

Road America - Justin Piscitell second quickest in wide-open Friday MX-5 Cup practice

ELKHART LAKE, Wis. -

Brad Rampelberg, of San Jose, Calif., was the quickest driver in three very competitive practice sessions on Friday at Road America in preparation for Sunday's SCCA Pro Racing Playboy Mazda MX-5 Cup race, part of the Bucyrus 200 presented by Menard's weekend.

Rampelberg posted a best lap of 2:39.606 (91.304 mph) around the 14-turn, 4.048-mile circuit in the second of two morning sessions. That session, run this morning under cool conditions, was the quickest of the three half-hour practices in his No. 4 AMG/Mazda/Cobalt Brakes Mazda MX-5.



Rampelberg topped Friday's combined practice charts (Shaun Lumley photo).

The three 30-minute sessions displayed three very different conditions for drivers to navigate. The first session, run at 8:15 a.m. this morning, featured a drying-but-damp track from overnight rains. Practice two, an hour after the conclusion of the first session, was under cool skies and a fresh track. The afternoon practice three was under a hot Wisconsin sun, making the track more slippery for the field of identically prepared MX-5 Cup machines.

With drafting a key part of a fast lap around the long straightaways at Road America, Rampelberg and his AMG teammates are among the favorites for this Sunday's race.

"This morning's practice session was really good, and the car was great," Rampelberg said. "The afternoon, the track was really greasy. There's a lot of rubber down from the Trans-Am cars and the Nationwide Series cars, and I don't know if these cars like that new rubber and the track was a little bit greasy. The session was still good, though. I don't know that we got a good draft so our times may not have been great. It's such a drafting track, but I think it's going to be an entertaining race.

"The top probably eight drivers and cars here are really good, and if you watch last year's races, everybody is nose-to-tail. Eventually, somebody is going to make a mistake and lose the draft, and maybe two or three cars can break away. The goal is to be one of those cars and fight it out for the last couple of laps."

Rampelberg was followed by current championship leader Justin Piscitell, of Weston, Conn., in the No. 89 Team MER/DAMG Worldwide Mazda MX-5 Cup with a best time of 2:40.331 (90.892 mph).

Like Rampelberg, Piscitell also spent the day learning to work with his teammates at Team MER in preparation for the green flag on Sunday.

"We've got all four of the MER cars running close together," the 21-year-old driver said. "All four of us are working really well, and we spent the day working the draft and learning. We started running close together like race conditions, and then tried to set each other up and use some gaps to practice for qualifying. My DAMG Worldwide/Team MER car is really good, though, and I can't wait to see what it does on sticker tires.

“As far as the race, the best plan in racing is not to have a plan. All of the teams have cars that are good, but this track is such a drafting track that even if you fall back you might have four cars in front of you and can catch back up. There’s going to be a lot of cars tight together, a lot of side-by-side racing, and it’s going to come down to which teams can get more than one car working together to get to the front.”

ALARA Racing’s Lyonel Kent, of Knoxville, Tenn., turned a best time of 2:40.606 (90.736 mph) in the No. 13 ALARA Racing/Bulldog Productions MX-5, working with teammate Ara Malkhassian’s No. 11 Bulldog Productions machine. Malkhassian ended up fifth on the day after a time of 2:41.043 (90.490 mph).

Jeff Mosing, Piscitell’s Team MER teammate, topped the afternoon time sheets with a lap of 2:41.013 (90.507 mph), which placed him fourth on the day.

The SCCA Pro Racing Playboy Mazda MX-5 Cup qualifies on Saturday morning at 8:40 a.m. (CDT) in preparation for Sunday’s race. To follow each session’s notes and timing, please visit www.mx-5cup.com.

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