



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L' AUTOMOBILE

2018 FIA Formula One World Championship

Azerbaijan Grand Prix

Saturday Post-Qualifying Press Conference Transcript

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DRIVERS

- 1 – Sebastian VETTEL (Ferrari)**
- 2 – Lewis HAMILTON (Mercedes)**
- 3 – Valtteri BOTTAS (Mercedes)**

TRACK INTERVIEWS

Q: Sebastian Vettel is in pit lane and will be out here to speak to us soon, but let's go and talk to the Mercedes guys who had such a quick car today but maybe not quite enough. Lewis, that first sector was phenomenal, just seemed to lose something in the second, but are you happy with your job today?

Lewis HAMILTON: Yeah, well firstly you've got a great crowd here – hi, everyone. That was close! We did the best job we could. Jeez, I think I was up three tenths until Turn 15 and then I came across the line two tenths up, so I lost a little bit in the last sector. But regardless, Sebastian did a good job. They were quickest all weekend. They've obviously got a phenomenal car this year. But really happy with the job the team did to get us from where we were yesterday to where we are today. Valtteri did also a great job. We're in the mix. This is the fifth-best track to overtake, I think. It doesn't mean it's impossible but I'll try to give Sebastian a hard time tomorrow.

Q: As we saw from even the place markers being pushed away by the wind when you got here, how windy is it out there? How hard is it?

LH: Down the straight particularly it's hard to keep the car straight. You're getting crosswinds in between buildings, so you're constantly correcting the car, but the track has been great today, so I appreciate everyone in Azerbaijan for having us.

Q: Great job, Lewis, and what about this guy? Seb, unbelievable job, three poles in a row, looked phenomenal out there. I know on your second run you were going for faster but a bit of a lock-up stopped you from doing that but you were phenomenal today.

Sebastian VETTEL: Thank you. I felt the car was good in Q2 and Q2 and then in the last segment of qualifying I knew I have it, I have the car that does what I want. Not have it as in pole position, but that I could get a good lap together. The first lap I was really happy, there were maybe two tiny bits where it wasn't exactly perfect, but I knew on the second run that the track would ramp up and that I would have to go out and get it again. I was a little bit down on the time, a little bit faster and then I locked up. It caught me by surprise for Turn 3 and then I wasn't sure, do I go straight or do I try to hang on to it. I tried to hang on to it but, yeah, fortunately it was enough. I really had a good lap on the first attempt, so really happy.

Q: Beautiful job. Don't go anywhere. Hey Valtteri, great car, quick car, can you take the fight to Ferrari tomorrow?

Valtteri BOTTAS: Yeah, for sure we can. We are there with both cars now. It's been really happening this season so we are starting very close. The race here can be really crazy, so we are up for the fight.

Q: Right until the last lap, to the last inches it can be crazy, you know that better than anyone from last year?

VB: Yeah, sure. Last year I was one lap down after lap one and I ended up second, so anything can happen but at least now we have a good starting point.

Q: Seb, we come back to you. It's been a great day, but this is only the start. Mercedes are in the mix, Red Bull are in the mix. How hard is it going to be tomorrow? Even just that run down to Turn 1, how tough is it going to be tomorrow?

SV: It's not that long. That way is a lot longer! I think it will be an intense race. Here, anything can happen, safety cars are very likely. The good point is that our car was really good this afternoon, so we should be in a good place tomorrow. Yesterday I struggled a bit with confidence, with trust in the car, and just rhythm, which is important around here, but today, when it clicks it just keeps coming and it was really enjoyable. I'm a bit upset with my final run because I thought I had a little bit more but we got pole so we can't be much happier with how the day went.

PRESS CONFERENCE

Sebastian, how happy are you after this one, particularly after yesterday when you said you were lacking confidence in the car?

SV: Well, lack of confidence in the car, leading into lack of confidence around the track. I think around this place you need to have the trust, otherwise you don't dare go as quick as you might be able to. At the end of the session I was quite confident and today I was able to carry that into the day and the car was amazing. It just kept getting better. The track picked up quite a bit through qualifying. Q3 run one I was really happy. There was maybe a tiny bit in the middle sector – in Turn 6, Turn 11 – where I was a bit greedy and went a bit wider than I should, but the rest of the lap was really good. Also, I had a good exit from the last corner, which was incredibly difficult today, with the wind playing tricks on all of us I guess, and even a little bit of a two with the car five, six, seven seconds ahead, so I was really happy how that lap came together. And then for the second run I knew there was a little bit more in those places that I mentioned and the car was on fire straight away but then I think I got a bit too excited for Turn 3 and tried to brake later, quite a bit later, than the laps before. I must have hit the bump as well and locked the front. From then onwards the front left was flat-spotted. I was quite upset at the time in the car, because I burnt my shot at an improvement and I didn't know what was going around me. So when I then aborted the lap and I was told pole position then obviously I was really happy. I think the team has done well. We've changed the car again overnight and found even more performance.

Lewis, we haven't had you in the qualifying press conference for the last couple of races, so what news from Mercedes? Is the car much more to your liking?

LH: It's good to be back. I hope you haven't missed me too much. Sebastian did a great job today, congratulations to him. Ferrari have been so dominant in the last couple of races and pace-wise we knew that they would be very quick here. Which they have been all weekend. I think Red Bull also looked really promising, not sure what happened to them. And we were struggling yesterday, but we came into today and the engineers did some really great work last night to understand where we were and how we could progress forwards, so a big thank you to them for all their hard work. Today was much more reasonable car. There were still areas where we were lacking but it's a work in progress I would say and to be that close to the Ferraris is definitely a positive and to have me and Valtteri up there is a good booster for the team, to be right there in up in the mix. Excited for the race. It's very hard to overtake here as it is anywhere around the world, but we'll give it everything we've got.

Q: Valtteri, how was the session from your point of view, and can we also have a word from you about the conditions. The wind seemed to be changing direction the whole time.

VB: I think, like Lewis said, we made some good progress since yesterday. The end result today was a lot better than what we saw and thought it could be today. We believed we can fix the issues, just like we did here last year here actually, from Friday to Saturday and, yeah, we were still finding out way with the setup in Practice Three and made it even better for qualifying. Definitely the best car I had this weekend, so far. I think the session was pretty straightforward. At the beginning lots of yellow flags and difficult to put the lap together but after that Q2, Q3, really straightforward. I felt that I could never quite get the perfect lap. It is extremely difficult here – and, especially the second

run I was still missing something. I feel maybe still Ferrari was too quick for us but yeah, as a team reasonable result now. We have both cars in pretty good position to fight for the win.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) A question for the two Mercedes drivers. What exactly did you have to change after yesterday's session and how much of a difference did it actually make in the car? What was different about the cars' handling today?

LH: Just setup. Yesterday we were sliding around a lot, so setup wing level, ride heights. Pretty much everything on the car. Did a lot of changes.

Valtteri, anything to add from your point of view?

VB: No, no I think we had similar direction where we were heading since yesterday with both cars and definitely it was better.

Q: (Luis Vasconcelos – Formula Press) Also for the two Mercedes drivers. You seemed to be able to match the Ferrari's pace in Sector One, almost in Sector Three but Sector Two as the most difficult for you guys. What's not happening in your car in the Old City section?

VB: Yeah, I think we have seen that all weekend really. Especially the sessions earlier to qualifying. Sector Two is the twisty section and I think we've been struggling a little bit more than other cars, riding over the kerbs in some places, which might cause a bit of lap time loss for us. I think the main issue has been getting the tyres to work, and that can be made through the setup of the car. I think we've made it better. Obviously, they are still doing something better in Sector Two and getting the tyres to work, and being able to ride over the kerbs.

Lewis, anything to add?

LH: The middle sector, I can't really explain it. I think they have a little bit more downforce than us.

Q: (Phil Duncan – PA) Lewis, Bernie Ecclestone had some complimentary things to say about you yesterday. Said you're super quick, super talented and a super nice guy – but he also said that he didn't think you're the racer you once were and that you appear fed up with things. Do you have any response or comment about that?

LH: Not really, no.

Q: (Phil Duncan – PA) Are you as good as you've ever been, do you think?

LH: We'll see at the end of the year.

Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Question for Sebastian. Sebastian, were you being made aware by your team how close Kimi had come to nicking pole from you. He was two-tenths up on you after the first couple of sectors. A second point to that, how much are you feeling from Kimi's side of the garage this year. Are you noticing a renewed level of performance from him?

SV: I think one thing is always to look at the result and the other one, if you look a little bit deeper... I think it's been incredibly close this year so far. He's obviously... to be honest, most of the Fridays I think he had the upper hand so far. Yeah, here and there was struggling to understand the car and feel the car so I think knowing him, knowing his strength, he's incredibly talented and able to drive around problems. So, as I said, it's been quite close this year. The last lap, I wasn't aware, obviously I was out because I took myself out but if you look also the previous years the image is a bit distorting. It wasn't as one-sided as you might think if you look at the results. I think we're... I don't know where you're going or why you're asking but I think we're a good pair, a good match. We just said recently there's so little problem... there's no problem at all between us ever and there were races where I messed up, crashed into him, took him out and yeah, life goes on. I think that's a really big bonus for the team and for us to just enjoy our job.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – GloboEsporte.com) Lewis and Valtteri, you said that the Ferrari probably has more downforce and here also the power unit is also very very important. Can you make a comment about it? It looks, from the outside that they have a little step in front of Mercedes, which is a great surprise in Formula One.

LH: Well, I don't know if that's a surprise because they've had the same power units for all the races this season, so they've shown they've been very quick on the straights. They've got a very strong DRS in particular, quite efficient DRS as far as I'm aware. Yeah, but honestly I've not looked at the data so I don't know where they are faster than us and where we're faster than them but

obviously they've made a big step forward this year and they are the number one team to beat at the moment.

VB: I think that was everything, really.

Q: (Jon McEvoy – Daily Mail) To Seb: you've been involved in Formula One now for a great number of years. How hard is it to sustain it at that level? I say that slightly... bearing in mind Bernie's remarks about Lewis. How demanding and draining is it for a high level driver?

SV: It's certainly different... going into the season certainly feels different than it did ten years ago. I think that's what ten years do to you. Don't get me wrong, not in a bad way but I think as you grow up you change your views on some things, you hopefully get a bit wiser so you change... your horizon changes and also your motivation is different. Maybe you are looking at things a bit differently. It always depends on how you are as a person, which targets you have and what you're ultimately trying to achieve. For me, I'm enjoying what I do, I love what I do, I love racing. Obviously there's a lot of people that have an opinion on every single day that I'm in the car and sometimes they are right, sometimes they are not. I think the most important thing is that you know who you are and you're true to yourself. Then, I think you can afford to listen less to what's going on around, not be distracted and simply enjoy your racing. Whether you are at your prime or not, I think then – once you retire – you have enough time to analyse and look back and say... Of course, the level is high, if you want to fight at the front, you cannot afford to do many mistakes and for whoever is at the top and was at the top in the past for many years, usually has a high level and there's a lot of effort going into it, not just putting everything together at the track but also away from the track. Yeah, without making it longer than it already is, it is a lot of work and sometimes it gets appreciated, other times less but ultimately it's about yourself.

Q: (Luis Vasconcelos – Formula Press) The first two editions of this Grand Prix were very different. One was very tame, almost dull, and last year we had a crashfest, so what can we expect from tomorrow's race, especially with the weather conditions getting even worse with more wind?

SV: I don't have a crystal ball so I don't know. The thing nowadays, that I don't like, is that people tend to judge our sport straightaway based on one race. After Australia we had 'catastrophe, these cars blah blah blah.' I mean yes, it might have been a boring race but also it's down to many things: the track, the race, whatever. Then we had, I think, an entertaining race in Bahrain and in China. Maybe tomorrow's boring, maybe it's exciting. I don't know. Maybe it rains. Who knows? In the end, that's why we go racing so that we will find out, I guess.

LH: Yeah, hopefully it will be fun and hopefully challenging. If you look at the GP2 (F2) race, there were lots of safety cars as there were last year. I really have no idea what's in store for us but I know it's going to be exciting and I just hope that we're there in the mix, fighting with them.

VB: Yeah, I think it's going to be a good race, because we have such a tight field this year and on a track like this, where we have a massive long straight and there's the possibility for overtaking so at least we try to make it exciting with Lewis and battling for the win.

Q: (Ralf Bach – Autobild Motosport) Seb, it's obvious that the guys next to you want to make the next undercut tomorrow. Will you be prepared for it?

SV: Well, I think certainly what happened in China, we didn't like it but I think we have a good team looking after this sort of stuff. I think we will see how the start goes, how the first stint goes but certainly we are aware that this is a long lap here and the undercut power is probably there. Equally it's tough, I guess, to make the tyres work straight away for everyone. I think what there was to learn from China we learned and we should be fine tomorrow.

Ends