



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

2008 BRITISH GRAND PRIX

FRIDAY PRESS CONFERENCE – July 4, 2008

TEAM PRINCIPALS: Ross BRAWN (Honda), John HOWETT (Toyota), Martin WHITMARSH (McLaren Mercedes), Sir FRANK WILLIAMS (Williams)

Q: A question to you all. There has been a letter from the FIA to all the constructors regarding the rules and the course of the regulations. What are your thoughts on that letter?

Frank WILLIAMS: The most important part of the letter which we received from Max was of course his statement that he wants to keep further downward pressure on costs. Regarding KERS we are already committed to that and anything else to do with the engine side is to do with our engine supplier. We view the letter positively and interestingly Max is not saying I. Max is saying please make the rules up and I hope I can underwrite them for you.

Martin WHITMARSH: I think like any business we will seek to improve safety, we will seek to improve the spectacle and we have got to control costs. I think it is continual pressure and I think it is right that the governing body is applying that pressure. We have got to work together as teams and with the FIA to achieve those objectives. It is in everyone's interest to have a healthy and competitive F1. We support the initiatives but we have got to come up with some good ideas.

John HOWETT: I think from Toyota's point of view we would like to go one step backwards and firstly establish a proper governance process for the regulatory change and also to learn from a lot of the changes we have had in the last couple of years. One can say a four race gearbox is actually, effectively, costing us more money, so I think our position is 'yes, we have no problem at all for dialogue', but I think we would like to see a clear understanding of the regulatory process, the governance process in conjunction with the Concorde Agreement and then I think we are very open to discuss the detail.

Ross BRAWN: I think the important thing about the letter is that it states that the teams can get together to write the rules for the future. If the teams can agree on the future direction of F1 that is the best solution. I think to prejudge what that direction should be, we are all reasonable judges of what is good for our business, we know we want to reduce costs if possible, we know we want to make it more entertaining and improve safety, so there's lots of common objectives and if the teams can genuinely get together to find solutions to improve the show, reduce costs, etc. I think we would be very happy with that. I think what is important is to have the confidence that when we come up with those objectives they are understood and supported by the FIA, otherwise the process is a waste of time. I am very optimistic that this is an opportunity for us to work together as teams to find solutions which are good for the future.

Q: Another question for all of you. Today there was a statement from the FIA and FOM about the future of the British Grand Prix. Your thoughts on that please.

FW: Delighted that the British Grand Prix will continue to be mentioned in a calendar. Some of us feared it may eventually be dropped but it doesn't seem likely now. If it is at Donington, it's at Donington. If it's at Silverstone, it's at Silverstone. Privately I would prefer to come to Silverstone. It is much closer for all our factory staff, it's closer to Heathrow and closer to the largest number of spectators but if it's Donington, we will be there.

MW: Like Frank said I think it is vitally important that there is a British Grand Prix, so that is good news. I think Silverstone and Donington are two great circuits. My personal recollections of Donington are very happy, so pleased to race there if that is where the race is in two years time.

JH: I think it has been said. The British Grand Prix is secure and in the end I think it is sad to lose a great circuit with heritage but at the same time I am sure Donington will create an environment which will be extremely good for F1.

RB: I think I agree with all of that. The most important thing is that we maintain the British Grand Prix because we are under huge competition from circuits like Abu Dhabi and Bahrain, these new countries that want a grand prix. It is just very good news that we will keep it in Britain, but a little bit sad that we are losing it from Silverstone, especially as our company and our factory are so close.

Q: Frank and Martin, what are your feelings about David and the fact he has decided to hang up his helmet?

FW: David drove for us for only one year but in that time it was apparent he would certainly win many races and arguably put a championship together. He was a gentleman, he was very straight forward and he was easy to understand at the time. I can't speak for now as he doesn't drive for us, but at the time he was very, very dedicated to what he was trying to achieve.

Q: And your thoughts about him deciding to retire?

FW: Looking at his lap times today I am wondering why he is doing that, but he has been at it for 12 or 13 years. Being a Scotsman I am sure he has saved a lot of money and will live happily ever after.

MW: I was very pleased to have had lunch with David earlier this week at the McLaren Technology Centre. I think it is important to remember the fact that David has driven more races for McLaren than any other driver. I think the whole team has a great deal of affection for David. I think he was a driver who was immensely professional. Even towards the end of his career with us every winter he sought to re-invent himself and become fitter and more dedicated, so there is a little bit of sadness when a character like David passes out of the sport. I think he has done a good job for the sport, I think he did a good job for the teams for which he has driven and as Frank said, looking at how he is going today, I wonder if it is the right time. But in truth David has got to make those decisions for himself. We had a great time with him and I think a lot of his wins were whilst he was in our team, so we are grateful for that and we will see what he does next year.

Q: John, tremendous results in the French Grand Prix two weeks ago and a good test here as well. However, it all seems to have reversed a bit today. What was the feeling after France?

JH: We were encouraged as we have been working hard but we are still not where we need to be because the relative pace if you like with Kimi with a broken exhaust is very large, so we have got a lot of work to do to get where we want to get to but it was a very positive result and Jarno did a brilliant job.

Q: And then the test?

JH: The test here was good. We have another big upgrade for Hockenheim and okay, we have had a tough day today but it depends on the programme and what people are doing. I think in the end tomorrow in qualifying the true relative pace here at Silverstone will be seen.

Q: Ross, quite a few changes to your car. How have those manifested themselves over the last few days with the test here and the race weekend so far?

RB: It is quite interesting as we have actually got a car which the drivers are quite happy with from a balance point of view. They can drive it well and it is reasonably consistent but in Magny-Cours we were just not quick enough. I think with the objectives and priorities of the team we have not had as an intense development programme this year as one would have in a normal season. Certainly not the intensity we hope to have in the future, so we have fallen behind a bit. We had these upgrades planned for a while and they will come over the next three races. The first is a new nose, front wing and some bodywork modifications. There are some further aerodynamic changes for Hockenheim and then we have a new rear suspension system for Hungary. I think that will be it for the rest of the season. We are pretty optimistic as always about these changes. I think we are seeing the benefit here of the first step of those changes, but I think it won't be until we get to Budapest that we will have the whole package.

Q: Was that one of your aims to accelerate the rate of development?

RB: Well, we have grouped the development this year. Instead of having a trickle of things coming through we have had a couple of pockets or projects that we have done because I was very keen to make sure that we balance our priorities between this year and next year. We do have a low downforce package for Monza as all the teams will have but we are battling down the hatches on this car now and getting on with the future.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Bob Bull – BBC Three Counties Radio) Do you think it is possible to make the sport cheaper to run given that it is so competitive and the teams are so close?

MW: I think the answer is yes. F1 is a very expensive sport and there have already been a number of initiatives... which I think have been successful. There have been other initiatives, some of which have been launched by the FIA, which have sought to control costs which have been spiralling. We all know that in truth we can quite dramatically reduce the costs without ruining the spectacle. It is important for those of us who have been in the sport for a long time that F1 remains at the pinnacle of motor sport. But I think we can do that with some sensible measures which control costs. I think historically F1 teams have not always been successful at working together and having a common interest, but I do sense personally that in F1 at the moment there is a strong view from all of the teams that not only from their own personal benefit, but for the good of F1, that we need to keep the independent teams in the sport. We need to make sure the sport is healthy and renewing itself, so it is time to work harder than perhaps we have worked in the past at controlling costs.

FW: I think Martin has got it right. The only thing I should add to that which perhaps is relevant is that next year's car is designed very much to improve and facilitate overtaking. If that alone occurs it will be a big benefit to what you see on television.

RB: I think essentially budget capping was a nice solution as that really did reduce the costs. You have got X amount of money to spend and you can't spend any more. You can't argue with that logic. Our difficulty has always been in restricting the technical regulations or procedures, you close one gate and everything bolts through the other one that is still left open. We froze the engine and all that money was put into aerodynamics and other areas of the company. That's the difficulty. In the purest sense, if we can constrain the amount of money that is available to teams, then costs will reduce. We don't seem to have been able to find the solution with that, so I think we are going to explore the technical constraints or the operational constraints and see if there are solutions there. But we have just got to be so careful that we do not leave any door even ajar that people could push open and pour all their resources into it. There is talk of restrictions on wind tunnels which is possibly a relatively easy thing to implement but if there are no restrictions on CFD, then teams will pour all their money into CFD facilities and nobody has explained to me so far how we can contain CFD. It is a very difficult thing to restrict. I can understand you can only have your wind tunnel turned on 12 hours a day but I can't understand how it restricts CFD facilities. It is not an easy task, I agree with Martin, but there is a good spirit within the teams at the moment to try and find a solution.

JH: I personally believe with open dialogue and shall we say with a good intent from all parties it would be very easy to achieve. If we don't get that, then I think it is challenging. We have the capability to reach agreement but it is having this very transparent and open dialogue which is very challenging in F1 when you come from an industrial background.

Q: (Dan Knutson – National Speed Sport News) Frank, could you give us a half-term report on your drivers? How do you think Nico and Kazuki have performed so far this year?

FW: Nico clearly is still learning, he's having rather too many accidents but he's super-quick and we have enormous faith and confidence. Nakajima doesn't say a great deal, gets on with it, has scored seven points which is really rather good since he's struggling a little bit to go as fast as his peers but he's a very good team member, works very hard and is very intelligent.

Q: (Takeharu Kusuda – Lapita Magazine) Question to Frank about your drivers: you have two young drivers, one is Nico, one is Kazuki. Kazuki spun today, I think Kazuki is not good at qualifying. Could you tell us about the differences between Nico and Kazuki?

FW: Well, qualifying is tomorrow but today there's 0.2s separating them, rather less than I thought there would be round this particular circuit. As regards Kazuki, his performance is truly encouraging so far today. The gap between the two drivers has been greater earlier, but he continues to improve. I would like to say he has very few accidents except for what we saw this afternoon. He's a great, great asset to the team in every sense.

Q: (Tomas Richtig – TV Nova) This question is for Martin and Frank: fourteen days ago Max asked your teams to put more pressure on FOM to give you more money from the TV rights, so you can pay more money to the FIA for its services. Any comment on that?

MW: Well, I don't remember the pressure being applied directly but of course we're always grateful to receive as much money as we can from FOM, but I guess that's a commercial negotiation between the teams and the FOM directly. I think, in the meanwhile, the FIA has stepped back a little bit from potentially increasing entry fees and the associated costs. Again, we welcome that. But there are a lot of negotiations in the background of Formula One. I think, at the moment, Formula One is at a critical point and it's clear that, as mentioned, we've got to control costs, we've also got to make sure we just stabilise the commercial environment of Formula One, which I hope and I sense that there's very much a wish amongst all of the teams, and FOM and the FIA, to achieve.

FW: Little to add. I will repeat what Martin said that the FIA (fees) don't go up except for inflation this year. Max has said that he has some safety equipment he would like to buy and maybe he would like to negotiate a contribution from the teams but that's not a new rule, it's a polite request – for a change – and I would also say that, generally speaking, the other thing to add, Martin said it and also everybody else, so it's a difficult subject. It could take two minutes or two hours. Let's leave it at two minutes.

Q: (Tomas Richtig – TV Nova) Martin just touched on the point and in this case I would like to ask Ross because you touched on the point about negotiations and it seems that the situation about the Concorde Agreement is more and more confusing for Formula One fans. Is there any clear message from the Formula One community regarding the Concorde Agreement negotiations in future?

RB: I think if you feel it's confusing for Formula One fans then it's confusing for us as well. There's still quite a long way to go.

Q: (Luc Domenjoz – Le Matin) Regarding costs, isn't there a contradiction between wanting to reduce costs and increasing the number of Grands Prix at the same time? So what does an additional Grand Prix cost for you and also, there won't be any summer break next season, and I remember Ron Dennis saying if there is no summer break it will be more complicated for mechanics because teams will need two sets of mechanics to tackle the season.

MW: I think the absence of the August break in the calendar next year is very tough. It really is tough on the mechanics. You look at the calendar and see how fewer days the mechanics and the cars are in the UK. It's undoubtedly the case. I think you posed the question about trying to save costs and the potential contradiction in that we've got more Grands Prix. I think that we just have to accept that we are in the entertainment business. If we are going to another Grand Prix, it does increase our costs but hopefully it's another show that we're putting on during the course of the year and it increases, potentially, the commercial value of Formula One. If we're spending that money on technology on the car, much as several of us up here today have historically enjoyed that, we have to also understand that so doing doesn't increase the commercial value of Formula One. So I think there will always be pressure to have more Grands Prix. I think you will reach a point of saturation but I think we're limited to 20 at the moment. We've got 19 next year. It worries me how hard it's going to be on the teams but I think that's a management challenge: how we're going to deal with that and make sure that we don't burn people out during the course of the season.

JH: I think it comes back partly to dialogue, so we, on a daily basis, are fighting costs, managing our businesses and I think ultimately we know where the cost factors are and by having an open discussion on the calendar and how best to optimise the calendar, it would be probably beneficial. In terms of extra races, we share fundamentally fifty percent of the revenue... IBITDA of FOA, so normally you would in fact benefit from the extra race and in many cases cover the marginal cost of the extra event.

RB: I think unfortunately we do tend to go round in circles and the August break was introduced as a means of genuinely giving everyone a rest in the middle of tough seasons. Now we want to expand the number of races and not do that, so we end up having to look at reserve squads and back-up mechanics and groups of people who can take over, so the others guys can get a rest. And without doing that, to have a whole race team that can't take a holiday from what would effectively be February until November is not easy. It means we're going to have to look at extra crews, extra people, so we can give people breaks. We've been through this before. I had the same discussion, came to a conclusion and those conclusions seem to have been forgotten again. So I think it's a shame.

FW: We believe that the extra race was very desirable from the front end of the business or extremely hard on the race team and I think we will have to take on quite a few more mechanics.

These will obviously be expensive, exposure we can sell better. It's hard on the people, perhaps it's a little bit better for the bank balance but not as much as you might guess. Ron Dennis once said several times to Max and Bernie in particular, eyeball to eyeball, 'the more races you put on, the more we lose.'

Q: (Mike Doodson) Apropos my colleague's previous question about the Concorde Agreement. Since there is no Concorde Agreement, can you make it clear to us whether you have a contractual obligation to continue racing for a given number of years? In other words, if you wish to do so, could each of you pull out of the World Championship at short notice, say at the end of this year?

FW: We have an agreement with Mr Ecclestone for a new Concorde Agreement. This document was dated 25 November 2005 and I add that it refers that there will be one, and secondly Max did issue a press release stating that Ferrari, Red Bull and whatever Spyker was called at the time had signed, again, to quote the FIA press release 'to prolong the Concorde Agreement for a further five years.' So unless my understanding of English has suddenly diminished, I do believe that according to the FIA, there is a Concorde Agreement. It's just not convenient for one or two people to believe that.

JH: I think fundamentally we're racing under a binding MOU with FOA. FOA, in fairness to them, are acting in good faith, so we're being remunerated and rewarded, if you like, in relation to the MOU and both parties at the moment, I would say, are displaying a clear contractual obligation. I would suggest we do have a binding agreement. I think the one outstanding issue is we've all signed for a modernisation but really a continuation of the existing Concorde Agreement, which is a tripartite agreement and I think the outstanding issue at the moment is the FIA actually joining that agreement and that's probably the current delay.

Q: (Mike Doodson) Can you pull out at the end of this year?

JH: I would suggest it's quite a complex legal issue because we do have a binding MOU and two parties are acting in good faith. If there is a clear breach of that agreement by either party we could do but at the moment there doesn't appear to be adequate breach for us to withdraw, so we are bound, at the moment, until 2012.

Q: (Niki Takeda – Formula PA) How come you are only harvesting energy from under braking? How come you are not going all the way? What's the benefit of doing that, if you cannot harvest energy from every moment when the car is running?

RB: Energy under braking is, to all intents and purposes, wasted energy. It's energy we dissipate as heat primarily through the braking system, and therefore energy which, if we recover, is additional to the total energy. So we generate energy primarily with the engine and then we dissipate it through aerodynamic drag, friction and a lot of it through braking. I don't know the exact percentages through braking, but quite a lot, and so we're trying to recover some of the energy that we would have thrown away. The other sources of energy in the car: heat from the cooling system and heat from the exhaust system, and those are two areas which we're going to look at in the future, to see if we can recover energy from those areas. But braking is the most obvious and it's the philosophy as used in many systems throughout the world: trains, buses, all sorts of things recover energy under braking, store it and then re-introduce it in driving the vehicle.

Q: (Bob Bull – BBC Three Counties Radio) Ross, you mentioned earlier on about being so close to the Silverstone circuit. As the European season shrinks and the bulk of the races are now moving further east, do you think that Formula One, as an industry, will tend to move with it in the long term?

RB: Personally I don't think so, no. I think there's a very strong core of expertise, certainly within Britain and definitely within Europe, but there are areas of expertise all round the world we use now. Our power train is designed and developed in Japan. When I worked at Ferrari, they were funded and supported by TATA which was an Indian industrial corporation which actually genuinely provided quite a lot of resource to Ferrari. I think we're very open to finding the resource and expertise we need all over the world. But the core racing experience tends to exist in Europe and particularly in Britain.

Q: (Alam Khan – The National, Abu Dhabi) Ross, you talked earlier about the new grands prix coming on the scene. Do you feel they will set a yardstick for the British Grand Prix and others to follow and is it quite exciting, is that's what's needed?

RB: I think several of the new circuits have raised the standards in terms of facilities, in terms of the quality of circuit. I think, for me personally, having been in racing a long time, it's still nice to have a character to a circuit, to have a spirit about a circuit, and of course Silverstone has a lot of history, a lot of spirit. You remember the races in which you did well, did badly. I think Donington has a lot of racing heritage. The proposal is to build a facility or expand the facility in Donington which will be the match of anything else in the world, and that's something which for us will be great; for Britain to have a Formula One facility which is comparable with anything in the world would be a great asset. I think it's a good thing.