



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L' AUTOMOBILE

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Friday Press Conference Transcript

TEAM REPRESENTATIVES – Toto WOLFF (Mercedes), Eric BOULLIER (McLaren), Maurizio ARRIVABENE (Ferrari), Christian HORNER (Red Bull Racing), Paddy LOWE (Williams)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Q: Opening question to all of you gentlemen: obviously it's the opening day of a new season of Formula One. Lots of changes on the cars but sum up how your first day went? Eric why don't you kick us off?

Eric BOULLIER: Reasonably well. Obviously we didn't add as many laps as we were expecting but if you compare with the testing it was a little bit better. Obviously the cars look more spectacular more aggressive, It was a good working day for us.

Christian, obviously you had the incident with Max that lost you a lot of track time but Daniel's long run looked pretty reasonable.

Christian HORNER: Yes, not too bad. Certainly the first session today was encouraging. The few changes that we made the drivers didn't like too much. Max did a little bit of grass mowing at Turn 12 and that compromised his session in the late afternoon but we got a lot of good information and we're generally quite encouraged.

And Paddy, how was your first day of action at Williams?

Paddy LOWE: It was sort of a mixed day because we had a great first session, some encouraging pace. [It was] Lance's first practice ever in Formula One, so he was taking it steady, step-by-step, making good progress. But into the afternoon we had an electrical problem on Felipe's car, a short circuit, and that really ended his session very early. So we didn't get the homework we would have liked on that car. But overall, quite encouraging for tomorrow.

Maurizio, did today go as you thought it would?

Maurizio ARRIVABENE: We were working mainly on car balance. This morning we were struggling a bit more than normal. But then in the afternoon we were still working on the car balance, but nothing different versus our Friday programme.

Toto, Lewis looking very much the man to beat.

Toto WOLFF: Yes, he had a very good day overall. For the team it was one of the better Fridays. Having had some question marks over testing in Barcelona it was encouraging to bounce back in that way, but it is a day that doesn't matter.

Q: Eric, coming back to you. We hear you are collecting quite a lot of air miles at the moment going forwards and backwards to Japan. How serious are your problems and what steps are you taking with Honda to resolve them?

EB: Well, obviously we had a very bad winter testing, a lot of troubles, didn't do many miles, no race simulations but like you said we are having many, many meetings with Honda. We both take it very seriously. All the options are open. Today we discussed how we can catch up and recover from that situation.

Q: Toto, they say you should never change a winning team, but here you are after three dominant seasons with a new technical chief and a new driver, so how has the dynamic in the team changed?

TW: It's a very large organization, between Brixworth and Brackley it's almost 1500 people and the dynamic is positive. Every year we are trying to reinvent ourselves without compromising performance and we are in good spirits.

Q: Christian, a slightly quieter testing period than with Ferrari and Mercedes, but lots of new parts arriving on the car today. Tell us how the development race will impact this year's championship. Is it going to be the deciding factor and are you going to come out on the right side of it?

CH: Well, I think it's going to be a big factor. These regulations are still very immature and there are going to be a lot of gains in a short space of time and it's a matter of who can most efficiently develop their car and effectively get components on the car that drive performance forward. It wouldn't be unrealistic to expect the cars to be 1.5s quicker by the time we get to Abu Dhabi than where we are here today. It will ebb and flow during the season but at the front of the grid hopefully we get a bit closer to Toto's guys and have some closer races this year.

Q: Paddy, you've gone back to the team you did some winning with back in the early 1990s, a dominant period with Mansell and Prost. Why is this move to Williams the right thing to do at this time of your career?

PL: I had a great three years in my previous team, some great success there, but there was a great opportunity, a challenge at Williams. As you say, it's going back to the team where I started my career in Formula One. It was quite emotional and special going back there a week ago, seeing people I literally hadn't seen for 24 years, but fantastic team and we look forward to making substantial progress over the years to come.

Q: Maurizio you have been downplaying expectations going into this season, but what I'd like to know is, inside the team, how hard it was to build what looks to be a very competitive car given all the technical changes and staff upheaval that you had in the second half of last year?

MA: If you change something, it's for the better, not to get worse. We have a change, the team is working very well together. Over the winter the guys were exchanging information; they have a common goal. Working all together, having a common goal and exchanging all the information they have, the car becomes not the car of one but the car of everybody and this is what has driven us until today and into the future.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (John McEvoy – Daily Mail) To Maurizio. Liberty have arrived, and one of the things they have said they want to do early on is make everyone more available to the media, but after arriving here it seems you have gone in the other direction. One of your drivers was unavailable yesterday in advance of this big race at the beginning of the season, from an organization as big as Ferrari. I was wondering why that is, whether that will go on or whether that will be addressed?

MA: Define media. What do you mean by media? Today, defining media is quite large in terms of communication media. It's also social media. It's not only what we are thinking about. Yesterday we had Sebastian who was talking and we were using social media and posting something related to Kimi. Liberty also said that in this business at the moment the digital platforms are used at only 1% of the potential. So, the good thing is to find the right balance. Instead of having two drivers on Thursday and talking and doing a copy and paste of one versus the other with the same questions we made sure that Sebastian was talking in one way and Kimi in the other. So we cover all the communication platform. Making happy also Generation Z.

Q: (Seff Harding – Xero Xone News) – To follow up on that, a question for all of you, do you feel that there does need to be a change in accessibility to the press, to arrange interviews that may be on social media, Facebook Live, Instagram, to reach out to other audiences, in other markets and of course to other demographics?

CH: I think the changes that have been put in place this year have been positive. I think that relaxing the rules regarding the digital platforms, allowing content to be generated... non-circuit content giving the ability for fans and followers to get a little bit beneath the covers and closer to seeing the personalities of the drivers in the build-up to a grand prix or pre-season is certainly positive. It's a media business at the end of the day. Formula One is a media business. We have to engage with the media. It's important that we give access to the drivers, access to the fans or how else are we going to promote the sport.

Toto?

TW: I think like Maurizio said, we have to cover three different generations. We have to cover the long-time followers, so-called middle ages, the Millennials and Generation Z. You kind of need to play the full span. For example, when we launched the car we put some time into the car launch, which is a risk on the engineering side, you're compromising your time, and we did a Facebook Live launch, 360, and we had almost a million views in 24 hours and it was successful. We have to embrace all that, not forget any audiences within these groups but target all of them and Liberty's approach has been right so far, in opening up.

Q: (Giles Richards – The Guardian) Question for all of you: we've had the big regulation change this season, can you tell me whether you think we will actually see better racing and the reason why this is so or why if not?

Eric, why don't you start?

EB: I think the car, obviously it's a hot topic with everybody talking about overtaking numbers and manoeuvres and whatever. I think 90 per cent of the overtaking is thanks to DRS since this device has been introduced. So as far as we are concerned the DRS is still on so I don't think there will be many changes on this: the number of overtaking. The car philosophy stays the same as the previous generation and, as long as it is dictated by this front wing, you will have this loss of downforce effect into the corners. On the positive side, I think the drivers were the ones lobbying us, all of us, to have a faster car, fastest cornering cars and clearly we have achieved this, I think, with bigger tyres, more downforce, fastest cars today and obviously that's going to facilitate, or help the bravest drivers to try or attempt some manoeuvres to overtake. So, I don't think there will be a big difference compared with before. I think, and the drivers as well, I can already feel – and I'm talking for McLaren only – Fernando clearly was the one who was complaining about the previous generation, and he's clearly happier now with this kind of car. He enjoys driving the car and you can see the cars today, in some fast corners they are flat-out already on Friday afternoon – so I think it's a good sign about what we wanted to achieve. I think all the drivers happier should make the show better.

Paddy, any thoughts?

PL: Yeah, I agree with what Eric said but on top of that I think the other element we will see with much higher loads now in the car, with higher cornering speeds, driver endurance is much more demanding, so we may see more mistakes in races, drivers more on their human limits. So, I think that could be another interesting factor.

Anything to add Christian?

CH: I think the guys have covered it pretty well. I think the cars are going to stretch the drivers. I think sitting here, and we don't know whether the racing is going to be better over the year or not, but I think the drivers are going to be working harder, you're going to get perhaps more differential between drivers and they're going to have to work harder for overtakes when arguably some of them have been a little bit too easy over recent years.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) Based on comments that Ross [Brawn] made earlier today and also previously, it appears that the Commercial Rights Holder could play a more active role in the regulatory process. Which means that possibly entertainment could take precedence over technology etc. How do you feel about this? About the commercial rights holder getting increasingly involved in the regulatory process?

Toto?

TW: This is an entertainment platform and it should be around the entertainment of the fans and I think with Ross in place it's the right individual. He has seen it from the other side; he knows pretty much what matters to the teams and now trying to seek a good balance between keeping the DNA of Formula One, keeping it at the pinnacle for racing drivers and for engineering and equally making sure it's the best possible show for our fans will be the main priority. I think we are definitely in an interesting place and it looks positive.

Maurizio?

MA: I think for the future cost and performance, they are two key factors. Reducing the cost and increasing the performance, they are the two key factors. Then, of course, it's an entertainment, what we are doing here. It's part of the entertainment business. Everybody, they're open to discuss and talk about new ideas in the appropriate places. At the moment we have governance, so talking to everybody to help the sport to grow is fine until we are all aligned to the actual governance. Or, if we want to change it, we have to sit and discuss about this.

Paddy?

PL: yeah, we welcome a focus on entertainment. That is what this sport is all about. I think the really encouraging thing is that Ross is building a team behind him who are going to do proper research into proposals that are under consideration, so I think there's every reason to feel positive about the future.

CH: I personally think there is far too much emphasis on technology at the moment and we're spectacularly bad at communicating that. I think the average fan and viewer understands very little about the technology that's in a Formula One car which, as Maurizio alluded, is enormously expensive. So, I think the Commercial Rights Holder, it's their business at the end of the day. They have to decide what they want the sport to be and, if the route is fan-attraction and creating a really exciting product, and at the end of the day they want to create great content on TV then it's vital they come up with an outline of what their vision of Formula One is. And then, obviously, the FIA have a regulatory position and the teams need to be involved in that process. We have a process that that can be achieved in if two of the three parties agree.

EB: All has been said I think

Q: (Flavio Vanetti – Corriere della Sera) To Maurizio, given the results of the test and what happened today, do you have an accurate idea of the position of Ferrari?

MA: Yes, we have it in Barcelona and in Barcelona we have our programme, we follow our programme since the last week and as well it's what we are doing here on Friday. On Friday we are working on the balance of the car, as on Day One in Barcelona we were working on finding the best performance day after day without panicking, without being under pressure and being focussed on what we were doing.

Q: (Luigi Perna – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Another one for Maurizio. Daniel Ricciardo recently told us in an interview that Sebastian Vettel becomes even quicker and more motivated when he has a winning car in his hands. Do you expect him to give an extra performance this season? And what do you need: Ferrari and Seb to go home together, to sign another contract for 2018?

MA: I'll start from the end of the question. Talking about contracts now is only distracting the attention of our drivers so I'm not ready to talk about any contracts. Then, I would like to see Sebastian happy during the season because if Sebastian's is happy that means the car is very quick.

Q: (Jon McEvoy – Daily Mail) Maurizio, do you have as much belief that you can win this race now, as you did this morning. I hear what you've said and the work you've done during the day – but do you have as much belief that you can win it as you did at the start of the day?

MA: We want to keep our feet on the ground. It's Friday. We have to work this evening. Tomorrow we continue our job and then, until Sunday, we have a lot of things to do, still. So, I don't want to do any prediction.

Q: (Louis Dekker – NOS) For Christian. It's only Friday but can you imagine Daniel winning on Sunday or is the gap too big?

CH: I think, being realistic, the performance we've seen today from Lewis, he's the absolute favourite. He was the favourite coming here and all today has done is underline that. But then it's motor racing and anything can happen. We've seen spurious results in opening grands prix in previous years and obviously to have a home winner would be an unbelievable result – but if you look at the pecking order at the moment that is a long shot.

Q: (Andre Leslie – DPA) Question for Mr Wolff, to do with the makeup of your team this season, with Valtteri Bottas now replacing Nico Rosberg, obviously Nico leaves a big hole in the team but Valtteri is keeping pace brilliantly today – we've seen twice. How do you see his role going forwards this season?

TW: It's obviously very big shoes to fill. Nico is the reigning World Champion and Valtteri has to fill those shoes. He has a couple of days of testing behind him which were very positive and the work with the engineers went very well and today was the first proper day on a race weekend. I think that in terms of the mindset, he has settled in very well into the team and how he has to find his grip and benchmark himself against probably the best driver in Formula One at this time. I'm very confident he is going to find the pace and his place in the team.

Q: (Heath McAlpine - Auto Action) For all of you: today's first practice session saw minimal running from the teams worried about engine mileage. Would you support a change in the engine regulations to increase the Friday running for your teams?

EB: Good question. I think if we don't run it is because we may have some technical limitation or let's say no interest to gather data at that stage so if we do between let's say 18 and 30 laps per session it's because it depends on the engine plan generally. I know you can have a different regulation to have more laps but we could do it simply by making sure there is an interest for the teams to run.

PL: I don't entirely agree with what you're saying, really. I think the teams are running pretty much a full programme during both sessions. If anything they're limited by tyres more than engine mileage.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) I would imagine that this is the first Grand Prix that any of you have attended without having Bernie Ecclestone in overall control and charge. Have you, today, thought about the fact that you can't just pick up the phone and phone Bernie if there's some sort of issue?

CH: How do you know he's not still in charge? What Bernie's done for Formula One has been amazing. The sport is what it is today because of what he created. I think in the role that he has, he's still going to be in a position to contribute, he still has a huge amount of historical knowledge, respect and relationships around the world and I think that harnessed and used in the right way is an asset to Formula One. I'm sure he'll be at some forthcoming events and yeah, I think hopefully the new owners can use him constructively and beneficially to build on the good work that's already been done.

MA: I think that Bernie deserves all our respect because if we are here and if the sport grows it is thanks to him. I think that the new group that is owning Formula One is here to make this sport grow even more so there is no future without the good historical base. If we have a good historical base then I think the new owners are looking forward to continue to grow and that's thanks to Bernie for everything he's done and now we need to look forward.

Q: (Mat Coch – pitpass.com) Earlier there was a question about cars not running on the circuit; what can be done in the interests of entertainment to spice up the Friday action which is comparatively dry for those at the circuit, given that everyone's involved in their own programmes, preparing for the weekend?

PL: I don't know. We used to have qualifying on Friday as well as Saturday back in the old days. Maybe that could be considered. I think the great thing now is that we have an evolving process to consider the rules properly and develop a sport that incorporates new ideas.

TW: I think you need to differentiate because we had a very busy afternoon with lots of track action. We had a morning which is completely normal and a green track so there is not a lot of interest in testing cars on a track that's going to develop a lot with the limitation on tyres, with the limitation on engine mileage and if you start to open that up it's like Pandora's box because we're trying to limit costs. The question is that as much as you need an entertainment most of the time entertainment on track, I think we have a good compromise at the moment.

Q: (Sam Tickell – Flagworld.com) We've had a lot of positive reaction to the change and the look and the appearance of the cars this year and it was mentioned previously that Liberty are looking to research for the future. How radical to the change in the appearance of the car would teams like to go to in the future, should the research suggest that a major change should be needed?

MA: Radical change with the new rules, everybody already changed their car and I think these regulations are offering the possibility to the designers of the cars, to the aeros, to exploit even more in terms of creative approach is the first step and then in the future we can do something more. We need to make sure that the car it's still looking like a car and not something that is a bit strange, that's for sure.

CH: I think the looks of the car... I think they currently look great. I think it's all about evolution. I think that rather than focus on the looks I would prefer to focus on the sound. I think the best sounding car we have here this weekend is a 12-year old Minardi that 12 years ago had the worst sounding engine in it and was hopelessly uncompetitive and I think that when you hear the acoustics of a V10, you've only got to go and see the faces around the circuit to see what it embodies in fans of

Formula One, so I would be far more focused on addressing that element than the aesthetics of the cars at the moment.

TW: I think we've changed the aesthetics of the car. I think trying to figure out what we could do next is maybe too far. Like Christian says, if we can work on the sound of the car and if we look into a future generation of engines that is something that needs to be considered. There wasn't enough emphasis on the sound in the past and if we can combine great technology, affordable technology with a lot of horsepower and a good sound, that would be really ticking a box.

Q: (Luigi Perna – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Last year Ferrari lost the pace compared to Red Bull for example in the second part of the season. Are you confident you can have a quick and a more efficient development during the season this year?

MA: What I can tell you is that we are putting all our effort to do all our work best to avoid the same result as last year. That's it. What more can I say?

Q: (Leon Alepidis – F1fan) Regarding the new commercial deal and the discussions that will be taking place soon, we have already heard from the new owners that they are planning to scrap the historical status for a team and the money that that brings. Would you agree that in order to have a more fair distribution of the prize money and a more competitive sport or not and why?

MA: This kind of discussion you do it with the people who have the contract with you and not in public.

EB: I guess if you ask the people for more money they will be against and you ask less money they will be in favour but this is a discussion behind the scenes, not to be done in public.

CH: Well, there's probably not a team principal in the paddock that would say they are happy to take less money. If they are, they're mad so therefore I think it's a question of bringing the bottom up rather than the top down and hopefully that may well be achievable.

PL: Sounds like a good idea, we'll support that one, yeah.

Ends