



**Toppe Takes Lites 1 Title by One Point in Road Atlanta Thriller**  
*JDC Teammate Versteeg Falls Just Short despite Ninth Win of Season*

**BRASELTON, Ga. (Sept. 30, 2016)** – Clark Toppe and Austin Versteeg never were separated by more than fractions of a second all season, so it's fitting the Mazda Prototype Lites Presented by Cooper Tires championship was decided between them by the thinnest margin.

Toppe, 19, from The Woodlands, Texas, won the Lites 1 title by one point, 238-237, after a second-place finish Friday in Round 16 at Road Atlanta in the No. 10 JDC Motorsports entry.

Versteeg, 17, from Sandy, Utah, earned his ninth victory of the season in the No. 7 JDC Motorsports car, beating Toppe to the finish by 10.336 seconds in the 45-minute race. But it wasn't enough to overcome his fellow teenage teammate in the standings.

"That was the longest 45 minutes of my life," Toppe said. "I can't thank my parents and JDC Motorsports, Puzzle Partner, all the support they gave me this year. I'm just feeling overjoyed right now.

"Austin deserves this just as much as I do, and I'm really happy for JDC to get the overall championship, Masters and the L1 team championship. Awesome day."

Max Hanratty, from Milwaukee, finished third in the race in the No. 30 Extreme Speed Motorsports Élan DP02 chassis powered by a Mazda engine and racing on Cooper Tires. It was the sixth podium finish of Hanratty's first full season in the International Motor Sports Association (IMSA)-sanctioned Challenge Series.

Series rookie James Dayson, from Vancouver, British Columbia, tied his best finish of the season by placing fourth in the No. 12 Extreme Speed Motorsports entry.

Stuart Rettie, from Houston, rounded out the top five overall and earned his first career Lites 1 Masters victory in the No. 21 Lion Rampant Motorsports car.

Versteeg started from the pole and never trailed, repeating his dominant victory Thursday in Round 13 that cut the title gap to Toppe to just three points. But with two points between each of the first six positions in the finishing order, Versteeg needed help from a rival driver during the race to slip between himself and Toppe, who started second.



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That help almost came on a restart with nine minutes remaining. Versteeg powered away from the field when the green flag flew, but Michael Whelden passed Toppe as they roared past the flagstand. That move gave Versteeg a one-point lead on track in the title race.

But that edge was short-lived. Whelden, from Sausalito, California, dropped inside in the No. 29 Extreme Speed Motorsports entry to pass lapped cars just before Turn 1 after the restart and drove on the grass. Toppe quickly regained second place in Turn 1 and kept it, preserving his championship by a single point.

“I was trying to be as cautious as I could, kind of sleeping on the start,” Toppe said. “Michael got by me but then got in an accident on the front straight.

“So, yeah, it was pretty sketchy there for a couple of seconds. I was like, ‘Oh, crap!’ But we got it done. That’s all that matters.”

Versteeg put on a driving clinic over the last nine minutes after the restart, gaining nearly a second per lap on Toppe to preserve his series-leading ninth victory of the season.

But consistency paved the title path for Toppe, who finished first or second in 12 of the 14 races this season. Unlucky mechanical maladies kept Versteeg off the podium in three races, and the end result was the closest Lites 1 championship duel since Sean Rayhall edged Ryan Booth by five points in 2013.

“I did what I could,” Versteeg said. “I’m happy with the year. There’s nothing I can complain about. The guys gave me a great car all year, and unfortunately just three problems in three races that no one could prevent. It’s just a little bit of bad luck.

“Every other race we were in, we had outright pace. I did what I came here to do this year, which was to get my first pole, to get my first race win, to get my first sweep of a weekend.

“The bigger picture is developing me as a driver overall. Of course, you want to win the championship. But I’m just happy it was a 1-2 for JDC and that we could wrap up the Team Championship, as well.”

Minnesota-based JDC Motorsports finished the season with its 13<sup>th</sup> Lites 1 victory in 14 races. The team clinched its third consecutive Lites 1 Team Championship on Thursday and has won 31 of the last 32 Prototype Lites races dating back to August 2014.



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## Lites 1 Masters

Rettie is an admitted devotee of racing in the rain, and he earned his previous series-best finish of second last year at Road Atlanta during monsoon-like rains.

But he broke through today with his first career victory in the series under bright sunshine and air temperatures around 60 degrees.

“It’s a perfect ending because it’s just my second season in Lites, and to get a win in the last race is really cool,” Rettie said. “I got second here last year in the rain. I love the rain, so I was a bit nervous about this year. But the team came through. The car was absolutely perfect today.”

Gerhard Watzinger, from Naples, Florida, finished second in the No. 32 ONE Motorsports entry. It was his seventh podium finish of the season, which helped him earn the second position in final Lites 1 Masters standings.

Joel Janco, from Key Largo, Florida, completed a memorable event with a third-place finish in the No. 25 JDC Motorsports entry. Fourth-year series driver Janco clinched his first Lites 1 Masters championship Thursday.

Rettie wasted no time driving to the lead despite starting fifth in the class. He climbed to first after just four minutes and built a 3.049-second lead over Watzinger just before the only full-course caution of the race.

On the restart, Rettie briefly climbed to third overall before dropping two spots over the closing laps. It was a strong recovery from Round 13 on Thursday, when Rettie finished fifth in class after contact with another car.

“Thanks to the crew,” Rettie said. “I know they worked really hard last night because I got hit in the first race, and there was a little damage to take care of. They did a great job. The car was great.”

For more information about Mazda Prototype Lites Presented by Cooper Tires, visit [www.imsa.com](http://www.imsa.com), follow hashtags #MazdaLites and #MRT24 @IMSA on Twitter or IMSA on Facebook.

## POST-RACE QUOTES



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**AUSTIN VERSTEEG (No. 7 JDC Motorsports, winner):** “I did what I could. I’m happy with the year. There’s nothing I can complain about. The guys gave me a great car all year, and unfortunately just three problems in three races that no one could prevent. It’s just a little bit of bad luck. Every other race we were in, we had outright pace. I did what I came here to do this year, which was to get my first pole, to get my first race win, to get my first sweep of a weekend. The bigger picture is developing me as a driver overall. Of course, you want to win the championship. But I’m just happy it was a 1-2 for JDC and that we could wrap up the Team Championship, as well. I want to give a shout to our L1 Masters driver Joel Janco for clinching the championship yesterday. He did an amazing job this year. Consistent, did what he needed to do, and it ended up paying off for him. I want to thank all of my sponsors: Muscle Egg, Papa Pita Bread, Wheel Woolies, dEp Patch, my driver coach Jonatan Jorge from JJRD. He’s the only reason why I’m doing what I’m doing right here. I want to thank everybody who has helped me in my karting career all the way from when I was 6 years old up to the World Finals. There are so many people to thank. I’m really happy with the year. Now it’s time to move on and figure out what we’re going to do next year.”

**CLARK TOPPE (No. 10 JDC Motorsports, second; 2016 Lites 1 champion):** “That was the longest 45 minutes of my life. I can’t thank my parents and JDC Motorsports, Puzzle Partner, all the support they gave me this year. I’m just feeling overjoyed right now. Austin (Versteeg) deserves this just as much as I do, and I’m really happy for JDC to get the overall championship, Masters and the L1 team championship. Awesome day.” (About dropping places on restart): “I was trying to be as cautious as I could, kind of sleeping on the start. Michael (Whelden) got by me but then got in an accident on the front straight. So, yeah, it was pretty sketchy there for a couple of seconds. I was like, ‘Oh, crap!’ But we got it done. That’s all that matters.” (What’s going through your head during the last few laps as you’re in position to win the title?): “Every second I’m just trying to execute, trying to keep my focus. The last lap was hard, just trying to keep the focus. It’s not over until you see the checkered flag. It was a long 10 minutes after that caution.”

**MAX HANRATTY (No. 30 Extreme Speed Motorsports, third):** “All weekend we’ve been aggressive with setup. We were trying some things out and got a little bit behind. But I really feel we found our setup going into Race 1. Unfortunately, I had an incident. We tweaked a few things going into Race 2. It took the car a good amount of laps to get up to pace, get some pressure in the tires. Once we did, we had some really, really good pace mid-race. We were chasing down P3, P2. It went really well. We got gifted that podium, for sure, but I’ll take it. It’s a great way to end the season. The ESM guys have been incredible all year, and hats off to them for their hard work and keeping their heads up all year.” (About avoiding chaos on restart): “I bent something on my car, the



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toe out, with about 10 laps to go. So I dropped off about two seconds in pace and was just trying to hang on. I was trying to stay out of trouble, get around them, put them between me and Michael. Michael definitely had the pace on me at the end of the race. One more lap, and I think he would have had us. So we were lucky to hold him off.”

**STUART RETTIE (No. 21 Lion Rampant Motorsports, winner, Lites 1 Masters):** “It’s a perfect ending because it’s just my second season in Lites, and to get a win in the last race is really cool. I got second here last year in the rain. I love the rain, so I was a bit nervous about this year. But the team came through. The car was absolutely perfect today. So it was really enjoyable. Thanks to the crew. I know they worked really hard last night because I got hit in the first race, and there was a little damage to take care of. They did a great job. The car was great.”

### **Mazda Prototype Lites Presented by Cooper Tires**

Mazda Prototype Lites Presented by Cooper Tires, an International Motor Sports Association (IMSA) Challenge Series, is in its 11<sup>th</sup> season in 2016. The series provides thrilling action and grooms drivers for future WeatherTech SportsCar Championship competition in the Prototype and Prototype Challenge classes.

The two classes of competition in the Mazda Prototype Lites Presented by Cooper Tires series take drivers and teams down unique, exciting roads of prototype sports car racing. Nimble, high-tech, purpose-built Lites 1 machines pack in the power with a 230-horsepower, 2-liter Mazda engine designed to prepare aspiring professionals for prototype competition in the WeatherTech SportsCar Championship and offer a challenging environment for mature semi-professional drivers, including competition in a Masters Championship. Equally capable and cost-effective Lites 2 machines offer new competitors a perfect introduction to the world-class competition offered by IMSA.

For more information about Mazda Prototype Lites Presented by Cooper Tires, visit [www.imsa.com](http://www.imsa.com), follow hashtag #MazdaLites @IMSA on Twitter or IMSA on Facebook.

### **About IMSA**

The International Motor Sports Association, LLC (IMSA) was originally founded in 1969 and owns a long and rich history in sports car racing. Today, IMSA is the sanctioning body of the IMSA WeatherTech SportsCar Championship, the premier sports car racing series in North America. IMSA also sanctions the Continental Tire SportsCar Challenge and the Mazda Prototype Lites Presented by Cooper Tires, as well as four single-make series: Porsche GT3 Cup Challenge USA by Yokohama; Ultra 94 Porsche GT3 Cup



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