



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L' AUTOMOBILE

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

### **French Grand Prix**

#### **Friday Press Conference Transcript**

**22.06.2018**

**TEAM REPRESENTATIVES – Eric BOULLIER (McLaren), Cyril ABITEBOUL (Renault), Frédéric VASSEUR (Sauber), Christian HORNER (Red Bull Racing)**

**Eric, you played a big role in the return of this race here to Paul Ricard. Just tell us the story of how it came to pass?**

**Eric BOULLIER:** Well, I have not played that big role, as it is described, just bringing a little help and you know, being on the other side of the channel, so just making the connection between Christian Estrosi and Bernie Ecclestone, at the time, to make sure that the project that has been started a few years before, concrete.

**Thank you, we'll come back to you in a bit. Fréd, you've obviously been here before in junior categories but what do you think of Paul Ricard as a grand prix venue?**

**Frédéric VASSEUR:** For me it's a lot of memories for sure. I think it will be a good event. The layout of the track, for me, is fine and everyone will enjoy the weekend.

**We just saw in FP1 there some encouraging pace in the car but then an accident for Marcus. What are your hopes for Sauber this weekend and is there an update on the car?**

**FV:** We have a small update on the car, it was difficult to see this morning, but step by step we are improving. The first target was to catch up the field and I think we did it. Now we have to improve step by step. For sure for Marcus it was a tough session this morning and he won't do FP2 this afternoon, but let's see tomorrow.

**Thank you for that update. Cyril, Renault's home race, as well as one for yourself. How much pressure is there on the team and how big an event is it for Renault?**

**Cyril ABITEBOUL:** Well, we are trying to be a bit insensitive from pressure, because we know that the pressure is not going to improve the result on Sunday, so we are just trying to take a similar approach to the approach we have been taking so far, which is trying to be in the top 10 on Saturday and Sunday, which we think the car is capable of, including this weekend. And great to have a home race, it's an extra boost for everyone. There are a number of French players in Formula 1. What I mean by players is drivers, engineers, managers, teams, so it's great now to have a stage to see all those players in action.

**Christian, another topic that has been in the news this week is that you are going to have a new power unit partner from next year onwards. Can you just explain the thinking behind that decision?**

**Christian HORNER:** Yeah, it's exciting news for us. We've been in a relationship for what will be 12 seasons, so it's a hugely long time. But basically, we've reached a juncture where we have decided to take a different path for next year. We have been following the progress of Honda's development

very closely, having obviously been in the back of our sister team so far this season. Driven by an engineering-led decision, we've elected to take a different route for the future. We'll look back on our time with Renault, obviously there have been many highs, some lows, but overall it has been a very successful partnership – 150 podiums, 57 grand prix victories, eight world championships during those 12 seasons. We're hoping to add to that between now and the end of the year, but obviously from 2019 it's a new journey for us and one that we're looking forward to.

**And as for Renault's home race, you just touched on it there, what are your hopes for the rest of this season with this partnership, what can it still achieve this year?**

**CH:** Renault, ever since we have been supplied a power unit by them... they've had a works team, they left the sport, they came back in, but what they have been very good at with us is giving us parity and equality in terms of the state-of-the-art equipment they have and we have no reason to believe that won't continue until the end of the year. We're outsiders in both championships, in both the Drivers' and the Constructors' championships and we believe that we've still got opportunities to close the gap to the cars ahead and we are going to need Renault's support to achieve and do that between now and the end of the year, which I'm confident that we'll have.

**Cyril, can we get Renault's feelings on the news from this week?**

**CA:** Well, as said by Christian, it's an important news, an important development both for Red Bull and for Renault, and obviously for Honda. We put a little bit of pressure because it was important to get that clarified sooner rather than later for a number of reasons, starting from a logistics perspective with procurement and supply of part and also IP and confidentiality, because even the way we are working with Red Bull, which is completely integrated, without any sort of Chinese wall or barriers. It was important to get that clarified sooner rather than later so that we can make plans and also can focus our efforts on 2019, knowing exactly where things are at in terms of customer base. So that's done, thanks to Red Bull for making that clear. And that's a clarification of really the plan of last year when we agreed to terminate Toro Rosso at the end of '17 and Red Bull at the end of '18. Frankly, as said by Christian it has been a wonderful journey. I'm extremely thankful of Red Bull, which has been a good partner team – very challenging, demanding, but also by being challenging and demanding in that sport which is a competitive sport and a competitive environment that we progressed. And we have progressed as a team, as a group. It's certainly something then when we will look back we will see that we have achieved and learned a lot together. So for the future, again as said by Christian, we have a package all together that is capable of winning races, maybe championships, why not, so we will continue to do what we have always done, nothing less, nothing more, to try to help in that respect. That will show that what we are providing is of quality, both in reliability and performance and for the rest, I full appreciate that there was a strategic decision that was involving a number of parameters to be done by Red Bull.

**Finally, Eric, what does this news mean for McLaren, as it becomes the only Renault customer from next season?**

**EB:** We are starting a new journey with Renault and getting used to working together there are a lot of things to discover and to build on and having obviously a little bit more focus, less distraction for Renault, having one team less to supply and to care about it's obviously good news for us and we wish Christian the best.

## **QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR**

**Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Daniel Ricciardo is on the market for next season, he's named your respective teams as possible options for next year. I just wanted to get your thoughts on how interesting an option he is for you and what you can offer him, given that the competitiveness currently lags behind Red Bull?**

**EB:** It's obviously this time of year that you start to think about your driver line-up for the following year or following years. Obviously we love Daniel, I personally have known him for many, many years. He is doing a good job with Red Bull. As long as a driver of that calibre is on the market you

look if there is any discussion possible but at this time of year it's still too early to talk about our driver line-up for the future, so just a normal, gentle discussion.

**CA:** We have in Nico and Carlos a very strong line-up. I am extremely pleased with the way that they are developing together. They are performing and they are also driving the team and building the team. For the time being it's a bit early to talk about the future. Obviously we have a particular situation with Carlos, in the sense that he is on a loan to us from Christian and Red Bull. So we have to see. We can say that it is unconnected to engine decisions but it's not. Frankly Carlos was loaned to us because of all the musical chairs that happened last year, so it was part of that agreement. So I expect that there will be some collateral consequences and that's something that frankly we are here to discuss with Red Bull and I'm pretty sure that we will discuss that in the next few weeks. We need to watch out for any driver development from Red Bull's side first and the collateral consequences that it may have on us. For the time being our focus is on developing the best car possible. If we show that we can progress, if we show that we can build a good car, drivers will get interested in joining us. We have to focus on that first and foremost.

**Christian, anything to add, these are your drivers we are talking about?**

**CH:** Yes, they're both our drivers actually. Look, the situation with Daniel, I think that there is an intent from both sides to move forward. The first thing was to close the situation with the engine. That has now been done. Daniel understands the rationale, the engineering rationale, behind that. Let's not forget that he has been in a car that in the last couple of grands prix has been lapping the cars to our left. So it would be a fairly bold decision to step out of a car that he has won two grands prix in this year as a championship contender. I would be surprised if he was to leave, because it's a good fit between himself and Red Bull, but it is Formula 1.

**Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines, Racefans.net) Christian, although you have alluded to the performance-led decision about the engine swap to Honda, there are obviously certain commercial benefits in terms of engine supply, possible branding on the car etc. Given that Red Bull contributes about 25% of your budget per annum, will these commercial benefits be used to offset that or will you be ramping up your engineering spend in the face of budget caps and costs?**

**CH:** Well, of course I'm not going to get into the depths of the financial arrangements of contracts but it's safe to say that we are going to see benefit in that we won't be paying the amounts we have been paying to Renault, but there are costs involved where you are feeding dynos and gearboxes and other hardware. The net result is obviously a positive one but it is one we are investing within the team to ensure the continued performance is absolutely there. I think that it's important for us strategically... the rationale behind this partnership was very much with an eye towards what's past 2020 as well, of having the right partner for the future. Aston Martin have also been very involved in our decision-making, they are fully supportive and let's not forget, they don't make engines, so it was a natural fit.

**Q: (Laurie Vermeersch – F1only.fr) Question for Eric Boullier. We know that Fernando Alonso might leave this season. Do you have any alternative for next season?**

**EB:** Like I said before, drivers are under consideration and it's just a matter of when you start to thing and build and maybe discuss. As far as we are concerned for Fernando, we would like obviously for him to stay in the McLaren family and I'm not sure yet he has taken his decision, so we will see at the right time.

**Q: (Phil Duncan – PA) Eric, will McLaren seek to identify and potentially discipline the individual member of staff who spoke out against the team today?**

**EB:** This is obviously an internal matter, so we need to discuss what we need to see internally, what's going... why that individual is unhappy. When you have, obviously 800 people... we have a lot of support from the workforce and from the engineering. I think it's just a matter of a couple of people who are grumpy. Actually, in some way it's maybe good for us because we have a lot of feedback and good feedback.

**Q: (Jonathan McEvoy – Daily Mail) Eric, do you accept any responsibility for the failings of this car. And will you resign?**

**EB:** That's a good question. Obviously, we are all responsible for the car performance. No, I will not resign, to answer your question. I know you have written some articles. I've got my twentieth year now in racing, I've won races and championships with every team I've managed before, including Formula One, so this is some record that you cannot take away from me. So I think we're on a journey. We are not where we want to be, we are not happy with where we are – but with the journey, with the new Renault engine partner, and obviously we have a good team of people, we just need to make sure we are finding the issues with the car and correct them. We know where the issues with the car are, and make sure... when you build a car, when you believe in a concept, you have to develop the concept and make sure you correct it for the next one.

**Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines, Racefans.net) Eric, all though you currently run about halfway up the grid in terms of your championship performance, a year ago you were right at the back, so there has been an improvement – however it's still halfway to where you really need to be as McLaren, as a championship-winning team. Is it realistic to project some form of progress this year, or do you think fifth is roughly where you are? And what are the actual stated objectives and how realistic are they?**

**EB:** Well, it's true that this time last year we had no points at all, so obviously we are now in the fight for fourth with Renault and once again, we would prefer to be comfortably fourth, which was one of the targets we had assigned to ourselves. The car this year is obviously not working exactly like how we expect to be but we are still using this as an experimental experience, especially like this morning, for example, a lot of new parts on the car. We want to learn from this car and learn as well working with Renault – because it's a different partner from last year who we worked with for some years. We have something new to learn; some of the technical options we have not explored yet.

**Q: (Alan Baldwin – Reuters) Another question for Eric, going back to the media reports today. Is there a toxic atmosphere at McLaren? Are you untouchable and are you fighting to save your job?**

**EB:** No, I think at this level of responsibility we are all obviously working for the company, we are all making sure we take our responsibilities. There have been a couple of stories about some chocolate-gate, I think in the media today which was a bit funny to read – and again, it was good because actually we have tonnes of email from people saying 'this is a joke' – so maybe it's a couple of people grumpy, which in any organisation you have some people who agree or disagree when there has been maybe miscommunication. I don't know what is the problem of these people and I think we have invited them to come and see us to understand what their problems are, other than obviously talking through the back doors, y'know?

**Q: (Benjamin Vinel - Motorsport.com) Question to Christian Horner. Red Bull currently doesn't have any junior drivers holding a superlicence and none of them seem to be in a position to get one next year – so are you looking at more experienced junior drivers, and secondly, what would happen if one of the four Red Bull drivers got injured and Sébastien Buemi was held back by commitments in WEC or Formula E?**

**CH:** Well, obviously, as you pointed out, we do have Sébastien Buemi. Within the junior programme we have Dan Ticktum in Formula 3 that is winning races and will have, for sure, a licence later this season. So it's not something we're particularly concerned about. We also have Jake Dennis that complies with a licence criteria, that we've been using on our simulator programme. So, it's not something that we at Red Bull have a concern about.

**Q: (Joe van Burik – Autocar.nl) Question to Christian. Which targets have you set with Honda for the next two seasons for you to consider working with them beyond 2020?**

**CH:** Well, we obviously don't want to go backwards, we want to go forwards, and that's the whole purpose of the change that we've made. We believe it's the best route for us to make the steps required to consistently challenge Mercedes and Ferrari – so y'know, this is a very different situation

than McLaren found themselves in. I think Honda have matured. They've got a good structure in place, they're on a good development path. We're confident on the decision we've made, which wasn't taken lightly, that this is absolutely the right route for the team, for 2019 and 2020 seasons, and then we'll see what happens beyond that.

**Q: (Gaëtan Vigneron - RTBF) Question for Eric. Starting from point that you could be interested by Daniel Ricciardo if Fernando leaves, does that mean Stoffel would be too light to be your number one, and what does he need to recover his full potential as we saw before?**

**EB:** Well, I think firstly he has a full potential and he has a good learning curve. His team-mate is obviously one of the maybe the most difficult one to have, with Fernando. You can draft any story, y'know? Today we have Fernando and Stoffel, we are happy with them. We have not yet a discussion about the future. So, at the right time, again, at the due time we will discuss about it.

**Q: (Ben Hunt – The Sun) Eric, just another one of Freddo-gate, is it right that you've ordered loads of Freddos in for your team this week as a show of support and you hope that perhaps you could get some strength from this situation?**

**EB:** No, it's not true! We are not working with some Freddos

**Perhaps you should...**

**EB:** Well yes, it's a lot of energy anyway, so thanks for considering this.

**Q: (Julien Billiotte – AutoHebdo) A question to Fred. Fred, is Ferrari trying to recruit Charles Leclerc for 2019? And how keen are you to keep him at Sauber next year?**

**FV:** I think that we have to take it a bit easy and that two months ago, some of your colleagues came to me after China and asked me if he will be fired in the next few days. It's not because you are getting results two or three weekends in a row that you will be World Champion in six months. He has to be focussed first on FP2 and then on the race this weekend, to do the job, step-by-step. I think it's by far the most important thing for him today, and I'm pushing like hell to keep him motivated on the next events – and he will be.

**Q: (Jonathan McEvoy – Daily Mail) To Eric. Just to go back to the Freddo thing, will you be reviewing how you hand out Freddos at the factory? Will you stick with the Freddo rewards – or do they stop?**

**EB:** I think if you did a course in management we can organise this for you. And if you're really desperate to test the Freddo chocolate, we can send a box to you, don't worry.

**Thank you. Thank you for that offer. Could I just say...**

**EB:** That's enough of it. You're looking after something, we will give you any answers later but I think it's enough.

**No, no, it's not enough. Do you expect to still be in your job at Silverstone?**

**EB:** Yes. Of course. It's a journey. It's not a plug and play story. It's a journey when you have to work too. You're after me, apparently...

**But you're being briefed against, by your own staff, by your management...**

**EB:** I think you are lying now.

**Matteo BONCIANI: Sorry (Eric) Jonathan, we do not want to have a one to one. I'm trying to give a word to everybody. Eric, if you need so say something else?**

**EB:** No, I am fine.

**Jonathan MCEVOY: I'm not lying.**

**MB: Jon, please. (Next question).**

**Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines, Racefans.net) Cyril, what do you think the commercial and performance implications of the Red Bull decision are on your team and Fred, we can assure you that Freddo-gate doesn't refer to you at all? But do you look at this Honda deal, which Christian obviously sees potential in, and sort of wonder what they see that you didn't see a year ago when you decided to cancel the pending Honda deal?**

**CA:** OK, implications of the termination of the deal on our budget is really marginal. Yes, there was a substantial revenue associated to that supply but there were also substantial costs associated so frankly, from an economic perspective, if you look at the bottom line, it's fairly neutral and clearly marginal in comparison to the overall budget of our organisation as we speak. What we are losing, frankly – you were not asking – but what we are losing is a benchmark because clearly I have to say that it was great to have Red Bull as a benchmark for the last two years, to evidence the progress of both the engine and the chassis, but I feel that we are at a point in our construction and our progression where we can afford to lose that benchmark and everyone must focus on where there is performance to be found, which frankly, as we speak, is really on the chassis so that we can match – to hopefully compete one day - against those guys.

**FV:** Yeah, on our side, we need at this stage to have a benchmark and it was quite tough for us to start with Honda alone. And the second point in my decision was also that we were not able to do our own gearbox last year and I had the feeling that at one stage McLaren will leave Honda and I didn't want to be in the position that I have to go to Eric to ask for the gearbox and if he's focused on the Renault project, it was more than uncomfortable.

**Q: (Luke Smith – Crash.net) Eric, you've spoken about the journey quite a few times throughout this press conference, that you were taking McLaren on. Is it harder for your vision to be felt by the team with the management structure that's got multiple chiefs, and are you still confident that you're the right man to lead the team and make your vision felt?**

**EB:** Well, obviously when I joined McLaren they were obviously the people in place and obviously you have to build an organisation that you believe in and I think that during the Honda era it was not obviously planned to be where we were. Again, no points, a lot of reliability issues and we had to deal with this, so you have to manage the company a little bit differently when have brought few people in, coming from a World Champion team. You obviously don't want to lose them. I think now with Renault as well, we can score points now, at least we try to be fighting for Q3, this is not where we want to be, but again it's a journey. We still discover... for example in the last race one of the pipes broke during the race and this is something we have investigated and this was a new problem we had to face and this is part of the journey. Again, we are learning to work with Renault and our new partners.

**Q: (Bart Von Doijewert – Nu.nl) Christian, how far are you prepared to go to keep Daniel in your team and if he leaves, would you rather have a young talent next to Max Verstappen or a more experienced driver?**

**CH:** Well, obviously our priority is to see if we can find a way to keep Daniel. I think things are going in the right direction. We have talent already on the books on loan to Cyril, we have not a shortage of requests from outside of our own contracted drivers. Obviously the cars are performing extremely well, so there's no shortage of demand from drivers that want to be in the car for next year but our priority is to retain the same driver line-up for the next couple of years.

**Q: And the second part of that was if it was to change, would you want an experienced or a younger driver alongside Max?**

**CH:** I think we definitely want fast and cheap! The two don't always go together but the Red Bull philosophy has always promoted young talent and given talent, opportunities and hence the guys who have graduated through Toro Rosso, it's been a proven path.

**Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines, Racefans.net) Christian, given that you and Toro Rosso will again be sharing the same sort of power unit, will you be moving more and more towards a Haas-Ferrari-type deal between yourselves and Toro Rosso?**

**CH:** Well, not quite the Haas-Ferrari because obviously Toro Rosso have their own infrastructure but there's obvious synergies that a common power unit supplier provides within what's permitted within the regulations – transmission, drivetrain etc – that creates those obvious synergies that will apply there, so I think it just makes life a bit easier all round.

**Q: (Julien Billiotte – AutoHebdo) To all of you: in today's Formula One, can you win titles as a customer team and if not, how can you change that beyond 2020?**

**EB:** Good question. Well, I think Christian is the showing that you can win races as a customer. I think winning a championship is another level, you need to have a works team status.

**CA:** Yes, there are very different types of customers, obviously, but I think it's important that in future we retain the capacity for any team to win races and a championship and I think that this is the direction that things are taking under the new ownership of Liberty.

**CH:** We've demonstrated, with 150 podiums and 57 Grand Prix victories, we've paid for every single engine along the way, varying amounts.

**CA:** Varying performance.

**CH:** We've gone through four different groups of management during our time with Renault. It started with the well-known Flavio Briatore, when we first took the engine. We ended with, as part of the deal, having a box at Queens Park Rangers and sponsoring the Billionaire Club for a season, so it's been an unconventional route but a successful one. Conflicts of interest didn't exist in those days. It's demonstrated that you can win with a customer power unit, I think. Our view on the future is that the situation is slightly different now with Cyril having his own team. Obviously the engines are a bit more complex these days so integration is very much focused around his team whereas we are all selfish in this business, we all want it to be focused on what's right for your own team and so therefore this relationship with Honda allows us to have that marriage that is focused and unique to Red Bull, rather than having to share.

**FV:** Yeah, but honestly so far I don't think that the fact to be customer team is the biggest issue if the target is to be World Champion for me. We will have some other topics before.

**Q: (Alan Baldwin – Reuters) Fred, Christian and Cyril, possibly, maybe, last word about Freddo. Do you give your staff chocolate bars as rewards for hard work?**

**FV:** Cyril first!

**CH:** We obviously have a totally freeflowing supply of Red Bull that people indulge in every day. We even send it to Cyril and his guys after a good result, so we're not really into Freddos, we're more into Red Bulls.

**CA:** We do receive them and we've drunk every single one of them. No chocolate, no. But if I may just jump in, I was hesitating. One thing I think about McLaren's situation: I was talking about benchmarks and the fact that we have Red Bull as a benchmark is also working for engine manufacturers and I think something that has been badly missing for both Honda and McLaren in the past has been the lack of benchmarks. I think that they have a clear understanding of the issues, I think we need also to appreciate that the time needs to focus on those issues. I have absolutely no f\*\*king clue about the chocolate bar that you're talking about. I don't want to comment on that, but I just wanted to make that point regarding benchmarks which is very important in a competitive environment.

**Q: Thank you very much and apologies for any colourful language in that answer.**

**FV:** Sorry, for me I have to stop the chocolate bar also.

**Q: (Stuart Codling – F1 Racing) Christian, can I ask you a non-confectionary-based question: you said just a few moments ago that your golden days with Renault were before there were**

**conflicts of interest. Is it the case that Renault's return as a works force has made your relationship untenable and that's set you on the journey to where you are now?**

**CH:** I wouldn't say it's made it untenable; it's changed the dynamic, particularly with this era of power unit. Renault's priorities are obviously their own team and they should be that and I think that our feeling was that the time is right in this... you know, after 12 years, and it's one of the longest standing engine supply relationships in Formula One. The decision's not been taken lightly. A huge amount of analysis, a great deal of research has gone into this and we've decided that this is the right route at this juncture for the team and the business to go in this direction.

Ends