



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

Press Information

2013 Bahrain Grand Prix Thursday Press Conference Transcript 18.04.2013

DRIVERS – Charles PIC (Caterham), Jean-Eric VERGNE (Toro Rosso), Paul DI RESTA (Force India), Pastor MALDONADO (Williams), Felipe MASSA (Ferrari), Jenson BUTTON (McLaren)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Jenson, before we get on to this weekend in Bahrain, a general question for you. We've seen lots of variety this season, lots of overtaking, 10 different drivers have led a race and you're one of them but the fans seem a bit divided on what we're seeing, whether it's good or whether it's bad. Now you're the most experienced driver on the grid, so what's your take on the action so far?

Jenson BUTTON: Wow, that's question! I haven't watched the races to be fair, as we've been travelling around so much. So I haven't seen what's on the screen. Maybe it's the commentary that's the problem.

Quite possibly, but as a driver competing in them, what's your take? Is this racing as you want it or can you not push or do you have to save fuel or tyres or whatever?

JB: Yeah, we have to do all that, but I think there's been a lot of overtaking. You know, we're never going to be happy with everything in this sport or in any sport but I think the racing has been good fun. I was on the receiving end of most of it at the last race, because obviously doing less stops you're running old tyres most of the time, so there's people overtaking you most of the time. So it's not the enjoyable part of it for me, but I think if you were doing a three-stop strategy at the last race it was a fun race. They seemed like they were able to push pretty hard. In the past we had tyres that would last the whole race and there wasn't any overtaking. It's very difficult to get the correct balance. But we're having two or three stops which I think is what the idea was for racing in 2013 so that's good and there are a lot of teams fighting at the front. I think Formula One's great at the moment. I'm really enjoying racing. As I say, I haven't watched a race but from what I see around me it looks good to watch.

What are us commentators going to be saying about you and McLaren for this weekend? A continuation of the progress you've been making or...

JB: I hope you say something different because it's getting a bit boring. It's all about tyres when you talk!

Well, give us something different to say then.

JB: No, I think it's been a difficult start to the season, as we all know. The first race was stand-out bad for us. Since then we've made a lot of improvements and I think we understand the car a lot more. Here, it's a very different circuit to Shanghai. It's very front

limited in Shanghai. Here it's rear limited – tyres. Last year it was a really tricky race to look after those tyres. Not sure if it's going to be the same case this year but we will see. We'll know a lot more at the end of practice, P3, and we can tell you a little bit more in qualifying.

Felipe, let's move on to you. Jenson's talked about this circuit. It's a circuit you've won on before. You've enjoyed success here. So what's the secret to a good lap here at Sakhir.

Felipe MASSA: The secret is secret!

Spill the beans.

FM: I don't know to be honest. It's a track I like to drive, since the first race, which I don't remember when it was, I was with Sauber – 2005 or 2005? It's a nice track. It's a track that has a lot of long straights, heavy braking, traction. I don't know, I just like it.

So I imagine that you come here with a fair amount of confidence, certainly different to last year. Your form seems to have improved immeasurably on this time in 2012. What's made the difference for you, the car, the tyres - what?

FM: Yeah, I think since the middle of last year we understood a lot more how to work with the tyres, how to work with the car, to improve the car, the set-up. I'm sure how we started this year was much more in a good way. I'm very comfortable in the car and I think when you are comfortable you drive automatically. So you can do the better job you can on the car. This is the job we did last year. For sure it's a different car, many things are different but I think the working is in the right direction.

Pastor, how comfortable is life for you in the Williams team at the moment?

Pastor MALDONADO: At the moment we are living hard moments, especially this start to the season has been very hard for us. But working very hard. The spirit is quite high in the team, we are working together as friends, as family, as a real team. We really hope to improve our performance quite soon and hopefully we will be there fighting for good places.

Does that improve come this weekend or is Spain more realistic?

PM: I think we need some time. We've been working hard as I mentioned before but we need some time. The problems we have got are quite big and yeah hopefully step by step we're going to get there.

Is that frustrating for you as a driver – maybe having to overdrive the performance of the car, putting more pressure on you?

PM: Yeah for sure. Sometimes you don't feel very happy, because this is the real situation in the team. But this is racing, you know. Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's not and we need to do our best when it's like that to try to improve, to try to survive.

Let's turn to Paul now. An interesting afternoon for you in China. A first-lap collision with your team-mate but a points finish in the end. Have you and Adrian had a chat since Shanghai?

Paul DI RESTA: Of course we've had the chat. It wasn't ideal but towards the end of the grand prix we managed to show the speed of the car. We were a bit locked because we were lost track position and I think our strategy was key on track position but I think looking back you can see how strong it was and the rewards was an eighth-place finish. We'll come into here hopefully with high confidence given our performance and how it was in Malaysia as well.

Q: It was a top-six finish here for you last year and the team are very confident that once again Bahrain could be a good track. Why necessarily is that? And do you agree: is top six possible?

PdR: Well, you're never going to say never. Last year was a bit of a key race for us. We tried the two-stop strategy which worked right down to the last corner and I think ran out of tyres and came under extreme pressure at the end. It would obviously be nice to repeat that but you're not going to say that on a Thursday going into a grand prix, given that tyres are the topic. But we'll manage our weekend as best we can and ultimately the end of the grand prix is what makes the difference and that's the key to this weekend because if we score points I think we can say it's a successful start to the campaign before we go to the European season when people start to bring upgrades and don't lose position out of that.

Q: A good weekend in China for Toro Rosso, Jean-Eric, not necessarily for yourself and once again qualifying didn't go quite the way you hoped. What is it about Saturdays that seem to be quite a struggle for you?

Jean-Eric VERGNE: Well last season it was a problem for me though I think I did improve from the middle of the season to the end. I don't think this year I've had so many problems on Saturday. At least with myself: in Shanghai I did get a problem, something wrong on the car, so that was the reason.

Q: The Toro Rosso car seems to have potential, seems to have pace. If you can unlock it, then is another weekend like the team had in China possible here in Bahrain?

J-EV: Everything is possible! Last year Daniel did P6 in qualifying. The pace he had in qualifying in Shanghai shows we've made a step forward in the race, even though I had a big hole in my floor, I had the same pace as him who finished seventh, so you know everything is really encouraging and hopefully for this weekend we can, I mean once more at least for my car, get everything correct and be in the front. So, two cars in the front would be possible and that will be the target.

Q: Charles, an interesting development at Caterham this week. Heikki Kovalainen comes back as a Friday driver to the team. Do you welcome his return and his input that he can give yourself and Giedo?

Charles PIC: Yes, of course I welcome him. I think it's always good to have his advice, he's got a lot of experience so I'm sure he can give us some interesting feedback.

Q: Something that the team feel is desperately needed at the moment? Some experience just to see how good or how bad the car actually is.

CP: I think on the first three races for sure we are not happy with where we are at the moment and updates are coming for this race... so it will be quite interesting to see how reacts the car here. Then we need to progress here of course.

Q: And these upgrades you feel will help you take the fight to Marussia? You should be on level terms with them?

CP: Yes, of course. It's always really hard to tell what will do the upgrades before running them but normally they should bring something and our job will be to try to optimise the car around them this weekend and get out one hundred percent of speed on Saturday and Sunday.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Kate Walker – Girl Racer) Charles, a question for you carrying on with the Heikki stuff, we spoke to him earlier and he said that one of the things he'd been told to look out for was balance problems with the car. Have you had the opportunity to talk

to him about any struggles you've had with the car or would you prefer he went in blind and delivered his feedback that way?

CP: No, I didn't speak to him for the moment. I think what will be interesting is tomorrow when he will drive the car because as I said, he's got a lot of experience and he will be able to bring his experience and also knows the team for three years. I think it's always good to take, and then after we have to be focussed also on the race, to make a good weekend.

Q: (Dan Knutson – Auto Action / National Speedsport News) A question for Felipe: by now you're very used to having a world champion as a team-mate. Describe to us the challenges, the pressures and the satisfaction of working with and competing against a guy who's the champion and therefore one of the best in the world.

FM: Yeah, I think for sure I had most of my career a strong team-mate. I think many people say it's not good to have but I think it's positive. You always need to do the best you can and if you don't do the perfect job you know you're going to be behind. And I think in terms of experience you learn a lot by working with a good team-mate, a strong driver. I think to be honest, for maybe most of you guys or many people around the world is maybe everybody's talking about him as the best driver, y'know? So, you know you have a lot to do, you have a very important job and I think that's good. You're always under pressure because you need to be perfect everyday. But I think, I like... think it's nice, I think it's important and we always need to grow, we always need to get better and better and that's still what I'm trying to do all the time.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – O Estado de Sao Paulo) Felipe, at the beginning of the last race you were fighting with Alonso for second place. Then after the pit stop, with the medium tyres, you suffered a lot. You said you had graining. What's the origin of this graining – the way you drive, the set up you chose? Could it be predicted during free practice?

FM: Well, for sure I had a big problem with graining in the last race, with the medium tyres. It was something that I was already having at the beginning of practice on Friday. It was a little bit less graining on Friday, but I had it anyway and for sure, the track gets better up to Sunday. I had a lot more grip at the rear of the car so the graining was even more in the race. I started the race concentrating very much on not over-using the front tyres, because of the graining, but then the graining started and I was not pushing because I was trying not to use the front tyres. I lost the second stint because of that. And in the third stint I had the graining and I started to push and I cleaned the front tyres and then the car started to be very quick after a while. So for sure the direction I took - saving the fronts - was completely wrong. I suppose to push a little bit harder with also a bit of traffic in the second stint and very concentrated not use the front and that was wrong. The third stint and the second last stint was not as much of a problem as the second stint but in the second stint I lost many positions, I lost a lot of time to these guys in front and I lost the opportunity to fight with them. For sure, it's something that we understand and it shouldn't happen again.

Q: (Khodr Rawi - F1Arab.com) Jenson, do you think the big chance for you to score big points at the moment is to take a gamble on strategy in qualifying and the race until the pace of the car improves?

JB: Yes, I think we've been improving since the first race. Every race we have made improvements and I think maybe these circuits suit the car a little bit more, in terms of where we have to put the car in terms of set-up. But to finish fifth at the last race and to beat some very quick cars, I think to do that we had to try something different. We beat every single car on the grid, at least one of the drivers, which is positive I think. P5 is not where we want to be, but I think we have to take a lot from last weekend and yes, we had to try a different strategy, we had to try and do a two stop. We felt that it was the quickest

way for us to the end of the race but it was very tricky to make it work because of the stint lengths that you needed. If you didn't make the stint length you dropped into a three stop race. By that point, you're pretty much out of the points so we had to make it work. A lot went into the strategy and trying to understand what we have to do with tyres and the lap time we have to do. It was a tricky weekend but in the end a good result I think we should be very happy with. And here, yeah, I think we have to wait and see. It's tough on tyres round here, it's hot, it's tough on the cars in terms of cooling so we have to see first of all what downforce people are running and how the degradation is, to see what we do with the car. Here, I think it's probably more likely that everyone's going to be running the same sort of strategy but we have to wait and see.

Q: Pastor and Paul, as drivers, as top drivers, do you enjoy the challenge of prolonging a stint, of driving on tyres that have less grip? It's a difficult way but it can be rewarding as Jenson said.

PM: Yeah, I think everyone is trying to make the tyres live for longer. For sure, that can change your final result in the race, because you can play with the strategy. At the moment, it seems to be that more or less all the teams are quite close on their strategies but this is only the beginning of the season. We saw the same in the past. We need a couple of races to learn the tyres more and it should be more or less like last year. For sure, this year the tyres are more sensitive, they are going away quite quickly but it's the same for everyone.

Q: It's something that you've had to deal with a lot, Paul, not just here but throughout much of last season.

PdiR: I see it as a very positive thing in the position that we are as a team, midfield, where Jenson's fighting at the moment. Obviously we're trying to take it to them, but being unpredictable gives you chances. Equally, when you see the big guys at the front, putting a load through the tyres in qualifying, it plays into our hands towards the end of stints. At the end of a Grand Prix, that's valuable points for us and if you can take a gamble and it pays off, like the position we were in last year, we definitely didn't have a car that deserved to be sixth but we got ourselves to do that and went away with some very big success. That leads momentum into other Grands Prix.

Q: (Andrea Cremonesi – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Felipe, tyres this year seem more important than ever, maybe as important as 2011. In this race, Pirelli has decided to change their option tyre from the soft to the medium. On the hard, you had problems in Malaysia. Could you tell us how the car feels on the hard and if you feel a little penalised by Pirelli's decision?

FM: Yeah, I think maybe you're going to see a race strategy which can be very important for the race as we've seen in most of the races up to now. It will be no different here. But I didn't have problems with the hard tyres in Malaysia. The only problem I had was that the degradation was similar to the medium, not just for me but for most of the teams. I think that's a little problem of the tyres. I think you need to choose the right difference, from one compound to the other, and I think that's the only... so I'm sure here the difference will be big on the tyres, from medium to hard, even though the degradation may be similar. Many people try to use the medium tyres as much as possible. I think here it's a track that is very hot so let's try to do a good strategy as well.

Q: (Michael Casey - AP) Paul, have you had a sit-down with your teammate and worked out the differences after last weekend's race? And even despite all the problems, with the finish you had, what does that mean for the season? It's got to give you more momentum.

PdiR: I already said, of course there were discussions, there were opinions, but I believe it's sorted. To take the positives from it, we obviously scored good points in China. Malaysia was a big miss for us. We went into that race with the unknown had we fixed the pit stop issue and the wheelnuts that we had? I believe that was probably the strongest

Grand Prix until now in terms of the performance, so I think that's why we're fairly optimistic, hopefully that we can do something this weekend, back in the heat. Our car seems to work very well with that and I think as a baseline goes, the consistency I think is the key to how we develop the car, and how we're going to progress this year. Certainly going away with points this weekend is the target, but essentially, I think we need to get ourselves a bit more up the grid in qualifying, because that gives you the track position and that's what hampered our race at the last Grand Prix.

Q: Would you say the discussions were amicable?

PdiR: It's always amicable, it always is.

Q: (Abhishek Takle – Middy) To all of you: with the nature of the tyres changing from year to year and given how crucial they are today, how much do you have to alter your natural way of driving or your driving style to get the best out of them?

J-EV: The driving style between qualifying and the race is different. We all know the tyres don't last very long and you need to be very careful with how you accelerate, how you are in the high speed corners. You have to try and manage them as well as possible, the tyre energy and therefore you need to change your driving style quite a lot.

Q: Felipe, you've been driving for a while. Is it difficult to change your driving style after so many years in the sport, or is there something that you have to do in the simulator which helps you to achieve that?

FM: Well, I think Formula One is something that you have to learn year-by-year, it's part of the school that we have in Formula One every year. Rules change, things change. You need to learn how to drive the car with the tyres so you need to learn how to save the tyres. As Jenson said at the beginning, from a driving point of view, for sure sometimes the situation is not easy for us to race, to save the tyres, and as he said 'I was on a two stop, people were overtaking me very easily' but it was the right strategy that he did anyway so sometimes our life is a little bit difficult. When you are at home, watching the race, I think the race is very nice to see now. It's a nice race to see and it's much nicer in comparison to the past. So I think many people actually complain about what Pirelli is doing but I think they're going in a good direction for the sport and I think what the formula is to choose the right difference between all the tyres, super soft, soft, medium and hard. I think that's one of the little things where we have to work in a better direction but I think the races are very nice to watch. You don't just need to think about ourselves, we need to think about everything. I think it's really important to learn how to drive and save the tyres and everything.

Q: Charles, what's happening with you towards the rear of the field? Are you working on trying to preserve your tyres, the fact that you have to move off the racing line a bit more than Jenson or Felipe, does that hamper your race more?

CP: I think on the tyre side, first of all you have to try to understand from where will come the degradation, because it's not always the same problem on each track. And then afterwards, you have to choose the best compromise between your car's set-up and your driving, to extract the best performance from them. And afterwards, in our position, we normally have quite clear first and second stints and then the last stint we get some blue flags, so what is important is try to not lose time.

Q: (Kate Walker – Girl Racer) Back on the tyres, we've heard over the last weeks Pirelli possibly bringing an additional set of tyres for teams running a young driver on a Friday morning; they're going to be pretty similar but more durable. Do you guys support this initiative, to help develop your cars but also to help bring up young drivers, or do you think it will just complicate matters too much?

PM: It's always difficult with this tyre story, because we don't have enough tyres to do many tests. The test plan is very restricted, especially during P1, in which all the teams normally run only one set of prime tyres. An extra set of tyres would surely help the teams

like us at this time, where we are having some problems with the car. You have to do many different tests.

Q: Jenson, McLaren don't usually run a Friday driver. With an extra set of tyres, a bit more useage of the track during that hour and a half, would it be beneficial to the team?

JB: I don't think you'll see many of the big teams having a third driver drive the car on Friday but I think it's a good idea to have extra sets for your drivers, yes. I think it's very difficult for young drivers to have mileage in a Formula One car. They need to bring a lot of money, it seems, to have the opportunity, but now that they have extra tyres, it could actually be useful for the middle of the grid teams and lower to have a third driver for more mileage, more information. There are quite a few test drivers who will sit around and watch Friday, Saturday, Sunday every other weekend. They don't get to drive the car, so I think it's good for them and for the future of the sport it's important that youngsters are actually getting the chance to drive an F1 car and to experience a Grand Prix weekend properly rather than just watching what happens.

Q: How beneficial would it have been for Red Bull's young drivers at Toro Rosso, Jean-Eric, and when it does happen this season, how good will it be for Toro Rosso?

J-EV: It would have been good when I remember my case a year ago. I was pretty happy to get some miles on the Friday in the Toro Rosso. I think it's really good experience, as Jenson just said. First of all we need to bring a lot of money, we had the chance to be in the Red Bull programme and we get the opportunity to drive, but it's never enough. It's definitely a good thing.

Ends