



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

Press Information

**2016 Australian Grand Prix
Friday Press Conference Transcript
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TEAM REPRESENTATIVES – Cyril ABITEBOUL (Renault Sport) Toto WOLFF (Mercedes), Eric BOULLIER (McLaren), Maurizio ARRIVABENE (Ferrari), Christian HORNER (Red Bull Racing), Gene HAAS (Haas F1)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Cyril, let's begin with you – welcome back as a Renault works team. Great history, 35 wins, two world championships and 100 podiums. How tough will it be to repeat those records against today's competition?

Cyril ABITEBOUL: I think it will be very tough and I know that there were a lot of comments regarding the time that it took us to make our decision last year. It's not so much the appetite to be in Formula One but to be in a capacity to be successful in Formula One, that was the question mark. So we come in that competition with lots of humility. As you mentioned we have been there for quite a long period of time, almost 40 years but we equally we know that the level has raised considerably. So we know it's going to take time; it's a long journey, a long-term plan but we think we have all the ingredients – financial, technical, the support of a large group – to make that a successful one. We're going to take it step by step but it's absolutely possible.

What's the plan for the engine this year? You've not used so many tokens so far. Do you expect to be close to Ferrari and Mercedes by the end of the season?

CA: Well, actually, I think that this is a demonstration that we have used little tokens but I hope in connection to the fact that we have made a substantial step in terms of performance will be actual evidence that there is no connection between token use and performance. You can use a lot of tokens and bring absolutely nothing in terms of lap time, which actually is maybe something we did last year. I think the whole debate of tokens should go away and we should focus on performance. There is a plan to use more tokens during the course of the season, that's the plan and we have made lots of comments about that. Hopefully it will happen, both for the benefit of the Renault works team and also Red Bull.

Maurizio, coming to you – Sebastian told us here yesterday in the press conference he feels Ferrari has enough to challenge Mercedes this year. Tell us about the effort that has gone on behind the scenes to raise the level?

Maurizio ARRIVABENE: We are doing our job. We are working very hard during the winter and we know where we are, but where you really are depends on what the other competitors are going to be. During this weekend we will know.

We've got some new rules this year, qualifying rules, team radio rules, tyre rules etc coming into force, what differences do expect these to make, especially in the qualifying we'll see tomorrow.

MA: I don't want to be against any changes, Ferrari don't want to be against the change, I simply think that maybe giving a bit more time to the team to work on ideas was better. But I can't say so with a certainty. The only certainty is that more probably tomorrow at the beginning of the qualifying we are going to see a line like on Saturday at the cashier of the supermarket – everybody wants to go out. Then we will see. It's not fair to criticize before that has happened.

Eric, your thoughts on that, the new regulations?

Eric BOULLIER: Well, we'll see this weekend. There is some upside and downside. The qualifying format we had before, I think we all agree, was a successful format. We were used to it. I think it is true that there will be more traffic at the beginning of each qualifying segment and there should be more unpredictability for the final result, but we will see.

It was a tough year for McLaren last year to say the least. What's the winter been like at Woking and what do you expect for 2016?

EB: Well, I think every year we keep working harder and harder. It was a very, very busy winter for us. We'll see. Obviously there is a lot of progress. We have been able to work through this Friday this weekend, which is good for both Honda and McLaren. We will see where we are. Obviously we don't want to overpromise everything. We will go step by step and there is still some more to come.

Coming to you Gene, a very warm welcome to Formula One. Your start-up has been a few years in the development. How does the reality match up to the expectation?

Gene HAAS: Well, I'm nervous. I think there are a lot of things going on here that I'm new to and the team is new too. So, putting all of the pieces of the puzzle together along with all the personnel and having it all come together for the first time has been a learning experience. That's really what we're here for is to learn how Formula One really operates from the ground floor. You can watch this racing your whole life but there's nothing like being a participant to really understand it and I have a lot of respect for the teams that are here and the level of technical competence you have to have to even start one of these races. I'm pretty much in awe. It's a challenge and I hope it's a lot of fun.

You've done it before, of course. You built a NASCAR team from scratch, won races, won championships. Formula One is obviously a different ball game from NASCAR but what would success in Formula One on a global scale mean to you?

GH: I think you have to look at it in terms of years. I have the feeling that if you over-anticipate what you can do in the sport it will humble you very quickly. I think the first year

or two just to be able to come to the races, be competitive, not make any major mistakes would be a tremendous achievement. I know a few of our drivers are hoping to score some points and that would certainly be an accomplishment.

Christian, coming to you – a new season, several new partnerships for the team. It feels, maybe from the outside, a little bit like a team in transition. What’s the plan for the next stage?

Christian HORNER: I think that it’s exactly that. I think we are in transition and I think we are hopefully getting on an upward curve now. We’ve had a positive winter, a busy winter. All the teams work hard. You know if you come into Formula One everybody works hard and arguably the smaller teams work the hardest as they have the least resource. But it’s about working smartly and I think this winter the team has worked not only hard but creatively and cleverly. We have a good basis of a car to develop throughout the year and with the different partnerships we have introduced, some exciting partnerships, welcoming Tag Heuer to the team not only as a sponsor but as branding on our power unit and also the announcement yesterday with Aston Martin, it’s very exciting for Red Bull Advanced Technologies.

Coming back to the discussion about the rules, specifically on the team radio I’m interested. What are your thoughts on those restrictions and the repositioning of the driver as very much the man in control, the decision-maker?

CH: Well I guess like modern technology these days and how people communicate, we’re working by text – maybe to SMS the driver would be an easier way, because we’re not allowed to say much these days. I think it’s going to be a voyage of discovery and I hope we haven’t gone too far on the radio stuff, because that’s taking away an element of dialogue between the engineer and the driver and some of that from behind the scenes can be quite entertaining, some it X-rated, but quite enthralling for the fans. We’ve got quite a few changes to take on board this year, let’s see how it goes.

Coming to you Toto, obviously the last couple of years some records that pushed the boundaries a bit beyond where they have been before. But nothing lasts forever, as I’m sure Christian will tell you. How nervous do you feel and do you think you have enough this year to hold everyone at bay?

Toto WOLFF: Before I answer the question, first of all I’d like to welcome the group and if you listen to what he says, that is certainly the right approach to enter Formula One. He’s been successful in NASCAR and obviously with his own company and I have no doubt that you will be successful in what you do here. You have to stay on your toes, that’s clear. You can be caught out quickly, either by regulations or just by not taking the right decisions and we’ve seen that over the last couple of years. There is a constant skepticism whether we have done a good enough job over the winter and we’re going to know more tomorrow.

Mercedes has some young drivers coming through the system – Pascal Wehrlein racing here with Manor, Esteban Ocon coming through and seconded to Renault as a reserve. Will we see more of this sort of development of drivers coming through from Mercedes in the next couple of years?

TW: I think it’s a good development. In the past it was only Red Bull holding up young drivers and transitioning them into Formula One on merit and now with Renault coming in and

having Esteban Ocon, Kevin Magnussen being back in a car, Pascal Wehrlein in a Manor and an additional team which has financial resource, I think it's good news and hopefully we will see more good young people come into Formula One based on merit. For us certainly it's about finding the right places. It doesn't make a lot of sense to start an inflationary system and just enter many young kids if you don't have a place in Formula One. With Esteban and Renault I think we found a good solution for our mutual benefit. Equally with Pascal, a completely different challenge for him this year than last and we'll see how that pans out.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Martin Moravec - DPA) Maurizio, last year you said that if Ferrari would win four races then you would go into the hills of Maranello barefoot. What would you do this year if Ferrari becomes World Champion?

MA: I'll let you know when it's happened.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) Last month the Commercial Rights Holder was quoted as saying “this sort of thing is what is commonly known as a cartel and cartels are illegal. We are running something that is illegal. On top of all that it is anti-competitive.” Given the EU laws etcetera and also the complaint that's also recently been filed, is Formula One really being run as a cartel? How do you feel about this comment? Any comeback on that?

TW: Hi Dieter! It's nice to start all over again. First of all, when you're looking at today's press conference, there's a lot of positivity around what's happening. Red Bull has bought Aston Martin back into the sport, a mega-brand. Renault is back as an official works team, Haas has entered the sport, an American team. But having said that, I don't think there is any cartel around here, nor is the sport run as a cartel. Bernie is always good for controversy and throwing one in. If that were to run like a cartel we wouldn't be sitting here. Some of us are part of multi-national global companies and we're taking compliance very seriously. So... it just causes headlines but nothing else.

Maurizio?

MA: I think this talk of a cartel is simply ridiculous. Simply ridiculous. Everybody, they are doing their job, they try to do their best. We are talking here about brands who have a long story. They are not going to throw out of the window their story, their reputation for this comment that they don't deserve even one word. I have to say, it's strange because in this world you have to be careful sometimes because, if you are talking a bit more with somebody, if I'm going to go to the dinner with Toto or Cyril, I do a cartel? It's simply a dinner! We have to learn something from rugby, that when you are in the field, you play very hard, you punch, whatever you have to do. And then afterwards, they go to the dinner and no-one is talking about having a cartel or creating some mismatch during the match. It's simply ridiculous.

Cyril?

CA: No, I would not agree with that definition of cartel for the simple reason that we are all in a competitive environment, so at the end of the day Ferrari wants to win against Mercedes and hopefully one day Renault will want to win, I don't know, against Ferrari. So, for that simple reason, any sort of unity will not last. So I will not agree with you. I will not

concur with that. Plus, you have to accept that only a limited number of manufacturers have the financial capacity to subsidise the cost of the technology in accordance with the current regulation that we have all accepted. So no, I would not concur with that view.

Christian, you're on the outside of the manufacturer equation, what's your perspective?

CH: Look, I think you can understand that Bernie's frustrated and his comments are borne out of frustration of being unable to influence change. You've got a dynamic in Formula One at the moment where the manufacturers collectively have a lot of strength. That primarily is through the technical regulations and the current situation regarding the power unit. I think Bernie's frustration as a promoter is that he can't influence that at this point in time. His comments obviously I think have come off the back of that. Our situation is different to that of a manufacturer team. As an independent team we rely on the manufacturers for the supply of an engine and, of course, there's been great debate as to what price that engine should be, what format it should be and, of course, you have a divergence of performance as well. So, there's some key issues that do need to be addressed. Hopefully consensus and agreement can be found on that in the near future.

Eric, do you have a view on that?

EB: I think it's been debated.

Gene?

GH: Well, I think the complexity of the engine- turbo-electrical package was maybe underestimated by everybody, including Bernie and the teams of how hard it would be to build. It would seem to me that maybe in hindsight that maybe if there had been a price that had been set initially that said 'this is what is has to be built for and what you have to sell to the teams for' maybe the manufacturers would have had to make a compromise, saying "well, we can't build the current package for that money, we'll have to compromise." I think it's something that just wasn't anticipated and unfortunately... I can certainly tell you what I know about the Ferraris is that the money they put into their [power unit] is probably well worth what they charge us for those packages but unfortunately that kind of technology doesn't really make it back to the fan base, which is the people that we rely on. So, going forwards, those sort of things, cost, has certainly to be part of the equation before they make any kind of rulings.

Q: (Peter Habicht – The Auto Channel) I have to two-part question, Gene, the first is to you and the next is to the team principals. So Gene, all credit to you, Gunther and the team and bringing America back to the sport after nearly 30 years. While there's been little time for nostalgia, now that you're here has there been anything more you'd like to share about your experience so far this weekend with American fans back home. And, to the rest of the team principals, do you have any words of advice for Gene?

GH: Well, I tell you all of a sudden I'm sitting here in awe that I'm sitting among all these team principals from Ferrari, Mercedes and Renault and Honda and Red Bull, that's pretty awesome for someone who... you look at these things in magazines. To be sitting among this group of elite is humbling, I can say that. It's been a long journey, I'm not sure how I really got here but here I am. I think, if you probably ask everybody here, how you wind up here is somewhat unique. Things in life, I guess you have to grab them. This is just part of the

process of being able to compete at this level. It's just awe inspiring. I know there's some hard times ahead but I'm looking forward to it. Looking forward to the challenge.

As for words of advice from the other team principals, maybe start with Christian.

CH: I think it's fantastic to have Haas join Formula One as an independent team, as a really credible independent team. Formula One's a big challenge, it's great to have an American, and a true American presence in Formula One. Words of advice... get a good lawyer!

Eric?

EB: Very similar. I think it's very exciting for Formula One to have, as Christian said, a true American team and an American character like Gene joining us who had a deep understanding of racing, who has also useful experience in America with NASCAR, which he could share and I would be very happy to hear sometime. I don't have any advice to give. He knows about racing enough and he is serious about what he had built already and I think it is going to be a nice surprise and maybe a difficult but a nice journey in Formula One.

Cyril, you're in a Renault shirt now but you were a team principal of a start-up. Any advice for Gene?

CA: I was expecting that one. No. I think it's interesting. I understand that you're following and it's interesting to see a new model, in particular a collaboration with Ferrari because I think that there is a whole field of collaboration between teams which is not explored at this point in time by most teams, so I think I'll be really curious and, to be honest, a bit frightened to see what it gives on Saturday. In terms of pieces of advice, I've heard a lot of people come in with big plans, willing to do things completely differently. So, don't try to do things too differently because the good old recipes, they also work.

Toto?

TW: I think Gene doesn't need any advice. He has done it very successfully in NASCAR and much more successful than all of us with his own company. If there is advice in Formula One it's to manage expectations – because pressure is going to increase the better the results are and, the way you've been doing it, keeping both feet on the ground and staying humble, I think is the right approach.

And Maurizio, presumably you speak all the time?

MA: I think that what I have to say, we are talking most of the time about teams that left or want to leave Formula One and not enough about people like Gene. He's a serious person, financially reliable, committed and with a lot of experience. I don't have to give him any advice – but I have to congratulate people like Gene Haas, that they want to invest in Formula One and they want to take this sport seriously and not as a kind of speculation. In terms of a lawyer, he got a good lawyer – but he's using his lawyer properly.

Q: (Flavio Vanetti – Corriere della Serra) Maurizio, yesterday we read some quotes from president Marchionne. Is he putting too much pressure on the team or is he right to say that Ferrari is ready to win all the time?

MA: If your editor is asking you to sell more copies, it is putting pressure on you. It's normal that the president, when you do something, is not asking you, the following year, to do less than what you have done. The role of the president is to push his people to do better, better

and better. If he's going to create pressure this is normal, this is part of our job, this is part of any kind of job. He's doing his role. He was giving to us what we were asking for and he's pushing us to strive for the best.

Q: (Peter Windsor – F1 Racing) Christian, you expressed some misgivings about the radio communication rules, which I'm sure some of us agree with. I personally agree with you but is there not a disconnect here, because we tend to think that nothing happens unless you guys have agreed to make it happen? Or am I wrong there? Can we not blame you for having it in the first place?

CH: Not me personally, hopefully not. Look, I think out of well intention, sometimes we don't think through the consequences. The intention of restricting the radio is that the drivers need to drive the car and I don't think anybody enjoys hearing a driver being told how to operate his car. I think the problem that we have is that the complexity of these cars is so great now and the assistance that is required from the pit wall and behind the scenes is very different to Formula One of even three, four years ago. And it's finding that line: is it right to help a driver find a bit of clear space in traffic or to pit now and so on? I think it's going to be a bit of a voyage of discovery with this rule and I think applying it to the operation of the car is one thing; applying it to other sporting measures... we need to find that right balance and I'm not sure we're going to achieve that immediately in one weekend.

Q: (Peter Windsor – F1 Racing) Just to come back on that point, if you're going to take away the radio, surely the logical thing is to replace that with other radio, because the fans do love to hear the radio, it's part of the show now? And hearing the technology on the radio was actually a good thing, I think.

CH: Absolutely, I think there's entertainment through the radio and I think that what's fascinating is to hear these guys communicating at the speeds that they're achieving and in the heat of the battle – that radio content can produce good entertainment behind the scenes for the fans and it's finding that balance. The bit that you should really hear is the intercom because there's a far more interesting discussion going on on the pit wall on the intercom than there is on the radio and we, for sure, would love to hear the Mercedes intercom.

Q: (Leon Alepidis – F1Fan.gr) Question to Mr Boullier: we presume that this season McLaren will be fighting with the midfield teams instead of at the front for the title, no title sponsor yet and two expensive drivers. Would you say that for now or with hindsight for the past that there has been a mistake, plans for investment for the development of the car instead of putting all this money into the drivers without having an actual good car to drive from the start of the project?

EB: Well, definitely we at McLaren had a difficult year last year and we are not where we want to be and definitely we have the ambition to be. If you want to be the winning team you need to have all the best elements and if you have the best drivers before the best chassis or the best engine it's a risk but it's also a challenge than for the chassis and the engine to be the best. I think that as far as we are concerned, in terms of money, we have signed three new sponsors this year: Chandon, Richard Mille, Volvo Trucks. We have renewed another three sponsors. We are part of the McLaren Group which is profitable this year so I don't think we have any issues on this part of the business. After that, it is just to be the best combination to catch Mercedes, Ferrari and Red Bull and others.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) Cyril, amongst all the announcements and personnel movements and promotions, one name wasn't mentioned at all and that's Rob White. Is he still with the company, what is he doing, is he involved?

CA: Yes, he's involved, he's part of the company. There will be more announcements regarding the exact management structure in Enstone and in Viry but in particular in Viry after the appointment of Remy Taffin as our new technical director, so there will be more coming, so I will invite you to the staff meeting that we will do in that respect.

Q: (Dan Knutson – Auto Action and Speedsport Magazines) Christian, in this room yesterday, Dan Ricciardo was asked about these rumours of Ferrari and among the things he said was that he's completely focused on Red Bull and this season and then "not exactly out of contract either." I realise these things are confidential but can you enlighten us a bit?

CH: Yeah, he's under contract, so I think he was pretty accurate with his comment. Red Bull invests in these guys at a young age, they develop them, they give them the opportunity through the Junior team and Toro Rosso. Sebastian Vettel was a prime example of that, Daniel Ricciardo is doing an excellent job, Dany Kvyat and the two exciting talents we obviously have in Toro Rosso. The contractual situation we have with Daniel Ricciardo is extremely clear. How long? That's confidential.

Ends