



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

**Press Information**

**2016 Belgian Grand Prix  
Thursday Press Conference Transcript**

**25.08.2016**

**DRIVERS – Esteban OCON (Manor), Romain GROSJEAN (Haas), Daniil KVIAT (Toro Rosso),  
Fernando ALONSO (McLaren), Max VERSTAPPEN (Red Bull Racing), Lewis HAMILTON (Mercedes)**

**PRESS CONFERENCE**

**Esteban, if we could start with you: many congratulations on your grand prix debut. Just describe your emotions now: how excited are you and indeed how surprised are you to be racing this weekend?**

**Esteban OCON:** Yeah, thank you, first of all. No, it's a great opportunity for me to be driving here in Spa. So thanks to Mercedes, Renault and to Manor for that. It's great to start in Spa as well. It's a track I know, so it will help [me] to get up to speed. Let's see how it goes. I'm looking forward to it and I'm ready.

**You're only 19 and as you say you've raced a lot here at Spa. You've also got quite a lot of Formula One now, you've done FP1 for Renault for the past three races, so do you feel ready and prepared?**

**EO:** Yeah, I feel like I've had the best preparation I could get. It's been quite a long time since I'm around in the paddock and also driving Formula One cars, so it's great to finally make the step and I feel like I am ready to take that one.

**And what are your goals for this weekend and the rest of the season?**

**EO:** It would be good to score some points. That will be the target. I also need to learn the team, learn the way they work. Also to see how Pascal works and to get up to speed together, learning from him. Of course, he is a great driver and he has been quick all season so I will need to learn from him and get up to speed in qualifying.

**Daniil, if we could come on to you please: it's been a very hard first half of the season following your return to Toro Rosso, and you've even been quoted as saying that you've fallen out of love with Formula One. What has the summer break done for your mind set?**

**Daniil KVIAT:** I think it's done good things for me. It feels like it's all OK now for me – just come here, do my job, drive as I know how to drive, nothing special really. That's it.

**What do you think you can achieve this weekend? You finished fourth at Spa last year and Toro Rosso introduced a lot of upgrades to the STR11 last time out in Germany, so what's a realistic goal this weekend?**

**DK:** It's hard to predict the future, obviously. I don't know how to do it. So, we'll get out there, we'll drive, we'll use our potential as good as we can, and we'll see where we are. That's all I can do.

**Romain, coming to you: great memories from here last year of course, you finished third for Lotus? However, it's been a bit of a dry old summer for yourself and Haas recently. Your last points finish was in Austria. What kind of reset does the team need in the second half of this season?**

**Romain GROSJEAN:** Well, I think, yeah, the last few races before the summer break haven't been as good as we would have loved. We made some steps forward but there are a few things we need to understand, so we're going to try different things. I think the whole summer break helped everyone to reset a bit the mind, to think more calmly about what we can do and what we have been doing and hopefully we'll get back in the car and it feels as good as it was initially in the year and from there we can score much more points. Generally, I still think that as a first year it's very positive and even though we have had some difficulties recently it's never far from the points. Eleventh often for Esteban, I had a bit more problems recently but hopefully goes away and we have a good race here.

**How tight is the battle with your immediate rivals in the Constructors' Championship? Can you catch McLaren, stay ahead of Renault? Where's the focus?**

**RG:** I think the focus is to learn and to do our best. I think we are more looking at catching McLaren than protecting from Renault. I think there are quite a long way behind and in terms of performance they are not any better than we are, so McLaren has done some good development recently but it doesn't mean we cannot go there and try to play with them.

**Max, you have a Belgian mother, you were born just 50km from this race track and lots of fans are coming to see you this weekend, so do you view this as something of a home race?**

**Max VERSTAPPEN:** Yeah, I think so. You know, even though I haven't driven here a lot, yeah definitely I think this is the closest I can get. I think there are also a lot of fans coming, so I'm definitely looking forward to that.

**Red Bull overtook Ferrari in Germany, last time out, do you feel confident of stretching that advantage in the coming races?**

**MV:** Well, we definitely will try to do that. I think the last few races have been very positive for us. We got the jump on them and now the most important thing is to stay ahead of course and try to close on Mercedes, even though I think that will be very hard, but we keep pushing, we keep developing and so far it has been very positive for us.

**And do you think you have the necessary horsepower to do the business this weekend?**

**MV:** We hope so. We'll see. I think first of all we have to get the car working really well in terms of set-up and then we'll see what happens.

**Thank you. Fernando, Honda boss Yusuke Hasegawa recently described the team's progress as incredible. Do you agree with that assessment?**

**Fernando ALONSO:** Yeah, definitely I do agree. If you look at the team 12 months ago we were in a very different situation. We were starting last here using I think the ninth engine we put in Spa. We've been lapped two times here last year and in Germany and Hungary and definitely we make a step of nearly minutes, let's say, not even seconds in a race total time, so definitely we are in a much better position. We are enjoying and definitely the progress is very optimistic in terms of... I think even for next year as well. We are looking forward to this weekend. We have some updates also on the car. We know that Spa and Monza will be tricky races for us in terms of layout and characteristics of the circuits but definitely we are enjoying our time now, seeing all this progress and hungry for more.

**You say you have upgrades for this race, but going forward where do you want the focus to be now for McLaren? Do you want it to remain on 2016 or would you like to see 100 per cent effort on 2017?**

**FA:** Well, I think we want to be world champions, so this year is not any more possible.

**Q: Lewis, you've had an amazing summer, winner of the last four races, you come to Spa with a 19-point lead in the World Championship. Do you wish the summer break had never come – or did you need to recharge your batteries?**

**Lewis HAMILTON:** Well, firstly, good afternoon everybody, it's good to see everyone. Not too many tanned people – I was expecting to see people with better tans! I'm happy the break came. I think myself and the team needed it. Probably like the rest of the paddock. We had a month with four races in it so it's definitely been a positive thing for everyone, I think everyone feels refreshed coming back in.

**Q: Are you confident of maintaining the momentum from Germany – or could an engine penalty interfere with that here?**

**LH:** Naturally we already discussed engine penalties before so that will come into play for sure – but I'll do everything I can to minimise the impact it will have. Yeah. Otherwise, beyond that penalty I'll eventually take, I think I'll be able to continue with the momentum. I plan to continue with the momentum that I had before the break.

**Q: Has it been decided if you'll take the engine penalty here or at another race?**

**LH:** As far as I'm aware we'll be taking the engine penalty this weekend, yes. I have no engines left, so...

**Q: Your next win will be your 50<sup>th</sup>. That's quite a milestone. What would that mean to you?**

**LH:** I have to get there first! Still, today, everyday I have to pinch myself really to think that I've... what I've achieved so far in my career. It's a dream for all of us to be doing what we love, and to succeed at it... watching grands prix growing up I never thought I'd be sitting here with nearly 50 grand prix wins under my belt. It's very surreal – but I plan to win more. Hopefully we continue to.

## **QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR**

**Q: (Dan Knutson – Speedsport & Auto Action) Max, you're an old hand now at Formula One, an experienced driver in Formula One. What advice would you give to the young man behind you, how to deal with this new world?**

**MV:** Just jump in the car and go out and drive as fast as you can.

**LH:** If he's old, what are the rest of us?

**FA:** At least to me. You are still young!

**Q: (Filip Cleeren - Motorsport.com) Max, there's obviously talk of Stoffel Vandoorne joining F1 next year. What would it mean for Belgian and Netherlands motorsport, and for yourself to have you two guys fight it out on the track together?**

**MV:** I think it will be very positive for Belgian motorsport and definitely you will see even more Belgian flags here – they will have to compete with the Dutch flags – so we'll see what happens. I think if happens it will be great in general for Belgium.

**Q: (Kevin Eason – The Times) Can I ask you, can you win here even from 20 places back – and can I ask you a question that fans ask me: is it fair that a driver has to bear the burden of the penalty for the incompetence of his team?**

**LH:** In terms of winning, that's the goal but it's going to be very, very hard if, obviously everyone's... if the gap is close between other cars. We're in the third year of evolution of these cars, so Red Bull have been very quick in some of the races, same with Ferrari particularly and down the whole grid, so it's going to be harder than it was last year or the year before to climb through the field, for sure – but I'll do everything I can. It's really about minimising the damage of taking the penalty. And I think... I mean it is a team sport. We win and we lose together as a team. Whether I make a mistake and the team take the penalty for it, or the team make a mistake, sometimes it's not actually mistake, it's just the kind of thing that happens. I don't look at it as incompetence, I find it a growing experience for us because we've learnt a lot from the issues that have happened and hopefully won't have them again. It's just unfortunate that I'm the – I guess – the test mice, or whatever you want to call it, that's tested all of these issues, because obviously none of the other Mercedes engines has had the problems I've had.

**Q: (Dan Knutson – Speedsport & Auto Action) Romain, we know you've had some balance problems with the chassis and the brakes – was that from the beginning of the season or is it something that's evolved recently?**

**RG:** It came more recently, for some reason. Probably track layout, tyre usage, grip of the car. Yeah, we're probably going to revert on some of the settings we've made. Hopefully get something that suits me a little bit better.

**Q: (Barna Zsoldos – Nemzeti Sport) Fernando, you said in an interview that, if the nature of Formula One next year doesn't change significantly, you stop – even if you win the championship. Is it really that bad? And Lewis, what is your opinion on that: is driving the car nowadays really that bad?**

**FA:** Well, I think I said, sometimes already that next year I finish my contract with McLaren, the one that I have now, so I will have to make a decision if I continue in Formula One or not. I think in the last couple of years, especially with this turbo engine era, the car is a little bit different to drive. I don't say that it's better or worse, everyone will have his opinion. I've been lucky enough to drive 2003 cars, 2004, 2005, even until 2009 the cars were, in my opinion, more extreme, more Formula One cars, so now when I see GP2 running three seconds away, or something like that in FP1 it feels a little bit sad. Cars are heavy. No grip. We save fuel, we save tyres, we save everything from lap one, so it's a little bit against the instinct of the driver and next year is a big question mark. I think with the new regs everything will change a little bit. I think if the cars are fun to drive, are exciting to drive, I will probably stay longer and I will drive for more years in Formula One. If the cars are still giving me the feeling that I have in the last couple of years, probably I will stop. But it's not related to whether you are competitive or not. If you are out in Q1 or winning a championship. It's just you are enjoying driving the cars or you are not enjoying. Right now, in my opinion, the cars are not enjoyable. Probably because I drove other cars. If you arrive now to Formula One, these cars are very fast and very fun to drive – but not for me anymore.

**And Lewis, your thoughts on the challenge provided by the cars?**

**LH:** I agree with everything Fernando said really. There's two aspects. Fernando's obviously one of the best drivers we have here and yet he's had an incredibly challenging last couple of years with a not competitive car, so it's understandable if that continues that way then it's no fun for any of us. We live and breathe to win. Knowing in himself that he could fight for a championship if he was sat next to me for example, in our car. In terms of the rules, the cars are going to be the same next year. It's a different looking car, the same issues are going to be the same and, what Fernando's saying, we slow down as soon as we've done the start and got that out of the way, generally we're

not pushing 100 per cent like perhaps they used to do. It was a more extreme race back in the day, it was a sprint. For us, all starting in go-karts, that's what it was from the get-go, from the lights out it was a sprint race to the end. Formula One's not about that anymore. It's about preserving your tyres, preserving the battery power, preserving the turbo, preserving all these elements which are not what people tune in to see. So, the governing body is continuing to push the car. Next year's still going to be even more heavy, probably not have great grip. The car will probably be faster but it will have the same characteristics, probably, as what we have now. I might be wrong but most-likely. We'll drive the same next year, just with a heavier car, and having to save fuel, save tyres, do the same things. Yeah. Probably said more than I needed to say!

**Q: (Jerome Pugmire – Associated Press) Lewis, if you do start from the back, you say you will do all you can to limit the damage of taking a penalty. What would be a realistic finish if you do that?**

**LH:** Honestly, I have no idea. Honestly, if you look... fourth? He says fourth. Honestly, I really don't know how far I can get up. It depends, the pace of the other cars. We'll start tomorrow and we'll find out. If Red Bull are right close with us, that's two cars less, that's three down and then the gap follows behind. If the others are much much slower than the possibilities go up. There's going to be safety cars, all sorts of things. I started last in Belgium, er, in Hungary a couple of years ago when the gaps were much bigger and came fourth, so Sunday's definitely going to be harder than that and I just hope that I can get into the points. As long as I'm going forward, that's what matters.

**Q: (Sarah Holt – Channel 4) It's just a really simple question for everybody: did you have a lovely summer holiday? What have you been doing? Did you have to take homework with you from the team bosses or were you allowed to forget about F1 completely?**

**RG:** Well, I spent some time with my family in Corsica. I had no phone signal and no internet and that's no disruption. I just spent the morning on the bike, afternoon with the kid on the beach so fairly straightforward and easy holiday.

**FA:** I've had some good time off and no homework from the boss.

**EO:** Yeah, I had a good summer break as well. I went surfing with some athletes from Quiksilver so they taught me the balance a bit, so that was interesting and yeah, some times with friends and family. It's what you need during a summer break.

**MV:** Yeah, pretty similar to everyone else, I think, spending some time with family and friends which is always very nice, to relax a bit and then spend some days just at home before you come here.

**DK:** Yeah, like you said, it's was a lovely holiday so it was good. I did a bit of karting but mainly I stayed at home. I didn't follow what was going on in Formula One or anything so it was OK. Very good.

**LH:** Well, mine was a little bit different to everyone else's but I had a good time. I went to a lot of different countries, I travelled a lot the first two weeks and then the last week stayed in one place by a beach. I think I visited six or seven different countries during the break. I didn't have homework but I did homework during the last week.

**Q: (Livio Oricchio – GloboEsporte.com) Lewis, in this vacation, did you take ten minutes without your mobile?**

**LH:** The last two weeks I didn't have... I tried to avoid my phone. Of course, I needed to stay in touch with some friends but generally check in in the morning, put it away and then in the evening... and there were some days I didn't even check it at all.

**Q: (Livio Oricchio – GloboEsporte.com) Max, you came directly from Formula Three to Formula One, 17 years old, and Ocon, 19 now and he had GP3 experience last year; is that enough for a driver to come to Formula One even if the circumstances show he has the capacity, in your opinion?**

**MV:** Yeah, I think in the end it doesn't really matter where you come from as long as you do a good job. Once you're in Formula One it's up to yourself to show that you're ready. I don't think it has to be in F3 or GP3. Once you go to Formula One you have to show it.

**OE:** I agree. Age is just a number in the end, you have to show that you are capable of driving in F1 and to show to the right people. I think that's the most important thing. When you arrive in F1 then you have to deliver like Max did. That's the target for me as well, when I come here.

**Q: (Joe Van Burik – De Telegraaf) To all drivers; a new official Formula One racing game has been released. I was wondering which of you plays racing games yourself and how close to the real thing are the simulation racing games these days?**

**LH:** Why would you think I do?

**MV:** I don't know, maybe you want to keep up to date, I don't know.

**LH:** Ah, no. I don't play any simulation games, my brother does, but I haven't played a computer game for a long time. I'm getting old, it's what happens when you get to my age.

**EO:** Yeah, I play in the winter to keep the rhythm a bit, even if it's not really exactly the same thing, to keep some competition in, I've been playing with some other drivers on line but yeah, I'm not in the 2016 so yeah, I didn't try myself on this one.

**Q: How realistic are they?**

**EO:** It depends, some are closer than others. F1 2016 it's not too bad, it's great. The tracks and the graphics now are much improved. It's getting closer and closer to reality.

**FA:** I am 35 now.

**Q: (Sarah Holt – Channel 4) Just to clarify Lewis, what homework did you do last week?**

**LH:** It's secret, top secret stuff. I'd have to kill you if I told you.

**MV:** You can tell me.

**LH:** I was just making sure that I was up to date with where we've been this year and then what I have to do and what I'm doing, moving forwards. After I left in Hockenheim, I was partying eight hours later or whatever it was so just making sure that I was up to date, hopefully before my engineers got back to work as well.

**Q: (Livio Oricchio – GloboEsporte.com) To all drivers, Spa maybe is the circuit where you can most use the kerbs. Is there any previous orientation from the FIA or will you discuss Friday in the briefing?**

**DK:** I didn't get it: can we use the kerbs? Yeah we can, of course, we can use them, no problems. Was that the question? Well, we have to discuss on Friday again I think, like always.

**Q: Lewis, has there been a directive from the FIA about track limits?**

**LH:** As far as I'm aware not yet. But we anticipate there might be because... I don't think there's any more than at any other track. There's just Eau Rouge and then there's turn 15 maybe? There's still those kerbs so that might be something they consider but I don't think it's going to be a problem.

Ends