact with the guardrail on the front straight at the start of the race. The No. 83 Hooverspeed MX-5 of Kim Ouye from Monterey, Calif., and the No. 14 Hooverspeed MX-5 of Simona DeSilvestro, from Thun, Switzerland, got together at the start, bumping into Combs and sending him off course at speed. Ouye and De Silvestro also veered off course in the opposite direction, making contact with the opposite barrier. All three drivers were OK, but out of the race before turn one.

While his teammate, and new MX-5 Cup champion, Jason Saini took over the lead of the race, Caddell took advantage of scuffles in front of him to work his way back up to third on lap five, when the only full-course caution of the race would come out for debris on the front straight.

On the lap eight restart, the No. 80 Hooverspeed-MobiTV MX-5 of Matt Cross of from Folsom, Calif., became the new race leader with MER teammates Saini and Caddell hot on his heels. It was at that point that Saini's transmission became stuck in fourth

gear and the No. 28 Autobarn Mazda-Saferacer.com MX-5 started to fall back. Caddell took over the reins with gusto, passing Cross for the lead the next lap heading into Turn One and never looking back, setting the Hawk Hot Lap of the race, a 3:23.144 (79.891 mph).

"I was picking people off one by one," Caddell said. "I got by Jason (Saini) when he started having trouble with his transmission, then I got by (Matt) Cross. I had a run on Matt and he moved back over. I just dove in there and took a chance. He was making the track pretty narrow, but I had to get by him, because I knew once I got by him we had the better car.

"It feels great. That was probably the most exciting race and the most frustrating race at the same time. We're coming back next year and we're going to the Runoffs this year, too."

With the win, Caddell secured his runner-up status in the championship, 41 points behind champion Saini.

Malkhassian was the benefactor of a late-race incident between Cross and the No. 31 Team MER-Feed the Need MX-5 of Frankie Muniz of Los Angeles. The two came together in turn one while battling for second on lap 10. As both cars slid off course, Malkhassian breezed through for the second spot.

While Malkhassian crossed the line in second, race officials deemed some of his earlier race actions too aggressive and disqualified him, as well as Mark Jenkins from the race.

With fierce battles raging throughout the field, Michaelian had one of the quietest races on the track, starting third and finishing second following Malkhassian's disqualification. It was a career-best grid and finishing position for the No. 19 Hooverspeed-Shozilla.com MX-5 driver who got caught behind Caddell on the start of the race and fell back to ninth, but kept his nose clean throughout the 11-lap, 49.346-mile race for his first podium finish.

"I got held up a little bit on the start and shuffled back," Michaelian said. "There was a lot of action going on ahead of us though, so we got helped out by some attrition. I've got to thank Jason Hoover for giving me such a good car that was consistent throughout the race. There were no mistakes on our part and we just drove it home to the

finish.

"This is a great series, so a big thanks to Mazda for doing this. I definitely want to run this MX-5 again next year."

The No. 56 BSI-Team Garcia-MOMO-Joe Gibbs MX-5 of Todd Buras from Melbourne, Fla., and the No. 88 DEX-Western Companies-RPM MX-5 of Salt Lake City driver Pratt Cole exchanged positions several times on the final lap, before Buras, who started from pit lane, claimed the third-place spot. Cole's fourth-place was enough to leap-frog him to a fourth-place finish in the championship.

Saini nursed his ailing car to a fifth-place finish. Saini clinched the championship in the previous round in Trois-Rivieres, Quebec, and has won himself a ride with a Mazda team in next year's SCCA SPEED Touring Car Championship.

Starting 29th on the grid, Charles Espenlaub, of Lutz, Fla., charged through the field and picked up an impressive 22 positions to finish sixth.

Barry Fromberg, Andrew Carbonell, Rick Bellew and "Grey's Anatomy" star Patrick Dempsey completed the top 10. It was the first top-10 finish for Dempsey.

Following his incident with Muniz, Cross continued on to finish 10th on the track, but following the race, officials penalized Cross three positions for blocking, while in the lead.

The penalty dropped Cross to sixth in the final championship standings, a single point behind Combs, who finished the season in fifth. Carbonell, Fromberg, Michaelian and Buras filled out the top 10 in the championship.

Shortly after technical inspections concluded, the first annual MX-5 Cup Pit Crew Challenge took place. Teams could enter two crew members per car, who were given the task of installing the flywheel and transmission without power equipment and then driving the car under its own power across the finish line, 20 feet away. Getting the job done in 6.09 minutes was Alara Racing's Jacob Oberg and Mike Yoes, who each won a Skip Barber Racing School courtesy of Mazda.

All races from the 2007 SCCA Pro Racing SIRIUS Satellite Radio Mazda MX-5 Cup season will be broadcast on SPEED. Check www.mx-5cup.com for a TV schedule to be posted shortly.