RED BULL AIR RACE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP RETURNS TO ABU DHABI

News / Events / Festivals



The opening leg of the Red Bull Air Race World Championship will take off over the waters of the Corniche this weekend.

The two-day event will see 14 pilots compete against the clock by weaving their stunt planes through a slalom course of 25-metre high floating pylons.

Known as the fastest motorsport in the world, the aircraft are able to reach speeds up to 370 kph, while the pilots experience vast gravitational forces as they undertake the tight turns and loops.

One of the favourite for this year's championship is Australian Matt Hall, who finished second in 2015.

"I guess statistically it's correct that I'm the number one main competitor and the favourites for the season but just the same, everyone that is flying in this air race can win the championship," he said at a press conference to launch the event on Monday.

"Last year was good for us and it would be great to think that we could continue with what we're

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doing last year. But everybody has the chance to win this championship."

Another strong contender is Czech pilot Martin Sonka, who was fourth last year.

"I will not give any expectations since all the guys here are very fast and first of all, we should be really focused on ourselves, our airplane and our team," he said.

Aref Al Awani, general secretary of Abu Dhabi Sports Council, was hopeful for a good turnout for the event.

"We are looking forward to a fruitful air race again here in Abu Dhabi and we are hoping everybody will enjoy the race on the Corniche," he said.

"Good luck to the pilots. I know it's a tough competition, having the best-ranked pilots together."

This year will see a change in the event' format, with pilots who fail to score a valid run of the course being instantly eliminated.

"For the sake of the sport, we've changed the format from a round of 14 to a round of eight," said Erich Wolf, general manager of Red Bull Air Race, at a press conference on Monday.

"We see this as creating more fairness in the sport. And this is for the sake of the overall championship, giving them more chances to collect points."

The air race takes place on March 11 and 12 as part of the Abu Dhabi Aviation and Aerospace Week, under the patronage of Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces.

After Abu Dhabi, the championship will move on to seven more locations around the world, including Austria, Japan and the US.

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