



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

Press Information

2014 Australian Grand Prix Friday Press Conference Transcript

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TEAM REPRESENTATIVES – Toto WOLFF (Mercedes), Eric BOULLIER (McLaren), Rob WHITE (Renault Sport F1), Stefano DOMENICALI (Ferrari), Claire WILLIAMS (Williams), Christian HORNER (Red Bull Racing)

PRESS CONFERENCE

A very interesting first day's running. I'll start with you Christian, as the defending world champion team. I guess given where you were two weeks ago in the winter testing, you must be fairly pleased with the way this first day of running has turned out. Tell us what has been going on behind the scenes in this intervening period?

Christian HORNER: Well today has been a very string first day for us. It's been our first proper test day of the season. We've had a very difficult pre-season with numerous issues, which have been pretty well documented prior to us arriving in Melbourne. It was refreshing for the drivers to get plenty of laps in and really get a first proper feel for the car. It's been an encouraging start but we still have an awful lot of work to do we can still see that there is quite a gap to the Mercedes and to Ferrari but we're starting to realise what that gap is and by the end of this weekend that should hopefully have a bit more clarity. But certainly behind the scenes there's an enormous amount of effort of going on both back in the Red Bull factory back in Milton Keynes and of course in Viry-Chatillon with the Renault guys as well. With such a big regulation change and such is the complexity of what is nowadays referred to as the power unit rather than the engine it's not unsurprising that there have been quite a lot of issues to deal with.

Tell us about managing the situation from your point of view. Does being a four-time world champion team recently – focusing on things like teamwork and morale – does it make it easier to rescue yourself from the kind of situation you were in because you've had some success or does it make it more difficult?

CH: Neither of those issues has been an issue. Morale is extremely high and we work very effectively as a team. It's been a challenging winter to design, build and then obviously modify RB10, but the way the team has responded to the challenge has been fantastic. There is a real desire and inner strength within the team. We've achieved quite a bit over the past few years and that's not by accident. As I've said there are always engineering solutions to engineering problems.

Thank you for that. Moving to you Stefano. Obviously Christian thinks you're ahead of his team. Fernando was fastest this morning and third this afternoon. How do you assess the first day of term for Ferrari, and what was the difference in programme between Alonso and Raikkonen.

Stefano DOMENICALI: Today was an interesting day just to see if some of the issues we had during the Bahrain test were solved. We are still not on top of all the things we have to solve and this is something that shows, as Christian says, the complexity of this project. But you know, what we have to do is keep working on the things we know. We need to improve and that's the way it is. For sure there were different things to test and to try between the drivers but that's part of the normal programme we do. In my view today maybe you will see that some teams were a little bit hiding or having some issues for the day. Tomorrow the situation will be different again, we don't know, we will see. If there will also be different weather conditions this will be another thing we never tested with this car so far, so the managing of the car in possibly wet conditions could be another exciting or challenging thing for all of us. But so far, it's important that we were able to run with the programme we wanted even if we had some little issue to solve. But that's part of the game, it's just the first free practice of a long season.

And are you happy with the structure you've got in place now? I know there has been a lot work behind the scenes – technical facilities, changes in the management, new people coming in, appointments and what have you. Is this the team you want now?

SD: I think the basic for sure. We've done a great job in the last couple of years to restructure the team, restructure the facility, that was absolutely and imperative thing to do and I think that now we are in the way that we should be to do the best we can in these conditions. So, so far I'm pleased about it.

Talking about restructuring, Claire, we'll come across to you. Obviously very much a new look Williams team in more ways than one. What steps that have gone on behind the scenes with your team are you most proud of at the moment?

Claire WILLIAMS: I think like you said we've had a lot of effort that's gone on behind the scenes to make sure that we entered this season in a completely different place as to how we ended it last year. So I think a lot of work has gone on behind the scenes but I don't think you can single out one of those efforts. Bringing in the Mercedes engine has had a huge influence on our position this year and our performance. Bringing in Pat Symonds and him heading up a whole new technical team as well has been significant and played its part as has obviously bringing in Felipe Massa to partner Valtteri this season. So there has been a lot of work and we've had a good winter but this is only the first race of the year and we haven't qualified yet, so we'll have to wait and see how we do tomorrow.

Q: You had the fastest time in the Bahrain test, you did the second-highest kilometres in testing, where are you today? What has today's running revealed to you?

CW: Today's been positive. I think the engineers are all relatively happy with what they've managed to achieve. It's been the usual programme of everything you'd expect us to be running on Friday practice. I think Felipe had a bit of an issue this morning which prevented him from going out – but that was to do with his radio software rather than an issue with the car. Valtteri seems comfortable with the car, little bit of understeer that we've got to correct overnight but both drivers are saying that they're happy.

Q: Eric, fifth and ninth this afternoon, plenty of laps on the board. Is it about what you expected from your first day of competitive running?

Eric BOULLIER: I don't know if we had any expectations today, just obviously we had a lot of plans and a lot of tests to do, to go through. Obviously first to put again some laps and miles and setup for the drivers. I think we can be happy, we went through most of the plan today so I think the team did a good job.

Q: You've been at McLaren a few weeks now. What changes do you want to make in the team and how much autonomy are you going to be given to do that by the management group?

EB: The first part of your question, it is still in my head, on my mind, my plan. But it doesn't have to be public. This is obviously a great team, a lot of history, the best facilities, I think, in the paddock. And obviously a lot of great individuals eager to do well and go back where the team should be. So, that's going to be... let's say, most of the work is going to be to get everybody on track on this. For the second part of the question, it's a team effort as always. The idea behind the split in the team principal role is something which we have... I actually had personal experience in Lotus. I think it's good today when you have so much travel during the season and so many people to care about at the factory, it's obvious that you need to focus or get some different roles split over the company. I think it worked well in the past and it should work well in McLaren.

Q: Toto, you came here as favourites, certainly among a lot of pundits, fastest and second fastest on the soft tyre runs, long run looked to be a step ahead of the others. Did it turn out how you expected today?

Toto WOLFF: Yes. If you look after Free Practice Two and analyse that, that was quite satisfying. As you said, on one lap the pace was good and the long run was good as well. But you can see how quickly it goes. In Free Practice One, Lewis went out and after half a lap the car stopped, so you need to be very careful. It's just enough to have a little problem and the race or the qualifying could be finished.

Q: Obviously you've got two top drivers and clearly a competitive package. Have you had conversations behind the scenes in terms of priority, team orders, obviously thinking about what happened last year?

TW: Yes, we had those conversations, and I think it's important to have those conversations. Both of the drivers know each other for quite a long time, they have been team-mates before – back in karting – and we got caught out by surprise last year in Malaysia and we don't want this to happen again. It's just very good discussions we had. They're not only very talented and fast but also very intelligent. They treat each other in a very fair way. We went through some of scenarios and I think we're in a good place.

Q: So it depends on circumstances as to what you decide?

TW: It depends on circumstances, yes.

Q: Rob, two teams getting plenty of laps on the board today, two teams in a bit of difficulty. Obviously your problems going into this season have been well catalogued. How do you feel about what we've seen today?

Rob WHITE: First race weekend is always a testing time and of course this year feeling particularly anxious because we're not as well prepared as we would have liked to have been. So, one of the things that Christian rightly alluded to is the fact that in some ways some of the race weekend scenario still needed to be practiced for the first time in P1 and also P2. So, pleased to be able to run through a normal-looking race weekend programme. That's the big achievement of today.

Q: Obviously you hadn't done too many practice starts coming into this Melbourne weekend. I noticed there were quite a few taking place with Renault-powered cars today. Are you happy where you are on practice starts?

RW: Yeah. There was nothing magical. They were kind of towards the end of the run plan for the testing and we didn't quite get there in the pre-season testing in several cases. We haven't got any particular concern about them. Of course we're now into learning about the setup parameters in order to try to get some performance into the practice starts. It is a very important phase of the race. We're very conscious and all of our teams are very conscious of that. So, once again, we're behind where we would have liked to be and the task now is to try and gain ground.

Q: A quick line from you on that Christian, are you comfortable on the starts.

CH: It's been the least of our problems. We haven't been out on the track doing laps, let alone starts. We're hoping to start the race on Sunday so we'll need a start.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Mark Fogarty – The Age) Claire and gentlemen, the reaction to the sound of the engines has been underwhelming, to say the least. You people have heard these engines during testing, has it occurred to anyone that we've got a real problem on our hands, just how horrible they sound, and how the fans are going to react?

CW: Personally I like the sound of the engines, but then I love Formula One and I love watching cars go round a racetrack. I think people will pretty quickly get used to what Formula One engines sound like. We've had so many changes over so many decades of motor racing and you very quickly forget what a previous engine sounds like and I think people just want to see a good race on Sunday and I think that as long as we can deliver that then I think that any issues that perhaps... or contentious conversations around that may fade away.

TW: Well, if you like sound of engines, let's go back to V10 and V12, let's not do any hybrid. This is modern technology, this is where road cars are going. Downsizing is the motto and I think we just need to accept that the formula has changed. These cars are going to go quicker than the old ones in a couple of races, we're going to get used to the sounds and I promise next year you will not notice and you will not notice any difference any more.

SD: I think that Claire and Toto summarised the situation very well.

Q: (Flavio Vanetti – Corriere della Serra) Stefano, are you worried about the problems that Kimi seems to have had today or are you more satisfied by the performance of Fernando?

SD: I always have to see the negative side of the... or the empty side of the glass, so of course we need to make sure that all the things that are still not solved – not only on Kimi's side – have to be solved or addressed very quickly because the competition is very strong and the time that we have available is not a lot. So I think that for me the most important thing is to address and to solve the issue very quickly and whatever it is, the driver is not really the problem because I'm sure that both drivers will be able to manage the situation in the best way that they can, but there is still a lot of work to do.

Q: (Stuart Codling – F1 Racing) Eric, you've added a new sponsor to your rear wing without much in the way of fanfare. Could you explain the significance of

that and maybe shed some light on your quest for a title sponsor. Are you closer to announcing something? I think Ron said the other week that it would be in the next few events. Are we closer to firming something up there?

EB: We lately signed a new sponsor which is good news and we are happy to welcome Asos which is an on-line fashion retailer. I think it's in nine languages delivering to 234 countries – I know my figures. It's obviously very exciting for us. It's a huge company selling clothes and selling all stuff like fashion stuff. Regarding the other part of the question, we will soon announce... we will hope to sign soon a title partner. We are not in a rush to announce it until everything is closed and done but it's going to be done in due time.

Q: (Dan Knutson – Auto Action) Stefano, three questions about your power plant: what are the specific issues that need to be fixed? Within the rules of homologation, what can you now do to develop the engine and the third question is how do you rate your engine compared to your rivals?

SD: First of all, we need to wait and see because points are the things that count so the first thing we need to do is to work on the reliability of it, because that is still not clear if it's enough, it's never enough compared to the others. In terms of analysis, I think we need to be careful because when you address only the issue on the engine, I think that's wrong. We need to address if there is the need, of course, to address the things on the entire car, on the efficiency of the car in a global way, not only the engine, on the mechanical side there's also the balancing of electrical power versus the engine power itself versus the efficiency of the car as the car itself. I think the right answer is that we need to work all around the car, full stop, and we will see where we're going to be because I already see a lot of classifications done already but I think it is better for everyone not to anticipate too much. I know that words are easy to fly away but I think we need to be very cautious and careful. That's why I keep this position. I think that we have a good base and we need to develop on that and see when it counts to bring home the points that are the things that are more important for this championship.

Q: (Ted Kravitz – Sky Sports) Christian, your cars with Daniel did more than a race distance today and Sebastian almost did a race distance across the two sessions. Is that the first time you've done a whole race distance in a day's running in the whole of pre-season testing and does that mean that you can do the whole of the race distance on Sunday with a vague confidence that the car will actually do all the laps, especially as we saw a heat bulge on Sebastian's car in the lower left hand part of the side pod during FP1?

CH: Well, I think Sebastian today has covered a third of the mileage of his total winter and obviously Daniel has done pretty much a race distance today, so that's extremely encouraging for our guys and the guys back in Paris at Renault. So hopefully it bodes well for the weekend because the most important thing is to see the chequered flag on Sunday and that in itself is an enormous challenge. We've learned some valuable lessons today, an awful lot of information to look at and to be honest with you, it's the first real opportunity that the drivers have had to drive the car properly without it being interrupted at any different part of the lap or the circuit. Really, for both drivers it's been their first chance to really start to explore the car and for the engineers to start to look at set-up and so in many respects, this is where we would ideally like to have been at the first test but that wasn't the case. We've got some ground to make up.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) To all of you including Rob because it could affect your side of the championship, since we last met in Brazil, we've introduced double points at the last race which is arguably the least scintillating race of the season. Given that the structure, the entrants and drivers licence fees are basically a tax on performance, how do you feel about these double points races, possibly for the last three races? Now there's talk about points for qualifying positions, what are your sentiments?

RW: I guess my opinion is more as a relatively independent observer and as a fan of the sport, I think that as long as the points structure is understood in advance, it's an optimisation target like all of the rest and Formula One is a fantastic machine for getting the best out of a given set of constraints. I personally am not in favour of things that are hard to understand and therefore if it gets too complicated, I won't like it.

TW: Yuh. Is it good? I think when it was decided we didn't put too much emphasis on it, we didn't think it was a big drama. It's clear that you have to support the commercial rights holder and if the TV audience is dropping, I think we have an obligation to listen. We got the reaction afterwards, it was not what we expected. You have to honour that. Nothing has changed since then, the last race remains double points and let's see what we're going to do next year.

CW: Exactly the same as what Toto was saying.

Q: (Andrea Cremonesi – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Stefano, yesterday your president sent a letter to the fans; could you explain to us the meaning of the letter, particularly the part he wrote about the systems and all the problems that can be grey areas in the rules. Could you explain the spirit of the letter, please?

SD: I'm not the president, first of all. You know that very well. No, I think that our chairman wanted to send a letter to our supporters before the first weekend of another season, as he always does every year, and I think that he was highlighting the challenge that we have this year in terms of new regulations for us and it's a challenge also for the federation to align with these regulations because also on their side, it's a big task to make all the controls that are needed to make sure that everything is running properly, so I would say it's just for him a way to stay close to our tifosi, to our supporters because you know how much he cares about Formula One and that's the way you always are at the beginning of the season.

Q: (Heikki Kulta –Turun Sanomat) Stefano, if it rains tomorrow, does it help your drivers to challenge the Mercedes boys for the top positions?

SD: Good question – the answer is I don't know. We will see.

Q: (Will Buxton – NBCSN) For everybody, there's rumours doing the rounds that there's a move on to try and get a test in Malaysia next week, before the race. Is that something... by the looks of things, it's a surprise. I was wondering if that is something you had heard and if so it's something you would be in favour of.

CH: Well, it's certainly a surprise. It's the first I've heard of it and if it is happening, we won't be there. I think it's fairly unlikely.

EB: I've never heard of it too.

Q: (Sylvia Arias – Parabrisas) Monsieur Boullier, I would like to know your opinion about Federico Gastaldi. As team principal, I saw you today saying to him 'good luck'.

EB: Yes, I wished him good luck, obviously, but I have no opinion at all because it's not my matter any more.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) What sort of progress would all of you like to see made on the cost cap or budget caps or whatever?

CH: What was the question again? You wanted the cost cap or what progress? Forget the word cost cap for the moment. Let's just focus on saving money. I think everybody around this group here wants to see all of the teams save money. The necessity to spend money in order to be competitive is what we want to reduce and I think however we achieve that as a group, it's something we all want to see happen. How to make it happen is obviously something much more complex. Then there's obviously discussions about caps and this and that. You've got to look at the root causes for why are costs the way they are and then in my opinion, address it that way.

EB: I think Ron has maybe said he's not in favour of caps – again, it's words. Definitely he's obviously in favour of reducing costs. Obviously competition or trying to be competitive is obviously the nature of any sport, especially Formula One, so we just need to draw the line and make sure that technically we can't spend too much to be competitive and try to have some targets which could be reasonable and suiting everybody.

TW: Maybe Stefano wants to say something.

SD: I think that Christian and Eric have summarised the situation very clearly, so nothing to add. We are always saying the same thing.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) But there's no progress and that as the question: what progress would you like to see made?

SD: I think that progress is on the way because we are discussing what to do at the level of the strategy group. I'm sure that you're aware of the work that is around that. I think that at this moment it's better to stay quiet and tell you when the thing is done and say we are doing something without going into the details of it.

Q: But it is the case that it's got to be in place by 2015, isn't it?

SD: Yeah.

CH: We've done an incredible job of reducing the costs for this year with the introduction of a new power train that's probably 25 percent more so we're doing a great job so far!

Q: (Chris Lines – AP) Rob, can you tell us a bit about the problems afflicting each of the teams; are they individual to the teams or is it a common problem and do you have a time line when you think this engine will be functioning at its principal level? Will it be KL, Bahrain, China, Europe?

RW: If we take a step back and look at the kind of troubles that have befallen us and our teams, then the first thing to say I think is that we're behind where we should be in terms of time, in terms of our internal objectives, then independent of one's level of competitiveness, then it's completely unacceptable to be coming to a first race as relatively unprepared as we are and without having run through all of the scenarios that we needed to. In terms of where the trouble lies, then we remain confident that the building blocks that we've got in place are the right ones, that we know the level of thermal efficiency that we need for the turbocharged engine to be competitive in terms of power. We know that the regulatory constraints on the electrical machines from the battery and that mustn't be exceeded but in order to be competitive, you've got to be able to be up with those limits and we are up with those limits and where it's tough is delivering turbo to the backside of the drivers to the contact patch between the tyre and the tarmac, the sum of those parts and at the moment we're

not yet able to deliver that in a decent fashion. And this comes right back to the heart of these regulations. In order to get the performance out of the cars, the cars are going to be quicker than the old cars in a minute with substantially less fuel, there's a lot more stuff and getting all that stuff to peacefully cohabit in the race car and to make it appear to the driver like it's a different thing to the thing it is is where the troubles are. I guess that's the stuff that is common to all users of our power unit and I don't really have anything much to say about the specific differences between one car and another. We're certainly working hand-in-hand with the teams that we work with in order to fix our problems and if we can participate in solving other ones then that's good too.

Q: (Will Buxton – NBCSN) FOTA, perhaps in the run-up to this season the perhaps inevitable dissolution of the Formula One Teams Association. How disappointed were those of you that were members of it with the dissolution of FOTA; those of you that weren't, why didn't it work for you? And as we move forwards with this sport and the usual talk of the need to reduce costs, how important is the unity of the teams in progressing this sport?

CW: Yes, obviously we were a member of FOTA and it was disappointing that it did dissolve but I think that from when it was originally established - it set out with a very clear mandate – and over the years that mandate has changed for a variety of reasons. I think the most important thing in this sport is that teams come together to work together to address the issues that we face and whatever those may be. We do need some form of structure around the teams so that we have a platform to have conversations so whether that's FOTA or whether that's something else, that's something that Williams would be keen to be a part of in the future but obviously we, as a team, are now part of the F1 strategy group which obviously we're please about.

EB: Obviously as McLaren and ex-deputy chairman, we were quite involved in FOTA. I think it's a bit disappointing to see FOTA disappearing but it was expected in the end. First FOTA was created in a different context with a lot of car manufacturers in the paddock and it has survived over the years. There were some defections and it just ended up where unfortunately it should have been. The most important thing is to keep some discussions and some firm places between the teams, as Claire said, to address our issues if we have to.

TW: I think the mandate of FOTA was to represent all teams and that mandate got diluted over the years. Teams stepped back and at the end it was a bit of a struggle for FOTA to keep alive and I think we were either all in or no FOTA.

SD: I think that clearly at the specific moment when FOTA was created it was really a situation that there was really the need to make sure that the teams were all together and if you recall, during that time, there were situations where the championship could have gone through a different part, we were very close to being in that situation but year by year the situation changed and therefore that was the reason why we quit FOTA two years ago, because we felt that that kind of situation was not really needed any more to be effective as an organisation. I think that for sure it is important for teams to agree and speak on a lot of subjects because we are all the actors in this show but we also need to recognise that there are different actors with different weights that also have be considered. All of us do care about this business, do care about this sport and I believe that this is fundament to also look ahead in the new way that we are organised, for example with the strategy group, to make sure that we take the right decisions for the future of Formula One.

CH: I think that Stefano has summed it up perfectly. FOTA, when it was created, had some specific agendas. It was at a time of uncertainty over many issues regarding

Formula One and then of course, the crisis came in 2008 and FOTA at that time achieved some good things in reducing costs and teams working harmoniously together within critical circumstances. Then the mandate as FOTA changed, and when it suddenly became involved in how you run your team and run your business and trying to police how a team is run, that's not the role of the teams and you're only ever going to end up in conflict when teams are trying to write regulations of how they should spend budgets etc etc. For that reason, we left at an identical time to Ferrari, because we just didn't believe in the direction that FOTA was going. Then it was no surprise to see – ultimately – that it petered out over the last few years.

Ends