



**BEND IT:** Daniel Ricciardo with a slot car track he designed for Fox Sports made from his favourite corners from the F1 circuit.

# DAN TRACKS MERCEDES

REBECCA WILLIAMS

DANIEL Ricciardo has warned Mercedes to look over their shoulder in 2017, saying he expects to be fighting for the title next year.

Buoyed by his second place in the Singapore Grand Prix, Ricciardo said he was confident he would soon break through as Red Bull gets set for a strong challenge to the all-conquering Mercedes next year.

Ricciardo claimed his fourth podium from five races after he finished half a second behind Nico Rosberg under lights in Singapore.

He has clearly established himself as the best of the pack chasing the dominant Mercedes team of Rosberg and Lewis Hamilton, sitting third behind them in the championship standings.

New Formula One aerodynamic regulations to come into play next

year are expected to enhance Red Bull's prospects.

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

"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 (on 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."

Ricciardo is still chasing his first race 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 but believes a win is not far away as the championship heads to Malaysia next week.

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

"I think Singapore was our best chance in dry conditions, but we could get a bit of rain or something.

"I feel like we deserve a win this year, I absolutely 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."

Ricciardo said he was driving "the best I ever have" this season, but 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 both feeding off each other and that's been fun," Ricciardo 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). So 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 I'd been able to extract that, so that was fun."

But Ricciardo said he did not feel pressure to stay No.1 team driver.

"I think most of the pressure is

on him (Verstappen), not pressure, just attention. Obviously he is the youngest winner in F1 and all that so for me I am just doing my thing," Ricciardo said.

Ricciardo has emerged from a testing start to the year that saw his chances hampered by strategic errors in Sochi and Barcelona and a botched pit stop in Monaco.

While there had been rumours linking Ricciardo to a move to Ferrari, he is committed to Red Bull for the next two years.

"Long-term I had faith, but the short-term vision (after Monaco) - I was just pissed off and just thinking 'what's happening if we can't put together a win, how are we going to put together a championship fight?'," Ricciardo said.

## Award far from a Don deal for Thurston

MATT WINDLEY

THREE Olympic stars, two inspiring Paralympians, a trail-blazing jockey, a rugby league Immortal in waiting and a history-making rugby sevens team will all vie for "The Don Award" on October 13.

The Sport Australia Hall of Fame yesterday released its shortlist for the award.

Swimmer Kyle Chalmers (100m freestyle) and rower Kim Brennan (single sculls) both won gold in August at Rio and have been nominated as a result.

Anna Meares did not stand atop the podium, but in becoming Australia's most successful female cyclist by winning a sixth Olympic medal in the keirin she once again inspired a nation.

All-star wheelchair tennis athlete Dylan Alcott - winner in both the doubles and singles in Rio - and war veteran turned canoeing gold medallist Curtis McGrath (KL2 200m sprint) wowed us during the Paralympics, while in winning the maiden sevens gold medal our women's Olympic rugby team inspired the nation.

Johnathan Thurston's all-round rugby league feats - not least his title-winning field goal for North Queensland in



**ON AWARD SHORTLIST:** Cowboys gun Johnathan Thurston is in the running for 'The Don Award' next month.

last year's NRL grand final - have resulted in a nomination, while in becoming the first female jockey to win the Melbourne Cup, Michelle Payne's heroics on Prince Of Penzance have also been recognised.

Selection committee chairman Rob de Castella said it was not "the sports star or team" of the year award.

"It's an award that seeks to capture, celebrate, recognise and reward the individual or team who has 'most inspired the nation' through their performance," de Castella said.

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