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DRIVERS – Pierre GASLY (Toro Rosso), Marcus ERICSSON (Sauber), Max VERSTAPPEN (Red Bull Racing)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Q: Pierre, if we could start with you please. Let's start by reflecting on your sensational result in Bahrain last weekend. How do you reflect on what happened there, and what kind of reaction have you had around the world?

Pierre GASLY: I must say it's been amazing. First, just personally, y'know? It's a big investment for a long time, since I'm a kid. It's a lot of work, a lot of preparation and, of course, it's my best result in Formula One – but just to see that all the work I'm doing at the moment is paying off and actually we are going in the right direction, so of course, I'm really happy about it. And secondly, for the team, it's only our second race with Honda and already we can see that we are actually going in the right direction, communication-wise everything is going well and the car is competitive. So, this was really amazing, and also the support I got afterwards, after the weekend, I'm just super-impressed. A lot of articles, a lot of TVs, and media writing as well. It was something impressive but really nice, a lot of support from the people as well. So, it's been great.

Q: You say the car is competitive. Do you think the performance will translate to a track like this one?

PG: I'll tell you tomorrow! I really hope so. I think definitely we understood much more about our car potential, car setup, about the tyres but still we need confirmation, as you say, and I think this weekend will be a good opportunity to see if... definitely to judge our baseline and see if the potential is the same on other tracks. Definitely we need to be quite careful. Bahrain has been so good for us and I don't know if it's going to be similar on other tracks. So yeah, hopefully it's going to be the same but we'll find out tomorrow.

Q: And are you coming into this weekend feeling very confident?

PG: Yeah, definitely, we feel more confident than we were, for example, in Melbourne or for Bahrain. This is going to be my first time in Shanghai, so it's also going to be a new track for me. We'll probably take a bit more time to adapt myself but definitely we are a bit more confident but still we need to be careful – because we have no guarantees about the performance – we know it's really tight in the midfield. In Bahrain, the car was just fantastic in terms of balance, in terms of grip – but we know that if we don't get everything right, suddenly if you lose two or three tenths you can be at the back of the midfield and it changes your weekend completely. So, we need to be quite careful and just make sure we do the right things.

Q: Marcus, you're another man celebrating a tremendous race in Bahrain. How do you look back on last weekend's events?

Marcus ERICSSON: Yes, like you say it was a great race for us, great to be in the points and also a great reward to everyone in the team. It's been a lot of things happening over the winter. We're coming from two very difficult years, where we've been always at the back as a team, and then this year we're coming into the year with Alfa Romeo coming on as a main sponsor, and partner to the team and it's like a new chapter for Sauber. It's been a lot of work put in to make a step forwards and to move up the grid. And to be already at the second race of the year in the points, it's, I think, a great result, a great team result and a great boost for everyone. So yeah, it was very nice. And also for myself personally, I was super happy to be back in the points. It's been a long time. So, yeah, overall it was very positive.

Q: Tell us a little more about that. It's been 50 races since you were last in the points. How much of a relief was it?

ME: Of course, it was big relief. I think I've had four times P11 since then. So, I was close a lot of times, and had some great races but it's very difficult when you're in the worst car on the grid. Some races I had a perfect race – and finished P14 or something like that. It's frustrating, but, yeah, of course we're all here to try to score points. So to be back in the points last weekend was a great relief.

Q: You say last year's car was the worst on the grid. How good is this one?

ME: I think we have a very solid baseline to work from. Like Pierre said, the midfield is very, very close and I feel that we are very much in that midfield – but probably in the lower part of that midfield at the moment. But also like Toro Rosso showed last weekend, if you make a step you can really move quickly up or down in that midfield group. So, first of all I'm just very happy that we part of that group on pure speed. Now we need to work even harder to try to improve that position – but I know everyone does, both here on track and also in the factory and we have a lot of things planned for the season. We need to keep working hard, keep pushing hard and then we should be able to fight every weekend.

I'm sure you'll keep doing that Marcus. Thank you very much. Max, coming to you now. As much as the other guys had a good weekend in Bahrain, it was a very frustrating one for you and Red Bull Racing; I think it was the team's first double retirement since Korea in 2010. Can we start by talking about the car? You were very bullish about it in winter testing but now that we're a couple of races in, just how competitive is it?

Max VERSTAPPEN: The car is very quick, I think especially in the race. I think we know in qualifying we are losing out a bit, just on pure performance, on top speed. But as soon as that all calms down a bit in the race, yeah, I was very confident, for example, before we went into the race to still move up a lot of positions, because I think the car was definitely capable of just driving back to the podium. So yeah, I'm just looking forward to get started again here, because we have a good package, and there are a lot of good things coming. So, yeah, ready to go.

You made a very good start on Sunday and then there was the incident with Lewis Hamilton. Just one week on how do you reflect on what happened with Hamilton? Have you seen it on TV?

MV: I was in the car. So I felt it, I saw it! That's racing. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. You can say whatever you like about the incident. I think I had a fair shot at it. It was nothing crazy, nothing risky. But yeah, unfortunately this time it didn't work out. Looking back, for example, in Mexico last year it did work out. This time we gave each maybe not enough space, but that's racing as well at the end of the day. Like I said, sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad.

Have you spoken to Lewis since the incident?

MV: No.

So looking ahead to this weekend, how important is it for you to get into the points and might we see a more conservative approach this weekend?

MV: It's always important to score points and that's always the target, but we are here to finish on the podium or win races – that's why we're here. That's what I will try to do again this weekend. So, for me, there won't be a change.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Phil Duncan – Press Association) Max, did you hear what Lewis had to say after the race? Do you think you will have a chat with him this weekend? And do you think that you will address your driving style going forward?

MV: No. I might have a talk with him. It depends if it's really necessary. But why should I change something. I don't think I did anything wrong in terms of my approach. I was just trying to overtake a car. I think it was a fair chance. I went for it. For example, last year in Mexico it could have gone wrong as well – maybe for me, maybe for another car. As you could see in Mexico it did. It's racing; it's very simple. I don't understand why everybody is so on top of the topic. Those things happen in racing, you know.

Q: (Jaap de Groot – De Telegraaf) Max, reflecting on what happened last week in Bahrain and thinking back to last year here. You also started at P16 and finished third. Remember the first lap? That was fantastic. Is that also for an inspiration? You talk about Mexico but over here you even did a better than that, taking over your opponents.

MV: Yeah, it was. That race was starting on wet tyres, so it's always easier to get past people if you have a good feeling and a good car. So yeah, always in the dry it's a bit more tricky. Sometimes you have those first laps where everything works out perfect.

Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Pierre, your result in Bahrain was Honda’s best since it came back into Formula 1. It’s obviously made a clear step in reliability – the changes it introduced after Australia. Performance-wise, what are you expecting this weekend? The energy recovery system has always been its limiting factor and there is a long back straight here and a long start-finish straight as well.

PG: We expect to be quite competitive, after what we learned from Bahrain. But as I say, we don’t know if we’re going to be on top of the midfield, if we are going to be in the middle, we just know that to have a similar performance as Bahrain we really need to be on top of everything and just make everything perfectly. The track layout, for sure, is not one of our favourites, or is not going to be as easy, with the long back straight. But still you need to have a really strong car in the middle part of the track, so I think we can still expect to be competitive. But to have a clear picture, we have done only two races. We were pretty slow in Melbourne. We were very competitive in Bahrain, even faster than what we expected, so it’s still difficult for us to know for us exactly where is the performance of the car. I think we are going to be in the fight for the midfield, but hopefully on top of it.

Q: (Andrea Cremonesi – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Gasly, we heard after the race in Bahrain that you said that we are in the fight now and it seems that it was a reply to what Fernando said the week before. So I would like to know your comment on that.

PG: It was simple, it was just a little joke, that’s it. I think we need to give credit back to Honda. In the end, they have had a tough three years with McLaren and to finish P4 in the second race with them was just amazing, so it was a way to give them credit, because they are working really hard and yeah, I think they need credit for the hard work they are doing. But don’t get me wrong, I must say I had pretty tough messages after that, after the race, by some Spanish people who are actually quite crazy. I have huge respect for Fernando so I’m just making it clear. Don’t get me wrong. Fernando for sure is one of the best drivers of all time in Formula One, and one of the drivers I looked up to when I was young, one of my idols actually. No, I have huge respect for him, so it was nothing related, just a high comment for Honda because I think they deserved the credit.

Q: (Andrea Cremonesi – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Ericsson, you talked before about a new chapter with Alfa Romeo. I would like to know exactly how the situation is now, if you can compare it to last year? So what does it feel to be the first driver to collect points with the Alfa brand on the car?

ME: Like I said, for the team, it’s like a new chapter this year. A lot of things have been changing over the winter, especially, obviously, with Alfa Romeo coming on board, a lot of new people coming in to the team. A lot of things changing, completely different resources. It’s been a big change and you can feel it inside the team. You can feel the motivation is very high, people are believing again. It’s a big motivation to move up the grid, whereas it’s been more about the team surviving the last few years, so it’s not so much been pushing for performance, it’s been more pushing for trying to survive every week, every race. Having that mindset, it’s then difficult to get the results whereas now we go into the season to push, to make results and to move up the grid. It’s just a completely different mindset. For me, that’s been very nice to see. So far it’s been very good, but we still have a long way to go and we need to keep working hard but it’s been very positive.

On the second part, to score points, being the first one in this new chapter with Alfa, I think it’s something that makes me proud. First of all I’m proud to represent Alfa Romeo in Formula One again, I think it’s a very legendary brand. It’s very special to represent them in Formula One again and of course to score points with them.

Q: How much of a step forward is this year’s Ferrari power unit compared to the year-old one you were using in 2017?

ME: It’s very big, not only in power but in everything: driveability, energy management and all those things. It’s a very very big step. It’s nice not to have that handicap like we had last year because it was a very big disadvantage last year.

Q: (Jonathan McEvoy – Daily Mail) Max, if the way you were driving you believe was fine, why do you think Lewis was moved to have a go at you?

MV: Why? Because it’s quite easy and simple to blame the younger driver. That’s the only way I can see it. Like I said, these things happen. There’s no reason for me to change anything.

Q: (Rik Spekenbrink – AD Sportwereld) Max, if you would make a list of your favourite tracks, where would Shanghai be in that list?

MV: Somewhere!

Q: (Rik Spekenbrink – AD Sportwereld) Top five or lower?

MV: Yeah, it’s good actually, yeah, especially for racing, I think it’s a good track, so it’s definitely on that list.

Q: (Jaap de Groot - De Telegraaf) Max, in Bahrain, several things went wrong with you and the car of Ricciardo. Did the team already analyse the whole matter and could you give me some information on that?

MV: Yeah, from my side, we put a new wheel on the car, a new floor, because that was destroyed. No, I think it was mainly more from Daniel's car of course and in the race I think we had the problem quite similar to me last year in Canada and I think in testing this year as well. So it's definitely something to look into but what can you do about it? It's something that Renault needs to sort out. They are of course working really hard on that. They will again try their very best to provide us with the best possible equipment here. I'm actually not too worried about it and at the end of the day, if it happens it happens. You can't prevent it.

Q: (Andrea Cremonesi – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Very quick question to Max: did you have to change the gearbox for this race or not?

MV: Why? I retired anyway so I can do those kind of things.

Ends