

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

Wednesday, January 15, 2025

Callum Ilott

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: As mentioned, Callum Ilott joins us now, driver of the No. 90 Prema Racing Chevrolet, beginning his fifth year associated with the NTT INDYCAR Series, clearly his first with a brand new Prema race team in 2025 as you can see right there, fresh off the huge launch, a successful launch Friday down in Concord, North Carolina --

CALLUM ILOTT: Thank you for coming.

Q. It was great. You guys knocked it out of the park for sure. Obviously there's some momentum with the team. How do you keep this going with the first race coming up in a couple months?

CALLUM ILOTT: We've obviously got some testing coming up. Still a bit fluid with the plan. But it's a lot of work. It's not easy for the whole crew. Yeah, it's definitely a lot more work starting from scratch than all the other teams have from the end of last season.

But it's part of it. It's what we've committed to. Yeah, I'm really happy with how it's going. The launch was amazing. Cars look great.

Hopefully they're as fast as they look, but we'll find out soon.

Q. There's a lot of drivers in the paddock that know all about Prema or have been with Prema. If not, they've seen them on TV. They know the championships over four decades. The numbers go on and on and on. Do you feel there's a buzz with the team and the drivers in the paddock, curious about how this is going to work out?

CALLUM ILOTT: I think there's a lot of people curious. A lot of people know Prema's history, and if you don't, they are the most successful junior formula team that there is, and they've won in almost everything they've competed in. So to bring them to INDYCAR and have them here is amazing.

But INDYCAR is another ballgame. We're going to have to work hard. It's not going to be easy, and especially not with everyone else having the same car for 10 plus years. We're going to have a steep learning curve.

But we've done all the right things so far and pushing like crazy to have everything we need and more for the first races.

Q. You've talked a little bit about just the struggle that you guys will have to get up to speed with this team that's got a lot of folks that have INDYCAR experience, yourself included, but still joining a field that includes tons of teams that have been in the sport for lots of years if not decades. How different is this compared to what you joined at the end of the 2021 season at JHR, a team that had been in INDYCAR before but still was joining late in the year and hadn't been in the sport for a couple years?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, it's a completely different situation because even with JHR we were very fortunate with the Carlin merger but a lot of what we'd had had been from previous Indy 500s and had been built up. So there was quite a good storage facility of stuff.

With us, it is kind of everything we need we have to find or build and start from scratch. It's quite an odd thing, especially for some of the people within the team that have been in other INDYCAR teams to kind of go, um, where do we get this? We're going to have to order it; going to have to wait a little bit.

But for anyone who's seen Prema in Europe and then what we've created in Fishers -- I say "we" like I built it. No, they did an amazing job, and in such a short amount of time. It is an incredible facility, and at the moment for two cars, it's really impressive.

But that is one thing. On track is another. We're just keeping our heads down. Where we start is where we start, and then we've got to build from there.

There's not really any pressure. It's more work with what we've got, and yeah, like I said, it's very different. It's very new. It's been a long time since anyone has joined



INDYCAR this way, and especially from Europe, and I think, not to put words in people's mouths, but we've almost had to help create a starting point for bringing new teams into INDYCAR because it's a bit of a -- normally you do it with a partnership or something like that where someone has done it, where this is a bit more hands-on from the beginning.

Q. I know you are talking with the mindset of being patient, knowing that you've got to start somewhere and see where you guys are in St. Pete and work from there. But how much are you champing at the bit to get in a race car and know what the car is like and what you guys have, having launched this team and been signed to the team for several months and still not yet been in a race car?

CALLUM ILOTT: I'm not frustrated because there's an element of you want to jump in the car and get going, but also you want to have everything ready and options to test and try. I think for me it's very important for the team to be ready and then we go from there, so that's been the focus on the team side.

I'm sure for Robert, who's driven the INDYCAR once before but a long time since then, I'm sure he'll be really wanting to get the experience of it and the oval side of things.

But yeah, I've got the Daytona 24 Hours and then afterwards full on with INDYCAR. So I'll be ready to go no matter what. But it's a team effort. I'm sure the engineers are as wanting if not more than I am to get going.

But yeah, we don't have a lot of time. We don't have a lot of days and we have to hit the road.

Q. Is it too early to even say what a successful season is like for this team? As you're going into it, what kind of benchmarks, if any, are you setting for you or the team itself?

CALLUM ILOTT: I think that's a question I'd like to answer probably after the first two, three races, see where we start and then where we go from there, because the street courses could be one way, road courses another way, and then the ovals is a another question.

Until I've done one of each, I think then I'll be able to kind of set the tone for that. But end of the season, yeah, I don't see a reason why we can't be pretty competitive.

But at the beginning, I mean, we could be great, could be not. Whatever it is, it is. But we've got some amazing people, good partners, and yeah, pretty excited.

Q. Speaking of amazing people, what's it like working with Michael Cannon? He's a little bit of a mad scientist when it comes to INDYCAR engineering.

CALLUM ILOTT: INDYCAR's own Einstein, right? Yeah, he's great. Obviously it's limited so far. We've only done some simulator stuff, and that was establishing the foundations of the team and just getting things going. Haven't seen the full creation as of yet.

But yeah, he's been working hard with the team. Let's see where it goes, and I'll answer that again later on. But right now it's a good start, but everyone's head is down at the moment.

Q. You've driven INDYCARs a lot but your teammate hasn't. What's going to be the biggest eye-opener for him?

CALLUM ILOTT: I think aside from the obvious part, the ovals, it's going to be the length of the races, kind of the strategy, the fuel saving.

He's probably had experience of all those things but not in the same way. With World Endurance Championship, which we both just came from, there is fuel saving, the races are long, but it's less intense. The fuel saving is less important a bit more automated.

So coming here, it's just full attack.

And then beyond that, I think the fast-paced nature of the weekend, the season. Once it starts, it doesn't stop. I think you kind of realize those things by mid-season.

But he's ready. He doesn't know what he's ready for yet, but he's one of those guys you just take, put in and drive and he'll be fine.

Q. You're working with Steve Barker again. Is that a nice transition, going to a new team but a bit of a familiar face who you've worked with on the engineering side before?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, it was a bit of a shock. I arrived back January 6 on the Monday, and I was like, oh, hello, welcome back. Okay, fine, good to have you.

He was awesome to work with, and yeah, to have him in Prema, another familiar face who's been in INDYCAR. The team, a lot of them I've worked with in Europe.

There is people I've seen around the INDYCAR paddock, there's people I've seen around the WEC paddock, and

one or two been around the Formula 1 paddock.

So it's a mix of people I have either worked with, seen, and yeah, Steve is just the cherry on top for that. It's perfect. I love the atmosphere right now.

Again, the season is going to be intense, but to start it off like I have, I'm very happy.

Q. The melding of all the different European racing, U.S. racing, when Carlin came over here, which Steve was obviously a part of, they basically brought a European team over here; whereas you guys are doing it kind of a meld of American and U.S. Is it interesting to watch the culture of the two different ways of racing meld together?

CALLUM ILOTT: It's definitely very interesting because there's a certain way of doing things in INDYCAR, which is hard to explain but it's just done that way. A lot of the Europeans, especially clever young engineers coming over are like, what about this? What about that? You're like, it doesn't quite work like that. It's a bit different.

But they're great. They have a really amazing analytical side of things, which is not to say you haven't had in INDYCAR, but it's refreshing to see the intensity of it. Then the experience that Mike Cannon or Steve has in INDYCAR of doing it in that way.

I think there's going to be a good blend, but I don't know in which way it's going to settle, if you know what I mean. But it is refreshing.

Also on the mechanic side, it's nice to see a lot of young Italian, French people coming over and enjoying the lifestyle. The cold is a bit of a shock to them, but they've got their coffee and they're happy. But their own coffee, not your coffee. No offense.

Q. They know where the best Italian restaurant is in Fishers?

CALLUM ILOTT: They've found a really great Indian and a good Mexican, as well. So they're experiencing culture.

Q. I just want to know, your very first thoughts when they asked you to drive for Prema seeing as they were going to be a brand new team in INDYCAR.

CALLUM ILOTT: I was in touch with René, who was my contact for all the years I was in Europe, big boss, and I'd been asking him, so are you going to be doing INDYCAR?

I knew end of 2023 that they were going to be doing this,

and he's like, shh, not yet. I'm like, okay, we should be in contact. He's like, definitely, definitely. Nothing, nothing, nothing, and then I was very close to continuing in European WEC, and then suddenly for no reason, he's like, yeah, let's do it. I'm like, if you could have told me a couple of weeks in advance that would have been great.

But yeah, once -- it was a project that I was very interested in and wanted to be a part of because I knew the way that they were going to do it and are going to do it is hopefully going to be another level.

But it will take time. I'm super excited to be a part of it. So as soon as we got the ball rolling it was pretty easy. Just had to wait a bit. Had to wait for the factory to be ready because we were running out of a small shop the end of last season. That's where I did the C fit. And we'll be ready to go hopefully.

Q. Looking at the schedule, is there a certain track you look forward to going to this year that you think fits your driving style?

CALLUM ILOTT: I've always been a road course guy. I think Prema is also naturally a road course team. It's going to be interesting how the INDY 500 is just because of so many unknowns with Prema going in there. But I've felt like every year I've been to the 500 I've improved and improved.

Beyond that, I'm looking forward to Long Beach. That's one that I've always thought I could have been better at. So there's room for improvement for me.

Q. Can you just expand a little bit on your mindset through last year? Obviously you said that Prema was kind of in the background and you were maybe waiting for a call. But was the priority always to be back in INDYCAR, back in single seaters, or were you having offers for some top teams in WEC, for instance, for your services?

CALLUM ILOTT: It was a bit of a mix. I wanted to leave it open. I was enjoying my time in WEC, and that was leading to a couple of things and I was very happy in the situation I was in.

But with INDYCAR, it's a very tough championship, as you can see with a couple of drivers, to maintain and stay in. I felt like this was the perfect way to get back in with a team that I think shows so much promise in the future.

And yeah, as soon as our sit-down meeting came it was like, okay, I think this is what I have to do, and let's make it work from here.



Q. What sort of weight do you feel is on you as kind of the experienced driver in the lineup in helping to build this team up? Are there any skills you feel you've learned during your time at JHR that you maybe could transfer to this opportunity?

CALLUM ILOTT: I think the thing I've learnt from my previous endeavors was to be patient. With Prema we're going to have to be patient. You never know at which point it kind of clicks and the results start coming.

That's one of the kind of founding points that I want to take through the season, is just to not push anyone too far, work and work and work, but what we have is what we've got.

And beyond that, obviously being the kind of veteran driver in the team, although I'm still young and not many seasons in INDYCAR, but with two different teams, is to take that and to expand within the team, keep everyone positive, and yeah, move forward.

It's not simple but just keeping it simple is important.

Q. Will Buxton is going to be joining FOX Sports. How much does it mean for you to have someone from obviously the same country to be a part of the full-time INDYCAR season with you?

CALLUM ILOTT: For me obviously being from the same country, it's nice and helpful. But no, I've known Will for a while. I've seen a lot of his stuff, even before the Formula 1 times. He is amazing, very enthusiastic. Amazing vocabulary, as well, so he's like an amazing encyclopedia of words that I learn every time I chat to him. I think he's great for the booth. James and Townsend also do an amazing job, so I think he fits that group very well.

I'm hoping that he builds and takes the series forward. He's been through a lot of championships which have grown and engages with a very young audience. I really enjoy hearing him talk, and I think he can only add a lot of positivity to everything that is INDYCAR.

Q. Of course Michael Cannon coming to the team, you've had pretty decent runs at the Indy 500. With Prema being a new team, how much optimism and what's the thoughts going into the Indy 500, even though it's a couple months away?

CALLUM ILOTT: Yeah, it could be good. Again, it's still a bit unknown. We don't know what we're going to rock up with. There's a lot of preparation which is Indy specific which a lot of other teams have started on.

Of course Michael has great experience and is very helpful on that side, but you just never know, and we need to be able to prepare and take time for it.

Who knows at this point. Could be good. I think a lot of people are expecting us to be very good. But remember, that's with teams that have all the foundation, all the equipment to kind of select and choose from. We're starting from scratch and building everything from the beginning.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.