



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L' AUTOMOBILE

2018 FIA Formula One World Championship

French Grand Prix

Saturday Post-Qualifying Press Conference Transcript

23.06.2018

DRIVERS

1 – Lewis HAMILTON (Mercedes)

2 – Valtteri BOTTAS (Mercedes)

3 – Sebastian VETTEL (Ferrari)

TRACK INTERVIEWS

(Conducted by Jean Alesi and Franck Montagny)

Jean ALESI: Lewis, your 75th pole position today. It was a good one?

Lewis HAMILTON: Yeah, it wasn't too bad. *Impeccable*.

JA: And the weather?

LH: The weather has been OK. It was much better obviously earlier in the week, but qualifying is always tough. Q3 has not been spectacular. Q1 and Q2 were good but then Q3 was so-so.

Franck MONTAGNY: How does it feel to get the first pole position here in France?

LH: It feels great to be back in France, such a beautiful place. We've got a great response from the crowd here and really excited to come to the first grand prix here at Paul Ricard for a long, long time and to be at the front is a great showing of the hard work from all the guys at my team.

JA: So Valtteri, how it was for you, the last lap?

Valtteri BOTTAS: It was not a bad lap, but not perfect either. I've been struggling to get perfect laps this weekend and missed pretty much all of FP2 and we didn't do any running in FP3, so I was kind of catching up run by run, but yeah, a one-two for us is perfect.

FM: Valtteri it looks like you had a massive advantage here in qualifying, especially with the new engine. Is that right?

VB: It feels good, the new engine. It feels very fresh and powerful, and the team has done an amazing job on that, and hopefully tomorrow we can also prove that is good.

JA: Sebastian, it was a tricky lap, very complicated. We have seen the car, sliding a lot.

Sebastian VETTEL: Yeah, it's a difficult one to get the right balance. I tried to push everything in the last attempt, but looking back I pushed too hard. You try to a little bit too much here and there and then you lose the tyre, the car and then it slides, you lose the line and you end up losing time rather than gaining. After the first attempt I saw that we are maybe there, so with a really amazing lap I maybe have a chance but it didn't come. In the end I'm happy, because the car should be good in the race, but yeah, it was a good session though.

FM: What is the feeling here to have the Ferrari car, you're going to start on the second row, with all the French people here, it's the first time we get back in France?

SV: Yeah, it's crazy. I think I raced in the last French Grand Prix. It's amazing to see so many people, the excitement, obviously the weather today was a bit *comme ci, comme ça*, but it's amazing – so much support, so many fans for Ferrari as well and I think for all of us it's nice to be here. Normally here this place is a bit grey but now there is a lot of colour, a lot of people and it really comes alive and for tomorrow I think we have a good chance.

PRESS CONFERENCE

Q: Lewis, your third pole position of the season in what looked like a tricky session, just talk us through your final lap?

LH: It was a good qualifying session. I think the team have done a great job throughout the weekend. I think we have all pulled together and done a great job in putting the car where we need it, for both Valtteri and I. The session was pretty straightforward, it was a really simple session to be honest. I think Q1 and Q2 were particularly good and then Q3 was OK. It could always be better. But really, really happy to have the pole. It's something we have been working on for so long. And the pressure is, as you know, you can see how close it is between us all. It's really, really great to have this result, and a one-two. Our bosses are here watching us, so I think it's a good showing for Mercedes and the team.

Q: Congratulations. Valtteri, the final lap you pulled out had you on pole position, at least for a few seconds before Lewis crossed the line. Did you think you had done enough with that lap to take pole?

VB: I wasn't quite sure, you know. When you know Lewis has still to finish his lap you can never be sure. Lewis did again a great job in the qualifying and I think for me missing a bit of track time in FP2 and with limited running for everyone in FP3 it felt like during the qualifying I was catching up all the time and I was finding the gains run by run. In the end it was decent, still not quite perfect but enough to put us on the first run. And like Lewis said, it's been an amazing job what the team has been doing with the car, with single upgrade we put on the car this weekend making the car better, including the engine of course.

Q: Congratulations. Seb: third place today. We saw in your final run a little bit of an error where you ran wide. Did you think pole position was on offer?

SV: I didn't know. For us, qualifying started a bit slow; obviously with the conditions it was a little bit tricky. Starting slow meaning it got better throughout the qualifying and yeah, I was confident I could improve a little bit for the final attempt. But already at the beginning I tried to push hard and probably pushed a little bit too much so I lost a little and yeah, then you're playing catch-up. I just didn't get a great feeling closing the lap. It wasn't as strong as the lap before. It was also slower. I thought that there was a tenth or maybe a tenth and a half, maybe enough to pip Valtteri, but obviously both of them improved. I think we can be happy with third. For tomorrow I think we have a good car. Yesterday looked really good, we have a little bit different strategy on tyres, so let's see.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) – A question for Lewis and Valtteri. Guys after the delayed introduction of the upgraded Mercedes engine in Canada, how much of a relief was to have that engine here and how much difference do you think it made today?

LH: As I said in the conference the other day, I didn't feel relief. I was getting a new engine either way. The gains are... nowadays... how many years have we had this V6? The gains, the upgrades you get now are usually so small, I didn't really... I'm very happy with the work that everyone has done, but that's not the whole, entire reason we are here on the front row, so I don't feel any relief at all.

VB: I think we definitely needed it. It's going to be a close season ahead, so I'm glad we could have it in this race. Obviously it would have helped us in Montreal, but we are here now and now we are in the first row, so for sure that's good.

Q: (Frederic Ferret – L'Equipe) Question to Lewis and Seb. What are your thoughts on Charles' qualification today?

SV: He was eighth? So... I saw only on the screen that Fréd Vasseur was pretty happy, so I thought one of his drivers did well in Q2. I didn't see in Q3 but obviously eighth is an impressive result. I think they are still quite a long way behind with the car so I think for him, he's doing the job. It's good for him and good for Sauber as well, to be up there. And hopefully for them they have some chance to score points tomorrow.

Lewis, you've praised Charles before. Your impressions of 8th place?

LH: Yeah, I just saw before I went out that he was... I think he was in the top ten going into Q3, I think. So... which was very, very impressive to see. Particularly with the all the pressures you could see. There's a lot of pressure for him, being here in the South of France, so yeah, really, really good. Really happy for him – particularly in that car, which is... yeah, he's doing a great job with what he has and probably delivering more, which is what you would hope from a good driver.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – Globoesporte.com) Sebastian, last time you used this tyre, 0.4mm, you did one pitstop extra. For sure you have more in hand with the car after the test of Barcelona. Same question to Mercedes, can it help the team in the race condition?

SV: Well, I think for tomorrow, it's not Barcelona, the track's not easy on tyres but we saw yesterday that we had pretty good long runs and no problems with the tyres, so yeah. Obviously we also start on a different set, so I don't wish for an extra stop, compared to the others. The pitlane is quite long here. But we'll see. First we focus on the start and then we see the true pace in the race but it should be good for us. Tyres... then we see, obviously in Barcelona Mercedes was very strong, so couldn't go with them – but for here I hope it's going to be different.

There's a question there for the Mercedes drivers as well. Do you believe the tyre strategy will help you guys tomorrow in the race?

VB: We obviously believe that is the optimal for our car. That's why we decided to qualify on the supersoft – but that's something we're going to find out tomorrow because obviously it's a very limited data on the long runs. Temperature are going to be cooler than they were in Practice 2. So, we'll find out.

Q: (Christian Menath – Motorsport-magazin.com) We've seen in the first attempt the two Mercedes drivers lost quite a lot of time in the last sector compared to Vettel. Did you any problems there in the last sector? Do you think this is due to a different setup? What do you three think of it?

LH: I got a bit of traffic with Grosjean, that's all.

VB: I had a lock-up in Turn 12, lost quite a bit of time.

Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Sebastian, just looking at the recovery you and Ferrari have made from yesterday, it's been a bit of a trait for you guys this season. I know you can't give away secrets, can you give us an indicator of how much has changed on the car and how different the car has been in your hands today from yesterday?

SV: Maybe I had a bit of a slow start as well yesterday. Obviously the track's... we've been here but then there's so many options to use, so maybe I was a bit slow to get in the rhythm but I thought by the long run it was a lot better. Car-wise, I know we didn't change too much but, for sure, the things that we changed, they helped. Not dramatic, this I can tell you – but it was good to have the support from the factory. They were obviously looking into it, trying to get everything out for qualifying, and for the setup mainly. I think we were relying on the help from the simulator. Antonio Giovinazzi and, yesterday, Daniil Kvyat was here and helping us, so those two, thanks to them as well. Yeah, I don't know why it is Friday we seem to be a bit off and then Saturday a lot better – but it's obviously better that way than the other way around.

Q: (Bart van Dooijeweert – NU.nl) Question for all of you. We've seen a lot of cars struggling in Turn Six today and yesterday. What's so difficult about that corner?

SV: I went wide on the last run. I think you have the sequence three, four, five before. So, it's quite tricky, then, by the time you arrive for six, obviously, there's not much straight between five and six – but the tyres are quite hot, the car is quite light and you know there's a lot of time to gain if you can get a little bit early on the throttle, because after that there's a long straight. I think that's what we all try but it doesn't always work. You then try to work around the kerbs as well to balance the car – but it doesn't always work. That's why I think it's quite tricky. Today, I think going in we had some tailwind – which doesn't help either. Going out, then it gets better but... yeah, I think the other way would be easier. A bit more help initially.

Lewis, any trouble with Turn Six this weekend?

LH: I did the same. That's exactly how I would answer it. Same with my last run. I went wide as well, so, that's where I lost a lot of time.

And Valtteri, how have you found Turn Six here?

VB: Tricky! Yes, definitely. Like them. Like for everyone.

Q: (Frederic Ferret – L'Equipe) How would you rate the track if it's wet tomorrow for the race? Will it be difficult, slippery?

LH: It's always difficult in the rain. I've not driven it in the rain so it would be as difficult as you could probably imagine. I don't know what the lines are, I've not driven it in the rain so... You saw how much standing water there was today, so I think it would be pretty tough for us all.

VB: Yes, I did some wet tyre testing here but obviously very different layout but yes, standing water can be an issue if it's raining like today but I think the grip level is actually quite OK, so just the standing water.

SV: Same. I did a test three years ago but different layout. I think the new asphalt makes it a bit trickier, the water doesn't have any place to go so it sits on the track which is obviously limiting us from running. I guess the reason why we didn't run this morning was because of that, or I know the reason why we didn't run was because of that. And usually when the asphalt is new and there's a lot of sunshine and then it rains, you saw this morning as well, it's like shampoo or I don't know, some foam or... yeah, it can get quite slippery, part of the oil is then released or something but I don't know, we forecasted FP3 to be dry and it wasn't, so let's see. I'm not trusting the forecast for tomorrow. I think we'll look at the grid, what it's like and see what we do.

Q: (Louis Dekker – NOS) On television, you see a lot of red and blue lines, sometimes there's a little car in between. Are you already used to the visuals, the layout of the circuit? Or does it still distract you?

VB: No, it's definitely very clear in my mind how the track is and I'm not looking elsewhere than where I'm supposed to go. I think the first run here was just a little bit like seeing all the different bits of track and getting used to that but I think after that, after the first run it was fine.

Q: Lewis, any difficulty for you here picking up the track layout with all the different options?

LH: No.

SV: Well, I think for us it's not so much the lines of the track because if you go onto the track and if you walk the track and you go on your knees... we are sitting quite low, that's what I want to say, so we don't actually see so much of the lines, the colours, the blue and the red. I think the more difficult thing is that there's no reference. Normally you have everything a bit closer to the track, a little bit more elevation and things but I think by now everybody's used to it.

Ends