

Press Information

2017 Australian Grand Prix Thursday Press Conference Transcript 23.03.2017

PART ONE: DRIVERS – Lewis HAMILTON (Mercedes), Sebastian VETTEL (Ferrari), Daniel RICCIARDO (Red Bull Racing), Fernando ALONSO (McLaren)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Let's start with Lewis Hamilton – a two-time Australian Grand Prix winner, record five times pole sitter here at Albert Park? Lewis, you and the other drivers have spoken about how much you enjoy driving this new generation of new cars. Could you perhaps give us an idea from your own point of view of a few areas you particularly like about it?

Lewis HAMILTON: Well, firstly, hi everyone, it's good to see you, it's good to be back. I don't know, as racing drivers and in general you want to drive the quickest cars in the world and you always want to go faster and the cars are faster than they were last year. And the challenge of exploiting that speed with your car on track is a great challenge. It's more in the direction of how Formula One should be, in the sense of the physicality side of it. We are athletes, and Formula One should be the most physically demanding sport in terms of all the driving series. In the previous years that's not been the case. To the level we train to it's relatively easy for us to, but now you are going to have to push the boundaries, which I like.

There's a saying in sport – never change a winning team. But you have a new Mercedes technical boss and a new team-mate. How's that all working out?

LH: So far, great. I sat down with James and had a great conversation with him and he's really blended well into the team and super-excited to work with him. It's always great to have great new creative minds and he's one of the smartest people I have ever met, if not the smartest. I'm excited to see what he can bring out of me and the team and all the guys we're working with. Valtteri has, as I said before, Valtteri has been gelling really well into the team, working really hard to be the best he can be, which is all I want.

Sebastian coming to you, of course 2011 Australian Grand Prix winner. You had a good chance to win this race last year and the recent testing would suggest you will be in the hunt again on Sunday. Is there a more solid baseline do you feel to this year's Ferrari attack.

Sebastian VETTEL: We'll see. So far we don't know anything. For all of us it will be exciting to find out where we are on Saturday/Sunday, to get a first impression. For us a lot of new things last year didn't really go the way we expected, so I think for this year we have really focused on ourselves. We have tried to do our job back in

the factory and in testing... I think testing times, I don't think they are that crucial, I think it matters much more what you show from here onwards. We'll see. I think we are a bit in the dark like everyone else, not knowing what other people have done. For ourselves we can be reasonably happy, we did decent mileage, we didn't have any major issues with the car and hopefully we can carry that momentum into the race.

Well, the car looks pretty competitive but the real question I guess is how it will do in qualifying. Ferrari have only taken five pole positions this decade, since 2010, so how have you addressed that? Have you got a go-faster engine setting for the final part of qualifying?

SV: Not necessarily. I think we worked on all areas, trying to improve. Obviously we all know that qualifying is important to have a good race, so the higher up you qualify the better the chance you have in the race. Statistically it doesn't look that good, so hopefully we can turn that around.

Fernando, coming to you, 2006 winner here of course, there's no hiding the fact that McLaren and Honda are in a very difficulty position at this stage. Do you have any expectations at all for this season?

Fernando ALONSO: Well, I think let's wait and see. We have only done the testing period, so I think the first race now will put things a little bit more clear. It's a question mark also for us where we exactly are. We were not able to push the car to anywhere close to the limit at any lap on the testing, due to different problems. Let's see. If we can have a good first weekend, see a little bit more of the potential of the car and hopefully see where we are. But yeah, still a long way to go for us and a lot of work to do.

It's been only three weeks since testing began and the problems came to light. Have you and team been able to put the rescue plan in place yet or is that something that's going to come in the next few weeks?

FA: The team is always working to improve the situation – to work as hard we can, to identify the problems and to improve those areas. I guess everyone did the maximum in the last three weeks and let's see what we can find tomorrow on the track and that's more a question for Eric and Honda.

Daniel, it's a stat they don't care for much around these parts, but no Australian has won the Australian Grand Prix since it became a championship round in 1985, so come on Dan, are you going to put that right this weekend?

Daniel RICCIARDO: I'll try. I'll try to. It would be nice. If anyone could win just one race they'd always say their home, so that'd be cool, it would be good.

SV: Didn't Alan Jones win here?

Not since it became a world championship round, no.

SV: So what race did he win in 1980?

DR: That was the world championship. He's here; I'll ask him.

Daniel, do you want to add anything more?

DR: I'd love to. We'll see what happens. I'm prepared. As Lewis touched on, it's more physical this year and I think we've all done our work in the pre-season. I'm sure all of us up here feel like we're coming in as well prepared as possible and it's been fun to put more emphasis on that, on the training. The cars are more enjoyable. They are going to be fast. For the fans here this weekend to see the cars on track, the cornering speeds, I think they'll definitely see that. Hopefully we're cornering quicker than anyone else.

Well, you got a really good look at your team-mate Max Verstappen in the second half of last season. How tough are the battles between you two this year?

DR: Hopefully tough. Hopefully we're fighting for victories, I think that would be something we would welcome. He's obviously fast. It's his third year now and although he's young, he's no longer a rookie anymore so I think we both carry a bit of experience. I think the team is excited to see how we go and I think everyone else is. They're starting to hype it up a little bit. Hopefully it's hyped up by the fact that we're fighting at the front, that's what we both want.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Ysef Harding – Xiro Xone News) I want to say good afternoon to everyone and I want to wish us good press conferences for the rest of the season and a good, robust conversation. This question is for the entire panel. This year we have some new owners, the sport is owned by Liberty Media and they have a big, bold vision for the future of F1. What would be your top three wishes for the new owners of Formula One?

DR: A race in Vegas.

SV: A race in Germany.

DR: That's it; I've said mine.

LH: Miami race.... More ladies in the paddock? More paddock access to some women, there's too many dudes in the paddock.

SV: V12s.

LH: V12s, I agree.

Fernando?

FA: I agree. I agree with everyone... equal engines for everyone.

LH: I don't agree with that one.

DR: But not electric.

LH: And not Honda. I'm kidding...

Q: (Andy Benson – BBC) We had Charlie Whiting in here a couple of hours ago and one of the things he was saying was that the so-called 'Verstappen rule' has been removed, just leaving the general catch-all regulation about potentially dangerous driving. Are you all happy with that situation?

SV: I don't know. I'm not...

You'll be told tomorrow.

DR: We'll be told tomorrow? You know everything before us! Let's see. I think we can... the good part of it is it means less decisions to be made on track. If they leave it up to us I guess the positive is that we sort it out on track. Hopefully we can get redemption if we feel like something has not gone our way. We'll see., I like being able to race. That's the positive from it.

SV: Will I get my trophy back... it makes sense!

DR: I guess he wants his trophy back from Mexico. It was a pretty small one actually. Right, I'll shut up.

Q: (Leon Alepidis – F1fan) A question for Daniel. For many years it has been talked of to have a second grand prix in the USA. In the past Germany, Spain and Italy had a second grand prix in the same year. Your thoughts about a possible second grand prix in Australia and where would you like that to be?

DR: I'm going to sound greedy if I ask for another one here. We've got some great circuits... Seb's saying Bathurst. That would be an amazing circuit for sure. Adelaide, I believe... I was very young but I did go to the 1993 grand prix, I was very young but I heard Adelaide was amazing, they still do it with the V8 supercars. Phillip Island, they host a great event for MotoGP, so there's a lot. I wouldn't say no, but I feel a bit greedy asking for more than we have got already. I think everyone else would like to come here. You guys like Australia, right?

Q: (Rebecca Williams – News Ltd) A question for Fernando. You were involved in a frightening smash here last year at Albert Park. Just wondering how you feel about your return to the track this year, and if that's something that's going to be at the back of your mind when you get out there, specifically at that corner?

FA: Not really. You try always to forget all the accidents, all the moments you were scared in the car, so yeah, it was a pretty big one here last year but it will be perfectly OK and I'm really looking forward to go back here. I like the circuit. I like how passionate the fans are when we are on the track so it will be a good experience to go through those turns.

Q: (Flavio Vanetti – Corriere Della Sera) To Sebastian. You said it's too early to have a judgement on your car. But do you feel this car has enough quality to let you fight for the title?

SV: Well, it's March now! I think if you are in a fight for the title that's a question for October, November. I think looking at the performance of the cars obviously it was expected to be a big step up and that's how it felt on the track. I think that's what we all said when we first got out of the car, that it's a big step forward. It's not entirely fair to judge to the previous years because it's a different formula but I think they will be the fastest cars we have ever driven. Naturally, the day I came into Formula One the cars got a bit faster, a bit faster, then they tended stall a little bit. We distributed straight line speed versus cornering speed and I think for us what really gives us a good feeling is cornering speed and I think we are back to the level we were probably ten years ago, and maybe a bit faster. For us it's always nice to have the feeling that these are the fastest cars we have ever driven. On competitiveness we are all here to find out, that's why we go racing I guess.

Q: (Heikki Kulta – Turun Sanomat) Sebastian, last year it was very tight between you and Kimi in qualifying. With this better car do you think it can be even tighter or is it easier for you in qualifying against him?

SV: I think it's never easy. You try to get the best out of yourself, out of your car for one lap. I think last year has been closer than the year before but it's always been fairly close. Obviously I want to be in front of him and he wants to be in front of me but I think starting the season priority number one is hopefully we are in front of the others. But as I said it's still very, very early. We try to do the best job for ourselves and the team and we go from there.

Q: (Andre Leslie – DPA) Question for Daniel. Daniel, this week in Australia – I'm sure you've been here longer than that – how has it been with the pressure and the reception that you've received around the country? Is it something that is a weight on your shoulders or is it something you look forward to?

DR: It's not a weight on my shoulders. It means more work, for sure. This week is easily the busiest F1 week of the year for me. But it's all positive support. It's kind-of overwhelming actually. I'm surprised that so many people are getting behind me and the event but it's obviously cool. It's nice and encouraging to see. I hear that ticket sales and everything is up quite a chunk from last year. I try to enjoy it. I appreciate it won't last for ever. It's demanding, it's a tiring week but it's pretty cool to see so many people supportive of me and the event. I don't see it as pressure in terms of, if I don't win on Sunday, they're all going to leave the track and say I'm hopeless and never come back. They want to see me do well and that's how I see it. It's just a bit of extra motivation for me and I think the drivers' parade on Sunday I'll see that and feel it and get me jacked-up for the race.

Q: (Abhishek Takle – Mid Day) Question for Fernando. Fernando, you've spoken about how much you're enjoyed driving these cars, this new generation of cars, despite all the problems in testing. I just wanted to ask you, does the joy of these new cars take away some of the pain – or is it a case that if you're not competitive then it's no-longer fun? Thank you.

FA: No, I think they are two separate things. One is how you enjoy and how much adrenaline these cars are giving to you on the cornering speed. Comparing with the last couple of years I think it's a good step forward. Not only for us drivers but also for the spectators: for the people here in the grandstands and watching on television they look spectacular and that's a positive thing. And then, yeah, naturally I think all sportsmen, we are competitive and y'know, when you arrive to race like we are doing now in the first grand prix of the year, you know that joy is together if you are competitive. Let's see how competitive we can be this year. At least when you are driving alone, you are enjoying. Then when you have a car close to you and they go much faster than you, that's a little bit less enjoyable.

Q: (Jerome Bourret – L'Equipe) Do you think that the new regulation can stop Mercedes' domination or do you expect Lewis to still be the man to beat this weekend and this year? And Lewis, do you consider yourself the favourite for the Championship?

SV: Well, I think he must be. Mercedes obviously has been in very, very strong form the last three years and even though we changed the regulations, if a team is strong then they will build a strong car the year after, no matter what you do with the rules. I think it's very clear who is the favourite. For all of us sitting here, we are trying our best to catch-up. How much we have succeeded, we will see and, as the season goes on, I'm sure the cars will have big progression and all the teams will bring lots of stuff to develop the cars. So, whoever's in a good place in the beginning and still in a good place at the end will have a chance.

DR: I think for everyone, it's like when Red Bull were dominating a few years ago, everyone wanted to see someone else win. So it's natural. People like change. And for us drivers not being in a Mercedes, we want to see change as well. I think even to have more cars fighting for a win, it makes it more exciting. I'll let Lewis answer but I think if he wins a race against four of us as opposed to just maybe his team-mate, I think that reward is bigger as well. So, I think if you can win against more, it's not only good for the fans but that feeling of self-accomplishment is greater. We'll see. Ferrari showed good pace in testing. If they can maybe take a few points away as well, it opens up the Championship over the long term.

See it that way Lewis?

LH: I see Ferrari being the quickest at the moment and I think they will definitely be the favourites but we'll find out more going into the weekend. It's interesting to see Sebastian's usually a lot more hype and I can tell he's trying to keep a lid on it. But their pace was obviously great in testing. I'm very keen to see what Red Bull bring because they were quite far behind through testing, at least compared to Ferrari and didn't see them bring many upgrades – or an upgrade as far as I could see. So I'm assuming they're bringing something here which I'm excited to see what they do bring. And I agree with Daniel in the sense of having more teams and more drivers up at the front fighting for wins, that's what racing is all about. I'm hoping that's the case. We, as a team, I don't believe, as far as I know, no team has won back-to-back through rule regulation changes, so that is our goal as a team. We're here to win, we're here to do something no-one else has done. Whether or not we're in the right place at this moment in the season, we'll find out. But I have every belief in my team that we can do that.

Q: (Louis Dekker – NOS) Can you remember how many cars were on the grid during your first grand prix weekend. And the real question is, is 20 enough to keep the public satisfied.

FA: Yes. Enough. Obviously, it's nice to have many cars on track and many teams in Formula One but at the same point it's a sport that's quite difficult to get in, quite difficult to stay for many years. We see with some of the smaller teams how they struggle to keep their financial situation healthy in the year. I think to have a good ten teams and 20 cars on track is more or less the number that we see in Formula One for many years. I think it's OK.

Q: (Giles Richards – The Guardian) You just touched on this. The last three years you've been fighting for the title, just between you and your team-mate. Would

this year be more significant, would you enjoy it more if it was a two- or three-way fight with Ferrari, Red Bull and other drivers. Would it mean more to you?

LH: Well, as I just mentioned, every year your goal is to beat everyone, of course, and the more of a fight you have, the more satisfying it is when you are victorious, so we're fully up for a challenge and for a fight. So, that's what I prepare for. I think it's not a bad thing. I can't remember the last time we had three years and then a rule change – but I think they should probably shorten that, maybe, and do more changes. Because there can often be dominance for a certain team and it's hard to catch up. There's a limit to how much development you can do through a year, and the top teams can generally develop at a similar pace. If you've got a gap already at the beginning it's hard to squish that gap being that there are rules in terms of how much investment and time you can put into developing your cars. Doing drastic changes kind of spices it up. I've never seen the fans so excited about the season as they are this season, being how that it is we don't know where the cars and the teams are. So, more of these kinds of experiences would, I think, be welcome.

Q: (Shane McInnes – Radio 3AW) Just about the length of the season, we know it's 20 races this year but new owners have suggested they might like to see it get out to 25 races. Is 25 too many, and do you think 20 is the right amount or even less, going forward?

DR: I think it depends on how they structure it. It's not too many. NASCAR do 36 or something. It's a lot but the travel's a lot less because they're just in the US. So, I think it depends logistically how they do it. It's all... I don't know. I like racing. If it means just racing and no testing and less other stuff then... maybe. We spend more days in front of cameras and other things than actually behind the wheel of a racing car. I'd be open to the idea.

SV: I think 25 is too many. I think 20 is enough. We don't need more. I think anything between 16 and 20 is the right number. Also, thinking of the efforts going in from the team point of view. For us it's fairly easy, arriving more or less with hand luggage, doing the job and getting back. I think we're on the better side. For a lot of the team, for the staff, it's hard work. So, I think we are having enough races.

LH: I think if you asked any member of my team whether they'd want to do more races or less, they'd ask for more. It is definitely tough on the guys that are travelling but they love it. They're addicted to it. They love motor racing and, of course they love time at home but... I'm like Daniel, I love racing so I'm not opposed to more races but I think they've got to change the structure, at least on different weekends. If it's the same four days for 25 races, oh my God I think that would be too much. If they spice it up and make it more... a period during the season that's perhaps more exciting than another, I think there's a lot they can do. As long as they are in countries that have a good following. There's no point in going to a country... for example Turkey, which was a beautiful place but there was no-one that turned up to a race. But if you go to places where there's a real great atmosphere then you can create a great event, then I think that would be awesome.

Fernando, any thoughts?

FA: The same. We all love racing I think so more racing will be always welcome – but in a couple of years' time.

Q: (Phil Duncan – PA) Lewis, how excited are you about the prospect of taking on Seb, a driver that's won four titles. Obviously, you have three. Do you think this could be the start of a great rivalry that Formula One needs with arguably the two best drivers of their generation going for the title?

LH: Yeah. I've not had a lot of battles with Sebastian on track so, of course, would love to have that. I think the fans want to see that but even between all of us. We need this guy [Fernando] to have a good car so he can get up there and fight with us as well – before his time's up. We got a hint that it's another couple of years at least, so that's good. I feel we're yet to see the best of Fernando. The sport needs that and he deserves to be able to show that. So, yeah, you want to be racing against the best. I think that's what the fans want to see. That close racing and sheer competitiveness and see the ups and downs of the best doing their best. I'm definitely looking forward to racing with all these guys and I hope there's lots of close racing.

Q: (Andrew Tate – The Age) Lewis, does part of you wish you were racing the reigning champion for the championship this year.

LH: Not really. When I walked in here I was thinking it was kind of neat because I have a champion here, a champion there and a potential champion here as well.

DR: Thanks!

LH: ...so it obviously doesn't make any difference if the reigning champion's here or not. At the end of the day every year it's a brand-new year, a brand-new start, it's a brand-new challenge and a brand-new championship to win. So, I think we're all out there to beat each other – but as far as I'm aware you don't say 'that guy over there's the current World Champion, I want to go and beat him'. You just want to beat whoever it is you're up against.

PART TWO: DRIVERS - Valtteri BOTTAS (MERCEDDES), Esteban OCON (FORCE INDIA), Felipe MASSA (WILLIAMS), Lance STROLL (WILLIAMS)

Q: It's been a Mercedes one-two here for the last two seasons. Presumably another one would suit you just fine. Is that why you made this move?

Valtteri BOTTAS: Sure, that would be a good way to start. Obviously we do need to see where we are standing against all the other teams. It's a completely new season, a new era of Formula One, a new team for me but that's always the ultimate target. I feel in a good place and definitely it's always some kind of dream coming true, being part of a team like this that has pretty much dominated the last three years in Formula One. I feel very happy but just keen to get going.

Q: We could see from testing that you settled in during the first week and then managed to close up a bit to your teammate Lewis Hamilton's pace at the second test so are you more or less where you expected to be at the first race?

VB: I feel well prepared, I feel definitely ready to race. I really think we made the most out of the short period of time I had to prepare with the team and get into everything perfectly. Obviously it's been a massive learning curve for me, since mid-January until today and that is still going to continue but I felt testing was good. Every single time I was in the car I felt better and better and I'm sure that is just going to continue and I'm feeling more and more part of the team so happy to be here racing.

Q: Lance, welcome to Formula One, at 18-years of age, the second youngest driver after Max Verstappen to take part in Formula One. How's the preparation gone and what would success look like for you this year?

Lance STROLL: Yeah, thank you. I think preparation has been going really well so far. We had a good test in Barcelona, the second week me and Felipe did all the running which was good. I think just a solid year, a clean year, obviously still a lot to learn so I don't think putting a position or a number would be the right way to approach the whole thing. I think we're just going to take it race by race. It's still going to be a big learning curve for me, there's still a lot for me to understand about everything but listen to the people around me that are there to help me and take it race by race. Looking forward to the whole thing.

Q: With all the rule changes that have gone on from last year to this year, is this a really good year to come in as a rookie or is it actually quite tough?

LS: I don't know. It is what it is and I'm just going to have to make the best of it. I don't want to look at it as a negative or a positive, it's the way it is, it's a new regulation and it's for everyone. It's my rookie year and I just have to learn what I have to learn and get on with it.

Q: Felipe, welcome back. Does this mean we get to have another party? How's the surprise comeback worked out so far?

Felipe Massa: Well, first of all, I didn't expect to be here on Thursday. Maybe I was planning to be somewhere (else), eating more, getting more fat, whatever, maybe not being here on Thursday which is an amazing day in Formula One. But things change in life – which actually didn't change, to be honest but for reasons... Yeah, I'm really happy, motivated, ready for this challenge and I think everything I hear, when Claire calls me, and I said 'I think we need to talk in a proper way' so then we had a long meeting and everything that I asked, that needed to be different, especially on the technical side, so many different things that didn't work in the proper way need to be better and everything she said and everything Williams is doing I believe is correct. So many new people arrived and are still arriving, so many things that we are working hard to make work in a better way so yeah, I'm staying in Formula One, I think to be racing for a team that I believe is professional and important, I feel important as well. Yeah, that's why I took this decision to carry on. I feel really happy and yeah, so we will see. I think the real answer to where we are we will have here on Sunday but also during the championship. I had some good

feelings in the Barcelona test and I'm really looking forward to having another great, competitive season and a nice job also, that gives me pleasure, so I'm really looking forward, really fit and ready for this challenge.

Q: Just continuing on the theme we spoke of with Lance a minute ago, the challenge of being a rookie. You made your debut when you were obviously very young as well back in 2002. What did you wish that you'd been told then and how did you handle coming into Formula One?

FM: Well, I am a rookie. I stopped, I retired! We start the first race, two rookies! No, I'm joking. It's his opportunity, he's allowed to learn, he shows that he has a talent for that, that all of us had the opportunity at the start and yeah, I met him when he was eight years old, one year more than my son which is really painful, to be honest, and here we are teammates. I have all the happiness to work with him but also to pass on everything I can. We are working for the team, together, both drivers so we need to score as many points as we can. It would be nice to work with him and to have a great championship together and for the team which is the most important thing.

Q: Esteban, obviously you were a rookie last year, now a move up the grid from Manor to Force India. It's a team that's been able to score podiums consistently in the last few years so easy question: is that the target for 2017 for you?

Esteban OCON: Well, I think it's a bit early to speak about that at the moment. No one has done a race yet so we see where everyone is. I think in testing everyone had a little bit left in the pocket so you know it's early to speak about that but I think to start the weekend here, the approach would be to do a strong weekend, to reach the finish line because in the past you always had problems for the other teams and for teams and if you arrive at the finish line you always have a strong result so I think that's the way to approach it.

Q: You're obviously part of the Mercedes Junior programme; do you feel that if you perform now for Force India there's a real possibility of getting into a Silver Arrows at some point in the near future?

EO: I'm obviously a Mercedes Junior driver but at the moment I'm a Force India driver and I'm fully focused on this target, to do a strong job this season and I think it's still early to speak about being a Mercedes F1 driver in the future, so no, at the moment I'm very happy to be with Force India and I'm fully motivated with them.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) Esteban, where were you and what did they tell you about your car would be pink this year? What were your first thoughts?

EO: I was actually at home, I was just training when I had the call. No, I think it's a really good thing, overall, for the team. BWT coming in to Formula One is a great thing as well, it also changes the perspective... a pink car – you don't see one a lot of times so I think it's a good thing but also a good sponsor like BWT makes money coming into the team and it can only make the car go faster.

Q: (Heikki Kulta – Turun Sanomat) Valtteri, so far you have been three times on the front row. If this is a winning car, would P2 be a satisfying or disappointing result for you?

VB: Well it depends if your teammate is P1 or... Obviously the result targets are going to be completely different now than what they have been in the past few years but as I said before, we still need to wait and see where we are, really. We will see on Saturday, we will see on Sunday. It's only the very beginning of the year but for sure as a driver you always want to be on the front row and in the best place, P1, but let's wait and see and go step by step and day by day.

Q: (Ysef Harding – Xiro Xone News) Felipe, first question is how did you feel coming back into F1 because it's like the Godfather, you tried to get out but they pushed you right back in again. And what were you doing when Claire did throw up the W and the symbol and you had to put your super suit back on and get back in the car?

FM: Well, for sure, things change for a reason. I had a lot of support from everybody to carry on. I have a lot of support from my family, a lot of support from my fans. It was really amazing to see everybody pushing me: carry on, carry on. We want to see you there and that everything that happens around the team that... maybe, we will see where we are now which I believe is correct what is happening so then we need to work to make it better. Yeah, to be honest, I had an amazing feeling when I decided to stop in the second part of the season and I didn't have a reason to carry on. If I don't have what I believe is correct, which maybe I have now. Then also the feeling that I had in Brazil, also in the last race which gave a lot of happiness in the way that I'm stopping, it's fantastic you know, but also it was not easy for me to take the decision to carry on because everything was just beautiful. But maybe something has happened for a reason and maybe it was not the reason to stop. I'm ready, motivated and we will see where we are going to be and how the season will be. I'm really 100 percent ready to do it in the right way.

Q: (Abhishek Takle – Midday) Couple of questions for Valtteri: now you've had some time in the car in testing, do you feel that you're at a stage where you're able to get the most out of the car now. And second question, I know it's still early days but assuming you're sitting in a title-contending car, what's your approach going to be: step by step, get that first win or do you feel under pressure to mount a fully fledged title challenge?

VB: Yeah, like I said before, I definitely feel every single time I was stepping into the car and out of the car in testing, I felt like I'd made progress and between the two tests as well. I feel I was getting very close to getting pretty much everything out of the car and being absolutely perfect. As always, it requires a lot of work, a lot of time in the car and a lot of effort, a lot of talent so as mentioned, I'm sure things will just get better and I will feel more and more comfortable every single day of the race weekend and every single race but I feel that I'm ready to race, I'm ready to bring the car where it should be, what the pace of the car, what the limits of the car is. I feel comfortable with that. About the second question, definitely... I always set my targets very high so from the first race, this race onwards, immediately, I want to perform where the car can be. That is my target. Of course I always go day by day

and step by step but I want to start at a very high level and keep getting better from that .

Q: (Heath McAlpine – Auto Action) Valtteri, Paddy Lowe recently made some comments about Williams having some elements that Mercedes does not. Have you been able to make any comparisons between the teams, after moving in the opposite direction?

VB: For sure I see a lot of difference between the teams. Definitely there are some things very very good at Williams, some things have been massively impressive at Mercedes. Williams have a great facility, a good bunch of people, a lot of clever engineers so for sure both teams have a lot of strong points, definitely differences in the way they work, so it's difficult to really point out exactly what parts maybe are better here or better there but overall, as the last few years have shown, Mercedes is a winning team, it definitely has this winning mentality at the moment. No one is standing still, everyone is pushing flat out - what Williams is also doing is definitely no bad, worse but you just sense that at this point, the group of winners know how to win at the moment and I hope that that can continue but the hunger is definitely still there at Mercedes. But I definitely agree with Paddy: Williams is a great team and has massive potential and it's a shame that we couldn't achieve the results together that I think the team deserves, but hopefully the future is good for Williams.

Q: (Kathy Watt – Inside Sport) I'm just wondering what you do in the off-season to prepare: is it on the bike or running or different other sports to get fit for the season?

Q: Esteban – you've been up a mountain or something?

EO: Yeah, I was up in the mountains at almost 2000m for almost two months. I felt this was the best way for me to prepare. When you get high in altitude, when you get down again it's easy to breath so I was training there a lot. It was about nine hours of cardio per week, ten hours of gym per week and all the rest was reaction work, co-ordination work, visual perception work, how the detection is as well, balance of body as well so it was complete training. It was very tough, for sure the toughest of my career but I'm happy that I've achieved it now, looking at how the cars are tough to drive.

LS: I was just moving sports, some biking, some running, some gym work, some strength work, some neck work but just staying fit in all different areas and just gaining fitness by increasing the amount of training I was doing. Just moving and keeping active.

Q: How about you Felipe? You were eating feijoada and drinking beer and then when the phone call came: stop. Right?

FM: Which was pretty much straight away actually so I didn't have enough time to drink and to eat feijoada, I would say, so yeah, I was definitely... most of the drivers didn't know how the new car was going to be so I was definitely preparing myself in a much different way to how it was in the past, even if I was always training very hard but I took on a new trainer, a guy who is following me everywhere I go, training every day. I had to train more also, for sure cardio but also a lot more my muscles to

be stronger, for these loads that we have in the cars now, so I was training in a very different way, to get a little bit stronger and training my neck a lot more which I think works pretty well because on one day in Barcelona I did 168 laps, which was my record in one test and I feel really good, so yeah, ready to start the season and really hope I'm totally fit to accept anything different that we might have this year compared to how it was up to last year.

Q: (Michael Lamonato – ABC) On a related question: how different have you found these cars in the sense of that strength component? What specifically have you changed in your training and in your first days in the car in testing? Was there anything in particular that you felt a bit of pain or a bit of strain from the new cars?

VB: I think always after the winter, it doesn't matter how much training you do and if you're the fittest you've ever been starting the year, it's so unnatural driving a Formula One car for the human being that the first reactions are always a bit strange but very quickly you get used to it, your body gets used to it. Obviously if you have a new seat as I did for this year, it's tuning those kind of things and yeah, you might get some bruises and stuff but that's part of the winter testing but specially with the new cars there's more G-forces, more load going through your body which makes more fatigue and means being able to maintain the same level of focus and alertness – you need to be fitter than before and like every driver have a good preparation for that but the main thing is the G-forces, the cornering speed and that way you maybe need a bit more strength especially the neck.

Q: (Trent Price – SEN Radio) A question for Felipe and Lance. Paddy Lowe has already identified a few areas where Williams are stronger than Mercedes. What's your first impressions of Paddy coming into the team. What has he brought in already and how is the relationship building?

FM: Well, as Valtteri said, Williams has many areas that work pretty well. Definitely we have some other areas that we need to improve, which is what I was saying before, things didn't work in the proper way, as even Valtteri said. This are the points we need to make better, improving, as quick as we can, because it means results, it means performance, it means everything. But I am sure he is a very important engineer, manager, that he can help to improve things in the right way. Bringing some good ideas from other areas that we were not so strong as a team like Mercedes where he won the last three years the championship – they are really strong. Not only him, but so many people, engineers, people that are working in different areas. That is something we are working very hard on, so he has just arrived, but I'm sure he understands things pretty quick. We are the beginning of a very important work but I believe we can do it in the right way. I really hope that the car is helping, because the car is there; it's ready. If you have a good car it's helping the job in so many areas that it needs to be better, it needs to improve. That's the way I believe it is. I was talking already with Paddy and I'm sure with all the important and very good engineers we have I believe and I hope we can do a very good job.

Q: Lance I believe you signed before it was clear that Paddy was going to Williams, so what did you feel when you found out?

LS: Yeah, Felipe said most of it. I'm obviously new this year, so I don't have the experience that Felipe and also even Valtteri have of Williams, so a lot of it is just new for me. Starting with winter testing, I obviously went to a couple of races last year and I got to know some of the people but really, until you're a driver and properly involved in everything that's going on, you don't pick up on everything. But for sure I think having Paddy in the team is positive for everyone. He's obviously had great success in recent years and I think it's just positive energy for the team. I think we have a great group of people at Williams and I think everyone is aiming for the same thing, which is achieve the best possible results we can achieve and Paddy's here to help us do that. I think it's all good.

Q: (Heikki Kulta – Turun Sanomat) Felipe, how tough an opponent was Valtteri in qualifying and in racing and how was it compared to your time with Kimi at Ferrari?

FM: Definitely different times. Different cars and everything. I think Valtteri shows his talent. He really improved year by year since he started. I think it's a great opportunity for him to race for a team like Mercedes. I believe he's ready for his job, he's ready to show what he can do and definitely he has an incredible team to work with, very strong team-mate – but I think he's ready to do a great job. I really hope the best for him. It'll be nice if he's behind me – but we will see.

Q: (Alex Popov – Match TV) A couple of questions for the young drivers. But different questions. Esteban, first of all, your target before the training was to gain 5kg of muscle, and you achieve it. And now I heard – I don't know if it's true or not – you have to go back 2kg. If it's true, how difficult it will be now?

EO: Yes, it's true I gained 5kg over the training course, which was very hard but I achieved it and feel good in the car. But then you know, all the teams are quite conservative with parts on testing, and they got heavy parts, and then once they see reliability is good they start to put lighter parts on the car. I think that's what's going to happen this race. On myself, I didn't lose any weight and I kept my weight to feel fresh in the car.

Q: (Alex Popov – Match TV) For Lance, it's more about a performance target. Another young driver will fight the team-mate from race one. You're in the position of having like a coach in the team, like an elder brother. Will you try to not to lose too much or beat your team-mate from race one?

LS: Felipe's not here to be a coach. He's a competitor like everyone else and he has his helmet on racing like everyone else. Everyone sets their targets differently and everyone is in a different situation – but all the teams have two drivers competing for the same thing, which is to try and finish as far up the grid as possible. That doesn't change – but my targets are obviously different to some other young drivers. Everyone's in their own situation: I'm just going to focus on my stuff and do the best I can – which is what I always do. That doesn't change.

Ends