



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

Press Information

2016 Bahrain Grand Prix Thursday Press Conference Transcript

31.03.2016

DRIVERS – Pascal Wehrlein (Manor), Max VERSTAPPEN (Toro Rosso), Romain GROSJEAN (Haas), Felipe MASSA (Williams), Nico ROSBERG (Mercedes), Fernando ALONSO (McLaren)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Fernando, we have to start with you: three times a winner here in Bahrain, but clearly we have to deal with the accident in Melbourne and the aftermath. You aren't racing here this weekend. Tell us the process that led to that decision and how disappointed you feel?

Fernando ALONSO: Well, yeah, a little bit disappointed obviously. We want to race. We are competitors, drivers and we like competition, and we love the sport. So when you come here and you cannot even try it's always sad, but it's understandable and I respect the decision. I try until the last moment to be able to race, at least to try in the practice. There has been some painful days, with some pain at home, but I was ready to go through this pain somehow in the car and make sure I could race, because at the end of the day the pain is manageable if you don't think too much probably and [with] the adrenaline of driving, but there are some other risks that the doctors they think. So it's a risk management that I understand, to minimise everything is the logical thing to do, so a little bit sad for that but it's the only way to go.

So, looking forward, how optimistic that it will be fixed and that you will be able to race at the next round in China?

FA: Well, you know, it's not 100 per cent. There will be another test that I need to do in the next eight or ten days and after that test the FIA will evaluate again, as they did now. First of all is the safety and then the performance, so hopefully everything is OK but it's something we need to see with the next test.

Thank you for that. Romain, coming to you, you've had some great days in Formula One, some emotional podiums and so on, including two right here in Bahrain, but where does that sixth place on Haas' debut rank for you?

Romain GROSJEAN: Well, it was a special race for us. We got a bit lucky with the red flag but we were unlucky on Saturday with the new qualifying format. It was a great debut, better than what we were expecting. It's been one of those races that I will probably always remember, when I'm getting older and I tell the kids of my kids my stories. But I think it was good for everyone. It was good for Formula One. It was good for the team. I think a brand new team coming and showing that it's possible to score points at the first venue, it was a very good thing. And for all my guys and everyone that has been working so hard in the last two months, it was just a good morale boost and a confirmation that the car we are driving is probably one of the best I've ever driven.

Really? Because you did seem to have the pace to comfortably stay ahead of the Force, particularly after the restart. Is that about the level you think the team is at or will it fluctuate depending on circuit?

RG: I think there is a lot we need to learn, there are a lot of things we could do better. We didn't have any practice in Australia because of the rain and then the crash in the pit lane in FP3, so you know we put the car on track with barely any set-up work and guess where we should be, so I'm sure that whenever we get more running, more time in the car, there is more potential to be coming. I'm not saying we're going to be in the top five here this weekend, I'm just saying that it's the beginning for the team. But generally I think we will have up and downs, but the potential is big.

Thank you. Pascal, welcome. You made your long-awaited Formula One debut in Australia, running as high as 13th for a while. Do you feel this car can get among the points this season?

Pascal WEHRLEIN: I think so. I think it's really depending on the track. Australia was great, especially in the race, my first lap was amazing and also the next few laps at the beginning were great. I could follow the other cars easily, so that was good, definitely, yeah.

It's interesting looking at the tyre selections for each race weekend from Pirelli, once again you've gone for a large quantity of medium tyres. What's the strategy behind that?

PW: I think the first thing is that we want to drive a lot in free practice because we still have to learn a lot about the car and you know that's easier with the medium tyres.

OK, thank you. Felipe, coming to you, fifth place in the opening round in Melbourne, behind Mercedes, Ferrari and Red Bull. Is that about where Williams are at at this stage? Do you think you might get ahead of Red Bull this weekend, on this track?

Felipe MASSA: Well, I think it was a good start for us. It was more or less where we expected to be. It's also true that Red Bull was quite strong in the race and even the Toro Rosso; they were pretty strong. It was quite a big fight with them, including qualifying. I really hope here we can be in front. I hope we can be more competitive on this track, because we know that we are going to have a big fight with these two teams and maybe some other teams as well. I think we saw that Mercedes and Ferrari they were pretty strong, as expected. I hope this track can be better for us.

Like Fernando, you have a good record here, you are a two-time winner on this racetrack. Tell us what you like about it, tell us about the challenge of this place?

FM: Well, it's a very nice track. I like to drive here. You have some nice corners but also some very tricky corners that you need a good car in terms of braking, in terms of traction as well. But it's a nice track. I had some good races. Always when you have good races on a type of track, you enjoy, so this is what I'm looking forward to have another one on Sunday.

Coming to the championship leader, Nico Rosberg: celebrating the 10th anniversary of your Formula One debut right here in 2006. Melbourne made it four wins in a row, how big a psychological boost was it to get off to such a good start?

Nico ROSBERG: Yeah, of course it was a great start but it's one race out of 21, so it's really early days. But I'm really pleased with the car that we have. The team has done an incredible job to give us such a car again this year. It will be a great couple of races coming up for sure, but of course we are also looking closely at the battle with Ferrari.

Well, one possible weakness appeared to be the race starts. Once again a problem for both Mercedes cars, the Ferraris got ahead. What steps have you and the team taken to address that?

LH: Yeah, for sure we've worked on it, but it's a challenge this year, because it's one clutch lever that we're only allowed to use due to the rule changes. So it has made it more difficult but it's definitely an area we are focusing a lot.

Max, coming to you finally. Positives from Melbourne: you were the first teenager for 55 years to qualify in the top five and also you personally went past the 50 championship points mark. But the negative, obviously, was the dispute over the Toro Rosso pit stop strategy. What lessons did you and the team take from that?

Max VERSTAPPEN: First of all, I think we had a great qualifying, so we could be very happy with that. But of course the race didn't pan [out] like we wanted to. But, yeah, we analysed a lot of things and hopefully we can try to come back stronger here even though I think this track hasn't suited us so far in the history but we try to make the most of it that's for sure.

Both the Toro Rossos were right up the front in qualifying in Melbourne. Has the pace of this year's car exceeded your expectations after testing?

MV: Well, I wanted to be there, so yeah, we just kept working hard, we saw the improvements during the winter time of course but you still want to see how it goes on track and in winter testing you don't know exactly where you are. But I think in the end to be P5 in qualifying was definitely a great achievement by the whole team, especially with such a short winter for us.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (David Croft – Sky Sports) Fernando, what are the extent of your injuries that have prevented you from driving this weekend and what are the risks that you mentioned that the doctors brought up about keeping out this weekend?

FA: Well, just to summarise a little bit. Last week I was OK Sunday – some knee pain but not big things. I had the green light from the doctors to leave the track and everything was OK. On Monday, I had a little bit of overall pain but nothing too serious. I flew back. I arrived in Spain and the pain was similar or a little bit more, so we decided to do a proper check – a CT scan. I had a small pneumothorax on the lung. So we took the advice from the doctors to relax at home and make everything come to normal and we repeat the scan last Monday. The pneumothorax is gone more or less but I have some rib fractures, so because of that there are the risks of driving, because Formula One is a very unique sport, a unique position on the car, and the G-Forces that a fracture could move into the lung as well, so yeah, it's not like a broken leg or broken arm, that you can deal with the pain, this is in the chest where some organs are there and we cannot do much more.

Q: (Alex Popov – NTV/Match TV) For all the drivers, about the start in Australia. How much it was different to last year considering it's just one clutch lever and slightly less preparation for a bite point on the starting grid. And for Pascal, if you can compare the start to DTM.

PW: DTM is completely different. We have the clutch pedal with the left foot, so it's different, that one. Starting an F1 race, I only know this system. My start in Melbourne was really, really good and I made up seven positions – so I cannot complain about it!

MV: I think quite similar. I had a good start so I was very happy about it but in general it just asks a bit more practice – but you can deal with it.

RG: I think I prefer the old-style one. Why? Because it was more about the precision of the reaction time and at the end it didn't change much of the procedure. I think some teams have

done it better than others. We're a brand new team and still have some work to be done. We didn't have a great start but at the end it won't change much.

FM: I think it's a little bit more difficult to do but I would say that after one or two, three races it will be similar to before.

Nico, you spoke about the single clutch in your previous answer. Anything more to add?

NR: It's a good challenge. It makes it more difficult, there will be a bit more variability in the starts.

Fernando?

FA: The same comments. More challenging, so it's good. There will be some random performance so it's good for the show.

Q: (Abhishek Takle – Mid-Day) Question to Fernando. Fernando, I just want to get your thoughts... every time you step into a Formula One car you take a risk. At what point does the risk outweigh the reward? In terms of the risk you're taking and the performance you're getting back for it. If I could have your thoughts on that. Thank you.

FA: I think we don't think about the risk at any point. Even you see it now, I have broken ribs and I'm here with some pain, not easy to sleep sometimes, depending which movements. I would like to sit in the car and see how is the pain in the car and how to enjoy driving the car. So, you understand that this is motorsport and anything can happen. Everytime you jump in the car. But yeah, you love it so much it's completely transparent, the risk, when you jump in the car.

Q: (Marco Canseco - Marca) For Fernando. You have started last season and this season with two accidents. Are you worried by that?

FA: No, not really. I've been very lucky all my career. This is my sixteenth Formula One year and it's normal that you have accidents here and there. It happened unfortunately in the last two years, two accidents that I miss one race. The last one in Australia that probably you all saw. It was quite a big impact, so I knew that it was risky, my possibility to race in Bahrain because it was only ten days from the big shunt. I tried my best, as I said, the team did a fantastic job preparing the car for this race, so I wanted to try until the last moment. I flew last night, I arrived this morning, I wanted to at least try to practice but I understand also the position. But now, yeah, I want to stay here for the weekend, help Stoffel because it's a good opportunity for him and help the team – because I love what I do. I love Formula One and racing and I will miss this race but I want to learn from the outside also, how the team prepare the race and how are the actions around the new qualifying system, the race itself, the strategy, the pitstop moments. I want to get involved in everything from the outside because it could help me on the inside at the next race. It's a step forward that we need to do together and yeah, hopefully help the team because I'm very thankful for the job they did last week.

Q: (Ralf Bach – Auto Bild) A question to Fernando, and then a question for Pascal. Fernando, your broken ribs, have they something to do with the g-forces of the accident or maybe with the broken seat?

FA: Just the g-forces of the accident. The impact.

And Pascal, you see how quick it can be that a second reserve driver has to make the race. Would you be prepared in the Silver Arrow case to drive in this car at once from the mental side?

PW: In general. Of course, I'm a member of the team since 2014 and I've done many days in the simulator and also a few tests and I was travelling to all the races last year so of course, I'm prepared.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) After the Australian Grand Prix the GPDA published a fairly hard-hitting open letter. To all of you, are you members of the GPDA, do you agree with the contents and, if so, what would you like to see changed?

Fernando?

FA: I think the letter says everything. We love the sport. We love it so much that maybe we think the last couple of years we've been a little bit moving left and right with not a clear direction and we want to help in any of the things the fans want, the drivers want, the sponsors want, that are quite clear in some of the things we've been searching in the last couple of years. Yeah, it's just a letter of... a supporting letter from all of the drivers that we do care about our sport and we would like to get involved in some of the decisions or in some of the things that we could help somehow. It's a start. It's the way the sport is moving in the last couple of years, maybe we don't see it completely right.

Nico?

NR: Yes, we're all united on this opinion because we love the sport and can see the fans are criticising some aspects that we could do better. We could be even more exciting as a sport and we want to question whether or not the F1 governance cannot review the process in which decisions are made in all these things to try to get it to a point where we can get some better decisions done and become a more exciting sport. There's recent examples, with this qualifying where the fans are just at home and they're not happy with it. We're racing for the fans. Mostly for the fans. That's the examples that are now the recent cases. Even the rules for next year. We're putting on more downforce although actually we should be trying to help overtaking. More downforce is known for making overtaking and following other cars more difficult. It's not necessarily the right way. With all of these things we are saying that we would like to be more involved, have more of a say, us drivers – so let's see where this takes us.

Felipe?

FM: The same. I totally agree with both of them. All the drivers are united on this letter that you guys saw. We just want to be part of... changing. To improve the sport.

Romain?

RG: I think Fernando resumed it pretty well: he has broken ribs and he wanted to race because we love the sport. We are fans of Formula One. We want it to be the best that it can be with the best drivers, the best car, the best shows. As Nico says, right now the decisions haven't been so good in terms of fans replies, or media or the sponsors. We just want to help the sport that we love more than anything.

Max – did you play a part in this?

MV: I have nothing to add. I think it's all explained very clear. I'm not a member.

Pascal?

PW: I just joined Formula One. I always dreamed of Formula One, then when you join it you want it to be on the best peak it could be. Definitely everyone is not 100 per cent happy today and we just have to improve that.

Q: (Michael Schmidt – Auto, Motor und Sport) Fernando, it was obvious that after such an accident you wanted to leave the car as soon as possible. Two questions on that: first of all, in such a moment, do you have the time and the nerves to watch whether the car could be under electrical power, because we saw this totally destroyed car, cables hanging out, hydraulic lines

hanging out? Maybe there was still high voltage in the car? And the second thing is, do you think that with the halo fitted, you would have still been able to escape as quickly as you did in Melbourne?

FA: First question: I didn't see anything. You just want to get out of the car and at that point you just want to put your feet on the ground and walk away. This is the only thing you are thinking at that moment. The halo system? I don't know if I could have got out of the car as quickly as I did. I guess so, because I'm sure the system is designed to look at all the scenarios but probably my only concern when I was rolling over was just to avoid hitting the head, because obviously I was very tight from the belts and I was flying but I didn't feel any risk at all in the middle of the accident, apart from to my head, that I wanted not to crash with anyone, so the halo was probably very welcome in my accident as well. I would avoid that concern, when I'm flying.

Q: (Daniel Johnson – The Telegraph) Fernando and Nico, just going back to the GPDA letter, you talked about the processes and the governance structure, what about the people at the top, because there's a structure we work within but there's also the people trying to bring in new rules? So can I just ask you specifically, do you both have your full confidence in Bernie, Jean to move the sport in the direction that you think it should go in?

NR: It would be inappropriate now to mention any names or criticise any individuals or even compliment individuals, it's just that we know that it's not perfect the way it is, it could be better and so it needs to be reviewed and that's what we're trying to encourage.

FA: Yeah, as Nico said, it's not a problem of any names. Actually I think Bernie has been looking to protect the sport all the time and to improve the sport and to improve the show. I think Bernie, Jean, everyone is doing their best but the system is somehow a little bit old in terms of decisions. As Nico pointed out before, the new qualifying system, also the new rules, these radio restrictions now that seem very attractive for you guys and from the outside, it's a little bit contradictory when we have a very complex car, very complex technology with hybrid engines, with everything to manage and now we cannot have any information about the cars. You cannot give us a spaceship and then not tell us anything when we are there. These kind of things are making drivers a little bit confused and a little bit... we need to help in the future for Formula One.

Q: (Jon McEvoy – Daily Mail) Fernando first, have you re-run the accident in your mind? Do you get nightmares about it?

FA: No, I don't have any nightmares, I just have pain sometimes. As you all know, a broken rib is painful when you make some movements but apart from that, zero nightmares and really looking forward to jumping in the car and sad to miss this opportunity. The team told me 'you will fly back home' and I said no way. I want to hear the cars, I want to help Stoffel, I want to see the new updates in the car, how they work so this completely fine on that.

Q: (Jon McEvoy – Daily Mail) And to the three drivers in the front row, not linked to that, do you feel that all the drivers should be members of the GPDA and that there would be a greater solidarity if everyone was a member?

FA: Yes, it would be nice to have all the drivers inside the GPDA but I have to say also that in all the important decisions that we make in the last couple of years we are all united, it's not that being part of the GPDA doesn't make the group united in the important things. Yeah, it would be nice but we will see.

NR: Yeah, this letter was signed by the GPDA but it is all the drivers, the whole grid, and that's what counts.

FM: Yes, I'm not a member but I totally agree with the letter and the help that the drivers can give to Formula One.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) Back to the GPDA situation, I'm sorry gentlemen, but on the Friday before Melbourne, Charlie Whiting suggested that the drivers weren't using every single platform and forum available to them to voice their opinions and he gave examples, for example a visit to Pirelli to which not all the drivers went, to a meeting at testing in Barcelona, not all the drivers went. He also said that on the Friday in drivers' briefing you have plenty of opportunities to voice your opinions. So what other platforms do you actually need, why aren't these enough?

RG: I was in the Barcelona meeting, I couldn't make it to Pirelli for sponsors' event. I think that's unfortunately our lives and it's going to be very hard to get all the drivers to come to meetings outside the paddock. I think we have been trying to raise our voices through different methods and I think Alex and the directors of the GPDA have been trying different ways before the letter was sent. I think again, all the drivers have been united on that subject and everyone is willing to help things to get better. We're not saying we've got a magic fix, we're not saying we've got the solution but we're just trying to help the best we can.

Q: (Ben Hunt – The Sun) Fernando, which side are your broken ribs? On your left side. And I just wondered if there were any concerns whether you would recover from this? There are no worries that you won't recover from these ribs?

FA: No, I will recover. I am already recovering from the pneumothorax and the problem is that the rib is just too fresh, it's still not completely 'glued', let's say. This thing could be a potential problem, very very low risk, also I didn't have any respiratory issues at any time, so the risks are very very small but I understand that we all want zero risk. It's just a question of time that the rib goes a little bit together and with that we will be OK. The next ten days should be OK for this but we cannot guarantee; maybe ten, maybe five, maybe twelve. It's just a normal rib.

Q: (Ralf Bach – Auto Bild motorsport) Me Again ...Question to all the drivers: normally if you write a letter you want to see a reaction but what will you do when there's no reaction at all?

NR: Well, let's see. It's a process. It's a process where we want to try and integrate ourselves a bit more into the whole thing. Let's see, step by step.

FA: Yeah, it's a process and I think it's very early days and I'm sure that in the next couple of steps or in the next decisions, I'm sure that we will have a part.

FM: As they say, it's a process. I was in every meeting that happened before, even with the FIA, with Pirelli, I was everywhere and I think we need to try and give our opinion and this is part of trying to be closer to the decisions in the future. It's a process. I hope it will work and I believe it will.

Q: (Christopher Joseph – Chicane) Nico, you mentioned in some of your previous answers the fact that you feel that the decision-making process is flawed. Do you think then that this letter is the first step perhaps in integrating the drivers' opinions and perhaps giving the drivers more say in the governance of Formula One?

NR: First of all, I didn't use those words. I think I just said 'for sure it can be done better.' We're driving those cars, we know, we have a really good opinion on what would be best to make the racing more exciting. It makes sense for us to be more integrated into the whole process.

Ends