

Countdown to Seats

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With a great result in the second test with Torro Rosso, and rumours dancing around the world of F1 about who's where, the countdown begins for Taku fans.

December 15th is the next test session and Torro Rosso boss Mateschitz has suggested an announcement by then. Gerhard Berger is leaving (denying rumours that is has anything to do with driver selection - which of course usually means that it is).

So which way is the cookie crumbling?

My sources are quiet, but Autosport is suggesting Taku has a place. Not the bible of F1 yet, Autosport has a good staff of reporters and they are sometimes on the button. Sometimes not.

Torro Rosso is a test bed and sister team of Red Bull. Red Bull was invented in Thailand - a country I am at home in, but sadly quite barron of F1 fans. They all tend to be European fans passing through, or ex-pats missing home. But in the rest of SE Asia, and Japan, the picture is very different. It is a huge market with four races thereabouts (Malaysia, Singapore, China and Japan). Bernie's plans were to expand further - but there are problems.

Nevertheless, for Red Bull, there is an untapped market out there. The hypo-drink has taken off very well in Europe, but it lags other brands in SE Asia still including it's homeland where it started life as "Krating Daeng" (red bull) - a non-fizzy drink loved by taxi drivers for getting through the night shift. In 2007 Red Bull had 70% of the European market, but just 13% of the Asian market.

Mateschitz is not dumb, Taku is a very big asset in the Japanese market - the source of the main competition to their brand.

Taku fans will rightly say that the seat should be Taku's because he has great skill, and is exciting to watch, and is the best candidate.

Red Bull will take all that and then add the commercial considerations too ... and that is where a global brand plays to our advantage. What does Bourdais bring? A French following, when there isn't a French GP - and when Red Bull is already a main brand. Hmm... I don't think so.

Taku's association with H2O, a Japanese sports drink which he helped develop will be a sticking point - but Taku is as money savvy as the rest. Which is better? A sponsor, or a seat?

Let's hope that for once, all the machinations of F1 means Taku is the winner.

If Taku wins, we all win.