



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L' AUTOMOBILE

2018 FIA Formula One World Championship

Spanish Grand Prix

Thursday Press Conference Transcript

10.05.2018

DRIVERS – Brendon HARTLEY (Toro Rosso), Carlos SAINZ (Renault), Fernando ALONSO (McLaren), Sergio PÉREZ (Force India)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Q: Brendon, you scored your first World Championship point in Baku, last time out, how good did that feel?

Brendon HARTLEY: Yeah, it was maybe a bit of a relief, in a way because I'd had a couple of opportunities already and didn't capitalise. Bahrain was the most obvious one where we had a very competitive car. So, it's nice to finally get that first point. Had a bit of pressure on the last lap from Marcus, closing in the Sauber. Happy I kept it clean, kept it on the road and got my first point.

Q: And what can we expect from both you and Toro Rosso in the coming races, because, end of last season you did four races in Formula One but you were dovetailing a WEC programme at the same time. Now you're focussing on Formula One, how do you feel it's all coming together?

BH: I felt strong, especially starting the season after all that preparation. Like I say, I felt quite disappointed after Bahrain, having such a competitive car that Toro Rosso brought to the table, almost getting through to Q3 then having the penalty and not scoring a point there. The last couple of races have actually been quite challenging for us as a team, with nowhere near the pace we had in Bahrain. But yeah, I'm feeling a lot more comfortable than I did last year – but still waiting to piece together the perfect weekend.

Q: Sergio, coming to you, your podium in Azerbaijan was the eighth of your career, surpassing the Mexican record of Pedro Rodríguez. What did that mean to you?

Sergio PÉREZ: Yeah, it was an amazing result, especially for us this year, it's been so difficult at the start of the season. So, having... actually they were my first points of the year so it was a massive boost for the team, we're certainly improving. That podium meant a lot to me. As you say, it's my eighth podium in my career, but now I'm the most Mexican driver with podiums, so it means a lot. Obviously Pedro... Pedro Rodríguez is a big name in our country, so to share that with him, it's a massive reward to my career.

Big news back home?

SP: Definitely.

Q: Did that result in Baku flatter the car? How confident are you of repeating, for example, your fourth place here last year?

SP: Well, that fourth place came in... very much, we had a couple of retirements in the race but the most important thing, and where our challenge is, certainly in Baku we were the fourth fastest team and that's the target for us here. Everyone is bringing upgrades. We're bringing also our bit so we're certainly closing up the gap. The midfield pack, the group is so close anything can happen. For us it will be very important to be on top of that group.

Q: Carlos, coming to you now, fifth last time out in Baku, you're now racing in your home grand prix for a works team for the first time. What does that mean to you can what can we expect this weekend?

Carlos SAINZ: It means a big boost. It has been a good start of the season but that result in Baku definitely has made it a lot better. From now on is keep pushing, keep learning, keep improving the car in the right direction to keep scoring that kind of result again. Like Checo said, the fifth place is helped a bit by the accident for the Red Bulls and all that – but we need to make sure we keep being the fourth fastest team. The Force India looks like it's catching up a bit.

Q: And are you comfortable with the car now?

CS: No. No, definitely not. It's not one hundred per cent confident yet. There's still things to test, things to adapt to, things to make the car be well-suited to me and it's something that I'm taking a lot of care of, a lot of effort and a lot of timing and it's coming little by little and sooner or later it will be one hundred per cent.

Q: Carlos, tell us a little about qualifying, if you would because you've been out-qualified by your team-mate Nico Hülkenberg so far this year, that's a new experience for you, because you've always been a very good qualifier. Do you feel under pressure from your team-mate – particularly here in Spain this weekend?

CS: No, not at all – because in the end, if I don't have full confidence in the car, and don't have the car well-suited for the qualifying lap time, there's always going to be tenths around. That's what I was talking about before. As soon as I will get the balance I like, the car better suited to me, it will just come automatically and I'm definitely not worried.

Q: Fernando, let's start by talking about last weekend. Congratulations on your victory at Spa in the FIA World Endurance Championship. How did it feel to be back on the top step of the podium?

Fernando ALONSO: Well, definitely felt good. It felt a long time not being on the podium and it has been a good preparation, a fast preparation into the WEC programme as well and a lot of testing, a lot of simulator, a lot of preparation, even going to Baku and from Baku, I had to keep studying, and watching onboard videos from previous years and things like that. It was nice for the team to get this result, one-two in qualifying, one-two in the race, and yeah, definitely quite a very good moment for the whole team and for me as well after a long time not being in the podium.

Q: Was there a sense of relief to kick off your sportscar career with a victory?

FA: Well, obviously, those races are quite long, quite difficult to predict. Even if you are quite confident in the first two hours then suddenly everything changes. We had a little bit of drama with an extra pitstop and things like that. Yeah, it was nice, definitely to start with a nice result, even if it was second or third, just finishing the race, get the experience and warming up for the big one, Le Mans in a couple of weeks' time.

Q: And turning to Formula One now, can you give us a progress report on McLaren. How far behind the curve do you feel the team is, and how crucial is this weekend in terms of upgrades?

FA: Well, I think we are behind. Definitely we are not in the position we wanted or expected at the beginning of the winter. At the same time, I think it has been a very positive start to the season. We are the only team completing the full four races with both cars. We did score points in every single race and we are fourth in the Constructors' Championship. Three months ago we were here testing and we did the least laps of every single team and we had a lot of issues. Reliability seems a concern into Australia for the first race and now we are quite happy with the results and the standards – but competitive-wise, we are not in the Q3, we are not in the top ten yet and that's something we want to change, if we can, this weekend. Obviously, it's a different circuit layout compared to the last couple of races and with upgrades everyone brings here, the same as us, hopefully we can pick up the pace a little bit. But let's see. The most important thing is to keep scoring points on Sundays and keep helping the team to secure this fourth place in the Championship.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Alessandro Sala – tercerequipo.com) Question for Fernando and Carlos. After a good fight and good points between you in Baku, you are here in a special Derby – Oviedo-Madrid – in front of your fans. What do you expect, the both of you having a stand here in the circuit? What does it mean for you?

FA: Well, obviously, we expect a close fight again. I think the mid-part of the field, as Checo said, is quite tight. In two or three-tenths there are seven or eight cars and I think in those cars are the Renault and McLaren normally, so I guess it's going to be a close fight again. Hopefully we put on a good show for our fans. As you said, a lot of people will come here to support us and a grandstand for Carlos, another grandstand will be for me as well, and, as I said, if everyone enjoys the race on Sunday and we both can finish and score points and put on a good show, that's the thing I wish for Sunday.

Carlos, your thoughts.

CS: Yeah, I think it's an exciting battle, what we have now in the midfield actually. There's many times in the Drivers' Parade, us three together chatting about what's going to happen today: who's going to be fastest: is it going to be Renault? Is it going to be McLaren? Is it going to be Force India? So, we are obviously... it's obviously quite exciting back there in the field and there are a lot of battles together with Fernando, with Checo, even the Toro Rossos sometimes are there. It just makes for very good, exciting racing and it's something that I'm enjoying a lot this year. Hopefully we can keep them behind, because I think up until now Renault has had a bit the upper hand and it looks like these two guys here are coming with big upgrades here in this part of the season and we need to keep pushing.

Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Fernando, question for you. You mentioned the limitations McLaren has at the moment, performance-wise, how far off do you think McLaren is of its stated position of challenging for podiums and wins again? And are you prepared to wait as long as you think it's going to take?

FA: I think it's difficult to say, and to be precise on how far behind we are – but if you take the first qualifying over the year so far in Q2 times, that we are eliminated in all four races. We were 1.8-2.0 seconds behind. That's my estimation. I don't know how much they push in Q2, so maybe it is a little bit more or a little bit less, depends on the circuit. We have been in power-sensitive circuits so far in the first four races to I think here, Monaco, we see a different picture of different teams. They're moving around, so hopefully McLaren is one of those that picks up a little bit of pace. And, as I said, Spain brings a lot of updates for all of the teams. Some of them they work better, some of them, they need a little bit more time. So, hopefully on that we can benefit somehow as well. Still a long way to go for us – but at the same time we were here last year with zero points. We are sixth in the World Championship and fourth in the Constructors' Championship, so it has been a very good start, in a way. Let's keep the momentum.

Q: (Toni López – la Vanguardia) Fernando, this weekend it will be five last since your last victory in Formula 1. What have you done to keep the motivation all this time? Secondly, after your last victory, in Spa, can it help to achieve a victory again?

FA: I kept the motivation because I'm a competitive man. I love to win. In 2013, we won here... I think the tyres were degrading a lot that year and we make an extra stop and we managed to win the race. Not with the quickest car, Nico was on pole by six tenths or something like that. That was a good call by the team at that time. In 2014 we had quite a difficult season, and then the last three years you know that we struggled a lot and that the project was always getting a bit difficult and we tried to give hope for the following year. It's the same this year. As I said, I think the start has been not too bad, in terms of results especially and the number of points. The win last weekend in Spa will not change anything. I think it's two different series and two different worlds. It will not change anything for me. Every time that I will have a car that is close to victory, I will go for it. I did some better races in the last five years, even if the last victory was five years ago. Here, in the last five year, I did much better races than previously, even if I was not able to win the race. The Baku race is one of... I will never probably do a race as I did in Baku, and I finished seventh. It's difficult to see from the outside but extremely proud and motivated every time you do a one-off performance.

Q: (Joe van Burik – Autocar.nl) A question for Fernando and Carlos. If you had to choose, which victory would mean more to you: the Spanish Grand Prix or the 24 Hours of Le Mans?

CA: Ah to win in this time sounds very good to me. I think it's something that I look forward to and I would never forget, to win in your home grand prix. It's what I'm working for at the moment. Every time I go training, every time I go to bed, I have one dream in mind and that is to win a race in Formula 1 and to win a world championship. Maybe in 10 or 15 years' time that dream will change and it will go towards Le Mans, because I don't want to be anymore in Formula 1. I doubt that will happen but in life everything can change. But at the moment, Formula 1 and winning is in my mind all the time.

FA: Difficult to comment, you know. A couple of years ago I would say the Spanish Grand Prix. Winning a race in Formula 1 is obviously something that we dream for a long time, when you are a

go-kart driver and you dream for Formula 1. Now that I have won a couple of times here in Spain, obviously for me it would be winning the 24 Hours of Le Mans, because it's the biggest race in the world. But I think everyone will have different answers in different parts of his career.

Q: (Phil Duncan – PA) Given how well you did on your WEC debut and given the troubles McLaren are going through it seems impossible that you will be able to challenge for victories with McLaren, do you think your future lies away from Formula 1 next year?

FA: It doesn't matter, I think, the results that we are achieving in one or other championships, you know I am attempting two world championships at the same time. I am happy with the progress we did here at McLaren and with the direction that everything is going for the future. I am happy on the endurance attempt as well. It's quite demanding, especially the F1 calendar. The biggest thing here is how predictable everything is. We can put on a paper now what will be the qualifying here on Saturday, what will be in Monaco, in Canada and in Silverstone, so that's something you need to take into account for future decisions. This is sad, in a way, for Formula 1, the direction in which everything went.

Q: (Mike Doodson – Honorary) Fernando, in the WEC car are you closer or further away from your personal limits than in Formula 1? Did driving the WEC car give you any apprehension about the possibility that you would have to re-adjust and waster time getting back to driving the Formula 1 car?

FA: I struggle a little bit more when I go from Formula 1 to the WEC car, just because the driving styles are so different. I think when I come back here I don't need any adaptation. I'm straight away comfortable with everything. It's what I learned and my driving style developed for Formula 1 driving, so I expect no problem on the comeback. I think I am closer to the limit here in an F1 car. You need to maximise, you need to make perfection every lap and repeat that perfection over and over the laps. That's Formula 1's style. In WEC, you have to be super-flexible, and super-open-minded on everything. You will not repeat the same lap in six hours. You will find traffic in different places, you will have different conditions, you will have different tyres age, you will have everything. So, that flexibility in terms of driving, I think it's quite good for me. That adaptation you need to make, you have to do it really quickly. Brendon has even more experience than me, but it's part of what's special about WEC: how you need to adapt, every single, every single laps, about different driving styles and how unpredictable will be the race until the chequered flag. That's lovely, in terms of sport, driving and the spectators.

Q: Brendon, at the end of last year, you were doing what Fernando is doing: dovetailing WEC and Formula One. How do you compare the two?

BH: I think Fernando summed it up pretty well. Yeah, there's a lot more variability in endurance racing, like Fernando mentioned, with the traffic. It was a bit the opposite for me last year; I felt so comfortable in the WEC car with the Michelin tyres, four wheel drive, everything else that goes along with LMP1 hybrid, so I was feeling a lot more confused coming back into the Formula One, which is exactly why, when I had this opportunity to be in Formula One this year, that there was no question mark that I would try and compete Le Mans and WEC at the same time. Obviously I'm at a different stage in my career than Fernando but it takes a lot of focus and hard work to put a perfect Formula One Grand Prix weekend together. I think both are equally complicated but in quite different ways. Definitely the driving style is a little bit different. I guess my only argument with Fernando is the fact that I feel that in WEC you are all so equally on the limit every lap, but like he said, there are these variables that you don't have the same in Formula One. Different, but a lot of similarities too.

Q: (Graham Harris – Motorsport Monday, Motorsportweek.com) Carlos, you say you're not comfortable in the car. Do you feel it's because you weren't involved in the design last year when it was set up or do you think there's something else needed? Is it more suited to Nico's style of driving or was it something totally different?

CS: I think it's a bit of a combination of both but that at the same time I'm very confident that as soon as I correct a couple of things that I need... we're talking about very small margins. In Formula One, those very small margins in one qualifying lap they can easily fall for you, so that's why I'm not worried because it's very very small, what I need to adapt and what I need from the car. As soon as this comes, every piece will fall in, you know. Responding to your question, I think it's a bit of both but mainly the car to me.

Q: (Vladimir Rogovets – SB Belarus Today) Fernando, last week we were with you in Spa. Thank you very much for a good race and thank you for your first place. First, do you like this system without control, open door in the paddock in WEC. And the second question,

what do you think for the future in Formula One: it will be possible or not, open door in the paddock for all people with tickets?

FA: I think I prefer this system in F1, it's a little bit more under control, the paddock passes. In WEC, especially until Sunday (Saturday) or even Sunday (Saturday), being free access to the paddock, it was a little bit too much, a little bit of stress a couple of times. I think here is quite under control and I think if you open free entrance to the paddock here we will not even be able to walk and we will hide even more, we will close ourselves even more in our motorhomes and things like that because you cannot do normal things. Then it will probably not be in the direction we want. We want to open the paddock and like these fans, they see the drivers and they can communicate a little bit more, maybe it has the opposite reaction so I think it's good as it is and I think every championship has its own philosophy and I think it's working quite OK for each category, so I think it's good as it is.

Q: (Cristobel Rosalen – Movistar TV) Carlos, it may be true that you're maybe having problems with the car but at the same time, it looks like your bosses are hinting about the possibility of extending your relationship with Renault in the future. How do you feel about those nice words?

CS: It's not bad. It means that it must not be as bad as it looks like maybe! Importantly, though, I'm working very hard. I think Formula One bosses appreciate the hard effort, the travelling to Enstone, everything involved and they see that I am very very close and at any moment it can fall for me and because of that, I am very very calm, very confident and they are giving me that confidence that I enjoy and that I'm willing to give back with results like I did in Baku. As soon as the opportunity was presented to me I went for it and scored the best results for the team since I came back, so as you said, it's going pretty well.

Q: (Joos Nederpelt – NU.NL) Brendon, we've had some power sensitive tracks now, what do you feel about the Honda engine so far and do you think they can supply a top team in the near future?

BH: Yeah, I don't think it's my place to comment on supplying different teams in the future but yeah, I was asked a lot of questions after China and Baku, because we were lacking pace and a lot of the questions were directed towards Honda but actually Bahrain was similar on power sensitivity and we were very competitive there. So yeah, Honda have been working very hard and I know that there's updates to come during the season. I would say everyone in Toro Rosso is only positive about being solely supplied by an engine manufacturer. I think that there's more or less only positivity coming out of this partnership and I think there's more performance to come during the year.

Q: (Louis Dekker – NOS) For all of you: does this circuit still have any secrets for you, or can you drive it with your eyes closed? Is it a challenge or not?

SP: Well, it's probably the circuit that we all know the most. We do all our winter testing here and I feel that this circuit is so much related to your car performance. It's not like Monaco, Baku or other circuits where the driver can make something special. I think here's it so much more down to what the car can do. If there is a circuit where the driver can influence the least I feel that it's Barcelona.

FA: Yeah, not many secrets any more but still always challenging. This year, for example, the track, they put new asphalt last winter so it's still a challenge for all of us to understand the best set-up and how you get around this new track. The same with the wind direction, the temperature. You know we come here over the winter with very cold temperatures and then in May you need to re-adapt a little bit so it's always challenging. Yes, it's a shame for Carlos or me or young Spanish drivers that we grew up in this circuit, we race in many smaller categories and then you arrive to F1 and you are the driver with the least laps at your home Grand Prix; you know, everyone has done more laps than you in Barcelona. You lose all the home advantage.

CS: Yeah, well at least we have the crowd which for sure helps a bit. I think there's two points: I think there's the tarmac that is going to make things a bit different this year, at least me I found personally in winter that the track has nothing to do with last year, the balance is very different. It is faster than it was last year, it has more grip, but it is a bit more difficult to find the right balance round here; at least, that was my impression. And then the second point: I think if you put this track in China, in Bahrain and you don't visit it as much as we do because of being in Europe, close to all the team bases, I think drivers would love this track because to go new into Barcelona, it's always the first two, three, four laps they are always fun, it's a fun track, I enjoy driving it. It's just that we do a lot of laps and because of that it takes away a bit the excitement, no? But I really enjoy it and this track somewhere else would be good.

Q: Well Brendon, you've probably done the fewest laps of the four guys in the room, how do you....?

BH: I've done a few actually, yeah. Yes, similar comments. A lot of winter testing here. During my time as a simulator driver nine times out of ten we were driving Barcelona so I think the whole grid knows this track so well which in a way also makes it very difficult to get any time or edge over your teammate or fellow competitors. In the end, we know the midfield can be extremely tight. It's not only the drivers who know it very well, the teams know it well too. But it is a fun track and the surface has changed, which is nothing new for me, so in some ways it's not really a disadvantage for me, maybe an advantage. The rain? If it rains, it will be extremely challenging. What we saw in winter testing was the new surface was very low grip and very few areas for the water to run off so that could be challenging. I think tyre management is interesting here because it's not just about degradation through the whole race, at least from what I've studied over the last years but also managing temperatures in the last sector, so even in qualifying how you approach the first sector can heavily influence the last sector. Even though it's all familiar for all of us there's still a few things to manage and definitely still some areas to maybe get an advantage. The only tricky thing here is overtaking, doesn't offer so many opportunities.

Q: (Daniel Horvath – Racingline.hu) Fernando, I guess you already tested the new updates in the simulator. What do you expect according to those this weekend?

FA: Faster car.

Q: Can you elaborate any more?

FA: You wish.

Q: (Fabio Marchi – Mundo Deportivo) What do you think about the probability of rain in qualifying?

CS: Personally my rain radar says Saturday afternoon/night, let's put it like that, so I'm not too worried about it.

SP: I wish we can have some rain to mix up the grid a bit on Saturday. As Carlos said, we are expecting it later than qualifying. Hopefully it will get to us earlier.

Q: And Checo, do you agree with Brendon about the slippery conditions on the new asphalt if it does rain?

SP: Yeah. Do you remember in winter testing actually Fernando did a lap in the snow which is even more difficult. It will be very tricky, on this new asphalt with the rain. Looking forward to it if that happens.

Q: (Lorenzo Cinares – Momento GP) Fernando and Carlos: we know that you are both introducing new parts this weekend. If the results are great, do you think we could see a double Spanish podium someday?

FA: Ooof.

CS: It's coming, it's coming.

FA: Easy.

CS: One day, one day. This year maybe a bit difficult, no? But who knows? All of a sudden, Checo did a podium in Baku and I think no one expected it so it's a good sign that strange things can still happen in Formula One sometimes but I think at the moment it's extremely difficult. Both teams would need more than half a second – nearly one second of performance boost to start to fight with the top teams but that's what we're here for, to improve and make it happen, so we will push for it.

Q: Carlos, what would it mean to you to stand on a podium with Fernando Alonso?

CS: It would be great. I think I've said it many times already but it would be a dream come true. If it's at the home Grand Prix even better but anywhere in world also. It's one of my dreams, what I'm working for and as long as I'm in front, always better but... no seriously speaking, it would be great.

Q: (Carlos Miguel – AutoHebdo Sport) Fernando and Carlos: what's your bet for the final of the championship? Who will win the Spanish cup for Formula One, Fernando or Carlos? Who will win in the championship between you and Fernando? Who will finish ahead?

FA: I think it's difficult to predict. It depends a little bit on our teams. If I have to bet my money, I will put it on McLaren and myself.

CS: I feel like...

FA: How many points do you have?

CS: I don't know.

FA: How many points do we have now?

Off: 28 for Fernando.

FA: And you?

CS: I think I have 13, something like that. Ooof, I have some work to do.

FA: Bet even more now.

CS: But Renault is the team that has developed the most last year, so be careful. I just give it that it could happen the same this year and I'm going to develop also.

Ends