

Melbourne local Mark Eaton eyes SCCA Triple Crown title

Saturday, 11 October 2008

Melbourne's Mark Eaton is on a roll and hopes to record a landmark accomplishment on Sunday in the Sports Car Club of America National Championship Runoffs at Heartland Park in Topeka, Kan.

Eaton, the 2007 SCCA Formula Enterprise National Champion who drives for Melbourne's RobinsonMotorSports, is set to defend his title and is eligible to win the prestigious SCCA Triple Crown.

Earlier this season he won both the Southeast Division national points championship and the Piggly Wiggly June Sprints at Road America in Elkhart Lake, Wis., and could become the first Brevard County resident to win the Triple Crown.

All total, he has seven victories this season in the spec series in which the open-wheel cars are powered by a 2.3-liter inline, 170-horsepower Mazda 4-cylinder engines.

The 2.5-mile, 14-turn, Heartland Park circuit will put a premium on track position and passing, challenging Eaton to ensure he has a good starting spot (Eaton won the pole with a time of 32.60 seconds) and gets the most from his car handling-wise over the course of the 18-car, 18-lap, 40-minute event.

"We're hoping for the win, but right now it's pretty tight after testing," Eaton said. "There's four or five guys within two-tenths of a second of each other. This isn't a really good passing track, so it's going to be really important to get qualified up front. We've got a really, really good shot at winning but it's going to be tough for sure."

Fort Myers' Mathew Inge also will compete in Formula Enterprise for Robinson while Melbourne's Hector De La Torriente, the 2007 Southeast Division Regional Champion, drives in today's Spec Ford race for Robinson. De La Torriente finished his inaugural national season seventh in Southeast Division points with one podium and three top-5 finishes, earning him a berth in the winner take all event.

Spec Ford racers are closed-wheel, open-cockpit cars powered by 105-horsepower 1.9-liter fuel-injected 4-cylinder engines.

In other sports car competition:

Former Melbourne resident and Melbourne High and University of Central Florida graduate Randy Pobst won the 2008 World Challenge GT championship last weekend for the second straight year and the third time in six seasons. Pobst and the No. 1 K-PAX/3R Racing Porsche 911 GT3 team finished fifth in the SCCA SPEED World Challenge GT Championship season finale at Road Atlanta, clinching the drivers' championship.

"I am so very honored and fortunate to be part of the K-PAX/3R Racing Team," Pobst wrote in an e-mail. "This championship win is a testament to their hard work and dedication to making our Porsches the best that they can be. Our cars consistently handle and race well which makes them fun to drive and competitive at every track."

"I was holding my breath for the first few laps until I knew we were in. Standing starts are high risk. You never know what can happen. Towards the end I ran hard to the finish. I was happy to finish fifth."

Several local racers will compete in the American Road Race of Champions Nov. 5-9 at Road Atlanta. The race determines the national champion for SCCA regional class cars.

Indialantic's David Ellis-Brown has entered his Volkswagen Jetta and Cocoa Beach's Deuce Keane has entered his Honda Accord, both in the Improved Touring B class.

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