



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

Press Information

2015 Chinese Grand Prix Thursday Press Conference Transcript

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DRIVERS – Marcus ERICSSON (Sauber), Nico HULKENBERG (Force India), Romain GROSJEAN (Lotus), Felipe MASSA (Williams), Sebastian VETTEL (Ferrari), Jenson BUTTON (McLaren)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Sebastian, it must have been a few really amazing days for you and we've heard you've been back to Maranello. What's it been like to be back there as a winner and do you have to temper the enthusiasm right now?

Sebastian VETTEL: No, I think we are realistic about where we are and what we want to achieve. I think the targets haven't changed. Obviously it was a great victory we had in Malaysia and great for us as a team, and especially for myself a very emotional day – my first win with Ferrari. And then to come back – I think it was Wednesday – coming back to the factory and to see all the people there was quite special. There are a lot of people working there, so you can imagine, and of course they were very, very happy. The team hasn't won for quite a while, so I think they enjoyed the fact that they had something to celebrate, there are a couple of rituals involved and it was nice for them to get that feeling again, but as I said, for the next races nothing has changed: we want to confirm that we have a strong package, we have a strong car and we want to make sure that we stay ahead of the people we stayed of in the last couple of races, but knowing that obviously Mercedes is in a very, very strong position.

We saw really good pace from Ferrari in Malaysia. Is this pace for real and continue to take the fight to Mercedes?

SV: I think it was for real two weeks ago. I don't think Mercedes backed off and everyone else. It was obviously nice for us to see that we were so competitive but I think there were also a couple of circumstances coming together but most important we managed to capitalise and get a very good result and win the race. But for here and for the next races, I think in general [at] the start of the season, things can be up and down. We want to make sure that there is quite a lot of up, not so many downs but it's normal that some races you are more competitive than others, so I think, as I said, that we managed to do a very good job in Malaysia but for here and for the next races we have to be realistic about what we want to achieve.

Thank you very much. Moving on to you Felipe, Williams haven't had the start to the year that they were hoping for. Have we seen the real pace of Williams this season or is there still a lot more to come? Can you claim you place back here in China?

Felipe MASSA: Well, I think we cannot complain about how we start the season. You always want to be on top, but we are third in the championship, so we scored some good points as well, even losing some good points in the first race from Valtteri who was not there racing. But even counting that, I think it was OK. So we cannot complain [about] where we are, we always want to have more, we always want to be better, to be more competitive, and also we saw that Ferrari was pretty good. I think it was the team that made the most steps forward compared to how we finished the last race. We need to work as hard as we can to fight with them and even trying to get closer or better compared to Mercedes as well. We're working for that,

we just need to keep pushing and knowing race by race where we are, but I think we cannot complain. We are not far away compared to where we finished [last season] so we are there in the fight.

The team admitted after Malaysia that there might be some operational procedures that need fine tuning, that there's still room for improvement, and there are also some new upgrades to be shown or tested here in China. What are you hoping for this weekend?

FM: I think you always have some room for improvement. You always can improve and you always need to keep working to improve the car, that's what we're doing, but it's also what the other teams are doing, to improve maybe the car, the procedures, the pit stops, the pace – everything is important for every race, Here we have some new parts but I think maybe other teams will have as well, so we need to wait and see. I hope we bring what expect to bring race by race, which is always what we are working for.

Marcus, coming to you: this year has been a step up for you coming from Caterham to Sauber. It's been a quite promising start, pre-season testing, the first race, but Malaysia was a big learning process. Has the prospect of scoring points changed your approach going into racing?

Marcus ERICSSON: First of all, it's a big step up, like you say, coming from Caterham into the Sauber team. We've been competitive from the start and Australia was great for us, with both cars in the points. Then I think Malaysia was a really good weekend. I was top 10 in every session and managed to get to Q3, so it was a really great weekend and then obviously I did my mistake in the race, which I had to pay a big price for but that's something you learn from. I'm not the first one and I'm not the last one that makes a mistake in a race. But yeah, overall, I think the Malaysia weekend was very positive and we bring a lot of good stuff from that and we showed again that we can be competitive and we're going to aim to continue that form in China and I think it's realistic that we can do as well. I'm really looking forward to getting going again tomorrow.

The pecking order is beginning to take shape at the moment. Have you and Sauber set any targets for this year already?

ME: Not specific targets for championship position but I think for us it's the target for every race weekend now to try and score points and like I said, it's a realistic target with the pace we have at the moment. We need to try to score the points and also keep up with the development of the car. That's the big aim for us for now.

Thanks. Moving on to you Nico. It's been a difficult start to the season for you and also the team, with all the delays and pre-season testing. Force India seem to have slipped back in this pecking order we were talking about, so what are the challenges you are facing at the moment, especially now that the B-spec car has now been pushed back to Austria?

Nico HULKENBERG: Well, yeah, the challenge is to get a faster car, to find performance. Like you say, clearly we are not in the easiest situation and Malaysia has been particularly tough on us but I think everybody in the team is pushing really hard and there is hope. There is still room for improvement with this car before we get major upgrades, so we just keep our heads down, focus hard and try to get the most out of it.

We saw a lot of wheel-to-wheel racing in Malaysia. Do you think this something that can be repeated this weekend and which are the main challenges that everyone is going to face this weekend in terms of tyre deg or temperatures or reliability?

NH: Usually China is well know for front graining so we'll have to wait and see if that happens again this year. But Malaysia, with those high temperatures tyre deg was high and whenever tyre deg is high you have a lot of wheel-to-wheel racing. I think it was quite entertaining from that point of view. I think it's going to be a little bit more difficult here to overtake but we'll see what happens.

Moving on to you Romain: 11th in Malaysia. We saw very good qualifying pace but then Lotus seemed to struggle for pace during the race and we haven't seen a clean race from a Lotus this year, so where does Lotus stand in the pecking order?

Romain GROSJEAN: Well, I do think our race pace is actually better than our qualifying pace. Of course, we didn't show much in Australia and in Malaysia I think we had a good race. We didn't finish where we were

supposed to, we had a few issues with the car but generally I think we could have done better than we did and on paper everything is looking in that direction, so it's very positive. We haven't put everything together right now. I'm sure that we've learned a lot and from where we come back from last year it's a massive step forward and I think we enjoy driving the car. There are updates coming and every time we put something on the car it works in a good direction so hopefully this weekend it's going to be a bit better, an easier race and from there we can start scoring points.

I was going to ask you: there's obviously a lot more to come from this car this this year that we haven't seen yet but how much are you enjoying it this year compared to last year and what are the targets to be set?

RG: I'll tell you one thing: if you could delete from the cloud of your life a year I would delete 2014. So let's speak about 2013 and 2015. I have fun in the car, I do enjoying driving it, it works pretty well, you can set it up and I think all the credit goes to the engineers who have managed to listen to us and get in a good direction. After three laps in this car this year I was just happy that it goes right.

Q: Moving on to Jenson. It's also been a difficult start to the season for McLaren-Honda, especially pre-season. A lot of work but massive steps taken between pre-season to Australia and then Australia to Malaysia. What is expected for this weekend? How big can the improvement be?

Jenson BUTTON: Hopefully very big! Yeah, it's always tricky when you start off in the winter with not doing much mileage. I think for everyone it was a big surprise to see us finish in Melbourne. I think for the outside world, they probably didn't think we made a big step from Melbourne to Malaysia but we did. It was very, very big. We weren't able to finish the race but we got a lot of useful information, again for another big step forwards. We've got to see what we've got here. It's a very long straight here, which makes it a little bit tricky but we're all working very well together. I feel we still haven't got the best out of what we have right now, so hopefully we can do that this weekend – and there's a lot in the pipeline for the future. A lot of people have asked me how I'm so positive and how the team are so positive and upbeat, and it is because we see a great future. It's just a lot of hard work now improving before we can get there.

Q: There's two world champions in the team and a lot going on behind the scenes: a lot of work, a lot of hours but there's also a very interesting competition between both team-mates. You seemed to have the upper hand in Malaysia. Did you enjoy that?

JB: I don't really think that was the case but when you're fighting at the front or fighting at the back I think that's when you more concentrate on your performance against the guy that's in the same car. When you're fighting in the pack it's obviously very different. For us two to be competitive, like any team-mates in Formula One, it's important for us to improve and to make big strides forwards. It's great having such an experienced driver in the other car. Hopefully that's going to help us, first of all get into the points and then hopefully challenge for something better in the future.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Flavio Vanetti – Corriere della Sera) To Sebastian, a couple of questions. Do you expect only the confirmation of the potential of the car here or also a step forward? Second question, are you going to invite Nico, Lewis to the Ferrari debriefing tomorrow?

SV: No, I think we rather stay amongst ourselves. Then, I think in general we had two races, usually you need a couple of races to really understand where you are. I think we have a decent understanding but the target is to confirm the fact that we were very close to the top cars in Australia and fighting with Williams for the podium. Obviously in Sepang two weeks ago we were very, very close, and close enough to win, so that was a great success – but, as I said, in general I think we want to establish as probably the team right behind Mercedes. That means that we stay ahead of strong teams like Williams, Red Bull, and not just for one or two races but ideally for the whole season. Once we've confirmed that, then the target is to ensure that the gap gets closer and closer with Mercedes.

No invitation. No.

Q: (Abhishek Takle – Mid-Day) Question to Sebastian. This is a two-part question. I'm sure you're aware that you're just one win short now of Ayrton Senna's mark of 41. Is that something you think about heading into this weekend? And, as someone who's very interested in the history of the sport, could you describe your emotions that you're just one win shy of that mark? Second part, you and Lewis could both surpass that mark potentially this season – so do you think that number, the 41 is more attainable in modern-day Formula One, and if so, why do you think that is? Thank you.

SV: First of all, I wasn't aware, to be honest. I know Michael's number but that's just ridiculous, if you look at numbers. I think it's very special. Obviously it took me a long while to get the number forty done. I hope the next one is not that far away but, yeah, I think it would certainly mean a lot for any driver. That's why I think statistics in this regard are quite nice. Once you are on the track it doesn't really matter so much. The second part of your question, I think nowadays it's probably not entirely fair to the guys in the past simply because we have more races. So, we were supposed to have 20 races but we have 19 this year, and in the past, if you really go back many years they only had ten races and then 13, 14, 15. Only in the last, probably ten years, it ramped up to 20 races a season – which obviously increases your chances of winning more races.

Q: (Weian Mao - Titan Media) Question to Felipe and Jenson. You have been racing here in Shanghai since the very first one in 2004. What's the most impressive thing for you, on track or in the city? And Seb and other drivers, if you would like to share your past memories of Shanghai.

FM: Well, I think it's a nice track. It's a track that has a lot of high-speed corners, quite difficult for the front tyres, front-left. Very long straights, see some overtakings, is a nice place to be, so it for sure, since I came here for the first time – it was 2004 – to now, you see how much this place develops. Amazing. I remember on the first year, I was taking maybe two hours in the traffic from the city to the track, and now it's much better. You see how much this country develops, and you see how nice it is here, the people. It's nice, I really enjoy a lot to come here in China – and is also a nice track. Maybe we just need a little more people to watch the race, because here... I don't know if it's too expensive or what, but people, they're always in the hotel waiting for you, a lot of fans but maybe they are not here on the track, so we need to push on that.

JB: I agree with Felipe. This place has changed a lot since we came here in 2004. I think the circuit is a fun circuit to drive. I also think that the last couple of years we've had more people at the race, more supporters. Obviously the first year there was quite a lot because it's new and it's exciting but I would say the last couple of years it's been pretty good. It's still looks like we need more advertising in the city because, when you're in the city you don't know there's a grand prix going on apart from the fans outside the hotel – but it's great to see how passionate they are about the sport. And it's men and women as well, which is good. Hopefully it can just keep growing – like China's economy has.

Sebastian, your best memories.

SV: It's quite funny. In 2007 I had a very good race here, finishing in the points for the first time with Toro Rosso. Finishing fourth. Before the race it was dry and I was speaking to Jenson on the drivers parade and Jenson's car was not very competitive that year, not at all, so he wasn't very keen to race in the dry, let's say, and he was praying for some rain – otherwise he was looking forward to the party, he said, on Sunday night. But then the rain came and I think for both of us it was a great race. He finished fifth, I finished fourth and we both started P18 and P20, something like that. Definitely good memories. Also the win in 2009, the first win with Red Bull. Obviously quite a special place.

Q: (Luis Fernando Ramos – Racing Magazine) To you all: you were talking about how the fans are passionate here and that means you are met at the airport and you get loads of presents from the fans. What was the most interesting, strange or different present you've ever got from a fan here in China?

JB: I don't know about strange and interesting. The little badges are pretty cool. Have you seen the badges? They put like bear faces with... it's panda (faces). That's pretty cool. Apart from that it's traditional things like chopsticks and fans and what have you. It's great, I love coming here, lots of goodies to take back home.

SV: I had a panda experience as well but it was a stuffed panda, not a real one, obviously. But it was too big to take it home so I had to leave it in China I'm afraid. That was some years ago. It's nice when you get something small to take along but that was too big, I struggled.

JB: That poor, devastated person that gave you the panda, eh?

SV: But I'm honest. At that time I couldn't afford an extra seat to pay in the plane, so I couldn't take the panda with me.

FM: Well, I had a panda as well. I always have a lot of books and on every page they put pictures of all the fans, like a big book and it's fantastic. So it's really nice to put in the... I also have a museum where they can put everything, even some gifts and everything from the fans which is nice. I always receive a lot of things for my son as well, gifts and sweets and everything. They are really amazing.

NH: No panda for me, no. It's pretty much like the other boys say, local stuff, a lot of sweets, books, Lonely Planet so I can find my way around Shanghai, stuff like that.

RG: I've received a very nice box of macaroons when I arrived at the airport. After a long flight that was pretty nice.

ME: No panda experience for me so far but I've had some candy and stuff like that, local stuff.

Q: (Gergely Denes - GP Live) Sebastian, can you give us a bit of an insight about the celebration at Maranello after the win? If I'm correct, you mentioned some rituals after a win. Can you give us just a little bit of insight about that process at Maranello?

SV: Well, I was there anyway to do some work. It was planned to come on the Wednesday to be in the simulator but obviously it was also quite nice to receive a bit of a welcome after the win. All the factory got together for a quick lunch which was quite nice, to have all the people in one room - it was a big room - all together and able to celebrate a little bit. Also I learned that when you win with Ferrari, they put a Ferrari flag right at the entry gates. Obviously the last couple of years... it has been a long time since there has been a flag. I think some ten years ago there were a lot of flags, especially at the end of the season, so this flag will stay for the rest of the year. We will of course try to maybe put another one sometime soon, but it's tough right now.

Q: (Luis Fernando Ramos – Racing Magazine) Romain and then to Nico, there was some discussion among the fans and journalists about the incidents each of you had in Malaysia. I want to hear your views on that. Was the punishment a correct call or was it a racing incident in your opinion?

RG: Well, I think, to be fair, it wasn't really... with Sergio. During the race, it was a good move on the outside of the high speed corner. He took a risk and he came out of the way... ended up. Sergio came to see me and just apologised. He had no more tyres at that point of the race and he just went a bit wide. I think that was... Yeah, he got a penalty. He didn't bring back by flat tyres of my spin the time lost but I think you just need to be careful in the high speed corners, not to get wheels in between other wheels.

NH: Yeah, also I spoke to Dany after the race and he just didn't expect me to dive back in and he didn't see me as well. I still tried to pull out of it but it was too late so we touched. The penalty was maybe a bit harsh but it's history now and we will move on.

Q: (Gary Chappell – Daily Express) Sebastian, according to Bernie Ecclestone, you weren't a very good World Champion, you didn't represent the sport very well, at least, not as good as Lewis Hamilton. How hurtful are those comments and what's your opinion of them?

SV: Well, I think he's free to say what he wants so it's fine. For me, I'm very happy with what I have achieved so far and looking forward to what might be coming and that's it.

JB: Maybe it's because you're not on Twitter.

SV: Yeah, is Bernie on Twitter then? I don't know.

JB: I didn't think he was into that social media stuff.

SV: Wonder how he knows, then?

Ends