

Justin Piscitell on the front row for Saturday's SCCA Pro Playboy Mazda MX-5 Cup Race at Road Atlanta

BRASELTON, Ga. - Mat Pombo, of Atlanta, Ga., earned the SCCA Pro Racing Playboy Mazda MX-5 Cup pole at his home track of Road Atlanta on Friday, part of the Classic Motorsports Mitty presented by Mazda. Joining Pombo on the front row for Saturday's race is Justin Piscitell, of Weston, Conn., with Lyonel Kent, of Knoxville, Tenn., starting third.

Pombo turned a fast time of 1:40.220 (91.239 mph) in the No. 01 PFM Pombo Racing/Range of Motion ATL/Carbotech Mazda MX-5 on his second lap around the 12-turn, 2.54-mile road course. Pombo's first MX-5 Cup pole also set a new track record, bettering the existing qualifying record of 1:40.763 (90.747 mph), set by Eric Foss in 2008, by over half a second.



Mat Pombo starts on pole at Road Atlanta in his hometown race.

"I've got to thank PFM Pombo Racing, Range of Motion, and the whole crew," Pombo said. "They've done a lot of work the past week, we've been battling overheating problems and it all kind of came together today. I got a big draft down the backstraight and that really helped me.

"It feels good to get a pole at my home track in front of my home crowd. I've got a few laps around Road Atlanta in my career, and that helps. All of our sponsors are here, and we want to put on a good show for them. But I get to sleep at home in my own bed, and that's a real advantage."

Piscitell was quickest in both practice sessions on Thursday, and also turned his fast lap of 1:40.689 (90.814 mph) in the second lap of the 25-minute session to qualify second. The 20-year-old, driving the No. 89 DAMG Worldwide/Team MER Mazda MX-5, paired with Team MER teammate Nick Evans in the No. 28 Team MER/Mazda/Sparco MX-5 to draft around the circuit.

"The track is a whole lot hotter today than it was yesterday," Piscitell said. "Nick and I worked really well together on the draft, and the DAMG/Team MER car was what we needed it to be. In qualifying, you get one lap to work and that's the trick."

With high hopes, Piscitell is already looking forward to Saturday's race.

"It's always nice to have a teammate behind you for moral support going into turn one on the race, and hopefully we'll just get a four car breakaway and play it smart," Piscitell continued. "Then we can really duke it out the last three or four laps and put on a great show."

Evans will start fourth after Kent broke up the Team MER train on his 13th and final lap, which he completed as the checkered flag flew to end the session. Kent's lap of 1:40.760 (90.750) just edged Evans' time of 1:40.782 (90.730 mph) to put Kent into third position.

"I would have rather had the pole, but starting P3 here isn't too bad," Kent said. "We should have a good inside line on the start. The ALARA Racing/Bulldog Productions car ran flawlessly right out of the box this weekend after a lot of damage just four days ago [from a first lap crash at VIR]. The crew was on a 72-hour sprint to put the car back together, and I think we'll be in good shape for the race."

Kent was the lone driver in the top five who didn't turn his quickest lap early in the session, instead waiting on the car to come to him.

"On the first lap, we got boxed in and I had to make a pass going into turn one," Kent explained. "That cost probably half a second, or that would have been my fastest lap. We just stuck with the draft and kept getting faster through the session."

Mark Carpenter completed the top five behind the wheel of the No. 14 AMG Racing/GGS Technical Publication Mazda MX-5, with a fast time of 1:40.963 (90.567 mph), also on his second lap.

ALARA Racing's Ara Malkhassian will start sixth in the No. 11 ALARA Racing/Bulldog Productions MX-5. A pair of AMG teammates, Michael Cooper (No. 84 AMG Racing Bromante Landscaping & Design MX-5) and championship leader Brad Rampelberg (No. 4 AMG Racing/Mazda/Cobalt Brakes MX-5) will start seventh and eighth.

Jesse Combs (No. 77 ALARA Racing/Coolgas.com MX-5) and Jeff Mosing (Team MER/RaceNowForAutism/Frank's Int MX-5) will start the race from row five.

The SCCA Pro Racing Playboy Mazda MX-5 Cup races on Saturday afternoon at Road Atlanta at 1:30 p.m. (EDT) in a 45-minute race. To follow each session's notes and timing, please visit www.mx-5cup.com.

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