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ARCA Racing Series Season Opens at Daytona in 48th Annual Lucas Oil Slick Mist 200 on February 12

(TOLEDO, Ohio) - Following a season which featured one of the closest championship margins and most prominent Daytona International Speedway races in ARCA Racing Series presented by Menards history, the bar is high for the Lucas Oil Slick Mist 200 on Saturday, February 12.

Given a field of drivers hungry for their first win on the 2.5-mile superspeedway oval and the historic track's newly-paved surface, the 48th appearance for the ARCA Racing Series at Daytona should live up to the billing.

As has been the case every year since 1964 – three years prior to Super Bowl I – the ARCA Racing Series will provide fans at Daytona International Speedway and throughout the racing world the year's first stock car race on the storied track. That distinction takes on added meaning this season, as the Lucas Oil Slick Mist 200 will be the first race for stock cars on the full oval's fresh pavement - a job which used 50,000 tons of asphalt and began last July.

Fifty-eight drivers took to the track earlier this month in a three-day testing period for the Lucas Oil Slick Mist 200. Benny Gordon (No. 09 VSI Ford) finished with the test week's top speed, driving a lap of 48.414 seconds (185.897 mph) in a car owned by Grant Enfinger.

Tim George Jr., the returning full-time driver of the No. 31 Richard Childress Racing Development Chevrolet, came away impressed after the first morning on the new surface.

"It's really smooth. It's astonishing how much grip there is, so we'll have to see. Hopefully, that won't cause tire issues. The Hoosier tire is a good tire and should keep holding strong. As far as the pavement, there's a little bump down in (Turns) 3 and 4. Everything else feels really, really smooth," George said.

George, who finished ninth in the ARCA Racing Series standings last season, will enter the Lucas Oil Slick Mist 200 with some race experience on the track. The 30-year-old New Yorker is entered in the Grand Touring (GT) class for this weekend's Grand-Am Road Racing Rolex 24 at Daytona, and will drive as part of a four-man team in the No. 66 Porsche GT3 for TRG Motorsports. George's experience, not to mention the addition of rookie Ty Dillon to the Richard Childress Racing team, figures to give RCR a slight advantage in February and throughout the season.

"It's good to have a teammate here, Ty Dillon; he'll be a good drafting partner. He's been racing cars way longer than I have. You know, he's much younger than I am. I'm going to lean on him for some stuff and he'll probably lean on me for some stuff on the road courses and maybe the superspeedways," George said. "There's a lot that he's done in his racing career that I'm looking forward to doing, including winning in the ARCA Racing Series. It'll be good to have support between him and I, and I'm looking forward to it."

Dillon will drive the No. 41 University of Northwestern Ohio/RCR Development Chevrolet, and will be looking for his third consecutive ARCA Racing Series win in just his fourth series start. Last season, at 18, Dillon started on the pole at Iowa Speedway in his first career start, and then won in back-to-back races at Kansas Speedway and Rockingham Speedway to close the year.

The 80-lap, 200-mile Lucas Oil Slick Mist 200 airs live on SPEED at 4:30 p.m. Eastern on February 12, with live timing and scoring presented by ARCA Nation at ARCARacing.com. Bobby Gerhart (No. 5 Lucas Oil Chevrolet) is the defending and all-time leading winner at the

track, with wins in 1999, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2010. Gerhart also won four consecutive poles between 2003 and 2006.

No other entered driver has won at Daytona International Speedway, but several have come close. Mark Thompson (No. 66 Phoenix Air Toyota) finished second last season and has finished in the top 10 on two other occasions in nine career starts at the track since 1991. Frank Kimmel (No. 44 Ansell/Menards Ford) has made 19 starts at the track since 1992 without a win, but has finished in the top three four times and in the top 10 on 11 occasions.

James Buescher started last season's race from the pole and led the first 29 laps, but Gerhart took control over the final 51 laps to win for the sixth time. John Wes Townley finished third and Buescher fourth, and eventual series champion Patrick Sheltra completed the top five. Danica Patrick, making her stock car debut, finished sixth.

The race is the first of 19 this year, and activity begins with a four-hour practice at 1 p.m. Eastern on Thursday, February 10. Menards Pole Qualifying presented by Ansell begins at 2 p.m. on Friday, February 11, and the series will host a final, 45-minute practice at 10 a.m. on Saturday. Live timing and scoring of all events will be presented by ARCA Nation at ARCARacing.com.

The ARCA Racing Series presented by Menards has crowned an ARCA national champion each year since its inaugural season in 1953, and has toured over 200 race tracks in 28 states since its inception. The series tests the abilities of drivers and race teams over the most diverse schedule of stock car racing events in the world, annually visiting tracks ranging from 0.4 mile to 2.66 miles in length, on both paved and dirt surfaces as well as a left- and right-turn road course.

Founded by John Marcum in 1953 in Toledo, Ohio, the Automobile Racing Club of America (ARCA) is recognized among the leading sanctioning bodies in the country. Closing in on completing its sixth decade after hundreds of thousands of miles of racing, ARCA administers over 100 race events each season in two professional touring series and local weekly events.

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