



HAMILTON CLAIMS POLE POSITION AT ALBERT PARK

Melbourne, March 17, 2012 – McLaren driver Lewis Hamilton has taken pole position for the Australian Grand Prix, using Pirelli's P Zero Yellow soft tyre to set a time of 1m24.922s around the Albert Park circuit. Hamilton beat his team mate Jenson Button to claim the 21st pole position of his career and the first all-McLaren front row since the 2009 European Grand Prix. Hamilton's last pole position with Pirelli came at the 2011 Korean Grand Prix.

Most of the top teams used the P Zero White medium tyres to get through the first qualifying session – although the two fastest times in that session were actually set on the P Zero Yellow soft by Sauber's Kamui Kobayashi and Toro Rosso's Jean-Eric Vergne. Lotus driver Romain Grosjean was the highest-placed driver in Q1 to get through on the medium tyres, going third-quickest.

All the remaining 17 drivers used the P Zero Yellow soft tyres during the second session, where the two Mercedes of Nico Rosberg and Michael Schumacher were fastest.

The drivers fighting for pole position aimed to complete the final session with two runs on the soft tyres, in order to save as many sets of the P Zero Yellow compound for the race. With the circuit getting quicker, the leading drivers left their last run until the closing seconds. Only one of the drivers in the final top 10 – Toro Rosso's Daniel Ricciardo – did not set a time, while Red Bull Racing's Mark Webber just completed one run on the softs.

Following yesterday's intermittent rain the weather today was dry, with ambient temperatures peaking at 19 degrees centigrade. In accordance with the latest rules, the rain on Friday meant that drivers were allowed to carry over one extra set of slick tyres for the third and final free practice session this morning. Hamilton was again fastest during that session on the soft tyre, which has been nominated together with the P Zero White medium in Australia this weekend. For qualifying and the race, the tyre rules are unaltered: the drivers have their usual allocation of three sets of medium tyres and three sets of softs.

Pirelli has closed up the performance gaps between all the compounds this year, and the difference so far between the medium and soft tyre at Albert Park is in the region of 0.5 seconds per lap.

Between two and three pit stops are expected for Sunday's 58-lap race, with the soft tyre lasting for up to 20 laps and the medium tyre good for up to 25 laps. This is line with Pirelli's objective of encouraging different race strategies. However, with so little dry running so far in Australia, the teams are still lacking data to finalise their tactics.

Pirelli's motorsport director Paul Hembery commented: "This was one of the most unpredictable qualifying sessions that we have seen since our Formula One debut, with a real sense of anticipation and excitement. The teams were only able to collect some meaningful data in the hour-long free practice session before qualifying due to the mixed conditions yesterday, which also meant that there was even less grip than usual on this track. The performance of the compounds is much more closely matched now, which will also be a feature of the race. We saw a stunning lap from both McLaren drivers, and we'd particularly like to congratulate Romain Grosjean – the reigning GP2 champion and one of our former test drivers, who did a great job for us – on his excellent third place. Having had such limited dry running up to now, the teams will still struggle to find the best compromise for a fully loaded car tomorrow, which is sure to provide plenty of interest."

Tyres used by the top 10 qualifiers:

Hamilton - Soft
Button - Soft
Grosjean - Soft
Schumacher - Soft
Webber - Soft
Vettel - Soft
Rosberg - Soft
Maldonado - Soft
Hülkenberg - Soft
Ricciardo - Soft (although no time set)

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