



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L' AUTOMOBILE

2017 FIA Formula One World Championship
Chinese Grand Prix
Thursday Press Conference Transcript

PART ONE: DRIVERS – Sebastian VETTEL (Ferrari), Max VERSTAPPEN (Red Bull Racing), Nico HULKENBERG (Renault)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Q: Sebastian, if we could start with you. Many congratulations on that win in Melbourne. You're now leading the championship for the first time since 2013. Just describe what that win meant to you and the reception you got when you went back to Maranello?

Sebastian VETTEL: I think of the entire team, I think it was a great weekend, including myself obviously. With the new generation of cars, generally first race of the season with a new car, always a lot of work that goes into the whole project and it's the best way to kick off the season. The day was very special; the fans in Melbourne, the reception there was incredible. Also for everyone back in Italy, in Maranello, obviously it was great to get a little bit of reward after such a long winter, a lot of hard work, as I said, that went into the new car. When I came back to the factory people were generally very happy and motivated to push even harder, which obviously is what we need. It's just the first race, so it doesn't mean much, but for sure, as I said, it's the best way to start off.

Q: For you personally, after what was a very difficult 2016, how much of a relief is it to have a competitive car underneath you?

SV: It wasn't that bad last year! It wasn't the best year we've had but still I think we had a decent amount of podiums. We had a lot of races where things were not going our way, but that's how it goes sometimes. Maybe my memory is wrong, but I remember it maybe better than what people make out of it now. For sure it wasn't the season we wanted to have and after one race it's easy to say that this year is better than last year, but it's only one race. As I said, it's only the start of the season. For sure a lot of things have changed since last year. The team has evolved. I think we generally are in a much better position; people are more comfortable throughout the whole team. The work that is going in is a lot more targeted and overall we're more confident with the way we work now and hopefully we keep up that trend to show it also on the track.

Q: Well, can you keep up that trend this weekend? It's a very different race track here in Shanghai than in Melbourne?

SV: It's a completely different it's true. Then, the weather is completely different, just looking outside now. It's always a grand prix full of surprises, the Chinese Grand Prix, since the day I can remember; in 2007 I think I had my first race here. I started 17th or 18th in the Toro Rosso and I finished fourth. We had the rain helping us at that time. You never know what happens around here. It's a demanding track with the cars, the tyres in particular, but also the drivers with the conditions, so impossible to predict anything.

Q: Of course you had the rain helping you, too, with that win in 2009 for Red Bull Racing. Thank you Sebastian. Let's move on to Max. Let's cast our minds back to Melbourne as well. You finished fifth, what is the mood in the camp after that result?

Max VERSTAPPEN: Pretty similar to be honest. For sure we have to improve, but that's how it is at the moment. We are definitely working hard to get new parts to the car as soon and try to just get the pace up a bit and be closer to the top two teams, because behind us is at the moment quite a big gap, as you could see. I think I could have done two pit stops in Melbourne and still have had the same position. We'll see, on a normal race track here in Shanghai.

Q: Do you expect to be closer this weekend to Ferrari and Mercedes?

MV: I don't know. We'll find out.

Q: Well, what about the gap to those two teams – how long do you think it will take to close it?

MV: It's a bit difficult to say really. It's quite a big gap, but I'm quite confident that we can definitely close it in the upcoming races to within a second and then we'll see when we get the bigger upgrades also from the engine side.

Q: Just talk us through the positives and the negatives of this car. What are you pleased with and where do you think there needs to be more work?

MV: Do you have an hour? No, I think we can... yeah, we can just improve the general balance. I mean, I think in qualifying everything felt pretty good but it's just we need more load. A bit more grip, we need more power. And it's a bit of both – you try to make an efficient car on the straights to make up for the loss of power there. Now we just have to focus on, first, getting the car in the right window and then hopefully we get the right upgrades from the engine side as well.

Q: Nico, can you give us your thoughts on your Melbourne weekend? You finished just outside the points, were you pleased with how things went?

Nico HULKENBERG: Not massively happy, but I think as a first weekend it was quite OK I would say. We're not too far from the midfield. My race was quite compromised by being stuck behind the McLaren. I think otherwise it could have been quite a bit better and further up the road. So that's the good news – that we're not too far, the midfield pack is quite close together there. It definitely comes down to the developments each team will bring now each weekend. I think we have a solid base that we can work pretty well with and hopefully score a couple of points in the next few grands prix.

Q: You're racing for a works team for the first time in Formula One. What are the biggest differences you've noticed between Renault and you're previous team, Force India?

NH: It's just a much bigger operation, more people back at base, more people involved, it feels like more power. But yeah, with a manufacturer team you have a lot more expectations as well and at some point you have to deliver. But fair enough. I think everybody in the team feels very keen and up for that challenge and just looking forward to the next couple of months and making that work.

Q: You're the senior driver in the team. What is your role outside of the car? Are you expected to have an influence over the general direction of staff movements, things like that?

NH: I don't think staff movements so much. But if they ask my opinion I'm happy to give my opinion! I think the two drivers are the guys that drive the cars and need to explain and identify the problems and the issues with the cars and give directions to the engineers and the people back at the factory to develop as fast and efficiently as possible. I think that's where the role comes down to and, yeah, obviously perform on the track.

Q: Before we open it up to the floor, a question to all three of your, but let's start with Sebastian. A lot was made about the physicality of this new generation of cars, how did you find the opening race of the season in Melbourne, physically?

SV: Tougher than last year.

Can you elaborate any more on that?

SV: Well, we're going faster but if you look compared to 10 years ago, you mustn't forget that we have a lot more fuel in the car. We are on the tyres for longer, providing they last, and in general the cars are heavier. If you talk about load and high-speed corners they are the fastest cars we've ever had. I think for more or less all of us the step from last year has been quite big. Melbourne historically hasn't been the most physical track, so I'm sure there will be tracks that will be more physical, but it's been tougher than last year.

Thank you. Max, do you have anything to add on the physicality of the cars?

MV: Sebastian is travelling a second a lap faster every lap, so for sure it's a bit more physical. But it was actually alright. I trained quite a bit more in the off-season period. For me it felt pretty similar to last year but I'm still getting older and stronger just by myself. It was alright. I didn't have a drinks bottle as well, so it was all good.

Nico?

NH: I think the first couple of grands prix aren't the most physical, but ask us again after Singapore. I'm sure you'll see a few drivers pretty knackered after that?

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Frédéric Ferret – L'Equipe) A question to all three drivers. Do you remember the first point you scored in Formula One and was it important for your career?

SV: Yeah, I remember, I was physically pretty knackered! I was completely destroyed after the race. So I remember, the first race I did in the United States, which obviously came by surprise, with Robert Kubica's accident the week before and then the fact that he couldn't drive. For me it was obviously the step into Formula One, because with that one race I was able to show whatever, what was necessary to get another chance, with Toro Rosso for the remainder of the year so it was very crucial.

Max?

MV: Yeah it's not that long ago is it? It was alright. I think it was quite a good race...

Just remind everyone where that was?

MV: Malaysia it was, 2015. There were quite a lot of issues at the end of the race, I remember, with the parts, but we managed to bring it home. So yeah, happy to finish in the points and it was just a good race and probably good for the future as well.

And Nico?

NH: Yeah, I think it was also Malaysia for me, second or third grand prix, in 2010. It's just nice. It's something you want to tick, to quickly get off your chest, you've done it and points are always good for your team.

Q: (Keren Wang – Top Driver) Max, you did a stunning wet race last year in Brazil, and considering the weather, it's supposed to be raining on Sunday, so do you think you will be able to do that again?

MV: To be honest, I don't know. I think last year our package also in the dry was a bit better, a bit more competitive. Also, you need the grip from the car in the wet to do a good job. We'll find out. It's always nice to drive in the wet.

Q: (Luiny Kong – Motorsport.com) A question to Nico. It's highly possible for it to rain on Sunday, so do you think it's a chance for you to gain a better position?

NH: Yeah, it can be, but it can also go against yourself. You obviously have to stay on the track first. It can be quite tricky with some rivers here in the wet. You have to be cautious, but generally I'm a fan of wet running. It offers more opportunity, you can make a bigger difference as a driver, and it's more fun, it's more challenging, so I wouldn't mind it.

Q: (Kate Walker – New York Times): Earlier this year Jacques Villeneuve that said F1 had 'lost its way' when it first started talking to fans and asking what they wanted, but we've seen with Liberty the new owners are very keen on fan engagement and we're seeing an increase in the number of fan surveys. To what extent do you think F1 needs to listen to the fans?

SV: It's a difficult one. I'm maybe very old-school on many things, and I think that some things we shouldn't change. The way people look at it now after one race, after a couple of races, they would like to see a change, but I think it's wrong to change too much. I think it's important to keep a certain framework consistent throughout time, so I think every now and then it's important to listen to people, but I think with surveys it's always difficult to get a very clear picture. I think too much change, equally, is wrong. Just to give an example, when there was talk about the race format, I think it would be quite bad to get rid of one race, one grand prix - I think it would take away the highlight of the weekend by putting two races, for example, or to make the race shorter because they say it's too boring and lasts too long. I think that's the grand prix: that's how it's always been. It's been even longer in the past, if you look a long way back, and it should remain a challenge. Making it shorter, more exciting, whatever, I think it's not a grand prix any more. So to give you an answer, I'm a bit sceptical to have change for the sake of change.

Nico, how about you and Formula One's relationship with the fans.

NH: I think it's definitely good and important to listen to what they have to say, and how they see the sport from the outside - I think it's definitely good to have that. I think not everything that fans may wish for is realistic and possible, but I think it's important to find the right balance there. We all want to race hard, it must be a good show and be entertaining, so I think the balance must be right.

Max, anything to add?

MV: To be honest, I think it's always good to get different opinions. It's a good thing to also listen to fans, of course. I think one thing I miss a bit is of course the engine noise - I think when you were a little kid and you were standing next to the track it was something... even when they were not going 350km/h but going 310 or 320 it was still something magical when they passed, a Formula One car. And now we're going really quick, but on the straights sometimes it doesn't look as quick as a few years ago, when we still had the engine noise. That makes a big impression to the fans as well, and I think that there also needs to be a bit more action in terms of overtaking. As soon as you get that back into it, it doesn't matter how fast the cars are around the lap. The engine noise takes over a lot more than having a car which is three seconds faster compared to last year.

Q: (Jens Nagler – Bild) Question to Sebastian. Can you tell us something about the special relationship between a Formula One driver and his car? Is there a special relationship – or is it just a human and a machine?

SV: I name my car but it's not like I stroke her in the morning when I come in and do the same again in the evenings. I think it's a bit of fun to give it a bit more of a relationship than just calling it 'the car'. For sure you need to trust the car the moment you step in – for many reasons, not just to go fast. But...

yeah... it's not like I call the factory and ask how the car is doing. I'm also happy to share it with other men, so I'm not taking it that seriously.

What is the name of this year's car? And why is it called that?

SV: The name is Gina. We sit down, we have a nice dinner, it's more about the dinner than the name. But then we just decide a name. It's a lot of fun. Gina was the outcome this year.

Q: (Inaudible) We know you have tested the most laps last year in the Pirelli tyre test and last race your tyre management is brilliant. So, is that experience giving you better understanding for the tyres or give you more advantages compared to other drivers?

SV: I'm not sure. I think maybe the right answer is 'no'. But the reason why I'm generally happy to do it is because I love driving. So, when there's an opportunity to test, even though testing can sometimes be a bit dull and boring but still, you're driving the car and that's much better than sitting on the bike for a couple of hours or whatever training to be fit enough to drive the car. I think that generally track time is limited so every opportunity you get. That's personal – but I can't understand why you would reject it and as I said, I'm happy to drive the car and I think there's always something you learn, so for sure the days I did last year with Pirelli to help them get feedback for the tyres etc., for sure they also helped me.

Q: Nico, your team and you didn't do any 2017 tyre testing last year with Pirelli. Do you feel at a disadvantage compared to Mercedes, Ferrari and Red Bull who did?

NH: I'm not sure, to be honest. Because obviously it was these mule cars which were not fully representative and the tyres were also not, I believe, the exact spec that we have now. But, you know, there's always something that you can learn, and pickup, that you can use for your advantage. But that's in the past. It's history.

Q: (Daniele Sparisci – Corriere della Sera) Question to Sebastian. You score your fourth victory with Ferrari. Was it something different to the first three in 2015? And here, in China, do you expect a strong reaction from Mercedes?

SV: I think Mercedes still has to be the favourite, obviously. We had a very, very strong first race. At least the way we look at it inside the team is to look at it race-by-race. I know, we know that we have a good package which puts us in a strong place but there's a lot of things that...

MV: And don't stop too early, otherwise I'll be driving there...

SV: Yeah, exactly! We know there's a lot of things that we need to do to keep up with them and keep the position that we are in now, to fight for good races. Melbourne, it was the first race of the year, with the year last year that was difficult – wasn't a disaster from my point of view – but was difficult for all the team, I think it was nice, and that's what everyone felt. A lot of hours going in and I think a lot of people inside the team, they invested so much time so, for sure here and there in Australia the people were maybe not as fresh as they could be because they invested so much time and spent so many nights working on the car, preparing the car, as well as in the factory. So I think it was a nice feeling to get something back. For sure the victory is always the medicine for everyone. It was good, we've done that, and now we move on.

Q: (Arjan Schoutten – AD Sportwereld) Question for Max about Melbourne. You mentioned the lack of overtaking. Was that a good indicator or will this be a whole, new story here in Shanghai?

MV: I think in general in Melbourne it's always a bit hard to overtake. It's just the track, the nature of it. I think last year actually in China there was a lot of action so I expect that it's a bit better to overtake here. I think it won't be the same like last year because the cars are going faster through the corners

and we have less tyre degradation. It will be a bit more difficult but I wouldn't say it would be like Melbourne.

Q: (Felix Görner – RTL) Max, did you get the beer from Sebastian?

MV: No, but it's alright.

SV: You're not old enough to drink!

MV: I'm not satisfied with water

PART TWO: DRIVERS – Antonio GIOVINAZZI (SAUBER), Kimi RÄIKKÖNEN (FERRARI), Carlos SAINZ (TORO ROSSO)

Q: Kimi, let's start with you... you finished fourth in Melbourne despite a few handling problems during the race. How confident are you of challenging at the front this weekend?

Kimi RÄIKKÖNEN: Well, I think we learned a lot, we understand quite a bit and kind of everything came a bit late. And obviously then you don't get a very good result. I mean comparing to the last few years it was far from a disaster. Yes, we had some difficulties and we know afterwards that we could have been much faster but still, as a team, we did a pretty solid job and yeah, we got some points – but new place, new circuit, so we'll see.

Q: Sebastian said a moment ago that he thinks Mercedes are still favourites coming into this weekend. Is that how you see it – or will the rain mix things up?

KR: I don't know who it will be. We haven't driven a single lap with the new cars here, so who knows. I think we have had a pretty good package, and feeling with the car whichever place we've been but it's pointless to start guessing who's going to be in front, who's not. We will see over the weekend and Sunday we'll hopefully be a little bit smarter.

Q: You haven't driven the new cars here but you have driven yours in the wet when the track was artificially watered in the Barcelona test. How was it then?

KR: It wasn't like proper wet. It's always hard to make the same conditions if it's raining outside like it is now or just dumping water on the circuit, so it's a bit tricky to get the best idea. Plus we have different tyres here for the wet. It's a bit unknown but the same for everybody. Usually if the car is good on dry it's not too bad in the wet either. We have to wait and see but I think in any condition we should be OK.

Q: Antonio, congratulations on a tremendous first grand prix in Melbourne a couple of weeks ago. How do you reflect on it now?

Antonio GIOVINAZZI: Thank you. It was a special weekend. It was my first F1 grand prix. Dream came true. Since I was a kid the dream was to arrive in F1 and to drive there was a fantastic experience, fantastic weekend. It was a quite late call on Saturday morning but I really enjoyed everything I did from FP3 to quali to race. So, I will never forget – and to be here already, to start from FP1 will be more easy. And also to have the experience from Melbourne will make everything a lot more easy. It will be a different race weekend though. The weather also looks difficult. So, it will be maybe wet and also to have some experience in the wet conditions will be good. What I can do is to do my best and hope the result can be good like Melbourne.

Q: What's your deal with the Sauber team, how many races are you going to do for them?

AG: I'm the third driver of Ferrari. Now we just think race-by-race. I had the call here on Tuesday and I'm here to race for Sauber but already from next week I will be back in red with the Scuderia Ferrari – but then we will see in the future.

Q: So no news on Bahrain yet?

AG: Not yet.

Q: Physically, how tough was the Australian Grand Prix for you?

AG: Of course I keep training in the winter so I arrive there quite prepared. To be honest at the end of the race was not easy but I expected it to be more difficult. Here I think it will be a little bit tough because the track has a lot longer corners so for the neck it will be not easy – but I was training last week and hope to also be OK here.

Q: Carlos, a good result for Toro Rosso in Melbourne; both cars in the points, yourself eighth. How confident are you of maintaining that form going forward?

Carlos SAINZ: Yeah, I think it was a really good weekend for the team after a very tough winter. I think we were the team to only just do more laps than McLaren so it was also an extremely tough winter in Barcelona for us and to turn up to the first race and put both cars in the points, and in Q3, was a success, definitely, so it just shows that the car has a lot of potential and that we can only get better from here. Shanghai will be a bit tougher because it has a bit of a longer straight than Melbourne but I think we can be happy with the first race and we can start from there.

Q: Can you give us your thoughts on the current Renault engine and how it compares to the two-year old Ferrari that the team used last year?

CS: Well, for me it feels great because last year was very painful and all the second half of the season we were something like 15-16-17kph down on the straight compared to our direct competitors. Suddenly, to start the first race and to see yourself 7-8kph back, even six or five in some cases was really good news and something grateful to experience but definitely, as you can see, we are still one step behind the leaders in that regard, or the best engines in that regard, so I have the trust that Renault are working hard on that upgrade package coming to Canada and that can give us the extra 3,4,5 kph that can put us back in a normal, standard top speed deficit.

Q: Kimi, coming back to you, a lot has been made of the physicality of this new breed of Formula One car; how does it compare to the cars that you drove in the mid-noughties, 2005, 2004? Are they more physical than back then?

KR: It's very hard to compare. It's a long time ago, I suppose. It depends a lot on the different circuits, conditions and everything and how the tyres will last and obviously these last better and you can push more. I think the key point is that as we do more running, more racing, we get used to it and it's not a big deal but at the start of the year, when you do the first test, it's a bit of a surprise but that's how it usually is after the winter. At least in Melbourne it didn't feel any different but it's amazing how quickly you get used to all the things and it feels absolutely normal. I'm sure somewhere it will be more harder than last year but that's how it is.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Frederic Ferret – L'Equipe) To Antonio Giovinazzi: do you think if you score a point this weekend it would change your career?

AG: It's a good question. Of course it would change but it will be important for me, for my mind. Of course the result we also had in Melbourne, P12, was a good result and yeah, to improve the result from Melbourne is to take... to score a point will be difficult but I will try my best and score a point.

Q: (Keren Wang - Top Driver) Antonio, how would you describe your driving style?

AG: My driving style? I don't know. I'm quite calm, I think, normal driving style. My strong part, I think, in GP2 was – in the race – to save the tyres. In Melbourne, I didn't have much experience so maybe I was too slow in the beginning of the race but of course here I will improve, to already have FP1 and FP2 will be good to see how is the degradation, to have a feeling with the car so I hope I can do a better job in the race here.

Q: (Michael Lamonato – Class Act Media) To all three of you: there's a lot being made about the difficulty of overtaking this season. There was maybe only a handful of passing manoeuvres in Australia. Do you think the new regulations will make attempting an overtake maybe a bit more of a braver thing; will you have to put more on the line now to pass a car and will that contribute to the spectacle of racing?

KR: Every circuit is different, obviously. Melbourne has always been difficult to overtake and of course when you maybe have the fastest car and the slowest car you get round it very easily but I think in China here, usually overtaking is easier so I think we have to wait and see how it is here and then see if it's harder or less easy than we expected but I think when you have two fast cars against each other, it doesn't matter if it's last year or this year, it's always going to be hard to get past. The other factor is that there is less tyre drop-off so obviously after the pit stops there is a much smaller difference between the speed of the cars because of that so there are all those things which in the end make a difference.

CS: I think it's definitely a bit more difficult compared to last year but I think it's a price that is worth paying for, having these cars which are a lot faster and these tyres that are allowing you to push a lot more. At least, myself I have been doing a lot more on the race but also if you would put one-stop races last year, I don't think you would have seen many overtakings so I think it's more dependent on pit stops than on the cars of this year.

Q: Antonio, how much harder is it to overtake in Formula One compared to GP2?

AG: To be honest it's quite different, you know. In GP2 we all have similar cars, only one strategy, only one pit stop so I think GP2 was a good category for overtaking but to be honest I think here in Shanghai with the longer straight it will be easier than in Melbourne but to be honest, I didn't have much experience compared to last year so what I say is not much to take into account so GP2 was good, F1 I don't have much experience of so after this race I can tell you better.

Q: (Veljko Jukic – Auto Focus) Kimi, when we look at a race today, how of your concentration is spent on taking care of tyres, on fuel consumption and on pure racing?

KR: Obviously it depends a lot on the conditions and the circuit that we're on. Some circuits you have to do some fuel saving, some not at all. Obviously it is a big part of those races and it's the same with the tyres, some circuits are much better for tyres that they don't degrade so much. You can't really say that every place is the same. Each place is a special place and it's different to the previous race and the next race so some days you can go full out for the whole race, some you have to take care of things or maybe if you have an issue then obviously that creates another story. So to really go full out is not an awful lot during the year, it is not often for the whole race. It's a nice feeling for all of us, I think, when we can really go full speed all the time and not really worry about tyres or fuel, just try and race against it.

Q: (Veljko Jukic – Auto Focus) Do you have to take care of fuel consumption?

KR: Sometimes, it depends on the circuit, obviously. I think it's the same for all the cars. Between the engines and the cars there's small differences but I'm sure the places that we have to fuel save the others will also, it's the same for them.

Q: (Andreas Haupt – Auto Motor und Sport) Antonio, did you set yourself any specific goals, targets for this weekend? For example, beating Marcus or is it just about relaxing for you?

AG: Just as you say, maybe relaxing and enjoying of course and getting more experience. After one race is not enough to set a target so I need to just drive and take experience and do my best and then we will see the results on Sunday.

Q: (Marc Surer – Sky Germany) Kimi, in Barcelona you seemed to do easily the fastest time. It didn't work out in Melbourne in the race. Are this year's cars more difficult to set up?

KR: In the race I did fastest lap. It was only one lap and I was a bit light but... No, I don't think it's any more difficult to set up this year than any other year but I don't also think it's ever going to be easy to find the best set-up. Sometimes you might end up when you go on a new circuit that just happens to be right and you just fine-tune it a little bit but for many different small reasons we never really got it right and it just makes a big difference, at least on circuits like Melbourne, the corners that there are. If it's not right you're going to give an awful lot of lap time. That was really the end story. Obviously with big enough understeer you have a little bit more unknown stories from testing still, you never have time to do everything plus you do testing in one place so you kind of end up being in a similar area with the car all testing long, so going to a new place you have to be much more and obviously they are much more experienced now and I think it should be fine now.

Q: (Michael Lamonato – Class Act Media) Antonio, it's rare for a reserve driver to get a racing opportunity. How are you approaching this race compared to the last race in the sense that... are you treating it like a CV for a race drive next year or is it really just about you filling in the race seat and getting the job done for Sauber?

AG: Yeah, I'm the third driver of Ferrari. Now I'm back here in China. Of course I have more time to prepare for the race so already from FP1 compared to Melbourne and yeah, I just need to take experience, do a lot of laps and of course about next year, this year is still too early to speak. I'm really glad to drive here so I need to say thanks to Scuderia Ferrari and Sauber for this opportunity and I need to just drive and gain experience.

Ends