

From zero to lead a team in F1: Q & A Nick Heidfeld

Rollercoaster should be the best definition of the last 12 months of Nick Heidfeld. After BMW years, he signed as Mercedes GP reserve driver, a year ago. Months later, test driver of Pirelli Motorsport and then exchanged seats with Pedro de la Rosa, racing for Sauber the final races. This year he started without a seat in Formula 1 but the disgraced accident of Robert Kubica has given to “Quick Nick” the chance to show he can lead a big team and achieve a common goal... the first win.

by Félix Iturbide

Interview for Grand Prix Actual Magazine. February 2011.

(Pictures: Félix Iturbide & Lotus Renault GP)



After your first test with Lotus Renault GP at Jerez and Barcelona these days, what are your first impressions and how do you feel?

“My first impression was already very good at Jerez although I tested just one day. I spent a couple of days with the team to see how they work, create a good relationship with my engineers, and all the team and I really enjoyed working with them.”

Circumstances have forced you to integrate within the team very quickly. Has been an easy process?

“Yes, people in the team made it very easy for me but there is still much work to do. I think in my whole career I have never been as busy as the last two weeks. Everything happened in a very short period of time and I repeat, there is much work to do.”

Everything indicates that you'll drive for Renault all the season, but could detail us the terms of the contract with Renault?

“No, this is not possible. I will be available to the team. We all want that Robert Kubica recovers as soon as possible, but for now we cannot say for how long.”

After more than 10 years in Formula 1, you have driven for many teams with just a period of stability with BMW-Sauber. In the last year you have been Mercedes reserve driver, then Pirelli test driver and competed with Sauber F1 team in the last races of the season. You have not missed more stability in your career?

“Well, it would have been nice, especially if you compete in one of the best teams. On the other side, currently I do not worry about stability, I just try to be successful. My goal has not changed since I came into Formula 1, even though I was without a drive and I still want to win.”



Nick Heidfeld testing for the first time with the R31 car in Jerez de la Frontera (Spain)

Have you considered racing in other competitions or Formula 1 was the only choice for you?

“A bit of both. My goal has always been to stay in Formula 1. If it was not possible, I thought about other competitions to keep fit and continue driving. Thus I signed as reserve driver for Mercedes GP and considered to compete in the DTM, but Formula 1 remains the first thing in my head.”

In a hypothetical situation if you had to choose between compete in one of the new teams in Formula 1 or be a third driver in one of the top teams, what would be your choice?

“Being a test, reserve driver. I had the opportunity to sign for any of the new teams in the last two years, but I didn't do it.”

But is not a problem the fact how limited are the Formula 1 testing right now?

“Yes, that's true, but I thought a lot about it and I think is the best option for me. I have great respect for the new teams. I think some people don't give them enough credit for the work they achieve given that the other teams have been in Formula One for long time and they practically had to start from scratch, but I think at this point in my career is not an option right. It's fine for young drivers, but not for me. Years ago, when I went to Jordan, it was not a good team, but I knew it was the right decision in that moment because a driver's career is not a straightforward. If I were younger, I would say yes, but not now.”

Without a place in the Formula 1 grid, being a reserve driver and compete in another category is the best option?

“Yes, and in fact this was something I was thinking about.”

What's your expectations for this season after two weeks within the team?

"In terms of position is very difficult, but we made some analysis and it is very risky. I cannot say because I could be completely wrong. Of course, the target is very clear I think Eric Boullier, Team Lotus Renault Principal said it officially, we want to be better than last year, getting more podiums, and maybe some win so I really hope we can achieve it."



And personally, you will keep your driving style or maybe will try to be more aggressive?

"I think that a driver always has to adapt, learn and change a little, but I've been in Formula One for a while and normally I performed well at least compared to my teammates so I will not change a lot."

Does your experience as a test driver with Pirelli last year have been useful adapting the R31 to the compounds of the Italian manufacturer?

"I think it is a small advantage. I have a bit knowledge of the tyres and I did some of the construction work of the tyres but in the compounds, I didn't test a lot. I hope the tyres will suit me well 'cause I was part of that development."

But that's because you took part in the construction phase of the tyres or they simply adapt well to your driving style?

"A driver always has to adapt to the car and its tyres, but in this case, it is easier for me than, for example in 2008, with tyres that were difficult to put into optimal temperature, which was a disadvantage for me and I had to work and ..."

... change a little bit my driving style while for other drivers such as Alonso or Kubica were good. But now I think they suits well with my softer style and other pilots will have to adapt a little more.”

Undoubtedly, it's a problem for all the teams do not test with a hotter asphalt, or in rainy conditions to test de full wet tyres, to enable to draw major conclusions of them. In case Bahrain test are cancelled, d'you have a preference about where the final tests should be conducted prior to the start of the Championship, like to repeat here in Barcelona?

“It would be nice to test in warmer conditions elsewhere. The warmer the better. These days here we have not had enough warm conditions, which are what we would find in the championship. Finally, about the full wet tyres, we don't know the tyres so we don't have enough data.”



Nick Heidfeld & Félix Iturbide during the interview in the Lotus Renault GP hospitality

(Thanks to Will Hings -press officer- and Nick Heidfeld itself)