



## 4 Aspiring Drivers Battle In 1-Day Shootout For \$100,000 Scholarship

Making a career as a racecar driver is a pipe-dream for most, there is no shortage of cliches like; how do you make a million dollars racing, start with a billion dollars... But for the ambitious, skilled, and business savvy there are opportunities up for grabs. According to Dean Case, of Mazda, it takes a lot more than skill, a helmet and ego to be a successful racecar driver. Recently at Buttonwillow Raceway Park we saw just that, as four up-and-coming drivers tested their mettle for a chance at a scholarship to go racing.

The four drivers, some of which aren't old enough to hold a driver's license, were selected from a pool of eager applicants like any other job screening. Ranging from age 14 to 20 years old, these drivers have grown up in motorsports; karting, dirt tracks, formula cars and the like. The scholarship they all pursue is a result of a joint effort between VMB Driver Development, World Speed Motorsports, and Mazda Motorsports.

### The Program

"This is a shootout that World Speed Motorsports and VMB Driver Development put on together to select a young up-and-coming driver for the 2017 season in Formula Car Challenge. Formula Car Challenge is a west coast series for Mazda-powered formula cars with Goodyear tires. We run at Sonoma Raceway, Thunderhill Raceway Park, Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca, Auto Club Speedway and Portland International Raceway," prefaced Telo Stewart, president of World Speed.

"It's a series which is the right step for two demographics of drivers; young up-and-comers looking to make this a career who are just out of go-karts or school racing, before they take the higher road to Mazda Road To Indy or Mazda Road To 24. We have drivers who pursue both of those tracks from our series."

The criteria by which the candidates were judged is not as simple as who can put down the fastest lap time, as Dean Case alluded to. The communications side of racing is as important as anything when it comes to developing a successful business plan.

A panel interview session allowed us to learn a little more about the applicants and test their communication skills. "We're looking for drivers who are very well-rounded, and that's what we aim to instill in them throughout the program. The driver development piece is not just on-track, it's about helping them develop themselves off-track. We're working on partnership, business plans, sponsorship, things like that. At the end of the day, if they don't have a partner at some point their career stalls," Stewart emphasized.

Of course driving coaches are involved, race engineers present data and offer technical insight and the drivers are expected to be active in that exchange of information, but that's not all. VMB Driver Development runs the candidates through a gauntlet of panel interviews, practice sessions and critiques when it comes to presenting well off-track.

Competitors were asked general questions like 'where did you get your start racing?' and 'what makes you unique from your contemporaries?' The four were also asked to describe how they would market themselves and help promote their supporters.

"We encourage them to go sign up for a public speech class, and to prepare a presentation on their racing background and what return on investment is for a sponsor, and what the perks are. They present that to us as if we're the customer. We have them go out and get a charity sponsor, which doesn't cost the charity any money, it just feeds some exposure to them. Finally we ask them to go get a true sponsor, of any size, \$500 or \$1,000. We mentor them during race weekends – how they interact with fans, we do autograph sessions," explained Steve Brisentine of VMB Driver Development.

### Meet The Drivers

Our four competitors are Colin Mullan (14), Courtney Crone (15), Jacob Loomis (16), and Ian Anderson (20). All of these applicants were hungry for the scholarship and are keen to show they are the most deserving of the bunch. All the drivers started racing at a similar age between 4 and 6 years old, and all in karts where they could get a thorough grasp on fundamentals.

"We want their background, their story why they got into racing. We also want them to think about the most important aspect of racing – sponsorship, marketing. How many really good drivers are there that don't have a seat because they don't have the funding?" Brisentine reinforced.

#### COLIN MULLAN

"I'm Colin, I'm 14 years old and currently a freshman in high school. I started in Quarter-Midgets when I was five years old, I did that till I was eight years old and won multiple championships and held multiple track records. I moved up to half-scale NASCARs called Mini-Cups and did that for three years, winning multiple races. I really wanted to pursue a road course career, so I switched over to karting four years ago. Outside of racing I take pride in my work, I'm a 4.0 student, am on the mountain biking team, engineering club, and have a fundraiser called Team Fox for Parkinson's Disease. I really like the Road To 24, I really like sports car racing, but I'd be happy to race anything. Road To Indy would be tough – you need to have extra money on top of the scholarship funds. I'm just happy to be racing!"

#### COURTNEY CRONE

"I started out in go-karts and Quarter Midgets when I was four years old, we moved up from there. We raced Ford Focus Midgets when I was 12 years old, to full Midgets, and Sprint Cars this year. Today was my first time driving a car quite like this, the only other road racing car I drive is a Formula Mazda. We had our first session out there, it was alright, we made a few adjustments. It was a lot of fun, there are a lot of things to learn – I've never shifted a sequential gearbox, the car is pretty different from what I'm used to driving. Our big goal is Indy Cars. The Mazda Road To Indy is a great way to get there, we're keeping it on the open-wheel route."

#### JACOB LOOMIS

"My name is Jacob Loomis, I'm 16 years old, I started racing when I was four years old in karting. I progressed up the ladder in karting through shifter karts, this last year I moved up to Formula Mazda. I'm here to learn and keep progressing in my career."

Of the group, Loomis had the most Formula car experience and it showed on track. He started the day with only the fine points to work on, evidenced by clean telemetry. In response to the experience of driving a Formula Speed 2000 car for the first time, Loomis said;

"It's a great car, I came from running Formula Mazdas and had the opportunity to test a Pro Mazda. This car is the perfect amount of everything, it's not too physical, perfect balance, downforce, speed, the gearbox is fantastic, brakes are awesome."

#### IAN ANDERSON

"My name is Ian, I'm 20 years old so I'm the old man of the group. I'm a sophomore in college studying pre-engineering now, hoping to go to UNLV. I started out when I was six years old in go-karts and stayed until I was 10 years old when I went to something called a Bandolero, then a Legends car, and then Thunder Roadster. I bought my own Legends car two years ago and I've been racing part time ever since, now I'm going to school and I pay for my own racing. I work as an instructor at a couple of racing schools in Las Vegas. I'm always looking to learn anything I can. Everybody knows something more than you, so it's a dumb idea to go in thinking you're not going to learn anything."

### Inside A FormulaSPEED Car

The platform that each of these drivers would be piloting was a Formula Speed 2000 (FS2000) car. These advanced open-wheel, formula cars are a spec class so everyone is on the same mechanical footing. Mazda plays a big role in grassroots level racing. The 2.0-liter four cylinder MZR engine that powers an FS2000, and the business coaching they provide are testament to that dedication.

"Our niche is grassroots and all the feeder series or ladder series, we've known the guys at World Speed for many years and they've developed this niche on the west coast. Road racing has become much more of an east coast biased presence, and one of the biggest factors that comes into play is travel budgets," said Dean Case of Mazda.

"Developing young drivers means developing all aspects, not just being fast ... can you give technical feedback, can you improve the car, can you help solve a business problem with your partners?"

Some of the drivers on track at Buttonwillow during this competition had never had to shift gears in a racecar. Coming to grips with a 6-speed sequential gearbox, high downforce, and the changing techniques that accompany those features was a theme for the day.

"It's a tube-frame chromoly chassis, all TIG-welded, features a Mazda 2.0-liter MZR engine that is bone-stock internally; we just put an intake, exhaust and dry sump on it, all making about 200 horsepower. The cars weight about 1,200 pounds. It's a 6-speed sequential gearbox with no-lift shift, and they make a decent amount of downforce," Stewart explained

These Formula cars are advanced. Inboard Ohlins coilovers, a Hewland sequential 6-speed, and Goodyear slicks make for a fast ride.

One of the surprising benefits to these Formula cars is the diminished running costs. Unlike a high strung engine that needs frequent and expensive service, the FS2000 platform is largely low-maintenance.

"That was part of our design criteria for the car, we literally went to Mazda and asked; 'what engine should we use for this application?' In a lot of the cars we are running, you're looking at \$10,000+ rebuilds every 2,000 to 3,000 miles. So far we have yet to have to replace one of these MZR engines, I've got one at 13,000 miles right now," Stewart concluded.

### What If I'm Not A Teenager Starting A Career But I Want To Learn More About The Business Side Of Racing?

This opportunity is all well and good if you are a teenager setting out to start a career in motorsports, but most of us were not groomed from birth to be racecar drivers. Because the vast majority of racers out there are hobbyists, scraping by to have fun and go fast on the weekends. VMB and World Speed have developed programs that go beyond the scholarship to serve the rest of us.

Between runs the drivers were given feedback. "For a couple of them it's the first time they've seen a data trace. We're fortunate this year that all four of the drivers seem to take the feedback really quickly and are able to apply it," said Eric Purcell (pictured).

"We've started doing driver development camps, it's a continuation of this program and everything we've done for the last 20 years. Most of the ones we've done so far have been middle-aged guys or guys who've done nothing but maybe some track days," Stewart told us.

These camps take the weekend warrior and get them a racing license in NASA or well on the way for SCCA. This sort of accreditation is much like that found at a school like Skip Barber, but goes further and is more personalized.

"The big thing is these camps are one-on-one or one-on-two. It's geared towards the driver and what their goals are. You have an idea going in, but once you get to the track you figure out exactly where somebody is and we adjust the program," he continued. Generally, World Speed rents out Thunderhill Raceway and tailors a program around the needs of the driver working on and off track. For more information on the various packages they offer check out the World Speed website.

#### And The Winner Is...

After the cars and track cooled off in hazy Central California, the drivers could exhale and socialize a little. The scores were tallied and officials exchanged comments. Leaving that evening, there's no doubt each driver had hopes and uncertainties of how their performance fared.

After a few days of thorough deliberation the folks at VMB and World Speed came to a conclusion. The recipient of the scholarship to race the 2017 season of Formula Car Challenge would be 15 year old Courtney Crone. The ambitious young woman displayed the experience, business acumen and forward looking attitude to deserve the honor. As a result of this win Courtney will receive about \$50,000 and the other \$50K going to her teammate; VMB Development Driver Carter Williams.

We reached back out to Steve Brisentine for comment on the decision and he reported; "When World Speed, myself and the judges get together there's a lot of criteria to go after. In terms of performance on the track, they were all pretty equal, but from a business perspective that's not everything – it's marketing yourself and the ability to attract sponsors. We split the track stuff and off-track stuff 50/50. In four years we've never selected the best driver (absolute fastest) at the shootout."

"Courtney already had sponsors lined up, she speaks very well, she is great in front of the camera, we're looking for the best well-rounded driver and person and she won out in that respect."

Of course there are a slew of small cues and intangibles that the judges gather throughout the day. Poise and perceptions go a long way toward a positive ruling, down to the simplest thing like a firm handshake.

"In the whole shootout deal there's a lot to learn, about the team, different cars, meeting new competitors and people. I have a lot of racing experience in a lot of different kinds of cars and that will help me for sure," Crone stated.

#### The Future

With the scholarship squared away, Courtney Crone has a season of Formula Car Challenge ahead of her. Between now and her first race on March 18 and 19, 2017, at Sonoma Raceway, she will continue to receive coaching and mentoring on and off-track.

"Part of the scholarship is one paid for test day, and in the meantime we'll meet with her and talk about the other aspects; doing a presentation, how she got her primary sponsor and more," Brisentine foreshadowed.

Spending the day around this shootout was an eye-opening experience, talking to the drivers it was clear that they all had an eagerness to learn and grow in their career trajectory. This scholarship program is not widely known, but no secret. Anyone who meets the criteria can apply, so check out the application page and maybe we'll see you next year. All you up-and-comers, or established drivers, look out for Courtney Crone in your mirrors, all the way to Indy.

**More Information:** [www.WorldSpeed.com](http://www.WorldSpeed.com)

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By Trevor Anderson



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