

# F1: Sauber Saga continues

It's got nothing to do with the parlous state of Dubai, but it's an interesting coincidence that, just as it seems that money IS an object in the middle east, BMW's proposed sale to a somewhat opaque group known as Qadbank Investments has fallen through. And guess what: BMW is to sell to the one person who wanted it all along, and who they said couldn't have it.

This morning, a quiet announcement appeared on the BMW Sauber website. Technically, the team still exists in that guise until the end of this year. It follows on from the decision by BMW to pull out of Formula One and BMW's initial response to Peter Sauber: you can't afford it, they said.

And so they wandered off and found a somewhat secretive group called Qadbank Investment. When questions were raised about its, and its commitment, BMW said it had done its due diligence and that Qadbank was both able and willing to support the team. Then Qadbank got embroiled in some sort of investigation over its involvement with a UK soccer team and - because it's soccer - we neither know nor care what the fuss is about.

But in the background, someone at BMW was clearly not following the party line.

And so, today, the notice said, simply "the sale to Qadbank Investment Ltd that was initially planned will not be completed."

Instead, it says, an agreement was reached yesterday to sell the team to Peter Sauber. Proving that Sauber is now in the driving seat, the agreement is subject to several conditions in his favour.

First is that the deal is subject to the perhaps obvious requirement that the new team gets a grid slot for 2010. This, one would have thought, would be automatic but BMW didn't sign up and so the space that it would have taken was allocated to Lotus. But there is a space on the grid since Toyota's precipitate withdrawal - and the FIA have telegraphed that they would welcome an application from a "viable" successor to the BMW Sauber team. Whether that is granted to the re-born Sauber team should be known early next week when the FIA publishes its latest (supposedly final but with F1 in its current turmoil that's uncertain) entries list for 2010.

The second condition is that the headcount is slashed - and BMW pays for it. So BMW has

delivered redundancy notices to 138 of the 388 staff. And it has warned that there may be more to come "in the near future." With this headcount, Sauber returns to its roots as a small, nimble team focussed on detail.

The third condition was that the team gets the Hinwil factory.

Of course, its present position is that it has no drivers, but that shouldn't prove too much of a problem to rectify: it's really just a matter of budget and there are plenty of people on the sidelines: Jacques Villeneuve is sniffing around, even to the extent of going to visit Lotus road cars' factory earlier this week, so desperate is he to be seen by a Formula One team. And he's not the only one hovering around.

BMW issued a somewhat mealy-mouthed statement: "we are very happy with this solution. This fulfils the most important requirement for a successful future for the team."

Shame they didn't think that when they first announced they were running away, and saved everyone a lot of heartache and worry.