



Hall narrows gap to leaders in final Abu Dhabi training

ABU DHABI – Matt Hall narrowed the time gap to less than a second to pacesetter Paul Bonhomme of Britain in the final training session of the Red Bull Air Race on Thursday ahead of Friday's Qualifying for the first world championship battle of the 2010 season in Abu Dhabi but only managed to climb up one notch to fifth place in the time sheets as the competition intensified.

The Australian was pleased about his error-free run through the 6-km long track just metres above the turquoise waters of the Arabian Gulf and slashing the gap to Bonhomme from 3.49 seconds on Wednesday to just 0.98 seconds on Thursday. The former RAAF fighter pilot sounded confident that he can get his new MXS-R plane to fly faster in Qualifying and Saturday's season opening race.

"It was a very clean run," said Hall, a 38-year-old from Merewether NSW who last year became the first rookie to win a podium. He also broke all records for newcomers, taking third place overall.

"That was my primary goal for this run – a no-penalty run," said Hall. "In training I'm happy to get penalties but now it's time to be a no-penalties sort of guy. And that was the objective. It's all about getting your lines right and then when it counts putting it together. That was the first time I did a proper race run with power and took the lines as hard as I could."

Hall's time was 1:13.35 seconds, 0.98 behind Bonhomme but just 0.32 behind Austria's Hannes Arch in fourth place.

The order of finish in the fourth and final training session determines the order for Qualifying, with the pilots starting in reverse order. Those starting towards the end have the advantage of seeing how the other pilots fly through the track and how they deal with the conditions. Hall likes to use the first three five-minute training sessions to experiment with his lines through the Air Gates before going into his race mode in the final session.

"Once again, it shows that smooth and no penalties gets good results," said Hall, who was briefly holding in third place in the session behind only Bonhomme and Arch before Nigel Lamb of Britain and Nicolas Ivanoff of France moved ahead of him with their flights later in the session.

"It would be nice to go a bit faster," said Hall. "I still think I can pick up a little bit more time in the vertical turning manoeuvre. But that's indicative about where I'm going to be. I'm now ranked fifth and I'm not going to be able to get much better than that at the moment. We'll see how it pans out."

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Hall said he was looking forward to using a more powerful engine, perhaps by the second race of the year in Perth on April 17-18.

“I’m getting good power out of this engine,” he said. “It’s just that I think the engine that I was planning on having for the racing is capable of putting out more power. The engine’s running well. It’s just that there’s a better engine out there to be had.”

Ends

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