



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L' AUTOMOBILE

## **2018 FIA Formula One World Championship**

### **Australian Grand Prix**

#### **Thursday Press Conference Transcript 22.03.2018**

**DRIVERS – Lewis HAMILTON (Mercedes), Sebastian VETTEL (Ferrari), Daniel RICCIARDO (Red Bull Racing)**

#### **PRESS CONFERENCE**

**Let's start with our world champion and six-time pole sitter here at Albert Park, Lewis Hamilton. Lewis, I think you said over the winter that you felt that last year was the best you've driven in your Formula 1 career. Do you anticipate having to go to another level this year in competition these gentlemen?**

**Lewis HAMILTON:** I plan to. That's what I've been working towards.

**Why did you feel that last year was your best? What had to come together for you?**

**Lewis HAMILTON:** It was just a combination of things and obviously with the pressure that was on us as drivers, I think it was just the most complete year.

**Thank you. A simple question for you Sebastian: can you and Ferrari find the speed to beat this guy over a whole season this year?**

**Sebastian VETTEL:** We don't have the answer now. We try. It's a long season. If it was one race it would be a different story, but it is a lot of races.

**To you, Daniel: in the last few years Red Bull have not been competitive at the opening round. This year it looks like you had better winter preparation, so do you think this could be your most effective Australian Grand Prix for a while?**

**Daniel RICCIARDO:** I believe so. We had a good winter. It's all there in front of us now. I think we're still the top three teams – Merc, Ferrari and us. I think we're still going to be leading the pack for now. So hopefully we'll be deep in that group and have a chance to stand up on the podium.

#### **QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR**

**Q: (Andrew Benson – BBC Sport) Lewis, how important is it to you to carry on ahead of Sebastian in terms of stats in your career and end your career ahead of him as well?**

**LH:** It's not something I've ever really thought about to be honest. I don't particularly have an opinion towards it. I'm just going to keep working as hard as I can to continue fighting up the front and hopefully with that comes some good results.

**Here's one for you: if you won from pole it's an all-time record, you beat Michael's record. Something to aim for.**

**LH:** Ah, OK.

**Q: (Giles Richards – The Guardian) Lewis, you say you don't chase stats but you have recognised that you could reach Fangio's record this season. Have you thought about that some more now that you are at the start of the season?**

**LH:** I have not, honestly. It's a long, long season so you don't really think about those kind of things, you don't think about what could be in the sense of matching others. In my mind I'm trying to break down new barriers, push the envelope. Trying to see how far I can take, firstly, the opportunity I

have and then obviously the ability I have and live to my full potential. I don't know what that is, and that's what I'm discovering.

**Q: (Andrew Benson – BBC Sport) Lewis, how important is it to you to carry on ahead of Sebastian in terms of stats in your career and end your career ahead of him as well?**

**LH:** It's not something I've ever really thought about to be honest. I don't particularly have an opinion towards it. I'm just going to keep working as hard as I can live to my full potential and that's what I am discovering.

**Q: (Leon Alepidis – F1fan) A question to all of you. As Renault is already considering strategically to have a fourth engine for the year. Assuming you will all stay at that do you put your faith in your team to go on with three. Would consider down the line, in the closing stages of the championship, to go for a fourth engine in order to avoid a DNF and a penalty instead of only a penalty?**

**DR:** It's hard to start thinking about that now. I had a few engine penalties last year and we've got one less [engine] this year so it's likely – I don't want to say it's definite – but it's obviously likely that we may encounter something like that or everyone may encounter something like that. I think it depends where you are in the championship. If you try to cut your losses I guess then maybe that's what you'll do but it's for sure too early to start thinking about that. I think we'll stay optimistic and try to get these three home to Abu Dhabi.

**What about you Sebastian, have you looked at it. Is there a performance gain in using four across the season?**

**SV:** I'm sure we looked at it. I don't think it's the plan but I'm very confident that we're not using four engines this weekend, so we don't need to worry now.

**And Lewis?**

**LH:** I don't really have much more to say.

**Q: (Dan Knutson – Auto Action and Speed Sport) Daniel, you say the team is the best prepared it's been in quite a while. Is that more pressure on you? Is that more pressure, more fun, less fun? How do you look at it?**

**DR:** It has to be more fun. Not starting last year wasn't fun at all. So it has to be more fun. Even little things. Last year we missed the anthem on the grid because I was in the garage trying to get the thing going, or be there for when it got going. I missed a lot of the Sunday build-up, which was not fun. For sure this preparation is going to mean more fun this weekend and we'll see where that fun takes us?

**Q: (Ian Gordon – The Mirror) Lewis, you said you're pushing the envelope. Do you think you've reached your peak as a driver or are you still learning?**

**LH:** I hope not.

**Q: (Ian Gordon – The Mirror) Is it a peak age for a driver? Or do you just carry on learning?**

**LH:** Again I hope not. I'm sure there is a peak when for a driver when their fitness level.... When it gets harder to reach the fitness level that we do today. When your interest starts to decline, when your drive starts to decline, I guess that's when you're over your peak. But I definitely don't feel I'm that. I'm definitely in a good range now and that's where I need to continue, to extract the most from it.

**How about you two? Daniel, are you peaking?**

**DR:** Not yet, still young.

**Seb?**

**SV:** I don't know. I think it's fine. Lewis is a little bit older and he's not peaking yet, so I have got plenty to look forward to.

**Q: (Andreas Haupt – Auto Motor und Sport) What is your opinion about the additional DRS zone and is it helpful or not?**

**DR:** I don't think it hurts. It's typically been a pretty hard track to overtake. I think, as well, with the cars, we're going faster and faster and following a car is getting harder and harder at some circuits, so I think they've been proactive and tried to help out a cause here. I don't know if it will necessarily create overtaking into that corner but it may at least put you into the zone to then have a chance somewhere else.

**LH:** I think Daniel answered it well.

**SV:** Agree.

**Q: (Louis Dekker - NOS) Do you think the next world champion is sitting behind the table now, or standing outside speaking Dutch?**

**DR:** Why are you looking at me?

**LH:** I don't have answer for you. [Sebastian] do you have a better answer?

**SV:** I think we hope the one sits here. I think it's obvious no?

**Let's put it this way, do you think the one outside speaking Dutch is ready to challenge for a world championship?**

**SV:** Who do you mean?

**LH:** There are a lot of Dutch people here.

**SV:** Especially for TV and journalists.

**Dan?**

**DR:** We'll add a ninth to this table?

**SV:** What?

**DR:** We'll add a ninth to this table. We've got eight between us.

**Q: (Phil Duncan – PA) Lewis, one of your former team-mates this week said that inconsistency was your biggest weakness. I'm just wondering whether you think that's the case. And Seb, what's your plan to beat Lewis. Have you thought over the winter about the best way to do that?**

**LH:** I think I proved that's not the case last year and... yeah... again, I think there's a lot of people that need to get headlines, and so maybe that's one way of saying it. No, the goal this year is to be even more consistent than I was last year. I think consistency was the reason that I won the Championship last year.

**And Seb, do you have a master plan?**

**QSV:** Yeah, all laid out – but it's not with me, it's in my room, so, of course, top secret, so I can't give you any details.

**Q: (Jonathan McEvoy – Daily Mail) Sebastian, do you see any weaknesses in Lewis? How would you describe them, or see them? What are they? If there are any.**

**SV:** Well, there aren't many, so I think he's doing a very, very good job for many years now. So, I think it's always a bit of a weird question to answer when the person is sitting right next to you. But, as I said, there aren't many. I'm sure we all have our weaknesses. Maybe some are part of our characters, maybe some are part of our driving – but to be honest I don't think about those too much. I think about mine quite a lot and try to get better at what I need to improve. But yeah, concerning other people, it's not in my hands. So, I try to finish my plate.

**LH:** I think I share the same weakness with everyone in this room. Everyone loves pancakes. That's really my only weakness.

**What's yours?**

**DR:** Pancakes again.

**Q: (Ben Hunt – The Sun) Lewis, are you up for it this year? You seem a little bit jaded here – I don't know if it's jetlag or whatnot – but are you up for the fight this year?**

**LH:** I'm definitely not tired – this is the 12<sup>th</sup> season of doing the press conference. I'm not the most excited about this section of the season and the race weekend – but I'm looking forward to getting in the car.

**Are you up for the fight?**

**LH:** Of course.

**Q: (Heikki Kulta – Turun Sanomat) Sebastian, were you surprised that Kimi started an Instagram – and are you planning to follow the example?**

**SV:** 'Yes', and 'no' are my answers. Finnish answers. Short.

**Q: (Andrew Benson – BBC Sport) Sebastian, can I take you back to your first answer, you were asked if you could beat Lewis and you said ‘if it was one race it would be a different story but maybe over the season’ or something like that. Does that mean you’re not confident this weekend that Ferrari are...?**

**SV:** ...no but I think the question was whether we... who’s coming out of top, sort of. I think Mercedes is right and I think Lewis is right to be the favourite, to put for this year – but it’s a long season so I think, y’know, obviously, this is one race, Melbourne is particular in many ways. I think we all look forwards to kick off the season, to get ready, get in the car and race. I think, y’know, we have all the reasons to be confident. Our car is great. There’s stuff to come, so plenty to look forward to – but usually at this point you don’t know where the others are. So, that’s why it’s a bit pointless to come here and say that you’ll blow everyone away. Based on testing I think we are in good shape. We could be in better shape but it’s always like that.

**Q: (Jonathan McEvoy – Daily Mail) To Sebastian again, how would it mean for you to go level with Fangio?**

**SV:** I think it’s a bit of a similar answer to what Lewis gave earlier. Obviously, I’ve had more time to think about it than Lewis had. More than one winter. But... yeah... I don’t know. I’m not setting these things out and planning or looking forward to what could possibly happen. Certainly, if it will happen it would mean a lot – and then I think you start to realise – but now I don’t see the point of thinking ‘what if’. I have a lot on my plate now and I’m happy also to look forward to what’s right in front of me, not what could be at some point in the future. Ideally, it’s less than 12 months away – but it’s a long way. I think we all know how many things need to come together to be able to fight for the championship towards the end of the season. And then to win it. Yeah. Also, I think nowadays the times are different. I think it’s very different times to when Fangio achieved it, compared to today. So, every era has its own challenges, certainly they were a bit different back then. So yeah, it’s not in my mind now, let’s say.

**(Q: Yianni Mavromoustakos, [talkingtorque.com.au](http://talkingtorque.com.au)) question for all three drivers: how do you feel about the shift in direction of Formula One since the takeover of Liberty Media?**

**LH:** I don’t know what to say. I just heard the new anthem. Reminded me of [TV programme] Gladiators. Do you remember Gladiators in England? Used to watch that on a Saturday night. We’re going to be the new Gladiators. I think there’s been a lot of good progress over the last year in terms of how we engage with people and how we engage with fans and the openness – but I think it’s still part of a long process of learning where to go. I don’t think anyone in this room knows exactly what is the key to Formula One moving forwards and succeeding. I think it’s a very difficult question to answer but I think they’re doing the best they can and we’re all trying to support them the best way we can.

**Dan?**

**DR:** I agree with that. I think there’s been some good initiatives as well within the paddock. Especially at a lot of the European races with the fixed team structures. Feels like week-in, week-out you’re just rolling into the same deal and everyone goes straight to their motorhome and that’s kind of it – but there’s generally a lot of friends or fans or VIPs whatever in and amongst the paddock but they’re secluded. They’ve tried to create like a bar and a bit of a common area, got some music going in the paddock, and just create a bit more of an atmosphere. Again, the on-track stuff for us, the racing, that doesn’t change, but at least the fans, spectators for the weekend get a good deal. I think Melbourne’s always done a good job as far as putting things on, as the whole weekend goes, like filling it up with other racing and other activities, so I think they’re learning to adopt some strategies to create more of an event around the race, so everyone’s not just living for that Sunday afternoon: there’s more going on.

**How about you Seb? You’ve said you’re not getting any closer to getting into social media – but what do you think of the job that’s being done globally?**

**LH:** ...I thought you were on social media!

**SV:** No.

**LH:** I think I’m following... someone

**SV:** Well, to whoever it is, congratulations! It’s not me. What did I want to say now? Yeah, from a driving point of view there’s obviously not that much that has changed. The regulations have been set before there was new people taking over. I think it’s great to see and I heard last year continuously around the track people supporting us. There were more things to do, it was a bit more fun, which I think is great. In general, I think I’m a traditionalist and I like to hold on to certain things, so probably there’s a lot of things I’m not a specialist in and I don’t need to understand – so I’m a

bit... yeah, confused why the races start later, a bit sad that there are no more grid girls – but other than that, not many changes yet. I think we need to wait.

**Q: (Chip Le Grand – The Australian) It's a rare thing in any sport when you have two enduring champions that are both at the peak of their powers so for you, Lewis and Sebastian, how special is it to share your careers in this way and heading into this season where I guess we're all looking at it as a bit of a decider, how much additionally special does that make it, knowing that the other guy is so good?**

**LH:** Ultimately it's a privilege to be in Formula One, it's a privilege to be racing for the teams that we're racing for and for me and Mercedes, with the heritage that they have, to be a part of the sport that's progressing and changing with the times and to be at the forefront of it, competing against the best drivers that you can compete against, I think that's... when you come to the end of your career, you want to know that you competed against the best. There are those that bow out early, there are those that have won championships maybe that have not been as competitive and the ultimate goal is to be... to be the best, I think you have to go up against the best. It's been a great experience to be able to race against Sebastian, he's got the four World titles, the most of any other driver at the time and I think this is an exciting year for Formula One fans, being that we have two four time World Champions battling it out but Daniel's been smiling quite a lot today so I think you're going to be surprised this weekend just how competitive Red Bull are. There's a lot of hype around our team, for example which I think is very difficult to really take much notice of because the last test was a little bit distorted with the track the way it was and everyone was on different fuel loads so I'm excited to see how we all fare up once we get into practice.

**SV:** Well, I think if you... I agree with Lewis. Obviously first of all it's a privilege to be able to get a chance to prove yourself in Formula One, then to be able to race in Formula One. Then I think when you get in it's all about winning. You want to win, you don't look at anything else. Probably later on, after you've won a little bit, you get a bit more perspective and open your horizons as well and then I think it becomes something special to win against the best. In my case, obviously, I think if I look at the people I raced throughout my career then I think it's always been sort of the same people which starting from karting age, even if I didn't race Lewis in karting but you were aware. Then you move on, we met a little bit later in Formula Three where he was a lot better than I was and then in Formula One ultimately but yeah, then you care more about who you race against and what it means to you, it gives you more satisfaction. And now, obviously, I'm searching for the ultimate satisfaction to win with Ferrari which is the greatest team in history, the greatest team in the paddock and that's my ultimate target now, to win with Ferrari and win against the best which arguably... I'm sure there's plenty of numbers that you're all aware of, arguably, and Lewis is one of them.

**Q: (Phil Branagan – Auto Action) Lewis and Sebastian, as Daniel sits here today, he doesn't have a deal for 2019. What would you like to say to encourage him to join your respective teams next season?**

**SV:** I don't know. I'm sure he'll find a seat so yeah, I don't know what he's up to or what he wants. I don't know how much he's asking but as I said... I'm confident he'll find a seat. We only shared one year together, I knew him before that and we had one year together which wasn't great for me, it was great for him. But anyways, I think we get along so I wouldn't mind if we get together again in the future but I don't know what his plan... I think he has a couple of options and I don't think he needs to rush.

**Q: Lewis, do you feel the same way?**

**LH:** I would just say that an important thing is just really to look at the history of drivers and things that drivers have said in the past and try not to alienate the team that you're in. It's all good and while hoping at some stage to experience something new in another team but there's a lot of people in our teams and it's really important to keep them encouraged and focused on you as a driver, to help you achieve your goal and if you look at... there are some drivers of recent years who have made bad decisions in upsetting and rocking the boat and that so yeah, he's in a great place still. Red Bull, I think, this year can really have a fighting chance to win the championship and the opinion of where you might want to go, if it's not where he currently is, may shift.

**Q: We have to have your rebuttal to that, Daniel.**

**DR:** Well said, well said by both. Yeah, I feel like I've answered already so many like contract talks and we haven't even got the first race of this year done so yeah, I'm just going to put all those talks on hold for a while and yes, this is a year which... obviously our prep's been well, our prep's been good and I really really hope that Lewis is right that we will have a chance to fight for a title and that will ultimately make me very happy and then we will then... I think, yeah, as Seb said, take my time and then see what happens in... ask me in six months' time.

**Q: (Gaetan Vigneron – RTBF) Last year the rules imposed numbers on the car, the name of the driver and so on. And this year, with the halo, it's even impossible to recognise the helmets of the drivers. Is the drivers' identification something you care about for the viewers, for the fans, for the TV commentators and do you have any suggestions to improve the situation?**

**SV:** We should be allowed to design the halo.

**LH:** I don't have a suggestion for it but I have noticed that you... it's almost pointless of us painting the helmets nowadays so I'm probably going to get rid of my paint on mine. Saves weight but yeah, I don't really have a suggestion for it. I'm sure they'll come up with something.

**Q: Is it important to you, was it important to you as a fan when you saw the drivers' helmets coming out when you were a kid?**

**SV:** Yeah, yeah, definitely and obviously we can't negotiate the position of the halo, we can't put it at the back of the car. I don't know, maybe it should be up to us to design the halo, I don't know. That could be an idea, just to add an element to what makes it different from the rest.

**DR:** Yeah, the only thing I could think of was putting something on the halo to distinguish teammates. I think we... is it the camera or the rollhoop or whatever that sometimes one driver has yellow so you can kind of tell a little bit there so maybe do something between teammates with the halos just to give fans a little bit of an idea who's behind the wheel because yeah, you don't really see the helmet now? We are pretty hidden. Yeah, that's all I can think of for now short term.

Ends