

Chasing the Formula1 midfield: Q & A with Mike Gascoyne

With more than 10 years of experience in the Formula One Circus, Mike Gascoyne, Team Lotus' Technical Director, is building up a team from scratch. Now, with the learning years behind, he doesn't care of being the best of new teams. He wants to fight against the midfield Formula One teams. Switching to Renault engines and Red Bull's gearbox are clear indications he takes it seriously, although it won't be easy.

by Félix Iturbide

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(Pictures: Félix Iturbide & Team Lotus)



Second day of testing for Lotus Team, here in Valencia. The problem with the power steering of yesterday has changed all the program of the week, isn't it?

“Yes, we identified the problem very quickly and it's a very simple thing to fix but unfortunately, we didn't have the part. It will arrive over the day so it will be ready for tomorrow. We did limited running yesterday and today we really changed the program but actually

we did a lot of useful work, lots of check with fuel, cooling systems, starts simulations, but not for lap times. Tomorrow should be fine for that.”

¿Tomorrow (Friday) will be a very busy day of work?

“Yes”

(A.N. “Team Lotus” was the only team remaining in Cheste circuit on Friday 4th February)

But it was not previously considered in the program.

“No. Our plan was to do just filming on Friday, but now we'll be able to have a full test day that will be perfect for us. We will be doing filming as well, so, as you said, tomorrow will be a very busy day for us.”

Power steering problems apart, what's your feeling about the T128?

“I think it's very positive. Our drivers immediately reported they had a very good feeling. Although they can't push it on the corner, Jarno said on the braking that the car seems very stable with a lot more grip than last year car. We know aerodynamically, it looks what it should be. We want to move to the midfield and I think this is the car with we can do it.”

Anyway, right now you're on the program as scheduled?

“Well, we are a little bit behind, but in terms of reliability and systems checks I think we're on the shape.”



“Lotus Team” staff with the T128 at the factory in Norfolk (United Kingdom)

After a conservative approach to Formula 1 with last year's car, the T128 is a radical different one with new engine, gearbox, etc. When you started to work on it? Can you tell us about the process to put all the new things together?

“Last year we could only finish 10th, we couldn't do it better than that; just be the best of the new teams and that car was just to do that. Our aim was to stop development of the car very early and concentrate on T128, arrive to Bahrain and make a good job. We worked a lot on the wind tunnel, In June we were totally concentrated in this car and not developing the one of last year and that's why we are really confident we can make that step forward and more we see, we are more confident.”

You decided not to use KERS, what's the reason?

“I think that for us, we're still a small team, a new team and KERS was just a development too much for us and we really can't cope with it. We decided to go with a simple light car, and spend efforts in the wind tunnel. I think in terms of pure pace of the car, it won't damage us too much and I think we can match the KERS cars.”

You think not to use KERS can be a point in the first races in terms of reliability compared with other teams using the KERS?

“Absolutely, and we have seen in this test that some teams had some problems with KERS so, certainly it can help us on reliability early on.”

With a new car concept like the T128, what was your biggest concern?

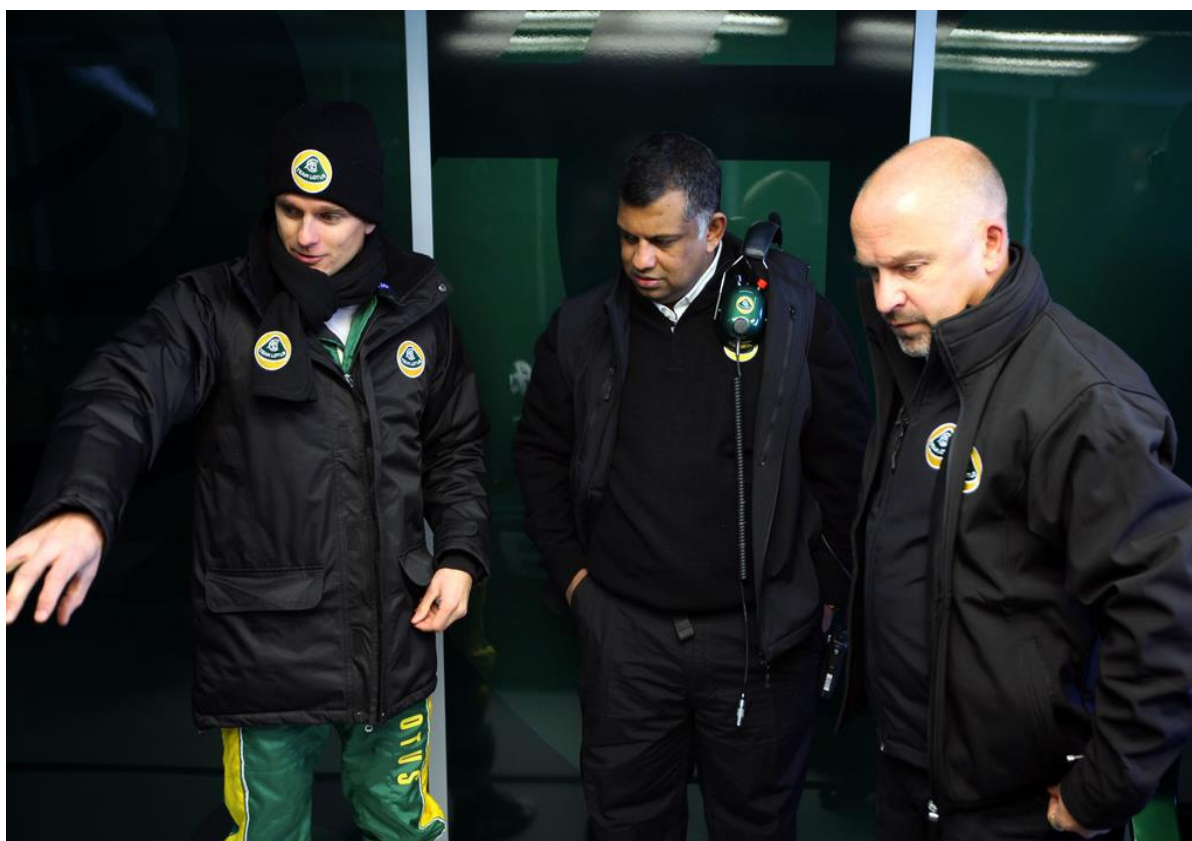
“I think obviously to switch with the engine and the new gearbox is a very positive thing for us. Working with the Red Bull gear box is obviously a really steep forward, the pull-rod suspension that goes with that it will be new for us but I think the big push was on aerodynamics on the car, because if you're two seconds off the pace, it's aerodynamics so that's what we really concentrated all our effort.”

Lotus Renault GP team has a radical new system which sees the exhausts exit at the leading edge of the side pods. A number of other teams are believed to already have the concept under development. You have a Renault engine. ¿Are you considering that option in the future?

“We will see and evaluated. We can look it in the wind tunnel but we are under development and we will see.”

Speaking about development, what's your program for the season?

“We have quite new parts for Bahrain with a totally completely new front wing. Then, there will be development race by race but we are planning a big update probably for Barcelona (Spanish Grand Prix), but also race by race.”



Heikki Kovalainen, Tony Fernandes and Mike Gascoyne in the boxes. Cheste circuit (Spain)

Second year with the same driver line up. What do you expect of your drivers?

“I think we have very good and experienced drivers. We made a clear statement when we employed two drivers like Jarno and Heikki. It was a frustrating year for them last year. They knew they would be in the back but I think that if we can give them a car to fight in the midfield, we have two of the best drivers in the midfield and they will deliver results. To pick up good places and points we can't have better drivers.”

We have seen Karun Chandhok in Lotus hospitality as a "guest". He's on the list to be the third and reserve driver of Lotus Team?

“Not third driver. He maybe will do some testing for us and we will see. We will make an announcement about our testing & reserve drivers in the next few days.”

In your plan, the reserve drivers will drive on Fridays practice during Grand Prix weekends?

“We will have some drivers driving on Fridays but we will make a full announcement about it.”

D'you think all the “Lotus” name row can be a distraction for the team?

“No. We are very confident in our position and certainly, for us from an engineering point of view of a racing team, we let this to the shareholders and the parts will make a decision and we just concentrate on our job.”

What's the view that Mike Gascoyne would like to see of the “Lotus Team” at the end of the 2011 season?

“I think we talk about a 7th or 8th position in the Championship. I think for a new team like us would be a good achievement and I think it would be great for Formula 1 to come in and in 18 months become a good midfield team. That would be very good news for Formula 1.”

So, your main target for the season is score points in some races.

“Yes, we wanna target points in a regular basis... and I think we can do that.”

Thank you Mister Gascoyne and good luck !



Mike Gascoyne & Félix Iturbide at the end of the interview in the Lotus Team hospitality

(Thanks to Tom Webb -press officer- and Mike Gascoyne itself for his amiability despite very busy days for Lotus Team in Valencia)