

Mexico City October 29, 2016

RED BULLS ROAR BACK INTO CONTENTION

Brake fires and balance issues: Friday saw the Red Bulls on the back foot, but they raced right back into contention in final free practice at the Autódromo Hermanos Rodríguez on Saturday. Here are the talking-points from the one-hour session:

The Max and Dan show

Red Bull duo Max Verstappen and Daniel Ricciardo both had a challenging day on Friday, one with fire damage to his rear brakes, the other with his car's balance, but they were the stars of FP3 as the young Dutchman topped the session with a best time of 1:19.137 – nearly two full seconds faster than Nico Rosberg's best time in 2015. As the whole field went onto Pirelli's new-to-Mexico Supersoft tyres for a qualifying 'dress rehearsal' late in the session, Verstappen was just 0.094 faster than Mercedes star Lewis Hamilton, while Ricciardo was third in the second Red Bull ahead of Rosberg himself.

Low-key morning for Mexican favourites

Sergio Pérez has some strapping on his neck to combat stiffness, and his Force India was not on top form either as the 26-year-old Mexican finished the session just outside the top ten and two places behind teammate Nico Hülkenberg. Meanwhile Esteban Gutiérrez, who complained of finding his Haas difficult to drive and lacking grip yesterday, was 15th-quickest with a best time of 1:1:21.338. Both Esteban and teammate Romain Grosjean struggled with their front tyres. 'The front tyres are nowhere,' said the Mexican, while the Frenchman was more emphatic: 'I cannot get the front tyres to work,' he said, 'it's a disaster and I don't know what to do.' Grosjean, who missed an hour with electrical issues yesterday, was 20th this morning.

Lewis loses out in traffic – but wins mind games

World champion Lewis Hamilton complained of two problems: one was that his steering-wheel 'felt a little left-hand down', but more significantly he couldn't find space in the late-session traffic to attack Verstappen's time. On a more positive note, the Briton had his request for an engine change overnight granted: he wanted to switch back to the one he used to win in Austin last weekend. Meanwhile Mercedes partner Nico Rosberg was still unsure about his practice starts – yesterday the clutch seemed under-engaged, today over-engaged – but may be more concerned about finishing fourth in the session as the Red Bulls found their wings. He was also almost four-tenths slower than Hamilton...

Felipe faster after Friday frustration

Heading towards his 250th and final Grand Prix in Abu Dhabi, Felipe Massa was brighter on Saturday than he was when he failed to work out his tyres yesterday. Once he bolted on the Supersofts, the Brazilian moved up to fourth at one stage before other drivers'

qualifying-style laps chimed in. In the end he was eighth, but teammate Valtteri Bottas showed strongly in fifth and the Williams pair seem to have the measure of Force India as they fight over fourth place in the constructors' standings.

Other points...

... Ferrari were fastest yesterday but Sebastian Vettel and Kimi Raikkonen were down in sixth and seventh this morning... Fernando Alonso, called 'an idiot' by Vettel yesterday, was warned that the German was close to him at one point in the session. 'Okay, no problem,' the Spaniard laughed, 'I enjoy a lot this!'

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