

Dan hunting Mercs

DANIEL Ricciardo says Mercedes should look over its shoulder next year because he expects to be right in the Formula One title fight.

Fresh from his second in Sunday's Singapore Grand Prix, Ricciardo said he was confident he would soon break through for his first win this season as his Red Bull team sets itself for a serious challenge to the all-conquering Mercedes next year.

Ricciardo claimed his fourth podium in his past five races when he finished half a second behind Nico Rosberg in a dramatic finish in Singapore.

He has established himself as the best of the pack chasing

**REBECCA WILLIAMS
PERTH**

the dominant pair of Rosberg and Lewis Hamilton, sitting third behind them in the championship standings.

With new aerodynamic regulations in play next year that are expected to enhance Red Bull's prospects, Ricciardo expects his team to close the gap on Mercedes.

"I definitely believe I will be prepared for it," he said at the launch of his ultimate Formula One track in Perth yesterday.

"Hopefully we come into the season with the package to do it and, if so, I believe I can come

out in Melbourne and get it done from the get go. I think we have made a big step (this season).

"From where we were last year, we've probably more than halved the gap (to Mercedes), so we've found more than 50 per cent of what we've needed to.

"Probably for next year they are (looking over their shoulder). I think they are probably a bit curious, hopefully a little bit worried about what aerodynamic gains we can make. They know our car's strong. We'll see, hopefully they are right."

Ricciardo remains in pursuit of his first win since his breakout 2014 season when he claimed victories in Canada, Hungary

and Belgium. He has been on the podium five times this year and said a win is not far away as the championship heads to Malaysia next weekend.

"I still believe we can do it, (although) it's probably not that realistic in dry conditions — if Mercedes finish the race then they are probably going to win in those conditions," he said.

"I think Singapore was our best chance in dry conditions, but we could get a bit of rain. I feel like we deserve a win this year, I 100 per cent feel we do.

"I just think if we keep going about our business as we have been the last few races, we've got three seconds (places) in

the last four races, we're knocking on the door."

While Ricciardo said he was driving "the best I ever have" this season, he admitted the arrival of young Dutch star Max Verstappen had helped push him to another level.

"I feel he has pushed myself and the team in a good way, so we're feeding off each other and that's been fun," he said.

"From the start of the season, I felt like I was driving really well and I think that's why the team made the changes, as I was doing quite well compared to Dany (Kvyat).

"They brought Max in and I felt like I was able to get even

more out of myself, probably a little part which I didn't think I had been able to extract, so that was fun."

Ricciardo said he did not feel pressure to retain his status as the No.1 driver in the team.

"I think most of the pressure is on him, not pressure, just attention," he said. "Obviously he is the youngest winner in F1. I'll just do my thing then I'm sure if I get the results then it will create good attention around me."

Ricciardo said he is committed to Red Bull for the next two years and that he always maintained faith in the direction the team was headed.

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Red Bull ace and Fox Sports ambassador Daniel Ricciardo declared Monaco's swimming pool chicane his favourite section of track as he unveiled his Scalextric fantasy F1 circuit in Perth yesterday.

TOP STEER

Daniel Ricciardo's dream F1 track

INTERVIEW: REBECCA WILLIAMS

MONACO #1

Monaco, the swimming pool section, that for me is awesome. You can see how fast the car bounces over the kerbs there, gets over the barriers so, for pure satisfaction and adrenaline, that is the one.

A ALBERT PARK

"I picked (turns) six, seven, eight. For me, what I always enjoy in a track is a flow, or combination of corners put together and that was the section where it kinks left, then drops right and then left again. It's a cool little part of the track where you could just get in and get out quite well."

B SUZUKA

"The first sector in Suzuka where it climbs up the hill like a snake, a bit of a rollercoaster sort of feeling. That's cool."

C MONACO

"The swimming pool in Monaco, around the swimming pool, a fast chicane, jump on the kerbs, get close to the wall and you can really feel the car through there."

D AUSTIN

"Austin turn one, it's a real unique corner, it's really wide at the apex, something which we don't really have anywhere else on the calendar and it creates good opportunities for overtaking. I love Austin."

E SPA

"Puohon at Spa, turns 10-11, it's just a fast downhill left-hander that requires quite a bit of bravery. I quite enjoyed that one."

F SILVERSTONE

"Silverstone Maggott's, Becketts, it's sort of like Suzuka but it's a bit shorter, tighter, quicker and not uphill, so a bit faster. It's sort of a left, right, left, right, left combination, you arrive in eighth, down to seven, down to sixth, down to fifth and then out of it, so it's cool."

F SILVERSTONE

ENGLAND

E SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS

BELGIUM

A ALBERT PARK

AUSTRALIA

B SUZUKA

JAPAN

HOCKENHEIM
GERMANY

MONTREAL
CANADA

START
FINISH

D AUSTIN
TEXAS

BUDAPEST
HUNGARY

C MONTE CARLO
MONACO

SOCHL
RUSSIA

SHANGHAI
CHINA

MONZA
ITALY

RED BULL RING
AUSTRIA

Ricciardo's fantasy track ... from Monaco to Albert Park

THIS is one serious race track.

Red Bull star Daniel Ricciardo has revealed his ultimate Formula One circuit, comprising his favourite turns, straights and chicanes from tracks around the world.

He showed a huge model of

REBECCA WILLIAMS

his dream track yesterday in Perth. It includes the famous Monaco swimming pool section, the Suzuka esses and a trio of flowing turns from his home Albert Park Grand Prix.

"Drivers always picture what their ultimate track would look like and it's exciting to see mine brought to life," Ricciardo said.

"I look at the map and I go, 'Wow, it looks busy', but I think it would be a lot of fun if

some drivers got to drive on it.

"I wish I was 10 years old again and had a big garage that I could fit this in ... the track is awesome."

Ricciardo, coming off a second-place at last Sunday's Singapore Grand Prix, rated

the Monaco swimming pool section as his favourite part of the track — and in the F1 championship.

"For pure satisfaction and adrenaline, that is the one for me," he said.

He rated the snaking section

at Suzuka as his next favourite, while he chose the section from his home Grand Prix for its "flow" and "fun".

"I enjoy Albert Park and the circuit. (Turns) six, seven, eight has got for me — it has got that flow ... and it's fun," he said.