



## Circuit Notes

by Peter Hubbard

### Red Bull back on top after second practice session in Austin

**AUSTIN, TX (Nov. 15, 2013)** – In what has become commonplace at Grand Prix race practice sessions in recent years, the No. 1 and No. 2 Red Bull cars of Sebastian Vettel and Mark Webber finished one-two in Friday afternoon's Formula 1™ practice session at Circuit of The Americas. Vettel was clocked rounding the 20-turn track in just 1:37.305, Webber at 1:37.420.

Close on their rear bumpers were the No. 9 and No. 10 Mercedes AMG Petronas F1 cars, piloted by Nico Rosberg and Lewis Hamilton, with times of 1:37.785 and 1:37.958, respectively. Their positioning is clearly no coincidence given the fact that Mercedes currently ranks second in the Constructors' Standings, with 334 points, just 11 points ahead of Ferrari and 37 ahead of Lotus, with two races left on the season.

Finishing fifth with a time of 1:38.073, in the No. 7 Lotus normally driven by Kimi Raikkonen, was replacement driver Heikki Kovalainen. The former Caterham test driver was tapped to finish out the season for his fellow Finn, and easily out-paced his previous Caterham team members Charles Pic and Giedo van der Garde, who finished 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> on the afternoon – in their usual places toward back of the pack – over three seconds slower than Kovalainen. He easily proved that the car you drive *does* make a difference.

Finishing sixth and seventh to nearly everyone's surprise were the No. 11 and No. 12 Saubers driven by Esteban Gutierrez, the young rookie from Mexico, and his German teammate Nico Hulkenberg. They clocked in with times of 1:38.229 and 1:38.254, respectively.

Things did not go as well for Scuderia Ferrari. Their two drivers, Fernando Alonso and Felipe Massa, finished in 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> place during the afternoon practice session, with times of 1:38.461 and 1:38.938. While both times are faster than the fastest track lap set by Vettel during the 2012 race (1:39.347), the two Ferrari drivers were beaten in a practice session by the two Sauber drivers whose cars are also powered by Ferrari engines.

Perhaps due in part to the hard tires most teams were using in the afternoon practice, coupled with cooler than normal Texas temperatures, the top 14 finishers on the afternoon posted quicker times than Vettel's fastest lap.

Finishing eighth in the No. 8 Lotus, just .001 second behind Hulkenberg, was Roman Grosjean, followed by the No. 5 McLaren of Jenson Button in the number nine spot. They posted times of 1:38.255 and 1:38.269.

Bringing up the rear, nearly nine and 10 seconds slower than the leaders, were Marussia's rookie drivers, Max Chilton and Jules Bianchi. Chilton posted a time of 1:46.226 before spinning out on the final corner late in the session. Teammate Jules Bianchi was even further back after taking his car back from Rodolfo Gonzalez. The Frenchman's best time was 1:47.009.



## NOTES:

- Red Bull's Sebastian Vettel, who was the fastest driver during the afternoon practice session, took the pole at last year's FORMULA 1 UNITED STATES GRAND PRIX and led 41 of the race's 56 laps. Lewis Hamilton, driving for Vodafone McLaren Mercedes last year, was second on the grid and led for the remaining 15 laps, including the most important one – the last lap.
- Lewis Hamilton is the only driver in this weekend's field to have won the F1 USGP, having won the trophy at Indianapolis in 2007 and at the inaugural race at Circuit of The Americas in Austin last year.
- While Heikki Kovalainen's fifth-place finish in the afternoon's practice may come as a surprise to some, he's clearly not all that rusty. Despite not having raced this year, he did drive all 20 races for Caterham in 2012, including the final race in Brazil last November, and has been an F1 driver since 2007, when he broke in with ING Renault F1 team. Sunday's race will be the 111 Grand Prix race of his career. He has one win and one pole to his credit, both of which he garnered in 2008 while driving for McLaren.
- Although he's the youngest of the five rookie drivers in the field for Sunday's F1 USGP, Sauber's Esteban Gutierrez is the only one to have scored points this year. He earned six points by finishing seventh at the Japanese Grand Prix on Oct. 13. Of all the F1 drivers this season, he also has the shortest commute from Texas to his home town of Monterey, Mexico.

## QUOTES:

**SEBASTIAN VETTEL, Red Bull Racing:** "The circuit was quite slippery today; I was happy with the car, but you always know you can improve here and there. I think we got through the program we were planning, and were able to test some things, some were good and some not so good. Ferrari looked quick this morning and McLaren could be a surprise here, and I'm certain that Lotus and Mercedes will be strong as normal. The track will continue to improve now, unless it rains. I thought the car worked well on the tires, so we'll see what we can do on Sunday."

**MARK WEBBER, Red Bull Racing:** "Today was all about tires again; getting information on them and working out how they work best. It was nice to drive the car on fresh tires and it was good to be out there on the circuit on what was a clear day in the end. We were working on both our long and short runs today. The car doesn't feel mega yet, there's still some work to do, but we'll work on that overnight."

**NICO ROSBERG, Mercedes:** "This afternoon we had a very good session. The car felt like it was on rails and I was very happy with the balance. I hope we can give the Red Bulls something to think about this weekend, and I will be pushing 100 percent for another podium. It's really difficult to get it right with the tires here as the track surface is very smooth and the compounds are very hard. Therefore the tires are lasting a long time and a lot of people will



try to manage only one stop on Sunday. So it will be an exciting weekend here in Texas for the fans and it was good to see so many people out there already today.”

**LEWIS HAMILTON, Mercedes:** “First of all, I want to say that it's great to be back here in America. This track is terrific and this city is such a beautiful place to come racing, especially with the support from all the fans we saw out there today. The circuit was quite green today, which made it pretty slippery out there as we are using the two hardest tire compounds Pirelli offers during this weekend’s race. After we changed the chassis yesterday, the car drove much better, particularly on the long straight, where it was pretty consistent, so that's a positive for me. The option tire is working well for a long stint, which may open up some possibilities for us with race strategy. It was a pretty straightforward day for our team. However, we still have some work to do to nail the set-up, because it's not quite there yet. But all of us in the team are focused on ending the season on a high and taking that foundation with us into the winter.”

**HEIKKI KOVALAINEN, Lotus:** "It's been a pretty smooth landing for me, joining Lotus F1 Team this week. We've had no major issues on the track today and we just need to keep chipping away to see how good we can get the car for tomorrow and Sunday. We lost a bit of track time in the morning, but the car’s balance was reasonably good straight away. I was able to settle in and work immediately on the chassis set-up and tire work. All the procedures and routines are quite similar up and down the pit lane that I was accustomed to at Caterham, plus I'm familiar with all the systems from driving with a Renault engine already this year, and previously, so it was a pretty straightforward day."

**ROMAIN GROSJEAN, Lotus:** "It was an interesting start to the day, waiting to see what the helicopter would do. After that the morning was about finding grip in the cold conditions. The afternoon was much warmer and we were able to complete some good work. We struggled a bit to get the brakes exactly as I want them on low fuel, but once that has been sorted we should be well placed for tomorrow. Certainly the car feels good on the long runs, so it's a positive start to the weekend."

**ESTEBAN GUTIERREZ, Sauber:** “It was a very productive day. Although the delay wasn’t ideal, I feel comfortable with the track and enjoy driving here. This is important. We are in a good shape, but now we need to focus on maintaining it for qualifying tomorrow and the race on Sunday. I think we have very good chances for a good result here. There are two more races to go and my goal is to get the maximum out of what we have.”

**NICO HULKENBERG, Sauber:** “It was quite a good day. This morning was a bit of a funny situation with the fog delaying FP1. Once the session started though, everything went well and we managed to get through the program we had planned. The car’s chassis was okay and the engine performance looked good too. However, I think there is still room for improvement, but I’m not happy with the balance we achieved on the medium tires. It will be tight tomorrow, but I think we can improve.”

**FERNANDO ALONSO, Ferrari:** “I had no problem being back on track today. My back felt fine and I was able to drive the same as always. Compared to last year, the track conditions seemed much better. For the first Grand



Prix held here the track surface was new, and had not been driven before. So there was a bit of oil on the track, making things slower. But this year there's a lot more grip. As expected, there was very little degradation today as Pirelli's choice of the medium and hard compounds here in Austin are an ultra-conservative choice. Generally, there were no major surprises and now we just have to see how things go tomorrow – and especially Sunday.”

**FELIPE MASSA, Ferrari:** “Today was a little hard for us to interpret, because in the morning we got off to such a good start and it seemed like the track was well-suited to the characteristics of our car. But then that changed in the afternoon and we were unable to set competitive times. Compared to recent races, the car has stayed the same and therefore we cannot expect a very different level of performance. But it's definitely important to understand why the car changed so much between the two sessions, especially when compared to last year. I have to say, the asphalt has improved a lot and the grip has increased considerably. I don't think the change in performance in the afternoon was necessary due to the rise in temperature, but maybe the wind didn't help. So we have a lot of work ahead of us to try and improve for the rest of the weekend.”

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