

# NTT INDYCAR SERIES

## News Conference

Friday, July 5, 2024

**Pato O'Ward**

**Alex Palou**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Wrapping up the first day of the Honda Indy 200 at Mid-Ohio presented by the 2025 Civic Hybrid. We'll be joined by P1 in that practice session, Alex Palou, but currently joined by Pato O'Ward, driver of the No. 5 Arrow McLaren Chevrolet, pole winner, NTT P1 award winner here in 2022, three top 10s here at Mid-Ohio.

Outside of the rain, which kind of put a damper on things, your thoughts on day one today?

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, obviously not ideal that it started raining there at the end. Would have liked to get a few more laps. We truly only kind of got one. Everything else was just always traffic, stack-ups, everybody trying to get clean gaps, but these tracks aren't long enough for the 27 cars that we have. So that's kind of been a little tough in these practice sessions.

But at least we got one in, a decent lap in, that we can kind of look over and really see what we need. I know what we need from the car, so that's the most important thing.

THE MODERATOR: The weather looks decent the rest of the way, so practice 2 is going to be crucial it sounds like.

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, tomorrow I think practice 2 will be obviously the most important going into qualifying. I don't expect this race to be any different to the last few years. It's going to be a track position race, very sensitive to where you qualify, and yeah, that's going to be the full focus tomorrow, just trying to get this car as close to the front row as we can.

**Q. How does the hybrid -- can you sense or feel the hybrid kicking in?**

PATO O'WARD: You can feel it. You can definitely feel it when you engage the deploy. It's obviously not as big as I think people are thinking in terms of lap time. It's less than two tenths I would say with a perfectly optimized usage of deployment strategy.

I think the system is capable of so much more, so I would like to see that evolve into let's really push this system and see how much it can actually give us in terms of lap time because if it gives us four, five, six tenths over the lap, I think that's when we'll really see it getting optimized by all the teams and just trying to perfect it as much as possible because now it won't be as -- it'll usually overthrow a little balance difference in the car exactly.

Yeah, so far I think we're just working through it. Obviously it's brand new, and we just need to kind of go through the whole process, I'd say.

**Q. It seems like it doesn't even take half a lap in some cases to harvest or regenerate. Are you impressed by that, how quickly you can get back to 100 percent?**

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, there's different levels to that, and it's very similar to -- I wouldn't say it's similar to the Formula 1 car, but it's the same kind of idea of, like, the braking generates the energy, it goes into the pack, and then you deploy it where you wish.

Different to us, we have to manually deploy. If you get out of sequence and you have to manually kind of regen, there's limits to how much you can regen and limits to how much you can deploy, so there's a lot of limits that we need to work through.

THE MODERATOR: Also joined by Alex Palou, driver of the No. 10 Ridgeline Lubricants Chip Ganassi Racing Honda this weekend, the defending champion here at Mid-Ohio Sports Car course, three podiums in the last three races here and obviously the NTT INDYCAR Series points leader. Picking up where you left off, Laguna Seca and certainly here at Mid-Ohio, your thoughts on day one?

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it was short. Not much running. Only got I think nine laps. I think everybody wanted to get more. We didn't really get all the learnings we wanted, but it was kind of hard waiting a little bit and the red flag screwed us up and then also the rain.

Yeah, happy with the first run we got, but we're looking forward to tomorrow.



**Q. Pato was talking about T2 tomorrow morning becomes a crucial session for you guys...**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I think for everybody just to get through all the hybrid systems that we want to get reads on all the stages and also to get the car where we want because with the repave, everything changed quite a lot. It's going to be exciting tomorrow.

**Q. Do you guys need better weathermen to try and get the red tire run in? I'm surprised nobody put the reds on earlier in the session to at least try that.**

PATO O'WARD: My Arrow McLaren is base Arrow McLaren. I don't have the radar in it, so I couldn't tell you.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I mean, we knew that there was chances of the wet coming, but it doesn't really make much sense also to run it at the beginning and be like, I don't know, imagine it doesn't rain and we're like a second slower and then you don't know if it was the track improving or the driving or the car, whatever. That's why I think I'm happy that nobody did.

**Q. Did you need more rubber to get down is basically what you're saying, more black rubber put down before the reds would be useful?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I think it's a track that always wants more rubber, and even though it's a new tarmac, it still wants more rubber. I think we saw a bit of evolution from the timings at the beginning and at the end.

Even if we started on reds, I think you could have improved on blacks at the end.

**Q. I know it was only nine laps, a dozen laps or so. Was there anything that you learned about the hybrid system running out there today that was new or a surprise or anything like that, or just not enough laps to learn that much?**

PATO O'WARD: Nothing we already know from the tests that we've done. The balance of the car has changed. I think it's an accumulation of both the new tarmac and the 100 pounds at the rear of the car that have shuffled the mechanical balance of the car rearwards, but I think you'll see teams and drivers get creative for the race. I think that's where you're going to see a massive shift in, like, effect on the tire or stuff like that.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, not much surprises. I think everybody, at least in our group, we started with what we knew. Couldn't really get graded yet. But I was a bit

surprised at the amount of deploy we had each lap. It's a little bit more than I expected and a lot more than what we had in the ovals that we just tested. Obviously it makes sense because you do a lot less laps, but still, it's quite good. I think it's going to be quite interesting. A lot more than what I was anticipating when the hybrid was introduced.

**Q. Pato, you mentioned if you time all of this perfectly, you're maybe getting two tenths or so on your competitors, say if they weren't using the hybrid system at all on a lap. With all the work you're having to do in the cockpit, all the buttons, having to do everything perfect, is there a risk that by going for those two-tenths, if you don't do it right, you could set yourself back by not doing other things on your lap as well as you might have been able to do otherwise if you weren't messing with the hybrid?**

PATO O'WARD: I'd say car balance is still a priority, but you can't just ignore it because it's to the point where, like, the series is so competitive in qualifying I've been left out of the Fast Six for half a tenth a couple times this year. If someone uses it that half a tenth better than you do, they'll transfer and you won't if you're right on the throw-out line.

I think there's a big emphasis on both ends. You've got to get it right if you really want to be one of the top performing cars. But I would say it definitely doesn't outweigh trying to get a better balance for the car. I think that is definitely the priority, and this is just kind of free lap time that you can gain by optimizing it.

**Q. How long will it be until this starts to feel like second nature?**

ALEX PALOU: I don't know, but I think we're going to talk about more than I expected. Like you see IMSA that they spoke about it for two weeks and that's it. Everybody forgot. I think with the system, it's more like Push-to-Pass. Everybody talks about OT every race weekend, how we use it. I think it's going to be the same.

We're not going to talk about it for qualifying because everybody, we're going to reach a point where everybody is able to optimize 100 percent, and we're not going to see a difference there, but we're going to see, I believe, a difference in race conditions.

Yeah, I think we'll be seeing big differences, so you'll be speaking about the hybrid part quite a lot.

PATO O'WARD: I agree.

**Q. For now, you've spent the last couple of weeks**



**playing in your mind, okay, I am doing this, this might be a time that the hybrid, I need to deploy here, I need to regen here? Have you been playing those scenarios through your mind?**

PATO O'WARD: Not really. I think it's just as you go on and as you start using it, you just automatically kind of get used to it. The more you think, the worse you're going to use it, in my opinion. You're just going to get confused.

ALEX PALOU: And the opposite, but yeah, I've been.

**Q. So you have been thinking?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, it's a tool that doesn't gain you a lot, but it gains you enough to make differences. Yeah, it's the same as braking, right; when we get to new tracks or new stuff, you always need to try and think about your braking spots and your driving references. I think it's just an add-on to the driving references that we're going to have.

Obviously by the end of the weekend, you don't even talk or think about it anymore because it comes natural, but to start the weekend, I think so.

**Q. Is this where the instinctiveness comes in being a race driver, instinct more so than strategy?**

PATO O'WARD: We've both tested it enough where it's nothing that's like a shock, and it feels just like Push-to-Pass. You're just clicking it more times -- kind of like a Thermal kind of thing where you were able to use Push-to-Pass in qualifying.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, yeah, it doesn't change the car balance a lot or it doesn't give you such speed that wheels are spinning. But yeah, it's like a push.

**Q. Except that you get to use it every lap if you want, right? That's the big difference? That's why it needs to become part of your culture, so to speak, right?**

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, yeah, we're a lot busier now than we were before. You need to deploy -- like every time you deploy, you can deploy it 10 times if you want, you can deploy one big one. So every time you need to hit the buttons, the paddles, whatever systems the drivers have.

**Q. After testing so much with the hybrid and racing without the hybrid and now it's all single spec for the rest of the season, do things get a little bit easier now from the perspective of now we don't have to remember how to do things without the hybrid and now everything is just the same from here on out, don't have to switch from running the hybrid to not**

**running the hybrid, back and forth, back and forth?**

PATO O'WARD: Yeah, it's nice that we're just going to have this for the rest of the year. You would expect it to throw curveballs to I'd say multiple teams, multiple drivers. It's still a system that we're getting to know. I mean, there's going to be issues with it. Nothing new comes without issues. It's going to be something that everybody is going to just have to work through and stay flexible with the challenges coming, I'd say.

ALEX PALOU: Yeah, I think it's good that we're now in the hybrid. Like we were testing the end of last season with the hybrid, and you had stuff in your mind, and then you start all over with the 2023 car, let's say. Yeah, it's good that we keep it that way. Let's see how it goes.

**Q. Pato, at one point we thought he might be your teammate sometime soon. That's led to a rotation of one car. Now you look at Rossi recently mutually parting ways with Arrow McLaren at the beginning of the season and Christian Lundgaard coming in. I'm curious your thoughts of your time with Rossi and essentially having a whole new lineup at Arrow McLaren next year.**

PATO O'WARD: He was a great addition to the team. He brought a lot that we can kind of fall back on, learn from, analyze. He definitely brought a different direction that obviously I haven't experienced in my INDYCAR career. I haven't been with truly another top team.

For us, for me, it's kind of normal of where we've been, but it's been very useful to have people that have been elsewhere for multiple years and really kind of compare the two and just to obviously strive and get better.

But I mean, it's nothing new. INDYCAR is quite unique in its way that you can tailor the car to what you want.

**Q. Thoughts on Christian, though?**

PATO O'WARD: I like the guy. He's good. He's quick. It's the same as when Felix joined, same as when Alex joined. All I hope for and what we all want as a team is just to work together and take the team to the next level because we're obviously not there yet.

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