

Beat: Sports

2017 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix - Preview

Yas Marina Circuit

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USPA NEWS - A thrilling 2017 Formula One season concludes with Round 20 from the Yas Marina Circuit

Toto Talks Abu Dhabi

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Stat Attack: Abu Dhabi and Beyond

Toto Talks Abu Dhabi -

We head to Abu Dhabi for the final race of the 2017 season with the same hunger and fire in our stomach that we took to Melbourne over seven months ago. During that time, we have pushed ourselves to new limits, bounced back from painful defeats and conquered new and unexpected challenges. Spurred on by strong rivals, we had to dig deeper this year than ever before. And that battle made both titles the most satisfying yet. Our target was to become the first team to win championships across a major regulation change and we are proud to have achieved that.

But regardless of what stands in the trophy cabinets back at base, our focus is always on the next race and the next championship. Our goal in Abu Dhabi is quite simple: to give the best of ourselves, to extract the maximum from our “diva“₂ in her final race ““ and to win. We saw promising pace in both Mexico and Brazil, both circuits where we had expected to struggle more than we did, and this is a positive sign of the progress we have made in understanding our difficulties this year. But we have not been on the top step of the podium since Austin and we are determined to change that in Abu Dhabi.

Yas Marina is a circuit that holds intense memories for the team, with two title showdowns in the past three seasons. We have claimed three consecutive wins and very much intend to make it four this year. The circuit offers a range of slow to medium speed corners that perhaps are not our car’s most natural habitat, but our recent steps forward give us confidence that we can perform strongly there. Valtteri is on an upward swing of form, with two podiums in the past two races; and Lewis will be aiming to finish this historic season on a high. This is a goal that we all share.

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There’s perhaps no better visualisation of Formula One as a team sport than in a pit stop, as the crews swarm around their cars, a blur of motion, teamwork and absolute precision in a split second. And this year, the Silver Arrows crew have proven themselves the best in the business, winning the DHL Fastest Pit Stop Award for the very first time.

The award, introduced in 2015, recognises the outstanding teamwork and performance of the most consistent crew in F1 over the course of a season. It’s an accolade for the unsung heroes who make those critically important, race-deciding stops happen.

This couldn't have been achieved without a huge effort from the pit crew and a concerted push by the team to develop and improve its equipment and techniques over the last few years in the drive to have the most consistent stops in Formula One. What good is one stop at 2s, if the rest are at 3s? The perfect pit stop is not about chasing records - it's about consistency.

Much of the groundwork that sealed the award was laid over the winter months, as the race team returned to work after the Christmas break. Practice for the new season started almost immediately, with three programmes of 20 practice stops per week to get them back in the groove.

The crew work through 15 stops a day from Thursday to Saturday of each race weekend, followed by five or more final equipment checks on a Sunday morning. With one race still to go, the team have completed an astonishing 891 practice stops this year so far.

That includes 70 practice nose changes – two of which have occurred in race scenarios. It took the crew just 9.1s to swap Lewis' damaged nose and replace a punctured tyre in Mexico, as he set off after Vettel on his way to the title. Stacking cars – stopping both Lewis and Valtteri one after the other on the same lap – is another high-pressure moment, which has occurred five times this year for a total of 10 stops. Include a five-second penalty for Lewis in Bahrain and the headrest incident in Baku and that's a lot of stops.

The quality of the competition in recent years has forced every single team to raise its game. If every team can regularly target a low 2s stop, there is extra pressure to be quick. It also pushes teams to develop. With the margins shrinking year by year, there is an increased emphasis on consistent, clean stops.

This has been the mission of the Mercedes crew for 2017. The team clocked a scorching 2.35s stop for Lewis at Spa – but it was the Williams crew that saw the fastest pit stop recorded this year, as they pulled off a 2.02s time for Felipe Massa at Silverstone.

Measured across 49 stops in 19 Grands Prix, the Silver Arrows have recorded the fastest pit lane time of the race an impressive nine times this year and the best stationary stop six times. But, most impressive of all, the team has achieved the best average time for both cars through the pits on 12 occasions over the course of the season. The team has ranked in the top three average times on 17 occasions, missing out just twice all year – specifically in China and Bahrain, which were both the result of equipment failure. In simple terms, no team was more consistent through the pit lane in 2017.

Taking DHL's race stationary times, the Mercedes crew lead the pack with a median time of 2.7s and a mean of 2.55s across the year. Red Bull were the second fastest squad on average, with the team from Milton Keynes clocking a median time of 2.8s and a mean of 2.7s. Williams might have had the quickest single stationary stop of the year at Silverstone – but the median for all their stops over the season was 2.9s, with a mean of 2.75s leaving them third in the charts.

To demonstrate just how competitive the battle to be the best in the pit lane was this year, the median for all 10 teams ahead of the final round was 3.1s, with a mean time of 2.9s. Ferrari came in fourth, just shy of Red Bull. Haas edged Toro Rosso into P5 – but both teams were close to the overall average.

Remember, this is all achieved under the greatest of pressure. That is an ever-present in Formula One – but when your cars are running at the front, there's everything to lose by getting it wrong. A botched pit stop is always news but a smooth stop is rarely given much attention – unless it serves to directly vault a car ahead of a rival. Even then, it's a matter of expectation that the stop should be a good one.

In the pursuit of excellence, mistakes can happen – likewise equipment failures, as experienced by the team in China and Bahrain. Fortunately, the crew's work is supported closely by the strategy department and Design Office. The front and rear jacks, for example, are designed in-house. And if one of them fails, such as it did in China, it's taken just as seriously as a part on the car. Every single stop is a learning experience. Each member of the crew has an input into the process of the stop and they are all provided with constant feedback, led by data driven analysis from the strategy team.

Nowhere has this learning and evolution process been more evident than at two hugely contrasting races – the Italian and Singapore Grands Prix. Monza was a supreme team performance, as Lewis and Valtteri wrapped up a famous 1-2 at the home of the Scuderia, while in the pits the crew clocked the two quickest pit stop times in the box – a 2.33s and a 2.15s respectively.

In Singapore, under immense pressure to capitalise on the early accident that eliminated the two Ferraris, the Silver Arrows pit crew took just 2.27s to turn Lewis around as he pitted from the lead ahead of a prowling Daniel Ricciardo. Those Red Bull boys were fast –

but the crew in black were faster and Lewis emerged once more with a lead he wouldn't relinquish.

After a long season, this award is clearly the icing on the cake for the crew "" especially those who have put the work in over the last few years to ensure the team has the most consistent stops in Formula One. It's an accolade that everyone in the pit lane wants to win and, in such a competitive arena, those top five or six teams will all be gunning for the crown in 2018. Expect every crew to be pushing hard to shave another 0.2s off their average time over the winter months"

On your marks, boys!

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