



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

Press Information

2013 Belgian Grand Prix Post Qualifying Press Conference Transcript

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TV UNILATERAL

Lewis, it was all about timing today and your timing was absolutely perfect.

Lewis HAMILTON: Yeah, it was. It was obviously a good job by the team. I was so surprised when I crossed the line. When I started the lap, it looked like, on the board... I saw on the screen that I was about seventh or eighth and I thought 'Oh my God', especially as it was raining more. I went wide in turn one and the dash display is usually telling you whether you're up or down and it said I was three seconds down and then five seconds and six seconds, so I didn't understand what was happening in the lap but I just kept pushing. I could see I was catching Sebastian towards the end but what a blessing, I feel so fortunate to be up here.

Particularly the middle sector seemed to be strong. So clearly through the Mercedes and yourself are well hooked up. How do you explain that?

LH: I think generally I feel quite comfortable in changing conditions and I feel I'm able to find the limits when the conditions are really on the edge. And in the middle I pushed quite a lot in the middle sector particularly as I thought I was down three seconds, so I was really caning it. But, yeah, the car's feeling good.

Sebastian, today was obviously also keeping your nerve. What were you thinking about the closing stages? Were you thinking that there is as much to lose here as there is to gain?

Sebastian VETTEL: No, there's always something to gain. Yeah, it wasn't clear that the first lap we did in Q3 was *the* lap, on intermediate tyres. Obviously we all went out for the start with slicks tyres. It was quite entertaining because it started to rain pretty heavily. Then on intermediates, as I said, it wasn't clear because in the beginning it looked like there was more and more rain coming, so we were all rushing to get a lap in. But then it stopped raining and the circuit came back very quickly and the last lap turned out to be the fastest lap, with the circuit drying. It's difficult to know how fast you can go. Obviously I saw Lewis catching up in the last lap and I thought I could have gone a bit quicker here or

quicker there. In the end it was quite close I think across the line. In these conditions anything can happen. A shame to miss pole, once again. I'm quite happy today. The boys did a very good job changing tyres from slicks to intermediates and got us an extra lap. Unfortunately the circuit wasn't ready but all in all I think a good day for the team, so let's see what happens tomorrow. We expect similar conditions to today, rain, dry and a bit of everything, so we'll see.

And Mark, your final qualifying session in a Formula One car at this Spa-Francorchamps circuit and it delivered its usual mixture of conditions. How was your session?

Mark WEBBER: Yeah, difficult for all of us to make the right calls. But in the end I think we got most things right. It's very easy to look stupid in those conditions, from a team side, from a driver's side, making the right calls. In the end, we got most things OK I'd say. It's a little bit bizarre with the DRS on or off in the session, actually in Q3. It's available in the first part of quali but not at the end, but it's the same for everyone, so it's a very, very difficult thing, as Lewis has touched on, to know where you are, how the track's moving around so much. It was quite a ballsy thing for me to go slow in the middle lap know if the track's going to be better on the last lap, to save the tyres, because they're struggling quite a bit in those conditions, on the inters. In the end, it wasn't too bad a lap and it was quite tight obviously. So, yeah, pretty happy to be right up there for tomorrow's race.

Back to you Lewis. Obviously it's not been the easiest weekend so far from the looks of things as far as practice has been concerned for you and the Mercedes team. Tell us about the race tomorrow. You're obviously starting from where you want to be, but can you keep these two guys behind you?

LH: I think this weekend they've both shown that they have incredible pace this weekend. But I'm hoping that whatever the conditions are tomorrow we can try to fight it out with them. The guys have done a fantastic job in bringing a good package here. I generally feel we're quite close. I still feel the Red Bull is generally a little bit ahead of us in performance and that's why results like this today feel even better because it feels like we extracted more than what the car can actually do, so I'm really happy with it.

PRESS CONFERENCE

Lewis, second race in a row now that in the closing stages of a Saturday afternoon you've spoiled Sebastian's day. It's becoming a bit of a habit and you two are having quite a duel at the moment.

LH: I'm trying to catch him up. He's obviously had incredible success over the last few years so I'm trying my best to battle with him and I hope that we can do that in the race tomorrow whatever the conditions are. I just feel grateful for the way the year has turned out and that we can be so competitive and really try to challenge the Red Bulls. It's a huge accomplishment by the team.

Tell us about communication on a day like this. You were saying just a moment ago that you weren't really quite sure what was going in the first part of the lap, obviously the times were all over the place, but in terms of the way the team communicates. We saw people making mistakes in Q1 and Q2, very easy to make mistakes and communication clearly critical to that.

LH: Yeah, everyone is on edge and communication is key for all the teams. So they're asking me what the track is like at certain points of the circuit and of course they need to be on it to make sure we get out at the right time. We nearly got pushed out of Q2, which I really wouldn't have been happy with...

Two one hundredths of a second.

LH: Yeah, by the grace of God we got through. And then at the end, I didn't know that I was going to be one of the last ones across the line. I just kept pushing and at the end of the day it was a good job by the team, particularly when the moment counted.

Sebastian, as we were saying, Lewis and Mercedes coming on strong at the moment.

SV: Yeah, surely. Obviously in qualifying they have been quite strong in the first part of the season and they keep doing it. I think today you have to look from a different point of view. In these conditions anything can happen. Lewis had quite an impressive middle sector. He was right behind me. Maybe it helped a little bit to know how fast he could go here and there. I checked in my mirrors and thought I could have gone quicker here, quicker there because he was closing up. But I'm very happy with the result. As I said, in these conditions anything is possible. Mark touched on it – it's very easy to do the wrong calls and you're out. So, overall, a good result and everything is possible tomorrow, condition-wise we expect the same as today.

You obviously looked very comfortable yesterday, apart from the puncture obviously in practice two and again this morning, the Red Bull looked well balanced, quick on the circuit. There was a sign in Q2 when you just waited and went out and did that one run that there seemed to be quite a lot of confidence as far as you were concerned about the session.

SV: Yeah, well confidence in the weather let's say, mostly. It was supposed not to rain. I said OK there's no point in going out, let's wait, because the circuit will improve, which is what we did in the end. My first lap was not fantastic so I did another lap. I think we did the right thing there. Fortunately it didn't rain. Obviously when it starts raining and you haven't gone out you look really stupid. I think we trust the guys on the pit wall to judge the weather and the situation. Obviously, Q3 was different. The boys were quite in a hurry when we came back in to change tyres and go back out. But for Q2 I think it was the right call.

Mark, we mentioned before that this is your last run in F1 quali at Spa-Francorchamps. Tell us about your relationship with this circuit, what you feel today and what you feel about this place.

MW: It's a sensational circuit. Compared to the ones that have been attempted to be designed of late obviously they're nothing like this track. It's a beautiful circuit to drive on, all the guys love coming here, the teams, the engineers. Even the cars I think in a bizarre way know they're here in terms of Eau Rouge and Blanchimont. You know, La Source is very tight and then 10 seconds later you're through Eau Rouge so it's a great mixture. I won the Formulas Ford race here in 1996 so it's a beautiful circuit to drive on in any category and yeah, looking forward to bringing the Porsche here next year.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Oana Popoiu – F1 Zone) Lewis, Toto Wolff said that Mercedes should start focusing on next year's car. What are your thoughts about that, especially now when you are in front of Red Bull?

LH: I think there's several different people that have different opinions about it but I feel quite relaxed and comfortable with the people who are at the top who are going to make that decision. I don't feel that next year is compromised at all or this year just yet. I think it's trying to find a real fine balance. Of course we want to have the best shot possible next year but of course all of a sudden we're competing as well as we are now so it's striking a fine balance, but I think they'll do a good job of that.

Q: (Graham Keilloh – F1 Plus) Lewis, do you think if it hadn't rained in qualifying that Mercedes had the pace to contend for pole position?

LH: I would be guessing but my guess would be maybe not. The Red Bull was looking particularly quick and also the Ferrari was looking quite quick in the dry conditions, so I'm not necessarily sure that we had the pace to be as fast everyone today. But who knows, it's just a guess.

Q: (Simon Cass – Daily Mail) Lewis, you said coming into the second half of the season that you've never felt better. Is it fair to say that you've never been driving any better or certainly as well as you have been at the moment?

LH: It feels like I'm driving the best but I feel like I've been driving well for quite some time and just sometimes circumstances don't allow you to really show that. But I really feel that I'm getting everything out of the car, I'm getting everything out of every opportunity that I have. I know there's a lot of pressure for everyone but I feel in a good place. And yeah, absolutely, I can't remember the last time I crossed the line and had such a good feeling, particularly as I was looking for the TV screens and I just couldn't believe... I could see the team was cheering so I couldn't believe that. It's just crazy to think that this is my 31st pole and it still feels like it's the first one. It's just an incredible feeling and I'm very grateful to be here today, as I said.

Q: (Peter Farkas – Auto Motor) Lewis, yesterday you said on the radio that the car was all over the place and even today in the morning you had some problems, and now you are on pole position. I think Nico had quite a good long stint yesterday, how confident are you in the long stints of the Mercedes and the race pace, and would you prefer wet or dry in that respect?

LH: I feel that the long pace is not bad. I think we... again, over the evening, last night we made some decent changes, but going into qualifying we made some better ones. Qualifying was more about just being there at the right time and you never know when you're going to be in the right position and I just happened to be one of the last ones coming across the line and that's when the track would be at its best. But I think Nico proved that the long run was good and I think I had a few good laps as well but the Red Bulls are still pretty quick. I think it's going to be close but I hear it's going to rain pretty heavily tomorrow.

Q: (Dan Knutson – Auto Action and National Speedsport News) Mark, it's very easy for anybody to look silly out there, make a stupid mistake. How much more chancy is a session in the wet compared to a session in the dry when there are far fewer variables?

MW: Yeah, emotionally it is a bit more of a roller-coaster, particularly when you've got... really it's the conditions changing so much. In our industry and in Formula One we like to control as much as we can, obviously, and the plan into a normal dry qualifying session is obviously very regimented, very organized and the fine tuning is incredibly precise. When it's like that, obviously you have to make decisions on the bounce, the driver's got to be very interactive with the pit wall, the pit wall has got to make the decisions with the boys so yeah, there is just, by circumstance, more emotion and the timing is a bit more – well, a lot more critical and that's what makes people a bit more squeakier, let's say, in terms of pressure. As I say, it's easy to get it wrong.

Q: (Paolo Ianieri – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Sebastian, we saw today that it was very easy to make mistakes. Ferrari looked like they made mistakes at the end so they are quite far behind, while you and Mercedes did everything perfectly. How easy is it for you mentally to get in the car and know that you can trust completely what's going to happen on the pit wall?

SV: I don't think you are in any doubt – at least for myself – in doubt of what the team does. Obviously in terms of which tyres to use and when etc is largely depending on us inside the car, but I think, as Mark touched on, obviously in these conditions it's a lot trickier to get it right, not just for the team, also for the driver because it's so much easier to make a mistake. In the end, I think all three of us had very good laps at the end, on the lap where it mattered most. But for sure, compared to the dry, I think it's much harder to nail that one where you don't have room for error and it's so much easier to make a mistake, go wide, lose the car, lose time so yeah, if I look back to the lap I had now, obviously, there's room for improvement but many times I was quite close to lose the car. It doesn't mean that I had to go off and crash the car but lose the car, lose time. That's why, in the rain, in the wet, in these mixed conditions, there's a chance for everybody to over-perform, but there's also the chance to get it wrong. It doesn't take much and you are somewhere at the back.

Q: (Leonid Novozhilov – F1Life) Lewis, what were you feeling in your last qualifying lap?

LH: This one just now? Again, it didn't feel spectacular. As I said, I went wide in turn one and my dashboard was really confusing me in terms of whether I was up or down on my previous lap, but I just kept pushing and particularly the first corner and the last two corners were terrible. I thought that the lap wasn't that great but...

SV: You thought I was on a cool-down lap which is why...

LH: I was catching him...

SV: ...so much that I will just take it easy.

Ends