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RACING

Rising to the Challenge

College student Bradley Riethmeyer bested a nationwide field of racing hopefuls to win the All-American Driver Challenge – and a ride in the 2006 Carolina/Virginia USAC Ford Focus Midget Series.

» Like many talented drivers in grass-roots racing series across the country, Bradley Riethmeyer, of Hutto, Texas, faced a financial burden. Despite compiling an impressive résumé that included the 2003 ROMCO SLM Rookie-of-the-Year title and the 2004

Super Late Model Series championship, Riethmeyer and his family were unable to continue funding his Late Model career.

Fortunately, Riethmeyer found an alternative. The Texas A&M University senior entered the All-American Driver Challenge, which rewarded the winner with a fully-paid contract

to drive in the 2006 Carolina/Virginia USAC Ford Focus Midget Series. And while Riethmeyer faced plenty of competition, he rose to the top, earning a congratulatory phone call from AADC promoter Tracy Trotter.

“When I got the call, it really took me off guard,” said

After surviving the rigorous All-American Driver Challenge, **Bradley Riethmeyer** was the last challenger standing. Well, kneeling.





The judges were impressed with Riethmeyer's ability to articulate how the car felt on the race track.

Riethmeyer. "This is so overwhelming and exciting. It was such a tough competition."

Open qualifying was held at go-karting facilities around the country between July 1 and Dec. 15, 2005. Challengers ages 15-26 submitted their top-100 laps, with the top-10 challengers from each of the 10 participating regions advancing to the semi-final round Feb. 4-5 at Andretti Indoor Karting & Games in Atlanta, where they competed on oval and road courses. The 10 best drivers in Atlanta then advanced to the finals March 3-4 at North Carolina's Hickory Motor Speedway, where they tested behind the wheel of the AADC Focus Midget before a panel of judges.

Picking a winner was tough. "I was so surprised at the level of talent in the whole competition," said Trotter. "All 10 drivers showed that they have the ability to win races. I can't believe how tough of a decision it was for the other judges and myself." In addition to Trotter, AADC judges included: Bob East, founder of Beast Midget Chassis; Bones Bourcier, motorsports journalist and former ITO editor; Rick Benjamin, Speed Channel

commentator; Gary Huffman, national championship-winning crew chief; and Robbie Ray, 2005 USAC Ford Focus Midget National Champion and last year's driver of the AADC midget.

In the end, Riethmeyer's talent shined through in both his on-track performance and his ability to communicate to the crew chief what he was feeling, even though he had never been behind the wheel of a midget before. "After my first run, I didn't know what I needed to do to make myself stand out because everyone was so close," Riethmeyer said. "I just listened to Bob East and his input and gave them some feedback about the car. On my second run, the car was just right and I knew I had to go for it."

East was duly impressed. "Bradley showed an extraordinary amount of talent for never stepping foot in an open wheel car before," said East. "He is going to be a very tough competitor. I was really impressed how he dug down deep and really performed when it counted, and in how race-track savvy he was. He wanted to win this bad."

For his part, AADC executive

director Brian Moates simply enjoyed the show. "It was the experience of a lifetime to watch these kids compete in Atlanta and at Hickory," Moates said. "I have memories that I will carry with me for a very long time. It was such a pleasure to work with these kids and their families through this competition. I have no doubt that a number of them will have a career in motorsports."

Riethmeyer is well on his way. In addition to a driving contract, he received a three-day racing school at the American Racing Academy in Las Vegas, and Simpson Performance Products will provide him with a complete driver uniform including embroidered racing suit, helmet, gloves and shoes. In addition, racing seat manufacturer The Joie of Seating will provide him with a custom-fitted seat, and Under X will supply two complete sets of its Carbon X fire-retardant underwear.

"This was such an awesome experience," said Riethmeyer. "I just want to thank everyone at The All-American Driver Challenge for the opportunity."

East encourages other young racers to pursue the opportunity in the future. "This program should really grow," he said. "Every kid in America who has aspirations of being a race car driver should enter this challenge."

