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DRIVERS – Valtteri BOTTAS (Mercedes), Carlos SAINZ (Renault), Esteban OCON (Force India)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Q: Valtteri, if we could start with you please. New Mercedes contract announced at Hockenheim last weekend. Can we just get your thoughts on that? How much confidence does it give you and what do you feel it says about your performances so far this year?

Valtteri BOTTAS: Thank You. Yes, of course, at this point of the year it's a very, very good point to know what you're doing next year. When there's a contract still to be had for the future. So, yeah, very happy of course, first of all. And really, it also makes me a proud team member again. I think for sure the team, they were evaluating all the options, as always, which is fair enough. I'm really proud also that the team wanted me and no-one else for the seat so, for sure it feels good. Really happy to continue.

Q: Valtteri, we're at the half-way point in the season. How do you assess how it's gone so far? And do you feel you've stepped-up from last year?

VB: I feel by the end of last year I started to improve quite a bit. I think I've been able to carry that performance from the end of last year into this year in general. Obviously where I am in the drivers standing, the amount of points I have, it's not quite ideal but I know, and the team knows, my performance each weekend and we can see it's been a step-up from last year. For sure, I just want to keep getting better and keep improving as usual.

Q: Esteban, while we're talking contracts, perhaps I could come to you and ask you about contracts. It's a furious silly season this year, particularly in the midfield, what can you tell us about your future?

Esteban OCON: Yeah, I mean of course you know when there are rumours it's almost good. It means that people are watching you on track and are quite happy with what you are doing. So, it's always a nice thing. On my side, I'm always focussed on the job I have to do, and I think yeah, if people talk about you there is always plenty of opportunities. So, we'll see. I'm not worried.

Q: When can we expect any news?

EO: When there will be something, you will be the first to know.

Q: Subject of contracts Carlos, seems only fair that we talk to you about it as well. What can you tell us about your whereabouts for 2019?

Carlos SAINZ: Yeah – I thought that was coming after Esteban's question. Yeah. Pretty much the same: nothing has been announced recently. Nothing has changed from my contractual situation

together with Red Bull and Renault. Until those two parties don't move and they don't know what Ricciardo is doing etcetera, my situation still doesn't change.

Q: What is your priority for next year?

CS: My priority is to find a place that I'm comfortable with. I've already spoken about a two-year deal. First my priority is what Red Bull and Ricciardo are doing and then myself together with my management team will find the solution I'm sure.

Q: Valtteri, coming back to you to talk about this weekend. Very few straights here, some engineers refer to it as 'Monaco without the Walls'. Do you feel you're coming into the weekend on the back foot as a team, as a result of that?

VB: I think historically for Mercedes it's not been the strongest race. It is a fact. And we know the tracks where you need the maximum downforce, normally Red Bull has been really strong and Ferrari for sure as well. I think coming to this weekend we can't say we're the favourites. We come to this weekend knowing that we can do pretty well if we can get everything right and that it's going to be again a close battle between three teams – at least – for the win. We've been seeing some really crazy races this year and I think it's going to be a close fight again. We're not too confident, in a way, but at the same time if we do a good job, everything is possible.

Q: Something of a home grand prix for you this weekend. A few extra flights from Helsinki laid on I gather.

VB: It is. It's a race where I think most of the Finns, they come to. It means a lot to see so many Finnish flags. Even the local fans here, there's big support I feel. I think there's a lot of fans of mine and I'm really happy to see all of them this weekend.

Q: Coming back to you Esteban. You're just one point behind your team-mate Sergio Pérez in the world championship now. Can you just talk to us about how this intra-team rivalry with him this year has changed since last year? Is it more intense? How do you feel? What's the feeling in the team?

EO: It's always been big. The rivalry we have inside the team. I think it's good. It pushes us up and pushes us to perform better, I would say. Of course, you know, I'm getting more experience. Towards last year I was happier with the job I was doing with the team, and also this year I feel strong. I feel very good at the moment – but it's a close fight until the end with Sergio. Of course, we both want to finish ahead of the other one. But, you know, he's pushing me hard, I'm pushing him hard and I like the rivalry we have inside the team. But the atmosphere is still great and we have a great relationship, so it's all good.

Q: Carlos, very close battle with team-mate Nico Hülkenberg this year. 7-4 in qualifying so far. Can we get your assessment at this halfway point of the year as to how you feel you've done at Renault, how you've settled in?

CS: Yeah, I think I've settled in pretty nicely, especially, I would point out, since Baku, Barcelona, I've managed to what I wanted to do to get the car a bit more to my liking. A bit more towards my comfort. And just when I managed to do that I started to do good qualifyings. Looks like Sundays have gone a bit more complicated for me – not achieving, or not getting all the points I would like to get – but those kind of things have been a bit out of my control recently. I'm particularly happy now where I am with the car and the speed I have with the car.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Carlos, to pick up on something you said there. The progress you've been making, or you feel you've made with the car this season, do you feel the complications, the problems you've had recently have maybe masked the extent of that progress that you've made; that breakthrough that you've made?

CS: Yes. Definitely. I think if start picking up the points that I've lost in the last three or four races, for things that are a bit out of my control, I think my position will be reflected a lot better. My team knows that, I know that and in terms of speed, especially since, as I said before, Baku/Barcelona I've taken a step forward and I feel a lot more confident with the car. All those, as Valtteri said before, sometimes the points don't reflect the situation and the realistic state of your championship and your performance.

Q: (Heikki Kulta – Turun Sanomat) Valtteri, in Hockenheim, there was a chance you could have won the race by stewards decision. With all your bad luck this season, how would that have felt, to you, winning in that way?

VB: Yeah. I'm definitely always really hungry for the wins and yeah, of course we always want to win, and yeah, the longer it goes from winning a race and knowing you're in a car that each weekend there is an opportunity for that most likely. For sure it's... yeah, I really want to win and for sure it would mean a lot – but yeah, it was not meant to be again. There was different things happening in the race. Obviously when Sebastian went off, at that point I was leading the race. Just in that situation, with the state of my tyres, with the rain, I kind of had no opportunity except to stop so I lost the lead. But yeah, that's life. We've seen those kind of things happening as well earlier this season and I don't think I'm the only one with those things happening either.

Q: How close do you feel you got to taking the lead of the race, when you came alongside Lewis Hamilton into the hairpin?

VB: Yeah. We did have a good battle at the safety car restart. I think we raced really fair but we both obviously wanted to end-up ahead. Yeah. I think at some point we were completely side-by-side so for sure it was close.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines, Racefans.net) Esteban, when you signed the original Force India contract, just before Brazil 2016, you said you were fairly involved in it and that there were five parties involved? I'm assuming you know your contract pretty well. Could you clarify for us whether Renault has any option on your services or can you only go to another Mercedes-Benz team?

EO: I won't go into details on that. I'm managed by Mercedes, this is not a secret, but I won't go into details on my contract.

Q: (Andrea Tajthi – Motorsport Mania) My question is for Valtteri. As I know you are quite a quick runner, what is your track record at the Hungaroring and are there any F1 drivers who can run faster than you?

VB: I can't remember my time here. Obviously I do love running and when I had more time, as a test driver, I used to run a lot more of the tracks. I have no idea of the lap time and no idea about other drivers and their running. Obviously we all need to be very fit and I'm sure everyone can run well, but I can't remember, sorry.

Q: (Péter Vámosi – Racing Line Hungary) A question to all the drivers. In 1971 there was a race in Brands Hatch called the Jack Brabham Trophy, which was a race for team principals. They had identical Ford Escorts, and by the way Jack Brabham won it. What do you think about an idea, today, something like that as a support race for Formula 1, for team principals and who do you think would win it?

CS: I would like that kind of race for sure. And I would like it also for racing drivers, to put all racing drivers in the same car for one race a year – imagine Macau Formula 3 – put all of us in exactly the same car, exactly the same engine, just to check the drivers' performance. The team principals also, that would be fun. Maybe we could join the two races and we could just have fun for a weekend in Macau or something like that. There you go, my idea! Let's see if they do something.

Who do you think would win out of the team principals?

CS: Out of the team principals? Good question. Who has a racing past? I think Christian Horner has been a racing driver. Give me ideas?

EO: Toto as well.

CS: Toto also. So those for sure have the best chance but then we would also have fun seeing other people.

EO: Should we be engineers, though? That would be fun.

CS: Engineers, no!

EO: Engineers who tell them what to do.

Valterri, your thoughts?

VB: It would be very good to watch. I think it would be nice to manage them actually, and properly be their bosses.

CS: Their driver coach or something.

VB: Make all the calls and positions and they would maybe get a feel of how we feel in the car.

And who win out of the team principals?

VB: Good questions. I think some of them can drive – at least Toto very much thinks so. No, he is alright, so I think he would be up there, thereabouts.

Esteban?

EO: I agree with Valtteri.

About Toto?

EO: Yeah.

Q: (Adrian Rodriguez Huber – Agencia EFE) A question for Carlos. Obviously at this point of the year every year there are a bunch of rumours. One of them, I don't know if it's true, I read it, is maybe you joining Fernando next year in the same team. Does this make any sense to you and what do you think about this?

CS: You're going for the headline here right. No, I cannot comment on it. Nothing changes until I'm not... until my future is not decided by Red Bull or anything like that and Ricciardo doesn't sign a deal etc my future is still uncertain and I'm not linked with any other team yet.

Q: (Rocio Andreina Romero Navarrete – Motorlat) A question for Carlos. The McLaren opportunity for you: are you ready to beat Fernando Alonso, as until now he has beat all the team-mates?

CS: I don't know, because I haven't even thought about it, as still it's not happening. I'm ready to beat anyone in the field. My racing spirit and my competitiveness and my self-confidence tells me that I can take over anyone. Probably Fernando would be the biggest ask that you could have on the grid, that's for sure, but yeah, I would feel ready for anything.

Q: (Luis Vasconcelos – Formula Press) Valtteri, after what happened in Hockenheim where you were not allowed to fight in the last few stages and given the championship situation, do you think you will still have a chance to race freely for wins or will you have to play a supporting role for Lewis like you did in the second half of last year?

VB: I do believe we are still allowed to race freely. Obviously it always goes case by case but there's no plan in place at the moment for me being at all in a support role. We are still on equal terms. That's the plan for now. Obviously hopefully it will continue until the end of the year. Back to what happened, you know, I think with all the difficult races we had on the triple header, we lost so many points with different causes, and I kind of get the team's decision after lap one. We were side by side a couple of times and they wanted to get those points. I am very confident they would have done the same if I was in the lead at that point. Yeah, that's how it is.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines, Racefans.net) Going back to this team principal race, and Valtteri, particular what you said, didn't you have a race against Toto one day? Could you tell us about it please?

VB: Yes, we have raced Toto with a rally car. That was already back in 2008. I remember it was my first proper... It was kind of a test day on gravel track and Toto had done a few rallies before that, for me first time...

EO: He beat you! That's what you meant; he beat you...

VB: No.

EO: No? Are you sure?

VB: Wait for it. We're doing lap times all through the day. There was one Austrian rally driver with us; unfortunately I can't remember the name. And lap times were getting closer, closer, more competitive and by the end of the day I went through to ask Toto how they were...

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines, Racefans.net) And what happened?

VB: Nothing really happened. Honest. I promise!

Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Carlos, in Germany last weekend, obviously you lost the points because of the stewards' decision. Could you just talk us through what happened on track? It looked a little odd and I think Marcus referred to it as a bit of a strange incident. So what happened from your point of view?

CS: Yeah, this was a very particular incident and a very strange situation. Just after my pit stop for inters I got lapped and I was one lap down and as soon as there was the safety car gave us the notice to unlap ourselves I was a little bit leaped into unknown, not knowing really well who was lapped, who had to unlap themselves and who didn't. At that point I saw pretty much most of the cars going really slowly, even if you were allowed to unlap yourselves, so I just decided to push, to rejoin the field at the back of the train as soon as possible. I think some drivers got the notice a bit later than me and they were simply not pushing, they had the recharge mode on so I just... particularly with the Sauber, I thought he had a problem on the car or he didn't want to get to the back of the field because he wasn't even pushing, so I decided to clear him, just as a personal decision. I was told to give the position back to him, I gave the position back to him but I don't know if intentionally or not he braked again and he let me by again. So big mess and a bit difficult to understand at that point what is happening, as you can all imagine now because the story is not very easy to tell. (I'm) Always wondering if it is not easier to drop back, get ourselves at the back of queue and recover the lap down instead of having to do a full lap of pushing behind the safety car, everyone pushing flat out to try and unlap themselves, if you know what I mean. Maybe it's just easier to drop back, go to the end of the queue and recover the lap that you've just lost.

Q: (Andrew Benson – BBC Sport) Valtteri, can you tell us when exactly you got the call from James Vowles in the race? Where were you on that? Was it the end of the lap, was it part way round the lap, into the stadium?

VB: I think it was more or less into the stadium. I think it must have been around turn 12, so during the first lap after the safety car went (in). In all honesty, I think kind of the biggest of the battle was already there, at least, that lap as it is very tricky to follow. We're in similar cars, OK, there was a little bit of a tyre difference but the last sector is extremely difficult to follow and it is just unknown if I would have had any other opportunities or not, maybe, maybe not, but yeah, that's when the call came.

Q: (Viktor Adorjan – Origo GP Hirek) To all gentlemen: we could see during the last couple of races that front runners could overtake the midfield runners quite easily, whatever, recovering from their fallbacks of lost places. Is there something to be done – apart from having faster cars – in order to make life harder for the front runners who are trying to reclaim their positions in the near future to make races a bit more exciting?

EO: I don't know, to be honest. At the moment, yeah, it's really easy for them because we can't fight, we would destroy our tyres and it's useless to do that because we are not competing in the

same league to be honest. Yeah, I see it from that angle, that it's not my race so I have to let them go and fight for mine. But we'll see in the future. I'm sure Formula One wants to have more equal cars between teams and I think that would be a good thing for the show, definitely.

CS: No, not much to add, not realistic when you see all these cars flashing by because we are not fighting them. I'm sorry to say that because it's not good for the show but we are just not able to fight them, it's two completely different categories, it's up to two seconds, two seconds and a half sometimes in race pace. There's bigger spaces between other categories sometimes and they are called different. It's like that, but I really have a lot of trust in Liberty Media, the FIA that they're going to push hard to overcome these deficits and make the thing a bit more close because if not, it's just a top six race and then the rest, as we all know.

Q: And Valtteri, is it as easy as these guys are making out?

EO: Yeah.

VB: Well, it really depends on the track, of course, but on tracks where there are overtaking opportunities, big DRS zones when you have the edge of more than 1.5s, two seconds in the race taking places, yeah, then of course you are always trying to do it quick but it's kind of a matter of time. Like Carlos and Esteban said, I've been in the same situation many many times before and you're always doing your own race as a team, as a driver, so you always need to calculate the risk on how much you're willing to risk your race for one position because you can lose five places if you destroy your tyres or something like this.

Q: (Peter Varkas – Auto Motor) Valtteri, going back to the end of the Hockenheim race for a minute, we have heard Peter Bonnington telling Lewis on the radio that he should push, because they were afraid he might get a penalty after all. The difference, I think, in the end, was four and a half seconds between him and you so were you given the same chance to push and were you aware by your engineer that you should push in case Lewis would get a penalty so that you would be able to stay close to Lewis?

VB: I wasn't aware of his pit stop situation, that he had to go over the line so I wasn't aware of that, so that's why I wasn't really trying to be within one second because everything was pretty much set for us then. I wasn't aware.

Q: (Luis Vasconcelos – Formula Press) Carlos, you made a big effort around this time last year to get to Renault, even upsetting some people at Red Bull. Are you disappointed that they're not willing to fight very hard for you and they're looking at other chances for next year, or do you still think you're their number one priority to stay?

CS: Well, nothing has happened, not yet, so I cannot be disappointed or happy about the decision that they have taken because nothing really has yet occurred. As you all know, I did push hard last year to join this team because I have a lot of confidence in the project, in the team, and from what I know the management and everyone is happy with my performance and how things are going.

Q: (Giovanni Messi – NewsF1.it) Valtteri, last year, here in Budapest, Lewis gave position to you to end on the podium at the final lap. But last year you were closer than this year to the championship leader, so do you think that in a similar situation this year, the same thing could happen or are you now too far from Lewis in the championship?

VB: Like I said, I think it really always goes case by case. It's not guaranteed and a completely identical situation can happen again, who knows? Every situation is treated by the situation but there's been no decisions or anything like that made, that I would be in a different role than Lewis. We are still both trying to collect maximum points, trying to always win the race. We always have an equal chance for that so one way or another, if me and Lewis end up in similar situation, then it's up to the team but we are on equal terms so I'm still allowed to try and catch him in the points and so on.

Q: (Adrian Huber – Agencia EFE) Carlos, what do you expect from this weekend here?

CS: I think it's going to finally be a race track that suits our car better. We've gone through three or four very difficult tracks for us: lots of long straights, high speed corners where we are not so strong. We've brought back the upgrade back in Hockenheim that we finally will run on both cars this weekend, apart from a few other upgrades. And together with the track layout that I think is going to suit the car a bit better with slower speed corners, I think we have a good chance to be the fourth fastest team in qualifying again, which it has been a while since we have been. It would be nice and a big motivation boost, I think, for all the team to go to the summer break with both cars in the points and ? in that midfield group.

Ends