

Hamilton all smiles as Vettel grinds to a halt

MOTOR RACING

SEBASTIAN Vettel described his car problems on Friday as a "small failure with big consequences" after missing most of the day because his Red Bull suffered electrical problems.

He had to watch as young teammate Daniel Ricciardo finished best of the rest behind the all-conquering Mercedes.

The defending four-time world champion only did four laps in opening practice at the Spanish Grand Prix and missed the afternoon session entirely as Lewis Hamilton and Nico Rosberg topped the times with ease.

Ricciardo wound up nine-

"It takes a while to strip the car and take everything apart"

tenths of a second off Hamilton's pace and said he felt "frustrated" by the gap.

"We are making progress, but unfortunately Mercedes don't seem to be slowing down either, so they are a little bit far away," Ricciardo said.

"A little bit frustrated, surprised. I hoped that we would probably close the gap a bit

more. Today, it was too far. We are trying to pull them back, but we seem to be in a solid third place today."

Vettel played down the significance of his problem, saying the complicated internals of the car made it seem like a bigger issue than it was.

"It is a small failure with big consequences," he said.

"We decided to change the whole (electrical wiring) loom and, unfortunately, that is a pretty big change.

"It was rubbing a bit which caused damage and caused the short, and made the car stop. There are sensors everywhere so it takes a while to strip the car and take everything apart."

He added that he expects Red Bull to make up for the lost track time.

A happy Hamilton topped the times in both sessions followed by teammate Rosberg, with Hamilton revelling in his role as a settled senior member of the German outfit.

His speed, he said, showed he was in "a good place".

"It means a lot to me to feel I'm an integral part of this team. I love the huge energy that goes into the car," Hamilton said. "It gives me a really special feeling. These guys, the engineers, they can do anything and it is up to us to help by 'steering the bubble'."

As he bids for his first Span-

ish Grand Prix triumph this weekend after three consecutive victories, Hamilton said he was aiming to grab the 34th pole of his career and make sure he can stay out of trouble with backmarkers on a circuit where it's difficult to overtake.

"Pole is always important, but it is especially so here because it so difficult to get past people, especially those with a Mercedes engine!"

The 29-year-old Briton said he felt "pleasantly surprised" by the pace of his car.

Rosberg leads the championship thanks to winning the Australian Grand Prix and then finishing second behind Hamilton three times.

First track event for rising club

CYCLING

DARWIN Cycling Club is hosting its first track cycling event in five years at the McMillans Rd velodrome today.

The club has been rebuilding through its junior development program and Friday night cycle skills training sessions at the McMillans Rd velodrome which have been very popular with Top End families.

More than 60 participants on striders, BMX, mountain, cycle cross and track bikes have been in attendance.

If you have a keen interest in cycling, speed and race tactics, track cycling could be for you, or you may need to test your bunch riding skills for the Santos Grand Fondo.

The track opens at 4pm today with a "Come n Try" session and racing starts at 5pm. So dust off your old fixed wheel bike or you can take advantage of Darwin Cycling Club's own bikes.

The event is open to all ages and levels of experience and a canteen will be open. For more information visit Darwin Cycling Club's Facebook page or call Tony on 0404 804 292.

Great day for Evans and mates

ORICA-GREENEDGE powered to a stage one victory at the Giro d'Italia while Cadel Evans gained an early edge over his biggest rivals on a superb opening day for Australia.

The rising Australian team made the most of an early start and favourable weather to win Friday's 21.7km team time trial through the streets of Belfast.

Orica-GreenEDGE, featuring six Australian riders, allowed Canadian Svein Tuft to cross the line first on his 37th birthday, meaning he claims the event's famed pink leader's jersey, the maglia rosa.

"What an amazing day. I'm so proud of the team and can't thank them enough," Tuft said.

"This team is really selfless in that way and I just feel really fortunate to be given that gift on my birthday."

The Victorian-owned team, who claimed the win in the same discipline at the Tour de France last year, were able to complete most of the course before conditions worsened when a brief storm hit.

They clocked 24 minutes and 42 seconds to finish five seconds ahead of Belgium's Omega Pharma-QuickStep team, featuring general classification contender Rigoberto Uran of Colombia.

Evans's BMC team was next a further two seconds back but some of the Australian's biggest rivals for the general classification copped the brunt of the rain.

Among them were Nairo Quintana, of Colombia, and Joaquim Rodriguez, of Spain.



Kei Nishikori, of Japan, celebrates break point in the second set against Feliciano Lopez, of Spain, in their quarter-final match at the Madrid Open

Picture: GETTY IMAGES

Nishikori raises flag for Japan with top-10 ranking

TENNIS

KEI Nishikori ensured he will become the first Japanese player to make the top 10 of the ATP rankings with a 6-4 6-4 win over Spain's Feliciano Lopez to make the Madrid Masters semi-finals on Friday.

Currently ranked 12th in the world, Nishikori will move into the top 10 when the latest rankings are released on Monday thanks to 13-match winning streak.

The 24-year-old reached the semi-finals of the Miami Masters in March before having to withdraw due to a groin problem and won his first ever tournament on clay on his return from injury at the Barcelona Open two weeks ago.

"It was a big goal for me to get to the top 10, but it is only one week for now so I have to keep playing better tennis to stay in the top 10," he said.

"My goal is not just to be there for one week so hope-

fully I can keep that ranking for a while."

Nishikori was bothered by a back injury throughout the second set against Lopez but he is hopeful of being fit to face David Ferrer in the last four.

World number one Rafael Nadal stormed into the semi-finals of the Madrid Masters on Friday with his 17th consecutive win over Tomas Berdych, 6-4 6-2.

Maria Sharapova also booked her place in the last

four of the Madrid Open with a three-set win over Li Na, but top seed and reigning champion Serena Williams was forced to pull out of the tournament due to a thigh injury.

Despite coming into the tournament with doubts following surprise defeats to David Ferrer and Nicolas Almagro in recent weeks, Nadal has looked in fine form in the Spanish capital as he has cruised into the last four without the loss of a set.

The 13-time Grand Slam champion will meet compatriot Roberto Bautista Agut or Colombia's Santiago Giraldo for a place in the final.

Williams was due to face Petra Kvitova in the quarter-finals but pulled out due to a thigh injury. Sharapova will face third seed Agnieszka Radwanska in the semi-finals after the Pole overcame French qualifier Caroline Garcia 6-4 4-6 6-4 after battling for nearly 2½ hours on court.