



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

Press Information

2015 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix Thursday Press Conference Transcript

26.11.2015

DRIVERS – Fernando ALONSO (McLaren), Lewis HAMILTON (Mercedes), Romain GROSJEAN (Lotus), Daniil KVIAT (Red Bull Racing), Roberto MERHI (Manor), Kimi RÄIKKÖNEN (Ferrari)

PRESS CONFERENCE

First of all then, a question to you all: how would you sum up your year and what was your favourite moment? Romain, why don't you get us started.

Romain GROSJEAN: Well, I think the favourite moment is pretty easy – Spa Francorchamps, the podium. To summarise the year: it was a pretty good year I think in terms of driving. We had a good baseline to start the year with the car. We couldn't really update it as much as we wanted but still fighting for sixth in the Constructors' Championship, so pretty pleased with that and yeah, last year with Lotus.

And Daniil?

Daniil KVIAT: Well, a very eventful year I would say, it went by very quickly. I think the start was quite painful but then I think I'm proud of how we managed to climb our way up through all the issues that we had to start with and then I think we kind of stabilised there. Some strong races and some good points, but obviously we are always looking for more in the future. The highlight I think was the podium, even though I wouldn't say it was the best race. We had a couple of really strong races, I would say even the last couple of races I was quite pleased about them. Hoping to finish on high here, yeah.

Kimi?

Kimi RÄIKKÖNEN: Pretty average, I must say. Better than last year but still far away from what it should be. But there's life and next year we'll try again.

Roberto?

Roberto MERHI: Yeah for sure we started in a very difficult way, with no testing and to be honest I never drove this car before. But I think through the year the thing improved quite a lot – I mean the team and also the car and also me, driving the car. I think the last races were quite good. And obviously the best moment of the year I would say were the last laps in Silverstone with the wet or maybe the qualifying in Spielberg was quite good.

And Fernando, how would you sum up your year and can you pick out a favourite moment?

Fernando ALONSO: Well, tough year, obviously difficult and struggling with the pace all year and the reliability, so definitely a difficult season for us. But personally I think it was necessary. It was a step forward in my career after the two championships, after five fantastic seasons fighting for the world championship but arriving second, so I needed some new motivation, some new project

that I could trust and I could believe is the only way to become champion again. After one difficult season, as I said, I learn so much. I enjoy working with McLaren, with Honda, with all the Japanese discipline and Japanese culture into the team. I still remain very positive. I'm very, very happy and looking forward to next year being a little bit easier than this one that, as I said, has been difficult in terms of results.

And finally, Lewis, how would you sum up your year. So many favourite moments I'm sure, difficult to pick one?

Lewis HAMILTON: Yeah, what can I say? Obviously all different experiences but it has been the best year of my career and I'm in a very fortunate position, a lot of great work done by my team. Probably one of the best races for me was Austin obviously, the pinnacle of the year for me. Yeah, and excited to be here in Abu Dhabi, with the 44th UAE national day and I'm here to try to win that 44th race, which I still haven't done, so it's cool how it all kind of ties in.

Did you see all the 44s around here did you think that was for you, rather for the day?

LH: Well it is my number, it's associated with me, so....

Fernando, you mentioned there it has been a tough season and it's coming to an end here. Your 252nd grand prix start, it puts you fifth on the all-time most experienced drivers list. You talked a bit there about motivation and I just wondered what is your main motivation and goal for 2016.

FA: At the moment there's a question mark, I guess, where McLaren-Honda can be next year. There are a lot of expectations in the team. I think we worked really all season, being united in some difficult moments and always moving forward, so I think for 2016 the main goal for the team is to come back to where we belong, we think, and being competitive, fighting for the top positions. I don't know if that means fighting for the championship, I don't know if that means fighting for victories or just being on the podium sometimes, that's always difficult to know in a very complex sport like Formula One. There are definitely some big challenges ahead in this winter and I see all the things that the team has done in the last couple of months and these seem very logical, very positive and I'm confident that it's going to be a completely different season next year and I'm happy with the progress.

Thank you. Lewis, coming back to you, I know you are very aware of fans on social media and the discussions that take place. There's been a lot of discussion for this final round about whether you and your team-mate Nico Rosberg should be allowed to go for it with whatever strategy you want to use on Sunday in a sort-of end-of-season free-for-all. What are your thoughts on that?

LH: I don't really have any thoughts on it, to be honest. It doesn't really make any difference what my thoughts are. We're going to be racing... the strategists will give us the best... whoever's up ahead will have the best strategy and the guy behind will have the second best strategy, so I don't really have any thoughts on that.

OK. Romain, coming back to you, your 83rd and final grand prix for the Enstone-based team, currently Lotus. You've scored 10 podiums for the team, so in what mood do you say goodbye this weekend?

RG: yeah, it's the first time of my career that I have had to change teams in Formula One, so it's something new. The first time I went to Enstone was September 2005, as one of the driver development and I learned everything from there. So yeah it's going to be... switching off the car on Sunday, jumping out of the E23 and thinking that was the last race with the team is certainly going to be quite hard. On the other hand I really want to push hard all weekend long to score good points, do a good result, thank the guys for all the support, through tough times, better times as well and I think we did both learn from those years, so it was a nice experience. Very

much looking forward to the next one as well, it's going to be very exciting with Haas. It'll be good to have a good weekend and say goodbye in a proper way.

Thank you. Daniil, a season of two parts personally for you. From Monaco onwards it's gone well. Your 10 points ahead of your team-mate with one race to go, so what aspect of your performance this year has given you the most satisfaction?

DK: Yeah, like you said, since Monaco we probably started to follow the right path more or less, a bit technically, a bit myself, but to be honest it didn't change much. An up and down season but we scored some good points, we managed to start taking the maximum out of the package most of the weekends. These things kind of give satisfaction but of course we are looking for more performance and we are not yet where we want to be but for sure it doesn't take one day to be there. So we will keep pushing. Like I said there were some good races in Spa, in Mexico and Brazil where I think we were taking the absolute maximum out of the car and we need to try to do this every weekend.

Roberto, back in the cockpit for Manor this weekend. A lot of change going on in that team. Can you tell us about the team's prospects and your own?

RM: Yeah obviously Manor wants to do a step for next year, to try to be fighting for points every race, every grand prix and they are putting a lot of effort on it and hopefully it goes well. The plan also for me next year is to try to stay in Formula One and trying to see what is the best options out there and yeah we will see. At the moment there is nothing clear yet but we will look in the next few weeks to see what is happening.

Q: Finally, Kimi, both your team principal Maurizio Arrivabene and team-mate Sebastian Vettel have said the target for next season is to challenge Mercedes for the championship. How do you analyse the progress this year towards that – and do you think it's achievable?

KR: Obviously this year has been a lot stronger year from the team than previous year and you can easily see it from whichever way you look at it and it all comes to next year. Obviously that's the aim: the aim is always to try to be in the front and Mercedes has always been very strong last years and everybody else tries to beat them. Is it going to happen? Are we going to be in a position next year? We hope so at least. We have to wait until we put the cars on the circuit in a test and the first few races – then we really see where we are. Obviously there's a lot of work being done at the factory, number and stuff but it's never the same until we're really on the circuit. Then we can see it pretty well, or feel it quite quickly, after a few laps, if it's going to a good one or not so good one. I'm sure we're going to have a strong package – but is it strong enough? Time will only tell.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Khodr Rawi - motorsport.com) Question to Fernando. Fernando, how realistic is to be beat Sauber and finish ahead of them in Constructors' Championship here in Abu Dhabi? Do you think it's realistic?

FA: I don't know really. I think it's unlikely. I think they are nine points ahead, I think, and we score points three or four times this year only, so to score as many as ten in one race, in the final race is a little bit difficult but, you know, I think we will try to do our best. We will try to perform a good weekend but I think our minds are on next year's project and probably half of the car is next year's parts or next year's philosophy as well so I think we are not too worried about beating Sauber this weekend or not.

Q: (Heikki Kulta – Turun Sanomat) Kimi, Bahrain, P2 was your best result for two years. Has it been also been also the best weekend for you during this times at Ferrari lately?

KR: The end result was probably best but it doesn't mean that we are somehow better than other weekends. The end result, it just looks good. But it's not been the easiest few years but that's how it goes, y'know? We improved a lot from last year but we're still not happy and when I don't finish five races it's quite a big... many races out of how many we've done so far this year. You don't expect to be very high up and fighting for a lot. So, we have to improve and I'm sure we can still improve it and next year is a new challenge. Let's see. I'm sure we can do better.

Q: (Frederic Ferret – L'Equipe) Question to Romain Grosjean. How much are you worried by the delay of the building of your cars?

RG: Something we have experienced in the past. We have always managed to put it on track on time. As long as it's ready for FP2 then I'm happy. We'll try to forget that, as we've shown in, I think it was Suzuka and Brazil when we were a little bit late. We did manage to put the car on track and go for it. It's just harder work for the guys who don't deserve this – but they are going to do the maximum and then from there we try to score some good points.

Q: (Joy Chakavarty - Sport 360) My question is for Romain. Romain this is the first time that you're joining a second new team. How different is the feeling when you were joining the F1 for the first time and now, after 83 races, joining another new team. Can you just give us an idea of the mix of emotions that you have right now? Sense of anticipation for next year? Kind of sadness or sorrow? Whatever for leaving the team behind now?

RG: Yeah, I think you summarise it pretty well. It's sad to leave... more than a team it becomes a family through the years. It's going to be hard to leave the guys but I know they won't be far in the paddock so that's good news. On the other hand there's real excitement at joining a new team, a new adventure, an American Formula One team is going to be great. Looking forward to it and going to Haas is a very different thing. So I came the first time in Formula One as a rookie. Everything to learn. Right now I'm going in a new team and I've probably got the experience they were looking for. We try to be successful as soon as we can – but it's quite different. It feels better now than it was the first time. Easier.

Q: (Dan Knutson – Honorary) Lewis, after your visit to the NASCAR race last week, what did you see there that would be really cool for the fans or competitors in F1? Or perhaps something you saw that said no way should come to Formula One?

LH: I don't know, I'd have to really think about that. There were definitely some things that for sure they do a lot better than us. Or, whether it's a lot better... but there were for sure things that we could learn from them. It was a great show, a great spectacle, particularly for the fans. A bit like DTM, the fans get very, very close to the garages in the background and to the drivers and... what else? Otherwise it was a really cool event. I hope I get to do one one day.

Q: (Wafa Suqqar - beinsports) Kimi, after the second round in Malaysia, Ferrari fans feeling better that maybe this year will be different. What Ferrari can promise the fans about 2016?

KR: Like I said before, we're going to give our best and hopefully it's enough to fight for championships. We keep improving, following our own way of doing the things that we've done from last year to this year and hopefully then it's enough to be where we want to be as Ferrari. So, we can promise a lot of things. Is it going to happen? Who knows? I really hope for all the guys there in Ferrari that we will come back strong – or stronger next year than this year – but there's no point to make big promises. We're going to do our best and then we'll see.

Q: (Walter Koster – Saarbrucker Zeitung) Gentlemen, last year Sochi, this year Mexico, next year Baku in Azerbaijan; three new tracks in three years. Are you looking forward to new tracks or do you regret not returning to the eliminated tracks in the past like Imola, Magny Cours, Istanbul Park or Valencia? This is for the four drivers who know these tracks.

FA: At the end of the day it doesn't change anything for us. Going to some of the circuits that we raced on for all our careers, like Imola, Magny Cours, Istanbul – they are nice tracks and there is nice tradition there so you enjoy racing at those circuits. When you go to new countries, you open the sport up to new people and to new generations so it's also quite a good feeling. We are travelling a little bit more. When I started some years ago, there were 16 races; now, next year, they have planned 21 and most of them out of Europe, so it's definitely more demanding in terms of travelling and preparing the championship but as I said, it's the direction that the sport chooses and there is the advantage of opening up Formula One to new countries and this is also good news, I think.

LH: Not really much to add to what he said but Fernando's right, it's good to go to different countries and to spread the word of Formula One, give them the experience and gain new followers for the sport. Those tracks you mentioned, apart from Imola, were not particularly spectacular tracks anyway so for sure it would be kind of good to keep the balance of the real classic circuits rather than just a bunch of new circuits because the new circuits are generally not as good as the old circuits, they don't carry the same history or heritage and I think it's important that we keep really close to the heritage of Formula One which is those old, historic circuits.

KR: It's always the new places that are quite similar, designed by the same guy, so I'm not saying that they're not good but they are more the same. I enjoy the older, traditional circuits. You maybe didn't like Magny Cours, I liked it, not many people, quiet, easy. It was one of the best places to go! I liked the older, they looked a bit nicer, a more normal feeling than when we come here and everything is put – in this case – in a more desert area. I prefer there, it's easier for people to go to – for us. We go wherever the race is. The weekend itself doesn't change. We have the same people as here, the timetable is more or less (the same) and the same things happen.

RG: I think it was really great this year to see Mexico was... a very warm welcome from all the fans, it was an awesome weekend. I would like to see Magny Cours back on the calendar, it would be the French Grand Prix, unique for me. Paris? The traffic is not so good. I would like a French Grand Prix. I think Fernando's point is completely right: in an ideal world you would like to do all of them but it's not possible so I think we follow the calendar, we like discovering new places but going to Silverstone or in Germany or Barcelona is always quite special.

Q: (Christopher Joseph – Chicane) Romain, earlier Fernando spoke of his appreciation for the influence of the Japanese discipline on him and his team. What are you hoping to get from the influence of the Haas team and the American approach on yourself next season?

RG: Well, I think I have already been seduced by their approach and when I met Gene Haas, trying to pronounce the word properly - it's very hard for a Frenchman – it was straightaway... the spirit was 'let's go racing' and I liked that. I really liked their philosophy, discovering more and more about America. I didn't yet get to a NASCAR race, I'm on the backfoot on that but I will probably go next year and I think there is this American spirit with the European base as the team is going to be in between Italy and Banbury in the UK and then all the management in the US. So it can be a great mix.

Q: (Graham Cagill - The National) Lewis, you've won here twice before and you were well on your way to winning in 2012 as well before the car let you down and you've had two pole positions also, so I think it's fair to say that you go well here. Just wondering if there's any reason why you think you go so well here and what your expectations are for this weekend?

LH: I don't know; I guess there are some tracks that suit some drivers' styles more than others. Ideally you would like your style to suit everywhere exactly the same but there are some that you just happen to go better at. I know this is a bit like a karting track, there's a lot of late braking and bouncing off kerbs and really having to throw the car around. It works for an aggressive driving style, I guess and yeah, I've had some great experiences here, even from the first race which I was leading but – (to Kimi) you won the first race didn't you? – I'm thinking you might have won the

first race maybe. Someone won the first race after my car failed but a great experience. It's always a good finale here, you've got some good battles, the weather's always fantastic, great fans and for me this weekend is... I've had an amazing year here last year and I'm here to try to do something similar.

Ends