



Reflections

by BOB RUPANI

The metamorphosis of Force India from also-rans to a force to be reckoned with in Formula 1

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LAST MONTH I SAID THAT INDIA

will not host another F1 GP. This is really sad, especially now that Force India have become a real 'force' in Formula 1. Recently at the Bahrain Grand Prix,

Sergio Perez driving a Force India was third and Nico Hulkenberg in the other Force India finished fifth. Yes, after the third race of the season they had scored more points than McLaren, Red Bull, Ferrari etc. A truly impressive and laudable achievement.

Force India was formed in 2007 when a consortium led by Vijay Mallya and Michiel Mol bought the Spyker F1 Team. Originally the team entered F1 in 1991, as the Jordan Racing Team. In 2005, team owner Eddie Jordan sold the team to the Midland Group. Then midway through the 2006 season, Spyker Car bought the team. In the decade or so that Eddie Jordan ran the team it scored four F1 wins and finished third in the 1999 Constructors Championship. After that the team scored just one point in the year 2007, when it was the Spyker F1 Team.

We must applaud Vijay Mallya and congratulate him for having turned the team around where it is now beating the likes of Red Bull, Ferrari and McLaren. And of course Sauber, Lotus, Williams etc. And who knows what will happen later in the season... one could even see a Force India driver on top of the podium.

Interestingly, when Vijay Mallya took over the team, he called it Force India. Being privately owned and no involvement with the Indian government, he could have named it anything he pleased, like Kingfisher etc.

But to his credit, Vijay Mallya not only named his F1 team Force India, but he also ensured that the race car and the team prominently sported the colours of the Indian flag. And Force India is the only team on the F1 grid that carries the name of a country! In my view this certainly makes Vijay Mallya a true patriot.

Strangely, Vijay Mallya has never had an Indian driver race for his team. He has not given either Narain Karthikeyan or Karun Chandhok the opportunity to drive his cars. Nor test them. He has said that only when he thinks a driver has enough talent, would



As the team chief, it's Vijay Mallya who is responsible for the success of Force India

he pick one to drive for his team. Having an Indian driver would obviously get Force India team lots of publicity, especially in India. It would also bring in more sponsors and more money. But despite this, Mallya has not taken on any Indian driver till date.

The current success of Force India shows that Vijay Mallya's passion, commitment and hands-on approach has paid off. Despite the financial difficulties he has faced due to the failure and subsequent closure of Kingfisher Airlines, he has stayed committed to his F1 team. In fact in 2011, he even sold 42.5 per cent of Force India F1 shares to the Sahara India Pariwar headed by Subrata Roy for 100 million US dollars. F1 is a very expensive sport. But despite whatever constraints and difficulties he may have faced, Vijay Mallya has succeeded in managing his F1 team very well. Right from 2009 when Force India scored its first points in Formula One, the team has performed consistently and has been successful mid-field runners. This year they are right up front competing for podium places. The Force India team deserves credit, but as the team chief, Vijay Mallya is primarily responsible for its success. He has motivated his team, technicians and drivers and got them to consistently deliver their very best. ❏

Errata: Reflections April 2014 - Manoj Gaur of Gaursons India is not the brother of Sameer Gaur, CEO and MD of Jaypee Sports International (JPSI). But Sameer Gaur does have an older brother named Manoj Gaur. The writer regrets the error.

Bob Rupani is a pioneering Indian automobile journalist and is presently the executive editor of Auto India