CROWDS GET READY FOR RED BULL BUZZ ON THE ABU DHABI CORNICHE

News / Events / Festivals

Aviation fans and adrenalin junkies were out in droves to witness the qualification rounds of the Red Bull Air Race in the capital.

Taking place yesterday on Abu Dhabi Corniche, the aerial race marks the start of the championship's 2016 season, which will take place in eight destinations.

Fourteen pilots competed yesterday to determine the order of play in today's main event.

Australian Matt Hall topped the charts, finishing the Abu Dhabi course in a little more than 58 seconds.

"Winning the first qualifier of the season is just a minor indicator that we should be competitive if we continue to race without mistakes," said Mr Hall, who finished second in last year's competition. "But there is going to be nothing easy about this season."

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He felt confident about his chances coming into the season’s first race, but revealed he was keeping an eye on the sky rather than the prize.

“I just want to focus on what I am doing, because if I look at the competition, I’ll lose sleep," said Mr Hall, who won two races last year, missing out on the world championship by five points.

Planes used in the Red Bull Air Race can reach speeds of up to 370 kilometres per hour and tolerate the pressure of up to 10 times the force of gravity.

Pilots must manoeuvre through a slalom course of 25-metre-high pylons.

It is a gruelling task and one that has enchanted spectator Jeremy Young, 30, a paramedic from the US.

“It’s a dream of mine to fly," said Mr Young, who hopes to train as a medical evacuation pilot and fly helicopters in rescue missions.

Despite aerial racing being a niche sport, it is exciting and offers a lot to those who give it a chance, he said.

The Keig family, from the Isle of Man, are not race fans per se, but they wanted to absorb the thrilling opportunity that embodies what living in the UAE means to them. “The UAE and Abu Dhabi are a premier destination for world-class events, we decided to come out and enjoy what’s going on," said Tracy Keig, who recently moved with her family to Dubai.

“What we’ve realised in our year of being here is that the UAE just knows how to put on superb events, and we as a family really try to get the best out of it," she said.

“Who knows? We might become huge fans."

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