

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**MEARS CONCLUDES RACY SONOMA WEEKEND WITH TOP 15 FINISH**

Sonoma, CA (June 24, 2012) – Experiencing a contrast in landscape, Casey Mears and the GEICO team left the Irish Hills of Michigan with a Top 20 finish and then headed to the beautiful vineyards of the Sonoma Valley. Awaiting them was the first road course race of the 2012 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series season.

Mears took to the scenic Sonoma road course on Friday for practice. After being 26th in the opening session, the #13 GEICO Ford Fusion jumped to 21st in the second practice and turned in the third best 'ten consecutive lap average'.

Mears' qualifying effort also showed promise, as the California native wheeled around the 1.99-mile circuit in 76.220 seconds, which was good enough for a Top 20 starting spot.

The green flag waved on Sunday afternoon amid cool temperatures, bright sunshine and a packed house. Starting 20th, Mears initially gave up positions and fell as low as 24th before charging back to the front of the field. He had worked the #13 GEICO Fusion into the Top 15 by lap 30 and then into the Top 10 on lap 33 before traveling down pit road for a scheduled green flag pit stop. The Germain Racing pit crew quickly outfitted their driver with four fresh Goodyear racing tires and a full tank of Sunoco racing fuel before returning him to the racing surface poised to do battle.

With the exception of a brief moment late in the race, Mears would not depart the Top 20 for the remainder of the afternoon.

The event's first yellow flag of the day would not manifest itself until lap 82, and crew chief Bootie Barker would order Mears to stay out on the racetrack rather than bring the GEICO machine down pit road for service. Barker radioed to Mears, "Stay out. We're good on fuel." The strategy placed Mears seventh on the board when the race went back to green with just 24 laps to go.

Unfortunately, he fell victim to cars with fresher tires and would quickly find himself freefalling through the field, bottoming out in 22nd place.

It didn't take him long to rebound, as he promptly returned to the Top 20.

It was high drama in Wine Country when Kyle Busch and Paul Menard engaged in a bit of synchronized spinning, bringing out the second caution of the day with just four laps left in the advertised distance. A green-white-checkered finish would ultimately settle an afternoon of hard racing.

Mears and the #13 GEICO Fusion restarted 19th when the green flag turned the field loose for the final laps of the day. As the race came to a close, Dale Earnhardt, Jr. got into the rear of the GEICO machine, causing Mears to make a masterful save as he flew through the dirt.

Although the contact also caused a tire rub that sent smoke from the rear of his car, Mears never lifted off of the gas and collected four positions on the final lap, recording a 15th place finish and accounting for the team's best result of the 2012 season.

"I'm proud of everyone on this GEICO team," Mears said after climbing from his #13 GEICO Ford Fusion. "We were fast all weekend and the pit crew did a great job today of getting me on and off of pit road quickly. We had a couple of tough weeks there with Dover and Pocono, so I think the last two races showed our perseverance and that despite the setbacks, we can turn around and get a Top 20 at Michigan and now a Top 15 here in Sonoma.

We qualified 24th last week and 20th this week.

We're improving and starting to show what we can do out there on the racetrack."

He continued, "It's great to have Valvoline NexGen back on the car next week in Kentucky and

I'm looking forward to giving them an exciting weekend.

Michigan went well when they were on the car, so hopefully Kentucky will follow suit.”

Next week, the colors of Valvoline NexGen return to the #13 Germain Racing NASCAR Sprint Cup Series entry as the team makes their way to Sparta, Kentucky, for race number 17 of the 2012 season.

Mears and the #13 Valvoline NextGen Ford Fusion will hit the track at Kentucky Speedway for the opening practice session on Friday, June 29th, at 11:30 AM (EDT). Qualifying will follow at 5:10 PM (EDT).

The Quaker State 400 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series race is on Saturday, June 30th, and it will be televised live on TNT beginning at 6:30 PM (EDT). The Performance Racing Network (PRN) will carry the live radio broadcast.

To learn more about the GEICO Racing program, please visit: [www.caseymearsracing.com](http://www.caseymearsracing.com)

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