

Andretti opens Circuit of The Americas

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The all-new Circuit of The Americas (COTA) in Austin began the final countdown to the 2012 Formula 1 United States Grand Prix on Sunday, when 1978 F1 world champion Mario Andretti officially opened the Texas venue in a 'First Lap Ceremony' featuring a collection of celebrity drivers, local dignitaries and VIP clients.

The invitation-only event, which was presented by Formula One tyre suppliers Pirelli and featured members of the Lotus F1 team, saw COTA ambassador Andretti cut a special ribbon of chequered flags before completing a lap in his title-winning Lotus 79.



"It's very green, as you could expect," Andretti told *Reuters*. "You get offline a bit - it's a bit slippery. But that's normal for a new circuit. Overall, my impression is absolutely fantastic."

Lotus reserve driver Jerome D'Ambrosio had the honour of becoming the first man to drive the circuit at speed in a modern F1 car, as he piloted the team's 2010 machine around the 5.516-kilometre track, with actor Patrick Dempsey among the special guests looking on.



"It's a very enjoyable layout with a couple of good opportunities for overtaking, some long, fast, sweeping 'S' bends and a few really satisfying, high-speed changes of direction similar to the 'Becketts' complex at Silverstone," D'Ambrosio told the Lotus website.

"The first corner is also quite special and it will be interesting to see it when people are dicing for position in the race. It's an enjoyable layout for a racing driver and also fantastic for the fans as the viewing areas are very well placed to catch all the action; of which there should be plenty!"

<http://www.formula1.com/news/headlines/2012/10/13944.html>