



Hall searching for more power from new plane in Abu Dhabi training

ABU DHABI – Australia’s Matt Hall struggled in the first timed training sessions of the 2010 Red Bull Air Race season in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday but the former RAAF fighter pilot still managed to post the sixth fastest time ahead of the first race here on Saturday.

Hall, who last year became the most successful rookie in race history with third place overall, said he was confident he could fly the 6-km long track set up just above the turquoise waters of the Arabian Gulf a second or two faster than in the first sessions on Wednesday. Hall has a new MXS-R plane this year and been working hard to get the new high-performance aircraft in shape for the first of eight races this year. The second race is in Perth on April 17-18.

“I was happy with the flying in the track,” said Hall, a 38-year-old from Merewether NSW. “I was experimenting with some new lines. We’ve still got a bit more power to get out of the engine. I think I can go a second or two faster than what I’m doing now. We do have quite a few issues with the aircraft, with the power supply and the fuel system. We’re working pretty hard just to keep it in the air at the moment.”

Defending champion Paul Bonhomme of Britain posted the fastest time of the day, a 1:11.14, ahead of Nicolas Ivanoff of France and Hannes Arch of Austria. Hall was 3.49 seconds behind Bonhomme but, encouragingly, just 1:18 behind Arch in third spot. In the first training session in the morning Hall was seventh. The Qualifying is on Friday and the first race of 2010 is on Saturday.

Hall has had to surrender a natural weight advantage he held last year due to a new rule requiring all pilots who weight less than 82 kg to make up the difference with ballast. Hall, who was down to about 70 kg last year, is carrying a 10-kg dead weight under his seat. In a 12g turn that 10 kg briefly turns into 120 kg. Steve Jones, a former race pilot and now a race TV commentator, said the extra weight will probably amount to at most an extra 0.2 to 0.3 seconds on Hall’s racing times.

“It’s not that noticeable because last year my plane was about 10 kg overweight,” Hall said, referring to a 540 kg minimum weight for the propeller plane. “So as an overall package we’re at about the same weight. The plane feels similar overall. It is a little quicker.”

But Hall also saw in the first session in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday that many of his rivals have made considerable improvements over the winter and that getting on the podium this year, like he did in Porto, will be significantly harder.

“There are some pretty damn quick planes out there at the moment,” he said. “Some of the guys have done good work over the break. It’s going to be a lot of hard work for us.”

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