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Press Information

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PART ONE: TEAM REPRESENTATIVES – Christian HORNER (Red Bull Racing), Cyril ABITEBOUL (Renault), Guenther STEINER (Haas)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Cyril, it seems that in terms of patterns of performance, Nico generally qualifies well but finishes behind his qualifying position – couple of exceptions to that but in general that has been the picture – whereas for Jolyon the opposite is the case. Can you shed any light on that?

Cyril ABITEBOUL: Well, I think indeed we started the season with generally a good pace on Saturday that we were not managing to convert on Sunday. So at this point in time and as we were waiting for some big developments that came further into the season we sort of trade some quali performance for some race performance by playing mainly with set-ups – by playing mainly with set-ups, stiffness and so on and so forth – which we did, which we achieved, which delivered some points. Then at some point, in Silverstone, we managed to bring that big development I was referring to. So that pattern that you are referring that you sort of underperform on Sunday compared to Saturday is not so true anymore. We will have to see here if that pattern, if that step that we made in performance both on Saturday and on Sunday in Silverstone and as confirmed in Budapest, which are two very different tracks, is confirmed here or not. When it comes to driver difference, no I can't... I think that indeed, Jo doesn't necessarily have the sort of pace as Nico on Saturday. Clearly, Nico is an amazing qualifier. Maybe he is one of the best of the grid. It doesn't always... it's not always visible because he didn't maybe have the car to demonstrate that but it is really amazing what he's capable of doing and Jo maybe doesn't have that pace on Saturday but was managing to extract more from the car on Sunday. We'll see. The short answer to your question is that the car is improving. The car is now fourth in terms of pace after the top three teams, which is clearly where we wanted to be at this point of the season. Obviously the championship position is slightly different so that's what we need to focus on.

Comprehensive answer; thanks very much for that. On Robert Kubica, everything was built up to the Hungary test. Things gained their own momentum; he did well. So what happens next?

CA: What happens next: good question. That was a test. Frankly, we said that we wanted to be extremely methodical and analytic about the way we were approaching things with Robert. It's not a PR exercise; it's not a coup. It's something we are taking very seriously and we are trying to leave the emotion on the side. We don't have all the answers that we potentially wanted to get from that test, after his test. In relation to that, Formula One is very restrictive in terms of tests you can do, so in a perfect world we would want to do more of this type of test to see if he can race again at the level that he and we could have wanted. It may or may not be possible. We will see.

Thank you. Christian, coming to you: performance today, it looked like you were in touch. Last year you were front-row qualifiers and got a podium. Do you think that's possible again this year, and also could you explain why you went for such a radically different selection of tyres for your two drivers compared to Ferrari and Mercedes? It's not usually such a radical difference among the frontrunners?

Christian HORNER: Firstly, today: it's been a relatively sensible day. We've been looking at different set-ups and configurations and fourth and sixth in the second session is reasonably encouraging, particularly at this type of circuit. I'm sure the others have still got a little bit up their sleeves for tomorrow, if it's dry. But hopefully we can consolidate where we are and be competitive on Sunday afternoon. Regarding the tyre choice: you obviously don't see what others are doing before you submit your choice so our engineering team felt that this is the best way to attack the weekend. As we often see, you start off with a different hand of tyres but by the time you've gone through the practice sessions it always seems to converge by the time you get to qualifying anyway. What on paper looks quite racy at the beginning of the weekend, by the time you've gone through the practice sessions tends to even itself out. I think by the time we end up in qualifying we won't be too far out of kilter and obviously we quite like the ultrasoft tyre.

Clearly. Can we explore what Red Bull's attitude now is to the young driver programme. You've produced some great drivers over the last decade – world champions, race winners – but it's not so easy to see where the next candidates for Formula One apprenticeship are coming from. In the meantime, your rivals such as Mercedes, McLaren and Ferrari have stepped up on that side and all have exciting candidates on the doorstep ready to go. Is it still a priority for you and Red Bull?

CH: Very much so. We still have Pierre Gasly, who won his first last weekend in Japan. We have Nico Kari in GP3, we have Dan Ticktum in Formula Renault and Verschoor and Verhagen. I think there are periods of stellar drivers that seem to come through the sport. For me if I look outside of Formula One at the moment, there seems to be a bit of a gap. There are a couple strong drivers in F2, there are a couple of strong drivers in GP3, but there seems to be a bit of a void. We're going to grass roots, we're looking at karting, we're supporting some youngsters even in karting at the moment. But talents like Max Verstappen or Sebastian Vettel or Daniel Ricciardo don't come along every season.

OK. Guenther, a question to you on drivers as well: you have confirmed both of your current drivers for next year, not taking either of Ferrari's development drivers, Giovinazzi or Leclerc. Can you give us the thinking on that?

Guenther STEINER: Our drivers have got a contract when we signed them. Romain two years ago now, he had a three-year contract and Kevin last year has a two-year contract, so it's quite clear what we are doing. There is no reasoning or nothing behind it. We, at the time, wanted the best drivers available on the market to get as much points as possible and that's why we did it and there is no other reason behind it.

OK, that's the drivers sorted out. When you look ahead to season three, where else do you think you need to strengthen the team personnel in order to move forward?

GS: I think everywhere a little bit. It's not like there's one void [to fill] to grow the team. We are still very small, I think the smallest one, we have got not more than 200 people at the moment. We need to strengthen it everywhere. That's what we are doing. We are now already looking for people for next year because it takes quite a long time to get good people, but we will increase again by 10 or 15 per cent – nothing compared with the big teams, how they grow – but that is what we are doing and that is what we want to continue to do. But we keep on getting... I wouldn't say bigger, we try to get better without getting bigger, which is very difficult, but at least we try to stay efficient because that is where we want to be.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Pierre Van Vliet – F1i.com) A question for Cyril about the Robert Kubica situation. You are telling us that you have some questions with no answers yet. What are they? And after the Budapest test – 142 laps in the heat and the lap times he did – he seems to be ready, no?

CA: Well, obviously we have access to some information that the public, the media don't have access to and I feel that is privy information to the team and Robert and I would not want to speak without his control. But no, you know, there are various things to do to come back into a racing car at this level, a car that is extremely different from the car that he's been driving six or seven years ago, as well the car that he drove in the test that he has done in Le Castellet, which was a car from 2012, much lighter, less downforce. So without going into too much detail, you could see what it could involve to go one step further. The problem, as I said, is we are restricted in our ability to test and to reproduce this test. In addition to that, testing in isolation, private test, one car, in control on the amount, without rain, without the first-lap action you can always encounter. All of that needs to be factored into the decision of pursuing or not pursuing, so as I said I don't want to go further than this, I don't want to create speculation and I don't want to put in the team that the team would have some obligation to go further because there is an interest, a willingness from the public to see Robert back. We would all like Robert to be back, but it has to make sense.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) Guenther, I see from the internet that your sporting director, either former, ex-, present or whatever, Dave O'Neill, has started his own company, together with one of Christian's former employers Kenny Handkammer. Could you confirm that? Is he still with you? Is he leaving? And what are you going to do about replacing him if that is the case?

GS: He's leaving. He's not here but he is coming to a few more races. I don't know about Kenny Handkammer, and Christian I think doesn't know any more. But Dave is leaving because for family reasons he relocated to the United States. I don't know any details about his company but he's free to do that. We have got a good relationship. He helped a lot in bringing us to where we are. But for family reasons he had to relocate to the US and that doesn't work for us. So he will be around for a few more races and then he will be gone.

And a replacement?

GS: Replacement: we have got plans in place and we will announce them when they are ready to be announced.

Q: (Jerome Pugmire – Associated Press) A question for Cyril. Do you have a date in mind when you will take a decision with regard to Robert and can you say when that is?

CA: Deciding on Robert is deciding our line-up the second part of our line-up for next year. It's well reported that Nico has a multi-year contract when Jo has a one-year contract. So obviously we have one driver to decide for next year. So we have also the restrictions I was referring to on Robert and we'll also need to be consistent with the timing of deciding for a second driver and as the market is starting to sort of go, with the different announcements this week of Ferrari and McLaren, and I expect there will be some other announcements at some points, because usually these things do not go in isolation, so we cannot just be sitting on our work and making up our plans and our timing ourselves. It has to follow the timing of all the drivers.

Q: (Louis Dekker - NOS) A question for Christian. The orange army will invade the country again like last year, especially on Sunday. Is it realistic to dream of a Max victory?

CH: Everybody is free to dream, but realism and dreams are sometimes a little bit different. It's fantastic to see the support for a driver that there is here in Spa. It's a sellout crowd, everything is absolutely rammed and to see so much orange around the place for Max is quite phenomenal and obviously last year was quite disappointing for all those fans that turned up when his race was effectively over within 50 or 60 metres and we're hoping that it will last a little bit longer this year.

He's had a lot of bad luck so far this season and where better place for it change but than here at what is effectively his home grand prix.

Q: (Alan Baldwin - Reuters) A question for Cyril about engines. There has been a lot of talk about McLaren talking to Renault about an engine supply, about Toro Rosso talking to Honda. Can you give an update, because it seems that neither of those two avenues have gone very far? And also, how many teams could Renault actually supply engine with next season, because I think Christian said three is the maximum?

CA: Well, the situation is that we have multi-year contracts with Red Bull Racing and Toro Rosso, so frankly we are open to discussions. I can confirm that there has been discussion with McLaren. But as you mentioned at the end, right now there is a restriction in the regulation, if we wanted to supply more than three teams first. And in addition to that, I don't think it would be reasonable to believe that we could supply more than three without degrading the level of service, the quality of the service for the other teams, so we've had discussions. Frankly, again, we have contracts in place. We value the relationship with Red Bull. It's a longstanding relationship and we would like to carry this relationship until it's term in 2020 but if there is something to be done, why not, but right now understand that things are very quiet and certainly we are not necessarily proactively pushing for anything.

Q: (Alan Baldwin - Reuters) It's a rather historical question for Guenther. Amongst all the anniversaries this weekend, it's also the 50th anniversary of the only win in Formula One by an all-American team. I was wondering how much that historic win influenced your team and whether that is something Haas is aware of and pushing to become the next?

CH: Were you aware of it?

GS: No! Thank you for making me aware of it. I didn't know that it was an anniversary but it's good to know. I think it will be a few more years until we get down to that level. It's a lot more difficult than it was 50 years ago. It's different; it's not more difficult. It was difficult at the time; I'm not trying to say it was not difficult. What we will try to do is get an American team on the podium as soon as possible but for a victory I think we are a few years out. But it's always good to know these things and thanks for letting me know.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) Question for Christian, the Toro Rosso-Honda negotiations that apparently happened during the shutdown. I know that you're not directly responsible for Toro Rosso but how would such a deal fit into the overall Red Bull Racing scheme of things?

CH: Well it doesn't really affect Red Bull Racing so whatever engine Toro Rosso takes, the only affect it has is the synergies between the teams in terms of gearboxes and so on. We need to know pretty quickly, within the next couple of weeks, what the scenario is. I think the gentlemen in the next press conference, Zak and Hasegawa, they should be able answer all of your questions in extreme detail.

Q: (Louis Dekker – NOS) Have you got a predictable weather forecast for me for Sunday and, if not, what would you hope?

CA: Forecast, I think the forecast for today was that it would be dry, so it says a lot about the quality and accuracy of forecast in Spa. So otherwise it will be about being capable of reacting and being on the right tyre at the right time.

Christian, presumably you feel you could win in the wet?

CH: Well, we'd love it to absolutely piss down with rain for the whole day but I don't think that's likely to happen. It's going to be usual Spa weather: bring your sunscreen and an umbrella.

GS: I was told two hours ago it will rain for about two minutes but it will dry out quite quickly. So, I'm a little bit with Cyril on that, y'know? Let's see what is happening. Normally I don't hope: we just deal with what is happening. Whatever comes we will deal with it as best we can.

Q: (Ysef Harding – Xiro Xone News) We asked drivers what their preparations were during the holiday, and getting ready for the second half of the season. So what did you all do to prepare yourself for the second half of the season during the holiday?

CH: Well, obviously training hard, like my drivers, dieting, all the usual stuff... no, in all seriousness, it was an important time to have a bit of time out with family, for them to remember who you are. I think it's a good thing within the Formula One calendar to have that time out. Not so much for us but for the mechanics and all the people in the backroom that work such incredibly long and hard hours. So to have that period of time as a bit of downtime, to spend time with family and friends, is very important. The only exciting thing that happened to me was getting stung by a jellyfish.

Cyril, any jellyfish in your summer?

CA: No, no-no. Sleeping a lot. All that Christian said is absolutely accurate. Time with friends and family. Sleeping, because I personally do not get enough of that and in addition to that I think it's important to come back with this willingness of being back racing again. We've got a long calendar and sometimes your motivation is sort of fading away with what the sport is demanding in terms of energy. So it's good to be back and being willing to go for it for that second half.

Guenther?

GS: Same for me. I stayed with my family and I can just say what Christian said. It's good for all the mechanics which work far harder than we do, to be honest. So for them to have some time off, to spend some time with family, and just do some things that I don't get to do during the season because I am sitting a lot in aeroplanes. I stayed in Europe. Happy to be back.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) Cyril, could you confirm that your team coordinator has resigned recently and is it coincidental that that position is resigned at the same time Haas has a new position in a similar capacity?

CA: You're talking about Geoff? Our racing coordinator. Yes, I can confirm that – and we may or may not be making some announcements in relation to him. Geoff was, and is, an important person at Enstone. Because not just Renault, Lotus, Enstone Benetton before if I go in reverse order. Geoff has been part of the Enstone family, so we have to prepare a big farewell party, even though he's not going... he may or may not be going very far. But I can confirm the first part of the move at least.

Q: (Graham Harris – Motorsport Monday) To all three of you, Chase Carey has recently said that he's looking at increasing the number of races each year. Possibly up to as many as 25. Now, the number of weekends available between March and November is limited: would you be prepared a) to agree to that type of number and b) we'd be seeing a lot more back-to-backs and even triples – would it not be a better idea to perhaps lengthen the season, start earlier and perhaps end first week in December.

CH: Look at next year's calendar, we've got a triple header this time next year followed by a double-header with a weekend gap in between, so already the calendar is... my feeling, at saturation point. 21 races is, I think, the absolute limit. To go beyond that, I think we're pushing teams, we are pushing engineers, we're pushing travelling staff too far. So then you're going to end up in rotational shifts. As soon as you do that then the costs will become exponential with it because you'll end up with a much bigger workforce to accommodate that. And it will be expensive. Of course ultimately anything is possible but it comes at a price – and to increase to that amount would be significant. I'd far rather look at the venues we've got and pick... y'know if there are ones that aren't coming up to scratch at the moment, replace them with better ones and have the competition to be in a tighter championship than going to 25 races. That's pretty much every other weekend during the year. At some point you reach saturation.

Guenther?

GS: I think it's a fine line here. If it makes economical sense for Chase how to do this, I think it can be done. To answer the question, should the season be longer or should there be more back-to-backs, I think it will be both of them because you cannot get it in otherwise. Otherwise you have just back-to-backs and that is almost not possible, and also there are other ways to accommodate 25 races. Maybe shorten the weekends, shorten the time we setup our garages and stuff like this. Control that a little bit more. Again, in the moment, Chase is saying it but there is not the fact that it is 25 races and he never came back to the Strategy Group proposing this in a way, as you just say it. He said he likes to do it – but I think Chase, before doing it, will come back to the Strategy Group and get real answers of actually what teams can do and cannot do. He's not going to go ahead and organise something which we then cannot do – because then he hasn't got a show. I think it's a plan but I think there are more than one way to do it, and one way would be to not do it, one way would be to make a longer season, shorter race weekends, shorter events. But first of all he must come back. What happens if it costs money for us and there is no revenue coming back in. Why should we be willing to do it.

Cyril?

CA: It think all has been said by Christian and Guenther. I think it's all about quality over quantity and I would focus on quality rather than quantity. I think we need races that are absolutely iconic, huge races, something that is really, really big and create the expectation of seeing those races. If you look back in the history of Formula One, you didn't need to have that many races in order to have Formula One popular, and in not even more popular than it is today. So that will be my answer, in addition to the economic factor which should not be underestimated with the cost to Formula One and all the teams travelling.

Q: (Joe Saward – Auto Week) On the subject of saturation, do you think that more races is something that the public actually want – or do you think they're happy with what they've got now?

GS: I think you will get different views on that but in general I think it's a 50-50. Some people want more races, some are happy with it, some want less. I think it's quite equally split, and the good thing with a lot of races is that you can decide not to watch them – if you don't have them, you cannot decide to watch them because they are not there. So, in the end it's a little bit like 'what is saturation'? That's my opinion about it.

Christian, is there a risk that if people watching sometimes they might stop watching all together, do you think?

CH: I can't even remember what happened earlier in the season, let alone if we go up to 25 races. It's like any good book. There's so many chapters that make up a good book and not all the chapters are going to be exciting and riveting – but you do reach a point where you can overfill it and I think that, as Cyril was saying earlier. Pick the premium events, pick big events, promote them, make them fantastic and go for quality over quantity would certainly be our preference.

CA: I would only add that we need to be careful. We will never reach the number of events like American sport, NASCAR, or even NBA. It's hundreds of games, so we may move from 21 to 25 but it's not going to hugely impact on the profile of Formula One. It's still on a limited number of weekends. I don't think we should work on quantity. We should focus on quality.

Q: (Luigi Perna – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Question for Guenther Steiner. We recently read in an interview to F1.com from Gene Haas that he will confirm your actual driver line-up for 2018. That means the Danish Magnussen and the French Romain Grosjean – but you recently also tested the Italian Antonio Giovinazzi of Ferrari and last year Charles Leclerc that is another young driver of Ferrari. Do you see a chance for them in the next future? In the short term, I mean.

GS: Next year it was made pretty clear also from me that in '18 we are set with our drivers. In '19 we don't know and we haven't talked about it. Yes, we they tested for us both. Charles and Antonio. Charles last year and Antonio this year, and he will do more FP1's this year, Antonio – but there is no decision taken for '19. There is no plan. What we know is Antonio will do another six FP1s this year and that's about it and then we need to see again what we do next year.

Q: (Jerome Pugmire – AP) Just to follow up on the 25 races for all three of you. You spoke about costs and putting the quality before the quantity but what about the drivers? Do you think they could handle 25 races or would they not want to? It seems a lot.

CA: I can't see why not but like any sportsman there is a time for recover but it doesn't look to me that they are particularly struggling when there is a back-to-back. 21 or 25 isn't going to make a huge difference – but, as always, I think that every single individual working in Formula One needs to have some form of huge motivation in order to be racing and providing the best in terms of sporting performance or show and so on and so forth. I don't think that if we wereto go too far in terms of figures, that motivation may be impacted. Physically, I don't see any limitation, as far as I can see.

CH: I think as far as the drivers are concerned, most of these guys are in their 20s, early 30s, most of them are paid several million pounds to drive the best cars in the world 21 weekends of the year. It doesn't sound that bad a deal to me. They don't have to go testing any more. So, if you look at the demands on a driver now, compared to where it was ten or 15 years ago, they'd have been leaving here on Sunday to go straight to Jerez to run around there for three days and then on to the next grand prix. So, life as a grand prix driver, compared to what it used to be, is far more focussed on racing, and they get a lot more free time than they would have done, as I say, ten or fifteen years ago.

Anything to add Guenther?

GS: No, I have nothing to add. I think physically it's no problem for the drivers and, as Christian and Cyril said, life is pretty good for them. So, to do four Sundays more, it wouldn't bother them.

PART TWO: TEAM PERSONNEL: Yusuke HASEGAWA (Honda), Franz TOST (Toro Rosso), Zak BROWN (McLaren)

Q: Zak, let's begin with you. Hungary, obviously a strong performance, the best performance of the season so far. How do you feel about the level of that performance that weekend and the steps on the journey back to competitiveness for your team?

Zak BROWN: Hungary was definitely a step forward. Good to see both cars get home in the points. Sixth and tenth isn't exactly what gets McLaren too excited but it was definitely forward progress.

Q: Where are you now on the long-term plans in terms of power units. Obviously we've heard all these stories of various steps along the way from winter testing right through to the summer break. Has anything changed? What can you tell us?

ZB: I think like all racing teams, we're working on our 2018 drivers. We obviously announced Stoffel, which was never in doubt that he was going to continue with us, and we're working on our second driver, some two-time World Champion, and making sure we have the most competitive race car for next year.

Q: Hasegawa-san, coming to you, your side of that story. Obviously Hungary, a step forward, your updated engine here, and also where do you feel it's going, the relationship with McLaren?

Yusuke HASEGAWA: Of course, in Hungary we are very happy. Actually, we are very relieved we get the points. That is performance we are not satisfied with but it is a minimum level of performance we have to achieve, so we are relieved about that. So, still the matter, we need to update our engine performance definitely to convince McLaren as well and to satisfy us.

Q: And the updated engine this weekend, what can you tell us about that? How much more performance is there in Stoffel's car?

YH: OK, it's actually... we had planned to introduce a spec-4 engine here but we failed. Actually we didn't match to the schedule. So that we have a halfway upgrade. We called it 3.5 and 3.6 but I think we can introduce some decent upgrade here but we don't stop the improvement.

Q: You have Franz next to you this afternoon. Is Toro Rosso still a possible contender for a second supply of engines in 2018? Are those talks still live?

YH: I don't think so. We don't have an official conversation about that. So although Mr Yamamoto visited Dr Marko, because we need to discuss about Super Formula, the Japanese formula series, and we have Pierre Gasly the Red Bull young driver, so that we have some communication with him – but other than that the Formula One engine supply, we didn't have an actual conversation.

Q: Franz, just picking up on that, as far as you're concerned, that was never really something that was in the offing; you're sticking with what you've got: Renault engines going forward.

Franz TOST: No, Hasegawa-san has just answered that there has never an official negotiation or talks between Honda and Toro Rosso.

Q: We spoke to Christian in the first part of this press conference about your Red Bull Young Driver programme – obviously it's been tremendously successful over the years but he was saying there's no real hot prospects. You've got some young drivers in the pipeline but it's just that sometimes there's plenty of good drivers and sometimes there aren't. I just wanted to know what your perspective was on what's been achieved if you like and whether there's still that same enthusiasm on the Red Bull side, when you consider that McLaren, Ferrari, Mercedes have all got some very hot prospects on the threshold of Formula One now?

FT: I think Red Bull is in a fantastic situation because there are four drivers who are able to win races which they've showed in the past: Daniel Ricciardo, Max Verstappen, Carlos Sainz and Daniil Kvyat and there's the reigning Formula Two champion, Pierre Gasly who is in the pipeline, who is also very successful in Japan. That means this infrastructure which Red Bull has built up is so successful and why should they change anything? You should also take into consideration that something can happen at Red Bull Racing – an accident and so on – and they can just take a driver from Toro Rosso and this is why Toro Rosso is educating drivers for Red Bull. Young drivers are coming but it takes another two or three years maybe until we can discuss to bring them into Formula One and I think that Red Bull is really in a fantastic position with the driver line-up.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Graham Harris – Motorsport Monday, Motorsport Week.com) Franz, Carlos Sainz is going to be spending his fourth year next year in Toro Rosso if we take Christian's comments in Austria that they've activated his contract for next year. This will be the first time that a driver has actually spent a fourth season in the team. Who will be sitting next to him? Have you decided? Will it be Daniil next year as well or would you be evaluating that later in the season?

FT: We will see. As I just mentioned before, Red Bull is in a fantastic situation. Why should they dismiss these highly skilled drivers? Red Bull has financed all the careers so far of Carlos Sainz and now he is ready to win races if he has a proper car so why give him to another team, to an opponent or whatever? And Daniil Kvyat was this year a little bit unlucky because many times we couldn't provide him with a reliable and fast car and I'm convinced that once he gets this car that he will show his talent, because he did it already in the past. He won the GP3 championship before he came to us. He finished on the podium at Red Bull Racing in China and he can race and he has the ability to be successful and as I mentioned before, Pierre Gasly is in the pipelines, which means Red Bull is really in a very strong position and there's no necessity to change something, but we will see. The driver line-up will be decided by Red Bull in the next months.

Q: (Abhishek Takle – Midday) To Zak and Hasegawa-san: firstly, the upgrades that you introduced this weekend, have they delivered as promised, and secondly, it's been reported that Honda has been working with Ilmor and has discovered some good gains on the power unit front. Hasegawa-san, firstly, can you confirm that you're working with Ilmor and Zak, couldn't Ilmor's involvement convince McLaren to stick with Honda for the future?

YH: First of all, about the performance upgrade, it is very difficult to compare the previous engine to this engine because this is a completely different circuit but from the data point of view, we see some good upgrade of the performance here.

And regarding Ilmor consultancy, we do not disclose any partner of a consultancy or a supplier or any partnership. But we don't deny about any kind of consultancy or partnership from outside. We have many partners in the development.

ZB: A good question was what do we think about Ilmor. As Hasegawa-san said, it's really up to Honda to discuss what their activities are. All I would say is that Ilmor as an organisation that has worked with McLaren in the past and is very successful and very good at what they do.

I wouldn't think we've been satisfied all year but I think Hasegawa-san's not been satisfied with how things have gone so we have seen some improvements here at Spa, not to the level we'd hoped for but some improvement nonetheless.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) Zak, bearing in mind what the other two gentlemen said about there being no official discussions between Honda and Toro Rosso although there were talks at high echelons, I believe that the McLaren/Honda contract has got some form of veto or approval clause where you've got to approve somebody else which I believe you did with Sauber. Have you been asked to bless some form of Toro Rosso/Honda deal at all? Has that come up?

ZB: We did bless the Sauber arrangement which we were official asked to do and in fact started to get to work on a gearbox. I don't think it's appropriate for me to disclose any conversations we've had. What I would say is we would be very supportive of Honda having a relationship with Toro Rosso and have been asked by Christian if we would be in a position to help with a gearbox if asked, so I think that's about as far as I will go on sharing any conversations.

YH: We didn't ask to start a conversation with Toro Rosso to McLaren actually because we didn't have any official conversation so that it is...

Q: (Livio Oricchio – GloboEsporte.com) Zak, it looks like Ferrari and Mercedes won't supply the power units to McLaren, in the case that McLaren has decided not to continue working with Honda. And also, we believe, as Cyril said, that very possibly Renault won't also supply, so it looks like you don't have other options. Is that correct?

ZB: No. We're not going to give a running commentary on our power unit situation. I know it's of keen interest to everyone but we'll say something when we have something to say.

Q: (Inaudible) Zak, do you feel within the team a difference for Stoffel now that his contract for '18 has been announced and this weekend, racing at home, is there more pressure, is he different or is he relieved that he will continue for next year for you?

ZB: Well, we always intended to put him in the car in '18. Of course, any driver, when it becomes public at their home Grand Prix, I think that's a nice feeling so Stoffel has been great all year for a rookie. He has been in a very difficult situation, we've not given him a faster, reliable race car which is that much more difficult when you don't have the experience of someone like your teammate so he's been a treat to work with and Hasegawa-san, I think you would agree, he's been a real star this year.

Q: (Graham Harris – Motorsport Monday, Motorsport Week.com) Zak, on the assumption – and it's obviously an assumption – that you persuade Fernando to stay for next year, and he was wanting to do this, would we see another possible attempt at the Indy 500, given that this year he was very competitive and could have possibly won it on his first time out? Is that something you would perhaps dangle as a carrot to keep him there for next year?

ZB: No. We would love to go back to Indianapolis, Fernando would love to go back to Indianapolis. He did an unbelievable job but it will conflict with Monaco again and we're not going to be in the same situation that we were this year in Monaco, so unfortunately he can't be in two places at once but we'd certainly love to do it with him again in the future.

Q: (Abhishek Takle – Middy) A follow-up to what you said earlier, Zak, on not giving a running commentary on the power unit situation, how soon though do you need to have something to say? How soon do you need to be in a position to announce something because obviously whichever way you go will those influence your signing of Fernando for next year?

ZB: Well, I think all racing teams right now – whether it's McLaren or Toro Rosso or anyone else down the grid – we're heading into 2018 so we need to be finalising all of our activities, whether that's driver, car design so that will be soon. As we all know, soon as the summer break is over it seems like it all starts to happen in Formula One so the timetable we've got to work to to get ready for next year.

Q: (Ysef Harding – Xiro Xone News) This week, we talked about e-sports and how some e-sports events have been a platform for inspiring young drivers to have a way into motorsports. And now this week F1 has launched an e-sports championship. Do you feel these platforms are good for young people who are interested in motorsports and that could possibly find an inroad into motorsports through this?

FT: I said already two years ago that you have to do something for e-sports because if you want to attract the young people, then e-sports is a very important game. What I said is that maybe ten or may nine o' clock in the morning on Sunday there should be an e-game race here at the racetrack, just to attract the young people, to come to Formula One, to see Formula One and to involve them in this complete package. Therefore I'm really happy that Liberty media managed to come up with this game.

YH: Sorry, actually I don't have many opinions about the current operation or situation but I expect to make it a very attractive sport especially for the younger people.

ZB: Yeah, I think e-sports is great. McLaren was the first team to announce our World's Fastest Gamer and whoever ultimately wins that will be our simulator driver next year. I think it's great what Liberty and Formula One have done and I think ultimately what you have with these sports is... Motor racing is a very expensive and difficult sport to get youngsters involved in, unlike football where you can go to school and you have a football and a pitch all ready to go so I think e-sports not only will generate a younger audience but it will also almost become the grass roots of motorsports

and be able to expose a younger audience to what it's like to drive a race car in a more inexpensive user-friendly way, so I think it's great that we're all embracing it.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) Zak, I'm not asking for a running commentary but I would just like to address the issue of engine supply to the teams, the FIA regulation being that you can only supply three teams with an engine. Now at the end of the day, unless you can persuade somebody to take the Honda engine it looks like you're going to have to approach somebody to supply a fourth engine supply. How do you stand with the FIA on this issue?

ZB: We speak with the FIA on a regular basis on lots of topics, being that they're the governing body of the sport so I'll leave the conversations that we've had, power-unit related, to ourselves and see what transpires.

Ends