



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L' AUTOMOBILE

2018 FIA Formula One World Championship

Japanese Grand Prix

Saturday Post-Qualifying Press Conference Transcript

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DRIVERS

1 – Lewis HAMILTON (Mercedes)

2 – Valtteri BOTTAS (Mercedes)

3 – Max VERSTAPPEN (Red Bull)

TRACK INTERVIEWS

(Conducted by David Coulthard)

Q: Lewis Hamilton, your 80th – 80th! – pole position. Not the smoothest of sessions for anyone but once again a great strategic play from Mercedes, and you delivered when it counted.

Lewis HAMILTON: The team have done an amazing job this weekend, and the call that we made to go out for Q3, which is probably the most difficult call – you saw all of us fumbling and kind of trying to figure out what to do – the team just were spot on with it and gave us the opportunity to grab this pole position. While it was a bit of an anti-climax, because we didn't get to do the last lap, it's still... it's my 80th, I can't believe I have 80, and I couldn't have done it without the team. We worked so hard on this car to refine it, to improve it in all areas. And even in ourselves, and how we function, the processes that we go through, our communication, everything. And so, it's really just such an honour to race for this team, for the guys and I'm just so thankful. Big, big thank you to everyone back at the factory. I'm so proud to be on this journey with them. I never in a million years thought I would get to 80.

Q: It was a great pole and it's a fantastic statistic to get that 80th. I'm sure you haven't not noticed that your main competitor for the World Championship had a difficult qualifying, and he's going to be starting at the bottom end of the top ten. That just adds to the momentum for this championship.

LH: It definitely does. I just saw it in here. It is so difficult out there to make the right call but I think that's another real big difference that we as a team have made this year. Every team has smart people but ultimately, when it comes to being under pressure, making the right decisions, the right calls, that's why we are the best team in the world. And rightly so, they deserve that.

Q: Valtteri. A week's a long time in Formula One. We came off the disappointment of Russia. It's been pretty close between you and Lewis in outright pace through free practice but in the end, he's had that little edge. So, how does second place feel? I assume not as good as you felt after the qualifying in Russia. And how can you convert this tomorrow?

Valtteri BOTTAS: Yeah, sure, you know as a team it's absolutely perfect. The team was really reactive again. We did the right decisions with the rain. Obviously, a real shame for everyone that it started raining but tomorrow should be some sun. I think for me, honestly Practice three this morning was very difficult. I didn't find the car good at all, so we made some changes to build up the confidence. Q2, I was the quickest. Q3, just had that one lap, which was not quite perfect in the middle and the last sector. So I was waiting for the second run – but anyway, it's not a bad starting position.

Q: Just how difficult was it in that last run in qualifying. We could see the Ferraris getting on the kerb at Spoon and running off the circuit. Is that somewhere where you just went below the car under normal conditions.

VB: Yeah, you know you need to calculate the risks here. When it's wet like this you can't use the kerbs but you still need to be absolutely on the limit. So, I did enjoy that. I just know there was a couple of corners where I could have done a better job – but yeah, let's see tomorrow.

Q: Finally, coming to a man who's probably as happy as the pole man. Third place, that's like a pole for Red Bull Racing with the, let's say, inefficiency of power you have on this race track.

Max VERSTAPPEN: Yeah, absolutely. I think realistically, normally we would be pretty close to Ferrari but it would be hard to beat them – but we made the right call in Q3. Of course, very happy to be third. A shame we couldn't give the fans a really cool Q3 but, y'know, it's great to see them over here. They're so passionate about Formula One. Even when it's raining, they just stay. When it's dark and the mechanics are working on the car, they're also staying on the grandstands. It's quite crazy to see – but in one way also it's amazing.

Q: You podiumed here last year; this puts you in a perfect position to do the same again.

MV: Yeah, I didn't expect to start third. Of course, we have a bigger chance now to be on the podium.

Q: And with the Ferrari cars being behind you, there could be a scenario that they come up, catch you. You wouldn't want to get in the way of the World Championship battle, would you?

MV: Is it still a battle? Not sure.

PRESS CONFERENCE

Q: Well Lewis, let's start with that number, that tally of eighty pole positions. What does that mean to you?

LH: It's been an incredible year but that number, I just thought... never in a million years did I think I would be at a figure like that. It just makes me think of all the great years that I've had, quite a few of those I was with McLaren, I think at least 20-odd or so I think might have been with McLaren and there were even times when we didn't have championship-winning cars at the time but the last six years with this team has been incredible and I'm just so proud of everyone and just so grateful for everyone's hard work which has enabled me to go out and exploit my own abilities. You see today, they just did such a great job in terms of timing, in terms of... Today there were no mistakes made, even though there was a lot of pressure on still, as there always is in qualifying. Everyone was cool, calm and collected and did the job collectively as a team so it's really an amazing journey to be on with this team. That's not the end, eighty is not the end but that is a milestone I'm very proud of.

Q: Lewis, you say the team was very cool, calm and collected but what was that session like from inside the cockpit?

LH: It started out OK but then you look out of the garage and you can see that it's raining, spitting but it's very humid. Saw a couple of cars spin. It was very very difficult to know whether the track was going to be dry or whether it was going to be wet. We obviously haven't done any practice in the wet

and it looked like it was going to be wet for Q3 so it's definitely not a great feeling when you go into Q3, knowing that you've had the pace, obviously, to be at the front and then know that you're... that mistakes can come in those tricky conditions, depending on how hard you push. But we're all in the same boat. We remained in the garage, we said we should probably sit here and wait for someone else to go out first. The Ferraris pulled out of the garage on the inters and I honestly didn't think it was the right decision. Obviously we made the right decision as a team and yeah, it was a bit of an anti-climax because we couldn't do that second lap but we all tried going down into turn one and I wish you could see what we could see going into turn one because you come out of the last corner, there's no rain on your visor then bit by bit, one spit, two spits, ten spits and by the time you get to turn one you're not quite sure if it's wet or dry so I tiptoed in there and I was lucky I did that because obviously other people went off.

Q: Valtteri, if we could come on to you please; let's talk about the pace of the Mercedes car, particularly in Q2 when you were fastest on the soft tyre and Ferrari are going to be on the supersoft and yet you were still quicker than them.

VB: Yeah, well first of all I want to say congrats to Lewis for today's pole and especially for the 80th, it's a big number and really big respect for that. But the car was so quick until... well, so far this weekend it's been very quick and today as well, both of the tyre compounds, supersoft, soft, it was enjoyable to drive in qualifying, for me less so in practice. I honestly struggled a lot in practice, I didn't feel the car was stable at all. I was struggling just to find confidence with it really but bit by bit in qualifying it was better and better and Q2 felt pretty good and obviously came down to one lap in Q3 where I missed a little bit in sector two and three. I enjoyed it, but I also want to say for everyone in our team, I think everyone now, from today, in that kind of session, everyone should be really proud what we did, first of all with the car that we have but how the team worked today, every single decision was right and everyone was calm. It might look weird from the outside that it's a hectic session and so on but everything was so calm inside and we were just sticking to our plan and making the right choices so really enjoyed that.

Q: Max, coming on to you, Valtteri said that he wasn't happy with his car in practice, and I think that was the same with you as well. How much progress did you make with it during qualifying?

MV: Yeah, so after yesterday when I was really not happy with it, I think today was definitely a lot better. It's difficult to find a good compromise because we're losing quite a lot on the straight, can go lower on downforce then it evens out a bit more... well, evens out, it's a bit better on the straight, little bit slower in the corners so at the end of the day it didn't really matter what wing we put on the car, I think the lap time was actually quite similar but I felt a bit happier with a bit more downforce. I think qualifying we just tried to be as close as we could to Ferrari. I think it was all looking quite good and then we made the right decision in Q3 so that's why we are third.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Lewis and Valtteri, you both mentioned the calmness with which Mercedes acted under today. Do you feel like you see the best from your team under pressure? We saw more mistakes from Ferrari and Seb today when it mattered.

LH: Absolutely. Naturally, I think, with experience that does come but that is an area... pretty much the same group of guys have all been together for quite some time and definitely at this point of the year, you would hope that you were more knowledgeable and more able to be a little bit better at making decisions, so I definitely think the team's been much more... been able to be focused and still on it but in a calm manner.

VB: I think that I really agree. I haven't been in this team... only less than two seasons but what I've seen, I think today was one of the best days as a group, I think.

Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Max, you mentioned the progress you've made, especially from yesterday. Do you think that the fact that the gaps will get smaller from one lap pace to

race trim, do you think you can take the fight to Mercedes tomorrow or will it more be looking in the mirrors?

MV: I honestly don't think we can take the fight. I just tried to be as close as I can. I didn't even remember last year in qualifying but I think we were also quite far off. In the race it was not too bad so I'm hoping for the same tomorrow but yeah, definitely Ferrari, with Kimi starting behind me, he will try to put some pressure on and I think Sebastian will come through the field so yeah, we just have to try and make sure we have the right strategy tomorrow.

Ends