



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L' AUTOMOBILE

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Friday Press Conference Transcript

TEAM REPRESENTATIVES – Cyril ABITEBOUL (Renault), Monisha KALTENBORN (Sauber), Robert FERNLEY (Force India), Franz TOST (Toro Rosso), Guenther STEINER (Haas)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Cyril, clearly you've made a lot of progress with your power unit over the winter, but it hasn't all been plain sailing. Can you give us an insight into where it still needs a little bit of work and when you expect to have some solutions in place?

Cyril ABITEBOUL: Well, I think it's fair to say we had a pretty good 2016 season from a power unit perspective, but we've made a bit of a brave decision to actually re-start from scratch again, because frankly in Formula One if you don't move forward you just die. So we had no choice but to accept to take some risks by, again, starting with a whole new architecture, which we had to do from a performance perspective and we saw that a bit of short-term pain for a longer-term gain. So we are in that period of a bit of pain because we have some weakness related to the, I would say, the health of that power unit, but which on the positive sign is really delivering good promise and good results from a performance perspective. So there is much more to come but that will only come when the reliability is here and that will come in the very soon future.

Can you be a bit more specific about when that's going to come. When can we expect you to be firing on all cylinders effectively?

CA: We don't want to go too much into the specifics, because when you start to give planning, everyone is now expecting and in particular we have very demanding customers and they are right to be demanding customers, but we want to continue to control our destiny and our programme. What I can say is that we are making sure reliability is under control and is as transparent as possible for the customer teams. We will have some fixes in the next few races and there will be some performance upgrades with the introduction. But the problem is that with the new regulations, with fewer power units used during the season, obviously you need to sync up the performance, reliability upgrades and the introduction of new power units.

There was a recent meeting in Paris to discuss the future engine regulations in Formula One. What can you tell us about that meeting? How productive was it?

CA: It was a good meeting. It was a productive meeting, very functional, chaired by the FIA in Place de la Concorde, but with the attendance of current engine manufacturers, plus a number of people interested in becoming engine manufacturers in the future, plus

also to get an answer of Ross – Ross Brawn. So it was good, a good meeting which has allowed us to share the diagnosis of the current engine regulation, what we think it was good, what we think is less good and what could be done in order to improve, and the associated process and timing. So I don't think it's my duty to communicate upon the result of that meeting. But in general, I believe, and that's good, that it is a positive sign for where Formula One is going which is in my opinion is a bit more constructive and forward looking than it has been recently.

Monisha, that was some debut by Antonio Giovinazzi in Melbourne. How impressed were you?

Monisha KALTENBORN: Well, we were all very impressed, considering how quickly it happened. When we came to Melbourne with Pascal, there was no indication at all that we'd end up in this situation, because Pascal, being a very ambitious driver, really wanted to driver but when he realized he does have a responsibility to the team and if he is not 100 per cent fit he really needs to say that. We more or less overnight had to make this call and then to see Antonio, who drove the first test for us in Barcelona for, but that's of course not in any way comparable with the car, what it is now, he still came in there, did a great session, did a good race, no major issues or dramas, so we're very impressed by him.

What can you tell us about Pascal's condition and when will he be back?

MK: Well, from a medical perspective he was declared fine to race, already at the tests. The rest is a question of his fitness to the extent that he wants to be able to deliver 100 per cent during the entire race. We've heard also now in between from doctors and all that, it is very challenging for the drivers. We heard that from the drivers themselves. He's working flat out on his fitness. It is very difficult to say, because the body is not that logical or analytical in its development, on what day it's going to be there but his target and our target is to have him as soon as possible in the car, ideally at the next race, but if not, it will be the next one. But clear is that he is our second driver and that's not going to change.

We've just heard from Cyril about the engine meeting that took place in Paris last week. As a privateer team, in what direction would you like to see the engine regulations go?

MK: Well, for a private team it's extremely important for the costs to come down again. We had reached with the earlier engines a point where we were talking about \$8m engines and it was meant to be coming down further and now we just went the totally opposite way. So we want them to come down to an affordable level. But more importantly there should be a certain parity amongst the powertrains. We wouldn't want that the engine should be the main denominator or differentiator in performance. So what's very important is the parity and the costs.

Q: Bob, coming on to you, the team was fourth last year, first of the privateers teams, if you like. Can you give us some insight into how difficult it has been to prepare for these new rules in 2017.

Robert FERNLEY: Well it's not actually been hugely different than normal. We obviously look at the following year's car very early on anyway. We had a very clear development programme for the '16 car which the technical team delivered perfectly and, obviously, resulted with the fourth place – but we were also well ahead for the '17 car. So I think, obviously there is a significant cost involved, simply because there is no carryover in the new regulations but like everything it's an interesting challenge. We're starting with a clean sheet of paper and you'd like to think that your technical team can build a car that can do exactly the same again.

Q: You've already raced this year's car once. There's quite a large gap from you to the front, how do you assess the pecking order at the minute?

RF: I don't think there's any question or doubt about that. You've got the three top teams that are spending significantly more than the rest of the field and I think that's the difference.

Q: Is fourth in the Constructors' Championship a realistic goal for you guys this year?

RF: Absolutely. Absolutely. I think we'll be fighting, it will be very tough because there's some very good competition around but that's probably going to be one of the most exciting positions that's going to be fought over for the whole season.

Q: Guenther. Melbourne. Positives and negatives for the team. How do you reflect on that race.

Guenther STEINER: The positives, for sure you try to think on the positives but then the negatives always come up. I think qualifying with Romain qualifying sixth on good speed, no luck or nothing, that was good. Kevin wasn't so good because he struggled in all the practice sessions with one problem or another and he just wasn't delivered but after qualifying we were pretty happy and pretty positive and then in the race we had the failure, the water leak and the turbo failure consequentially, and you go home empty-handed. You go away knowing that the car is there. We just need now always to get always the potential fulfilled and the potential out of the car in each race track. So, I think in the end it's positive, even with a little bit of a sour taste.

Q: It's a very tight midfield this year. Do you think the team has the development capacity to keep at the front of it?

GS: I don't know. I don't know what the other people are planning to do. It's always trying to shoot a moving target here. So, I think I know what we are going to do. We are going to introduce developments. We have a good plan in place but I don't know if the others have a better plan or if their updates are better. That I don't know. Looking back in the past, I think our quantity and what we want to do is equal to the other midfield teams. For sure it's nothing compared with the big three but let's hope the quality we bring to the race track in development and updates is to be in the race with them.

Q: Franz, great start for the team in Melbourne. How much of a surprise was it to get both cars in the points given your lack of reliability during winter testing.

Franz TOST: Winter testing we were suffering a little bit in the first test with reliability issues but fortunately we could sort out most of the topics for the second test already. Therefore I was not so surprised by our performance – but of course it was good to have two cars in Q3 and then at the finish with both cars in the points. This is always a good start.

Q: You've got the most experienced driver line-up in the team's history, you've got a stable technical team. What do you think you can achieve this year?

FT: The target is the fifth place in the Constructors' Championship – but as my friends here around, they have nearly the same target and we will see. I think that we have a very competitive package, we have a very good car, we have to experienced drivers and the team is also making progress, we have also some development steps during the year and it will become a hard fight between Renault, Force India, Haas and ourselves.

Q: Do you think you can challenge Red Bull Racing?

FT: No. Red Bull Racing is not our target. Red Bull Racing is in another league. I am happy if we challenge successfully the teams which I just before mentioned.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Jia Hui Huang – Guangdong Television & Radio sports channel) To all of you. Someone says listening to F1 drivers is wrong, it's bad for F1 racing. As we've seen in the first race the drivers are happy because they can push harder – but the fans are not. They are not satisfied. It's boring. No overtaking. Standard one stop. What do you think. F1 should listen to who?

GS: I don't fully agree with the comments, that the new cars are boring and everything negative. I'd rather see the glass half-full than half-empty. I think the race in Melbourne was by no means boring, in my opinion. We had a different winner than last year. I think that the fight between Ferrari and Mercedes and Red Bull will be very close. We have got an interesting midfield, there will be fights, the overtaking was not very good but I would not jump to a conclusion yet that this will be the whole year. Like this, it looks like it's difficult but other elements will come in to overtake, so I wouldn't say that all the fans are negative about it. There's a lot of enthusiastic people out there that think the new cars are good – so I'm pretty... I don't see it like this.

Franz, do you have anything to add?

FT: I agree with Guenther. For me, the race in Melbourne was quite an interesting race because it was a close race. There were many cars within a few tenths of a second and the overtaking manoeuvres in Melbourne are always difficult, it was always in the past the case. We must wait now the first three races to get a clearer picture – but the cars are looking much better, much more aggressive and I think the direction was OK. The rest we will see during the season.

Cyril, anything to add?

CA: No, nothing much to add. I believe it's a little bit too early to judge. We need to give a chance to the product. It's an interesting formula in many aspects. I think strategy will play a different role, qualifying will play a different role. You will have in this new formula to execute everything perfectly well, so I think it puts the onus on the teams here at track to make sure you get also to the right setup, so everything is perfectly executed. It's a different challenge, an interested challenge, certainly it is to live from inside. Obviously we also need to care about the fan out there, so answering your question about who we should listen to. We should also listen to the fans – but that's one of the things I believe Liberty and FOM in its new format, which is also to look at surveys, trying to understand what the fan really wants. Not think for the fan but listen to the fan for themselves.

Bob?

RF: From our side, sitting on the pitwall, we had two drivers that did two incredible overtaking manoeuvres. Certainly it got my attention on both occasions. I think they were exceptional manoeuvres and, from a strategy point of view it's actually quite interesting because it's brought a new dynamic into it. We now have both the undercut and the overcut process and I think it's going to be one of those things that's going to prove very interesting as we move into the year.

Monisha, anything to add?

MK: Well, it's all been said. You have to wait and see. It's just the first race, it's a very unique race and that's always been the case. When these rules were brought in, we all knew what the negative sides would be and that the positives side was mainly to have more attractive cars, and I do think most of the fans actually like that. So we've achieved

one target. And the other issues are to do overall with the competition. We should just take it from here and try to find other things, other rules that we can also target more at the other issues you raise. It's an ongoing process but I think it's kicked off very positively.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) To the four independents or privateer teams and then a separate follow-up to Cyril. Could you see yourselves, given that there's no clear guarantee of engine parity going forward regardless of regulation changes, could you see yourselves clear to retaining the current engine formula provided the price is dropped? And then to Cyril, given that the manufacturers have spent most of the money already on this particular engine formula, does it really make sense to consider dumping it just when it's on the cusp of being reliable and highly competitive?

MK: Well, as a private team, we understand that from the engine manufacturer's perspective you have to represent certain technologies and that doesn't go against our businesses or our business models as such. Where it's gone terribly wrong is on the costs. We certainly want a movement that is irrespective of the technology which is being used. The other aspect we - like all other teams, irrespective of if you're private or not - have to consider is what it's done to the show and that's where a lot of criticism is coming from - all the discussions around the sound - and so as a private team, these are more important issues to us and we have to find a balance overall that what is necessary for manufacturers to stay in there, what do they want to showcase in here... but it has to be making the competition a good one, so that we all actually have certain chances in there; it has to be affordable and the fans should like it, because at the end of the day we're doing this for the fans.

GS: I think, on the cost, sometimes what we were thinking is that the engine which is developed now it's never finished being developed but it's at a good level, so I think the cost should come down or you freeze the engine. Sometimes, keeping something you know - and like it was done with the V8s, to freeze the engine spec - that would make it cheaper, if we go for the cheap and a very high technology. So now, jumping to a potentially cheap version of some kind of engine, but starting development from new, could be more expensive than keeping this engine with the high technology just to freeze or to reduce investment, so that's another idea which needs to be discussed, between the engine manufacturers, but I'm sure they will come up with some ideas and that will be one of the things I guess somebody will come up with, if we keep this. The technology in this engine is amazing for everybody involved in engines, this is an amazing technology, so now we go backwards and maybe invest more money to develop something which is actually not as sophisticated as this. So I think it needs to be evaluated as well, if maybe from a certain point on. All their engines are the same, we freeze the engine like we did with the V8s, that would be a possibility. But again, in the engine group, we as independents have not got a lot of influence so we can just voice our opinion outside of the group and say maybe that's an option. So I hope they weigh up that option as well because I don't know, just to go to a potentially cheaper engine, if that's the right way, and reduce the technology. As Monisha said, there may be an issue with the noise but it will never be perfect whatever we do so there is some give and take and maybe we could live with that.

RF: I think there is a little bit of work which could perhaps be done to address some of the issues, particularly the noise and simplify the base technology, but I think I agree with everybody else. I think that the principle of the current engine shouldn't just be abandoned, a lot of work has gone into it but I think it could be simplified a little bit. I think a lot of the things that we're doing perhaps go beyond what even the most sophisticated of fans is understanding, so we could come back a little bit, get the cost right, obviously get the power and the noise right and move forward but you don't have to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

FT: I nearly agree with what's been said so far. For me the pillar for the new engine is the parity – there must be a chance that there is parity between the different manufacturers because without it they can't contribute anything to the show and they do something. It cannot be that some cars are far ahead. We will see now what's going on during the rest of the season. The second pillar is the costs. The current engine is simply far too expensive. From the technology side, it's a fantastic engine, it's extraordinary technology but it's therefore also very very expensive. And the third point is the noise; we need to bring in some music and these are the criterias and I think, regarding the parity and the costs, this is now in the hands of the people who make the regulations and if the development is restricted from the beginning onwards with very strong regulations then I think we will achieve the goals with the parity and the costs and the sound, it should be able to find a solution that the fans are happy with, the music of this new engine.

Q: So let's get the view of a manufacturer now? Cyril?

CA: I feel a bit under the spotlight. I think one thing is that we cannot be stubborn, or we cannot be deaf to what obviously we've been constantly hearing since we introduced those new engine regulations. I think fundamentally there were very good things introduced with that new engine formula. With the previous V8s, we believe that clearly Formula One had lost contact with the direction that automotive was taking so something had to be done. Maybe we've been a step too far, we've been a bit moving from something that was a bit too old-fashioned to something that is maybe too modern, too complex, too sophisticated, too expensive. We need to be a bit careful about solutions that seem to be easy like freezing current engines because if we freeze the current engine we will freeze something that is extremely expensive and costs will not go down. Development costs for manufacturers may go down but supply costs to the teams will not go down simply because the bill for material of the engine is extremely expensive because of its sophistication. So I think that again that it seems there is a common view about the diagnosis of the current regulations and what we would need in order to build from there, without starting again from scratch, over and over again, but I think the devil will be in the detail and it's not going to be that easy to find a solution that satisfies everyone and achieves everything, so I think it will be about prioritising and that's where I hope that the new process in partnership between the FIA and FOM with Ross Brawn – who has a fantastic understanding of all the complexity involved – will provide a good leadership for the discussion. I think everyone agrees that there should be some element of electrification. We don't necessarily see some road relevance or contribution to the show to an element like MGU-H, so that this orientation for the future, I think the whole debate would be on the architecture of the internal combustion engine which will be an interesting debate and some things that I guess will keep us busy for the next few months.

Q: What would you like to see, how many cylinders?

CA: There is what I like and there is what we need. I don't think that Formula One can afford to turn its back on some things that are relevant to the manufacturer, given the current business model of Formula One. Formula One could completely change to a different business model and go for something that is really different and not road-relevant but that would be a brave manoeuvre. As far as I'm concerned, I started with the sound of the V10 and that's something that I will never forget obviously, but that's just me. The new generation, the generation that we need to attract - because it's not just about the current fans of Formula One, we also need to think about the fans that we do not have – those fans have never heard the sound of a V10 and maybe for those fans, getting back to a V10 or V8, is not so relevant. So it's a complex debate and an interesting debate and I hope it's going to be done in a constructive and also documented manner and again that's where I believe all the surveys that are going on, all that will also go on in the course of this year will be instructive for the direction that we need to take.

Ends