



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

Press Information

2013 Japanese Grand Prix Thursday Press Conference Transcript 10.10.2013

DRIVERS – Charles PIC (Caterham), Pastor MALDONADO (Williams), Jean-Eric VERGNE (Toro Rosso), Nico HULKENBERG (Sauber), Sebastian VETTEL (Red Bull Racing), Jenson BUTTON (McLaren)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Sebastian, just a few days ago you described coming here as coming to the best track in the world. Can you explain why it is the best track in the world? I'll ask everyone else the same question, so prepare your answers.

Sebastian VETTEL: I think generally we race on the best tracks in the world and, as I said, I think Suzuka is one of the best, if not the best, in my point of view. As a driver, just going through the first sector is fantastic, with the high-speed corners. It's a track where we really get to challenge ourselves, get to push the cars to their limits and obviously it's much more intense feeling the car at the limit in a high-speed corner rather than in medium or low-speed (corners). There are quite many around here. It's a very tricky track, very challenging. Another great corner, I think, is Spoon, which is off-camber on the way out and therefore it's quite tricky to keep the car on the right line. So, all in all, it's a place where we love to race. On top of that there is a fantastic atmosphere, crazy Japanese fans. They are very passionate about us coming here and I think all the drivers we do get a lot of respect when we come here but equally a lot of support.

Jenson, an extraordinary record here – you've finished all 11 of your races here, plus the two in Fuji as well. Your thoughts on Suzuka?

Jenson BUTTON: Yeah, I'm not sure that's really the best record to have around Suzuka but, yeah, it's great to be back. I love this circuit. I think most of us do. It's a very unforgiving circuit. Very fast and flowing, especially from one up until, well, actually, after the second Degner. It's a really good section up there. So, very enjoyable. It's a tricky circuit to overtake on, but I think the DRS zone is hopefully going to help a little bit with that. But it's always a flat-out race, with hardly any rest. We've got the hard and the medium tyres here, so it's going to be pushing all the way, which is what we love as racing drivers, especially around a circuit like Suzuka. So, hoping for a good weekend.

Charles, just one race here so far.

Charles PIC: Yeah, last year. It was my first time last year and it's not the easiest track to learn, especially the first sector because it's very fast. But definitely it's one of my favourites. I think it's one of the tracks, with Spa, where you get the most sensation out of the car. I like it very much.

Pastor, you finished eighth here last year?

Pastor MALDONADO: Yeah, this is my third time here. Very nice track. I agree with all of them – it's one of the best of the season. I think all the drivers are very happy to be here. The fans' community is very big. It's a special weekend. I hope to do my best to be in the points again this year.

Jean-Eric, 13th last year, what are your thoughts on the circuit?

Jean-Eric VERGNE: It's a track that I love. Obviously all the drivers love it. It's a great atmosphere. You can really feel the whole history here. Obviously, as Spa, it's a track where you can, in a way, stretch the legs of the car, which is a really nice feeling.

And Nico, seventh last year, I think.

Nico HULKENBERG: Last year was a good race for us. Also one of my favourite circuits. I think everything else has been mentioned by these guys.

An individual question for you all. Sebastian, also you mentioned last weekend that the car was very much on the edge. We see these extraordinary performances from you, almost weekend after weekend. How easy or how difficult is it to drive?

SV: I think it's never easy. Obviously I think the car, don't get me wrong, it's on another level when you compare for example with Charles' car, there is a difference for sure. But no matter how quick the car, in the end, makes it around the track, you will always push the car to its edge and try to get the best out of the car. We obviously have been to Korea to a couple of times and we know the trend of the track, especially throughout the race – the front right is on the limit. So, therefore, you obviously try to set up your car to fight that sort of problem and, yeah, I think overall it's never easy. We had to push a lot in the race. We were under pressure from behind with Lotus. Obviously we were strong enough to always have a little bit of a gap but yeah, you could not, unless maybe in the last two laps, I could not lean back and rest too much.

Q: Jenson, somebody very close to you a few years ago said you were becoming a Honda man through-and-through. That possibility emerges again in 2015 if you're still with McLaren. What are the chances?

JB: There's a chance, yes. There's definitely a chance. I think first of all it's great that Formula One has another engine manufacturer that's interested in coming back in. I think that's very good for the sport and hopefully it will bring others back into the sport. Japan... it feels that Japan needs either a driver or a manufacturer in the sport. Obviously it's been a little while since they've had a manufacturer and with no Japanese drivers on the grid now. It's a country that really does love it's motorsport, has true racing fans. The guys said there were hundreds of people out on Wednesday, on set-up day – yesterday – when it was chucking it down with rain and they were watching them set-up. That's a true racing fan – none of this Monaco stuff! So, it shows it's in their culture and in their blood. I think it's very special for Japan to have a manufacturer in the sport – but obviously that's not for another year and a half. We've got a long time before that and hopefully a very good year next year with Mercedes-Benz.

Q: Charles, you so nearly led the team to regain tenth place in the Constructors' Championship last weekend in Korea. Do you think that can happen before the end of the year?

CP: We hope so. It was very close in Korea. We need 13th place and finish 14th. So... yeah... we will keep pushing very hard to get this 13th place. It's very important for us and also to prepare well next year. So we will do everything we can.

Q: Pastor, it hasn't been a good season so far this year. What are your thoughts on staying with Williams? Your future with Williams?

PM: For sure it was a hard beginning of the season and quite hard times for us as a team. We've been working very, very hard, 24 hours per day, trying to improve our performance and trying to do something different to improve the car performance and at the moment, we find some way but maybe it's not enough to catch the teams who are quite close to us. For sure, it's nothing to do. We need to keep trying, we need to keep doing until the last race I think. There are still five races to go. We've been quite close, even last weekend, to being in the points. We had some problem in the last part of the race but yeah, I'll keep trying to get some more points before the end of the season and then... we will see for the next year. At the moment I have a contract and it's looking quite good.

Q: Jean-Eric, I think you thought things were going to be better last weekend than they were. What was the problem? What actually happened?

J-EV: First of all, we struggled the whole weekend to find a correct balance. In the end both cars retired because of brake-ducts being broken. It was probably the issue that we had in the weekend. So we changed many things for this weekend. Obviously Sauber has done a very good job to catch us back so now they are just in front in the championship with the same points. Now for us it is a five-race season. So, we're pushing like crazy. I believe we've got a good car and if we put everything in together we will score some more points. That's definitely our target.

Q: Nico, how come it's coming good at this stage of the season? What's changed – you or the car?

NH: I haven't changed! I certainly haven't changed. I think the car. Of course we've put on some updates: a big one in Budapest – which we now understand better and better – and then some small bits and bobs. I think the tyres did the rest. And what we did in Korea I think was outstanding. I'm really happy and proud about that but we probably punched above our weight there and out-performed a few cars which we shouldn't do. But there was this opportunity and we grabbed it. So that was very good.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Livio Oricchio – O Estado de Sao Paulo) Sebastian, you had a very fast car since the beginning of the season. Then from Spa, you've had four poles, four victories; the gap increased even more to your competitors. How do you personally explain that?

SV: I wasn't on pole in Spa. As you mentioned, I think it's right to say that we had a very strong car from the beginning of the season, strong enough to always finish in a very very strong position on Sunday afternoon. Lately, I think we've been very strong in qualifying as well whereas at the beginning of the year Mercedes definitely seemed to have the upper hand. I think there's no real explanation from our side, there's not one part that went on the car and all of a sudden it was that much quicker. I think we were able to improve the car so that arriving at Spa the car was better than it was in Hungary. Since then, we've just tried again to improve, there's new bits coming every race weekend, even though sometimes it's a very small package, but even so, we're pushing very hard, trying to improve the car. I'm sure the others do the same but it seems that we've had lots of good parts coming lately and making the car quicker. Also, I think there's a factor of you understanding the car more than at the beginning of the season so you are able to react quicker, change the set-up in the right manner. Obviously there's not so much time available. If you look on Friday, you have one chance overnight to make a change and I think we got better as a team in that regard to get closer to one hundred percent on Saturday morning already and then benefit throughout the weekend.

Q: (Frederic Ferret – L'Equipe) Sebastian, if I'm correct, in 2008 you climbed Mount Fuji; can you tell us more about that? And can you tell us more about your helmet, last year with the Japanese flag? Where is it now and does it mean something special for you?

SV: Yeah, climbed the... well, climbed is not really the... you don't need a rope to go up there. We started very early, together with Alexander Wurz, it was a fun trip and we climbed or we walked up so we reached the summit as soon as the sun came up which was very special. There were a lot of people telling us off because it's too cold and it's too late in the year but actually it's not a problem, so it was quite cold at night but not too bad. It was a very nice experience to be up there, it's very high, close to 4000 meters above sea level, so it was a unique experience.

Regarding the helmet of last year, I'm not sure... I think it's at home. Always in Japan, the last couple of years we came here with a special helmet design. I'm using an Arai helmet which is a Japanese manufacturer and obviously it's their home Grand Prix, not just for my helmet but also for many other helmets. It's nice to give a little bit back to them, but also to the fans, to come up with a special idea and I think also this year's helmet looks very nice.

Q: (Abhishek Takle – Midday) Nico, you've given Lotus a deadline to agree a deal (for next year). Can you update us as to what's going on there and if not Lotus, what are your other options?

NH: I've not set a deadline. I think that was a misunderstanding and someone not laying it out correctly. What I've basically said is that I would like to have clarification or certainty by the end of October.

Q: (Abhishek Takle – Midday) Nico, Eric Boullier said that weight would not be an issue if he chose to give you the drive. Does that reassure you after all the talk about heavier drivers being marginalised, that at some point you might not find a seat next year?

NH: To be honest, not, and there's no one from the team who has personally told me that weight or height is an issue, but this whole discussion, for me, is not worth having because I am what I am and I can't change it.

Q: (Ian Parkes – Press Association) Sebastian, I was wondering whether you have read or heard about Lewis Hamilton's comments following the race in Korea?

SV: Yeah, I was told. Obviously it's very nice to hear something like that. I think I can only give it back, I think. There is respect amongst the drivers, obviously there's a lot of stuff that gets written and said but I think that the most important thing is when you go up to another driver, whether you feel respected or not and I think that is the case. I think Lewis is one of the best drivers currently in Formula One. I get along quite well with him lately so I can only say 'thank you very much' and give it back.

Q: (Ian Parkes – Press Association) Can I just follow up on that? You obviously read about Lewis's Tweets but I was referring to his immediate post-race comments?

SV: Sorry, I didn't hear (those).

Q: (Ian Parkes – Press Association) The post-race comments referred to the fact that your era now was as predictable as the Schumacher era, in that when you watched a race back then, you watched the start, fell asleep and then by the end of the race, you knew who had won.

SV: Well, that's a compliment, first of all. I think it's very different. I think there's probably one race which was a bit of an exception. If you take Singapore, the gaps we had and were able to build up were incredible, to lap two seconds quicker than the cars behind us, but obviously it depends on who was behind us at the time and which tyres (they had) and so on, but anyways, what I want to say is that if you take Korea which I think is more similar to Spa, the gap was something between three and six seconds for the whole race. If you look at ten years ago, it was more like thirty to sixty seconds which is a big

difference. Don't get me wrong, it's a nice cushion to have in the car, when you see that you're three seconds down the road, but equally you know that if you make one stupid mistake – in Korea, for example, a lock-up which was very likely and three seconds is nothing compared to thirty or sixty.

Ends