



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

Press Information

2013 Hungarian Grand Prix Friday Press Conference Transcript 26.07.2013

TEAM REPRESENTATIVES – Cyril ABITEBOUL (Caterham), John BOOTH (Marussia), Toto WOLFF (Mercedes), Claire WILLIAMS (Williams), Franz TOST (Toro Rosso)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Good afternoon everyone. Cyril, can I start with you? In a way it's been a quiet season for you so far, there doesn't seem to have been any forward movement. What's been going on behind the scenes?

Cyril ABITEBOUL: Come to the factory and you'll see that a lot is happening! We're continuing with our plan. We said quite early that we would have a bit of a particular season because we started with a hybrid car, which was based mainly on last year's car and obviously we have been carrying on with that programme, so we have seen new upgrades almost every race since Bahrain. That is quite aggressive, I have to say, maybe a bit ambitious also, because we also keep an eye on 2014. Sometimes what we are bringing is working and is delivering. Sometimes it's not working exactly as we want. Also as we are a young team we have to learn about controlling so many upgrades and that maybe some things, thinking about it... maybe we are sometimes a bit too audacious in what we are bringing on track. But we are coping with it, that's exciting, that's also keeping the motivation high in the garage and at the factory, which is always a challenge when you are at the back of the grid.

There has been some doubt, maybe completely fictional, about Giedo van der Garde's seat within the team. Heikki Kovalainen has been mentioned. One wonders whether Alexander Rossi will ever get a seat for the United States Grand Prix. Can you tell us the situation there amongst with your drivers?

CA: This is the first time I'm answering this. I think the situation is quite straightforward. Apart from the fact that we have young drivers in the seats and a reserve driver who is more experienced, I think our structure is quite clear. Having said that, it's true that the two drivers we have are two young drivers, one has a bit more experience than the other. One has some challenges with tyres, obviously Giedo, and we have to see how the changes to the tyres this weekend are affecting him but also how the upgrades to the car are affecting his challenge. But just like everyone, he's being challenged, just like I am challenged on a daily basis by our shareholder. So like everyone, he has to deliver but he has no particular pressure, no more pressure than any other driver on the grid.

John if I can come to you. Interesting announcement that you are going to be using the Ferrari powerplant in the future. It must, first of all, be a big investment to use that but at the same time a saving as well as you have all the transmission too?

John BOOTH: It's a saving on effort. We're very happy with our position with Scuderia Ferrari. It too a long time negotiating but very happy for the whole team to announce it a couple of weeks ago.

Where does that fit, first of all, with Jules Bianchi, because of course he's a Ferrari young driver and secondly, with McLaren, with whom you have a partnership.

JB: First of all, with Jules, he is a Ferrari young driver but the two deals are totally separate. The powertrain deal has no bearing on Jules' future at all.

And with McLaren?

JB: Two totally separate contracts. Ferrari's contract is purely powertrain and then the other one with our other partners McLaren covers separate areas altogether.

So it will work quite well?

JB: Yes, no problems.

Toto, we're half way through the season now, what marks out of ten would you give the team's performance in the first half of the season and what can you still achieve in 2013?

Toto WOLFF: Well, I think the team has made a great step forward from the second half of last season. If you would have told us we're going to score two wins and a couple of pole positions, we would have taken it, so the score would have been an eight probably.

So what can still be achieved?

TW: Obviously we have many challenges to overcome. Our car is still a bit of a difficult one in hot conditions, what we are going to expect here on Sunday. This is something we must analyse, also in terms of making it work next year.

The way the driver pairing has worked with Lewis Hamilton and Nico Rosberg has surprised quite a few people. What's it like to work with them? It was amusing to hear Lewis saying here yesterday that Nico's considerably more competitive than he was when they were in karting together.

TW: It's great, because we have a really good team spirit. Although they are very competitive with each other, they know each other for a long time. They have two completely different ways of working and being competitive, driving the car, analysing. Within the team we have just a great contentment working with the two of them.

Claire, coming to you: interesting new re-organisation on the technical side. Can you give us some background as to why it happened and how it came about?

Claire WILLIAMS: I think it's been obvious to everybody that the performance of the team hasn't been where we wanted. At the end of 2012 we thought we'd made a step forward with our performance that clearly when we came to Australia this year that wasn't the case. In order to move forward and to get to where we want to be we needed to make changes on the technical side of the business. We needed to make those changes and obviously Pat Symonds coming on board as our new chief technical officer is part of that step but it's only the first of a number of good news announcement we'll be announcing in the near term.

Q: What does that mean for next year's car? Has that already been started, does Pat go straight onto that?

CW: No, Pat will divide his time between trying to make improvements to this year's car but then working on the 2014 car as well.

Q: So this year's car will still be developed?

CW: It will be. We're Williams – we wouldn't stop developing a car mid-way through the season.

Q: Franz, first of all, testing performance at Silverstone: what was your feeling about that?

Franz TOST: Good. We had, I must say, two very good days with Ricciardo and with Sainz in the car. The third day we struggled a little bit because we had a hydraulic problem and therefore we lost two hours but I must say also Kvyat did a good job and generally speaking the young drivers from Red Bull were surprising fast and I think they were high-skilled and will have a successful future.

Q: What's your feeling for next year with your drivers? Are you being prepared to lose one of them?

FT: We will see. It's not decided yet from Red Bull but we must not forget Dietrich Mateschitz and Red Bull bought Minardi in those days to give young drivers from the Red Bull driver pool a chance to come into Formula One. Toro Rosso is the team to educate young drivers and I see it as positive because it shows that a) drivers are skilled and b) that the team has done so far a good job – and therefore if they choose Daniel I am quite happy with this decision.

Q: And will you look outside the young driver programme to replace him or strictly-speaking within the young driver programme?

FT: We will see. We will discuss together with Red Bull. If there is a driver from the Red Bull driver pool of course we will take him. And if this is not the case then we will look outside. Currently I think there are some skilled drivers within the Red Bull driver pool.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Joe Saward – Grand Prix Special) Question about the number of races and which races we're going to have next year. Does anybody want more than 20 and which races present the biggest challenges for a team? And as a back-up to that, is the German Grand Prix important to you all?

JB: Any more than 20 would be very difficult for a small team to service. We would start drifting into the area of having to have back-up crews, to rotate staff – and that obviously becomes very expensive. German Grand Prix? All European races are very important. I think it's where grands prix were born and we need to maintain them as long as possible. Most difficult one... no difference really!

Toto...?

TW: I think there is a consensus about doing 20 races and, like John said, anything more and you need to ramp-up the organisation. So, let's stick to 20 – I think it's a good number. Most difficult one for us is the hottest – so I hope not Hungary this weekend.

The German Grand Prix?

TW: Obviously that's our home grand prix, so ultra-important.

Claire?

CW: I don't really have a huge amount to add except that 20 races for any team is a lot of races for team personnel to have to go to and manage. To make it any greater than that would be, as John said, a significant difference for everybody. Germany clearly is a very important race for us, in particular next year when we have our partnership with Mercedes starting.

Franz?

FT: I'm happy with as many races as Bernie can organise because we are a race team. If it's 22 it's 22: if it's 24 it's 24. I'm happy to go everywhere. Germany is very important. Nürburgring of course because of the history but also the Hockenheimring. I think these are the classic races which we need in Europe. It's one race in Germany, Monaco, Silverstone, Monza, Austria of course – which is a new race on the calendar next year – we need to have more races in Europe, not just to go overseas.

Cyril?

CA: I tend to agree with Franz. If you look at other models, other series, in particular in North America, you see that the number of races is almost irrelevant. I think we need to know what is the right model between exclusivity – making our show a bit exclusive so that we do not saturate an audience about Formula One – and making sure we are here for a sufficient period of time. And then I guess the economics can be done in such a manner that every outfit can cope with that. I guess it would mean proper preparation and in that respect it would be good to know for the time being, to start with, to get some confirmation about the calendar for next year before talking about expanding. In that respect I think more notice, more lead-time in the preparation would be welcome to know where they are. I think Germany, I would agree is important. When it comes to a challenge, the biggest challenge for us is when we hit a new track and when in particular the conditions on a Friday are totally different to the conditions on a Sunday. Everyone has to deal with the same issues, except that our simulator – which is now a very important element of the team's preparation – may not be as developed as other teams. Therefore familiarisation on the Friday is particularly important for us.

Q: (Dan Knutson – National Speedsport News/Auto Action) To all of you: there's always talk about cost-cutting in Formula One. Compared to a couple of years ago, have your operating costs gone up or down?

FT: There is no cost-cutting in Formula One. Formula One is expensive, we all know that. Next year we will have an increase of – I don't know – 15, 20 million and that's reality. This is the reason why, as I said before, the more races we do, the more income we have. We have to show a good entertainment, that sponsors are interested in Formula One and we have to go all over the world to different countries which are important for our sponsors and therefore I think that real cost cutting will not happen as we all discuss all the time. Formula One was expensive and Formula One will always stay expensive.

CW: I think cost control is the most important thing, isn't it. But then we're looking at an escalation in engine costs next year which, for a team like Williams is always difficult but we've always found a budget which we need to go racing. Our costs over the past couple of seasons at least, have remained relatively stable but obviously those are escalating next year but it's our responsibility to ensure that we find the budget that we need in order to keep us racing at a competitive level.

TW: You know we can't close ourselves out from the real world and it's pretty tough out there at the moment so on one side we want to be competitive and successful

on track because this is the reason why we're here but on the other side there is an economical reality which we must respect. So for us at Mercedes it's all about being efficient, about not spending money where it's not necessary but staying competitive – or being competitive.

JB: Our costs have increased year on year but that's mainly due to us being a very young and very small team that has a planned expansion programme for every year. That's the main reason for our cost increases.

CA: Yeah, the same thing obviously. I tend to believe that it's going to be extremely... it's human nature to spend whatever people have to spend so I guess that limiting expense is difficult. I think the only time that Formula One did a fairly good job limiting costs was by putting some cap on engine costs and also limiting the number of engines used so I think it's only by policing the product that is on the track, therefore the car, that you will have a more direct influence on the overall costs, rather than looking at what's happening in the factory. That's my belief.

Q: (Abhishek Tackle – Midday) Franz, Christian Horner seems to have ruled out Jean-Eric Vergne for the Red Bull seat, so what can you tell us about his future at Toro Rosso, because Christian Horner says that he still deserves to be in Formula One. Will the ultimate decision on his future rest with Dr Helmut Marko?

FT: I'm convinced that Jean-Eric Vergne will race next year for Toro Rosso. We must not forget that Jean-Eric came later into Formula One (than Daniel) and why Red Bull Racing is thinking about racing with Daniel Ricciardo next year, it's simply because he is more experienced, he showed very good performance in the first half of the season but Jean-Eric Vergne is quite close to him. It's not that Jean-Eric is out of the team. As far as I'm thinking, next year he is with Toro Rosso.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – The Citizen) I don't know who can answer this question but we spoke about the future of the German Grand Prix, I believe at 1pm there was a meeting with Mr Ecclestone about the future of another Grand Prix, namely the Indian Grand Prix which has certain tax issues. Earlier this week, Sochi announced their date for the 19th of October next year and I have spoken to representatives here who have confirmed the date. What is the future of the Indian Grand Prix and why could it possibly fall away, please?

JB: It was a private meeting so it's not for public discussion. As far as I'm aware, the Indian Grand Prix is on the schedule and we'll be going.

TW: Well, I think you know that the calendar is in the hands of the promoter and we have a great promoter, so wherever we need to go, we will go.

Q: (Joe Saward – Grand Prix Special) Franz said something about reality; is the reality sensible and is reality sustainable in regard to the budgets of Formula One?

FT: As long as the cars are on the starting grid, as long as we are racing, this is the reality of Formula One, yeah? Nevertheless, we should think how we could come down with the costs but if I look at next year, what has been decided is we get a new power unit package, which is more expensive than the current one and we've brought back testing, which costs even more money. That means we are discussing different directions. The most efficient cost-cutting was from 2009, 2010 when we said 'OK, we don't do any more testing' and when the engines were frozen, no development on this side, that meant that engine costs came down and during the last years everything was quite stable. But next year, I'm worried about the costs because they are simply running away.

CW: It's my job to get the money into the team so it always worries me when I'm looking at an escalation in costs and as I said in my answer before, whether it's sensible and whether it's sustainable, this is a sport that we race in and as someone said earlier, it's an expensive sport but as Toto said, we have to be mindful of the outside world as well. I think my biggest concern is the disparity between budgets of teams and I think that in order to have a level playing field in Formula One, in order to remain competitive in Formula One, there has to be some kind of control over costs so that we are actually operating on a fair and even platform in this sport, rather than having some teams racing with a 50 million pound budget compared to teams racing with a 250 million pound budget or 200 million pound budget and I think that that's one of the biggest issues we have facing us at the moment.

Q: Toto, it might be said that you're one of the wealthier teams out there.

TW: Well, I'm not sure but Franz always said it very clearly and directly; there is a bunch of new regulations kicking in next year and we have to look carefully at all the steps and decisions we are making because we cannot allow costs to escalate. This is very important for us as well. And then on the other side what we are seeing is the team environment is very difficult but as Claire said, it's about getting the money in and finding the sponsorship and at the moment, I have the feeling that it is getting a little bit better and we must not forget that Formula One is the number one sport platform in the world. We are going international with all the new races coming in so I am nevertheless very optimistic.

JB: It's a tough environment out there at the moment but I very much agree with Claire. If you have teams operating with a budget delta of maybe 200 million, what does it do for the sport? It doesn't make it any more attractive so I think there needs to be a way of keeping costs under control and a more equal distribution of revenue.

CA: I'm not so worried about costs, I am more worried about performance and I think that one can affect the other, obviously. The only thing that we need to make sure is that there is the question about distribution and cost control and level playing fields but I think we need to make sure that Formula One as a whole is properly valued so we are not living above our standards. Like any household, we are making sure not to spend more than we receive, generally. Then there is the question of distribution which is something different and it is true that there are some studies that demonstrate that as a sport we tend to be struggling in comparison to other sports like the NBA, like NFL which do not have the sort of costs that we have. We are highly technological, we are driven by innovation, we need to be manufacturing I don't know how many composite parts per year. So I think maybe we need to put the efficiency of the business at the foreground of performance. It may not be the case by now.

Q: (Zolt Godina – Best of Radio) Toto, next season will be your last as a partner of the McLaren team; will you have any difficulties in terms of the working relationship between the two parties?

TW: No, I think both organisations are very professional and of course it's sad losing a customer who has been with Mercedes for so many years and a very successful partnership but I have no doubt that it will be handled in a very professional way from McLaren as well.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – The Citizen) Toto, following on from what you said earlier on about new regulations coming in and costs and whatever else, if one looks in the back of *Autosport* one regularly sees one team advertising enormously for staff, full page adverts week in, week out. How much are you ramping up

the operation? Will you still be able to remain within the resource restriction agreement or are you that far below that at the moment you can afford all these extra people?

TW: You know, I think if you look quite carefully at *Autosport* we are not the only ones advertising there. This is the number one or one of the good publications in the UK for hiring staff and whether it's in *Autosport* or any other platform, I think this is just a normal process. There is a certain fluctuation in personnel and also at Mercedes we are very interesting in getting and keeping the best possible people. Obviously you much watch how RRA is affecting the operation.

Ends