



Hall moves closer to podium with strong Qualifying in Abu Dhabi

ABU DHABI – Australia's Matt Hall took a strong fourth place on Friday in the Qualifying session for the first Red Bull Air Race of 2010 in Abu Dhabi on Saturday, flying two flawless runs despite stifling hot and humid conditions that put him in range of a spot on the podium.

The former RAAF fighter pilot had been only been sixth fastest in Wednesday's final training but moved up to fifth on Thursday before climbing another notch on the time sheets in Friday's tense Qualifying session, the most important run of the 2010 season so far when all 15 pilots were going all out to win the first championship point that was up for grabs after a long off-season of preparation.

With temperatures rising towards 34 degrees, Austria's Hannes Arch won the one point, posting a time of 1:12.78 for his run through the 5.657-km long track set up just above the turquoise waters in front of Abu Dhabi's impressive skyline. Two British rivals, Nigel Lamb and Paul Bonhomme, were second and third, respectively, while Hall was a competitive fourth. He was 2.22 seconds behind Arch but only a fraction of a second behind Bonhomme, the reigning champion.

"Overall, I think I can go a little faster than that," said Hall, from Merewether NSW. "It didn't go quite according to plan today but it was still pretty good. The first run wasn't quite as clean as I was hoping and on the second run I knew I had already qualified for the top 10 so I did some experimenting with the lines. I could have gone a little quicker but I got some more data. I've got a couple of good ideas for the race tomorrow."

Saturday's race in Abu Dhabi kicks off the eight-race 2010 season. The second race will be a homecoming for Hall in Perth on April 17/18.

Hall, who has been racing the clock to get his new MXS-R plane ready for the season, has been working hard with his team to squeeze more power out of the U.S.-built aircraft.

"I've been nursing the engine and the air frame until now and I've been targeting certain areas of the track to work on improving," said Hall, who was the most successful rookie in the five year history of the race in 2009 with third place overall. "Today was the first day we decided to draw full power out of the engine. We've been able to basically halve the gap to the leaders so I'm pleased about that."

After the Qualifying, Hall caught up with about 30 other fighter pilots he flew together with on combat missions in Iraq in 2003 in the 336th Fighter Squadron. The squadron, mostly American Air Force pilots, were doing training exercises in the United Arab Emirates and were eager to see Hall and the Red Bull Air Race.

"It was good to catch up with those guys and they loved the racing," said Hall, who retired from the RAAF in 2009 to join the race. "They were quite inspired. Quite a few of them came up to me and said 'How do you get into this?'"

Ends

For more information on Matt Hall Racing go to www.matthallracing.com or contact Team Coordinator David Lyall at david@matthallracing.com