



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L' AUTOMOBILE

2018 FIA Formula One World Championship

Bahrain Grand Prix

Thursday Press Conference Transcript

05.04.2018

DRIVERS – Valtteri BOTTAS (Mercedes), Kimi RÄIKKÖNEN (Ferrari), Fernando ALONSO (McLaren)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Kimi, if we can start with you. It was third place in Australia for the opening and it could have been even better and you said you were happy with the car during the first weekend. Could you just tell us what about this car you like and does it suit you more than last year's car?

Kimi RÄIKKÖNEN: Obviously it's hard to say. I think it was a pretty straightforward weekend. For sure, we could have done more things and improved always, but it's the same: it doesn't matter if you win or are tenth of something; there are always things to improve or work on. Obviously we have a very limited amount of time over the weekend to do things, with the practice, and also with the weather it was a bit tricky. Overall, I think we were quite pleased with how things went. You want more, better positions, but I think we take that happily. As a team we did a pretty job out of it. Not much to complain about really. We want to win races, but it's the first race out and we managed to do decent points, so we go forward here, try to make a good practice. So far the car has been working well, even with pretty limited testing over the winter, with some illness and obviously the weather was not ideal on the first test, so I'm pretty OK with how things are running, so let's just keep doing our normal things and improving.

Thank you. Valtteri, coming to you: it was a difficult weekend for you in Australia, especially with the crash in qualifying. How much does a weekend like that play on your mind in the gap between races and how eager are you to get out on track this weekend?

Valtteri BOTTAS: Well, not so much been in my mind, because everything was kind of processed during the weekend. It was a bad weekend, that's it. Now we still have 20 races to go and we're here in Bahrain, so nothing really to worry about at this point. We have a competitive car. We know we still have a lot of work to do to make it better. Just a bad weekend, so looking forward to this one.

Thank you very much. Fernando, you said on Saturday evening in Melbourne that hopefully you'd finish higher than P7 or P6 in Australia and you went and finished in fifth place, so where will you finish this weekend?

Fernando ALONSO: I don't know, I don't have the crystal ball anymore! I think definitely the car has some potential. Over the winter we had some ups and downs in testing and then in Australia it was the same thing – the free practice was affected by the weather and the qualifying was not smooth enough for us to show the potential. It was a good race, a lucky race with the two Haas retirements and the Virtual Safety Car. Nevertheless, I think we take this fifth place and we move

on. There is still a lot to improve for us if we want to catch up to the top three teams, but I think we have the potential there and hopefully we can unlock some performance in the next races.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Dan Knutson – Auto Action and Speedsport) Fernando, following on from that: as you say, ups and downs and still potential to come, but are happy days here again?

FA: Well, I think there's still quite a reasonable gap to close with the leaders, but I think it's up to us now. It's up to the team to deliver the performance in the next weeks, in the next four or five or six grands prix. If we are able to bring the performance to the track and close that gap and, you know, being in a reasonable distance to the pole position and the podium finishes and things like that, then it's up to us to deliver the result on the weekend. I think the next two months are crucial for our hopes in this year's championship, but hopefully we can keep improving the car, keep putting more performance and if it's not a world championship fight, it will hopefully be some podium positions during the year or it can be regular top six or top five positions, not only in Australia P5 because of the Virtual Safety Car and the two Haas retirements. Maybe P5 could become a normality. That's something we need to discover and to find out and as I said before, it's probably the first time in the last three years that it's up to us now to deliver that result, so we will try to do our best.

Q: (Heikki Kulta – Turun Sanomat) Kimi, you have eight podiums here but the qualifying results have not been that good – only one P3. Is that the biggest difference you have between racing and qualifying in any circuit, and, if yes, where is that coming from?

KR: I don't look too closely what has happened in the past, you probably know better. To be honest we try to do our best. Sometimes it works; sometimes not and obviously, you start where you qualify. If it's a good place or not that great you try to make the best out of it. To be honest some years it's been working out well here. You can choose the tyres and do a different race and it worked out well. Could it be better if you started at the front? Who knows? Another weekend where we try to do a good job and be up there and see where we end up. It's a bit unknown. This is a completely different circuit to the previous two where we've been in Barcelona and Australia – so yeah, we have to see how everything plans out and where we are, where others are – but it's been a pretty decent place in past years.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – Globoesporte.com) To Kimi and Valtteri, starting with Kimi. Kimi, you were almost seven-tenths slower in qualifying in Australia. Do you think Mercedes can also have such an advantage in qualifying here? And, in race conditions, if you believe Ferrari will be more or less in the same gap to Mercedes – or even smaller due to characteristics of the track, and considering the history of Ferrari in this track?

KR: Who knows. You can keep guessing as long as you want, we see over the weekend where we are. I have zero interest to start guessing where we are, what's the difference in qualifying. There's so many things that will change that and y'know, we'll do our best and see where we end up in qualifying and the race – but the most important part is the Sunday after the race where it will be finished. I am finished to be two seconds off if we win every Sunday. I don't care. It's pretty irrelevant on Saturday in that way. But yeah, I don't know. That's why we come here. To find out.

VB: I think pretty much the same. You can always guess but at this point we can only guess, so yeah... I think historically Ferrari has been good here. They had good race pace in Australia. Last year they had stronger pace here than in Australia, so I think it's going to be a threat and they're going to be close to us. Even Red Bull. But more than that, just can't say. We will see how the weekend develops.

Q: (David Croft – Sky Sports F1) Interesting day coming up tomorrow where we understand Liberty Media will be presenting their blueprint of the future of Formula One to the teams. I was just wondering, as drivers, what input you've had, what consultations you've had and

where you see any changes necessary from a racing perspective to improve Formula One for the future. It's a question to you all.

FA: I don't think that there is anything thing that we can probably can say about that. Definitely Liberty has been quite open to us from Day One and they've been asking us all of last year about opinions and different ideas that we may have. So, they were very productive conversations. So, now I think they have a plan. They will show it tomorrow to the teams and we will agree with whatever their decision is because they have all the power and they have all the knowledge of who to do things. Hopefully they'll bring new ideas, new things that can improve the show and that will be welcome from all of us.

Kimi, has there been any feedback you've been giving to Liberty about the direction of Formula One?

KR: No, in the end it's no our decision, it's up to them. It's their business. They make plans and obviously take decisions they feel is correct. I don't know what they're doing now. I know very little about it and I'm not interested in it, so we'll see tomorrow what they say. It's in many years' time anyhow. I doubt I'll be here so it doesn't really bother me.

Valtteri, anything to add?

V: Not really. I think Fernando covered well. In the end, it's their decision and tomorrow we'll see what they will recommend. It's difficult to speculate more than that – but it will be interesting to see what they recommend.

Q: (Jerome Pugmire – Associated Press) Valtteri, you say it's been processed - what happened at the Australian Grand Prix - but how much pressure do you feel to have a good performance here?

VB: I think it's a normal race weekend, that's my feeling at the moment, honestly. Sometimes you have bad races and then there's always the next one and of course you always want to perform but there is no point in gathering pressure from one mistake in qualifying. Of course, I always hope for a good weekend but yeah, I feel a normal race weekend ahead.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – GloboEsporte.com) Just coming back to the previous question, to all drivers, Fernando said they have the power to change Formula One. If you had the power, what would you change in the Formula One we have today?

KR: I don't have it, so...

Q: Nothing you'd change at all?

KR: No, I don't have the power so what's the point to wasting... even thinking about it because I don't understand why you... what's the point for me, to give you a list, because in the end I have zero power? I can't. You understand? We can't, we don't make the rules, that's my point. What's the point of even making a story out of it.

FA: Well, I think it could be a closer battle, that will always be welcome but it has always been like that in F1. I remember watching the TV in the very old days... it was on television last week a race from '90 or '89 and apart from the first four cars, everyone was flat. We remember that era like a golden era, with big names etc and they've always been a big spread but I think if you see now, other series, if you watch a race of IndyCars or whatever, that unpredictable result until the last ten laps makes you excited in front of the television and now we can put (down) the qualifying order for this race right now, on Thursday and that's a little bit sad.

VB: Well, I think, like everyone, all the spectators, all the drivers, we would all love more closer racing like Fernando said but how to do that? It's not in my hands.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines, Racefans.net) Fernando, one of the current stated objectives this year is to return to the podium. Now based on what you've experienced in testing and the race, what you've just said etc, in order to get onto the podium you have to

beat both or one or both Ferraris, one or both Mercedes, plus two Red Bulls which have got the same engine. Do you honestly believe that that's do-able and achievable this year?

FA: Yes. We were two places from that podium already in Australia. They were very close, the last ten laps, Ricciardo and Kimi fighting together so anything can happen in a race. I won two races in 2008 with that ING Renault. I was on the podium in 2009 with the introduction of KERS and that car that we were, I think, ninth in the World Championship or something like that, and I was on the podium so anything can happen in F1. If you are close to that position, sooner or later that opportunity will come and we will be there to take it. I think it's very possible this year.

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