

INTERVIEW: NICK HEIDFELD ON TESTING BATTISTA FOR THE FIRST TIME IN NARDÒ

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What was your first impression of driving the Battista prototype in Nardò?

Nick Heidfeld (NH), Test and Development Driver for Automobili Pininfarina:

The very first moment was really special for me because we have put a lot of time and effort into the car. I know all the numbers in theory, but then to really feel the Battista for the first time was amazing. The first steering input was already so direct that I felt this is not a normal car. As soon as you put the throttle down, it's a different world. The power delivery and acceleration is just so instant, that's insane.

As well as the performance, what else stood out for you?

NH: *The thing that really amazed me – because I expected the car to accelerate like mad anyway – was that I didn't expect to feel what was actually happening when cornering. Battista is a luxurious hyper grand tourer rather than an-uncomfortable track-tool, but the grip level, cornering speeds, feedback and controllability we already achieve at this prototype stage is what amazed me the most.*

What were you expecting from the Battista and what surprised you?

NH: *What really surprised me was how at home it felt on the track and the cornering speeds I could achieve, even at this early stage of development. When I started to push on my initial laps, I did realize that the handling track in Nardò is not the easiest one to learn, so I turned to some online footage showing onboard laps of various other performance cars. I quickly realised they would be of little use, because the acceleration of the Battista is on another level to even the fastest road cars, so that is a big box, ticked. When you push it, it gives you all the feedback and the capability to drive it at astonishing speeds.*

What level of power and performance were you able to exploit during your first test?

NH: *At the moment we are at roughly 80% of the power that we will achieve for the production version of Battista, which will be more than 1,900 PS. What surprised me is how we are able to put the power down. I was a bit worried about coming here, flooring the throttle and just spinning the wheels with smoke everywhere. But this didn't happen! Due to our tailored chassis setup together with the best and rather wide tyres and four-wheel-drive the Battista accelerates at levels that no one that sat in the car assumed were possible. Yet, there is a lot more to come as we are currently testing with minimal traction control and with a lot more to come from torque vectoring.*

How did the tyres perform on your first drive of the Battista prototype?

NH: *We are testing two kinds of tyres for the Battista. One of these is similar to a semi-slick, the Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 R and it is currently our preferred performance tyre. However, unlike a pure race tyre it can also perform in damp condition. And we could test that here in Nardò as it was a bit wet at times. But as soon as it gets dry, you reach yet another level of performance, and this is exactly what the Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 R gives you. It then grips like a race tyre and puts Battista into another dimension, especially when you talk about turn-in, precision and stability.*

How do you feel about the suitability of a pure-electric powertrain in a hypercar after your experience here?

NH: *I have been in Formula E and I have driven electric cars before so I understand the benefits which, for me as the racing driver, is especially the control you have in the performance. You get what you ask for straight away – no delay or misfire – and the torque levels available are much higher at lower rpm speeds, so I didn't really need to be convinced. It is all about other people needing experience an electric car for the first time. I have not seen anybody yet that didn't like it! It is a different driving experience but it's easier to focus on getting the car to the limit.*

You've been on this journey from the beginning, for two years. How were you feeling before coming here and how do you feel now having driven it?

NH: *I was a little anxious, not in a negative way, but you have to imagine that while I've driven many cars over the years in motorsport, helped to develop many cars in Formula 1 at the highest level, I have learned a lot and I knew what to expect. This is something new for me. The Battista is a road car, and every step I'm learning something, looking forward to things. To develop the car on paper and on the simulator was obviously a big help, but then to get my hands on it for the very first time was of course the part I was waiting for.*

How would you describe being part of the new team at Automobili Pininfarina?

NH: *For me, being part of the Automobili Pininfarina team on-site, was as important as having our first passenger rides. I really enjoyed seeing the feedback, reactions and emotions, and hearing the sounds that people made unconsciously, when I ran them around the handling track for the first time. What we have delivered at this moment makes me happy and proud, and there is still so much more to come. When you drive a racing car for the first time prior the beginning of a new season it is a really important moment and I've been lucky enough to experience good and bad first tests. The aim here is not exactly the same – this is not only about being the fastest around a race circuit – but my first Battista test in Nardò certainly exceeded my expectations. It is about enjoying the emotions experienced when driving the Battista in any circumstances. I'm therefore really looking forward to driving Battista again in a different location and digging a bit deeper into its capabilities.*

What are you expecting from the final dynamic experience of Battista, now you've had the chance to experience it at prototype level?

NH: *The target we set ourselves when we started this programme was for the Battista to be a fun car, a hyper GT, to drive on any occasion. Be that in the city, in the mountains or on the race track. I think that we proved, at least to me, that it performs on a circuit. I also felt that in the few metres we were driving between our box and the circuit, the Battista prototype feels quiet, it feels easy. The next target is to make sure it is as good to drive on the road as it is around the track.*

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EDITOR'S NOTES**THE AUTOMOBILI PININFARINA BATTISTA**

The Battista will be the most powerful car ever designed and built in Italy and it will deliver a level of performance that is unachievable today in any road-legal sports car featuring internal combustion engine technology. Faster than a current Formula 1 race car in its 0-100 km/h sub-two second sprint, and with 1,900 hp and 2,300 Nm torque on tap, the Battista will combine extreme engineering and technology in a zero emissions package. The Battista's 120 kWh battery provides power to four electric motors – one at each wheel – with a simulated WLTP range of over 500 km (310 miles) on a single charge. No more than 150 Battistas will be individually hand-crafted at the Pininfarina SpA atelier in Cambiano, Italy.

ABOUT AUTOMOBILI PININFARINA

Automobili Pininfarina is based in operational headquarters in Munich, Germany, with a team of experienced automotive executives from luxury and premium car brands. Designed, engineered and produced by hand in Italy, the Battista hyper GT and all future models will be sold and serviced in all major global markets under the brand name Pininfarina. The new company aims to be the most sustainable luxury car brand in the world.

The company is a 100 per cent Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd investment and has been named Automobili Pininfarina following the signing of a trademark licence agreement between Pininfarina S.p.A. and Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd. Pininfarina S.p.A. will take an influential role in supporting design and production capacities based on their unique 90-year experience of producing many of the world's most iconic cars.

ABOUT NICK HEIDFELD

Starting his motorsport career in 1994 by racing in the German Formula Ford race series, Nick Heidfeld (43) would go on to race in various competitions before making his debut in Formula 1 in 2000. After more than 10 years at the pinnacle of motorsport, he became the first driver to make the move across to the pinnacle of electrified motorsport, when he entered his first race in Formula E in 2014. With unrivalled expertise in developing and honing the characteristics of performance vehicles, Brand Ambassador Nick has been part of the Automobili Pininfarina Vehicle Development team since the beginning of the Battista programme and played a key role in simulation testing of the pure-electric hyper GT.