



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L' AUTOMOBILE

## 2018 FIA Formula One World Championship

### Japanese Grand Prix

#### Thursday Press Conference Transcript

04.10.2018

**DRIVERS – Sebastian VETTEL (Ferrari), Stoffel VANDORNE (McLaren), Esteban OCON (Racing Point Force India), Lance STROLL (Williams).**

#### PRESS CONFERENCE

**Q: Three of the four of you are without a contract for 2019, so let's start with that topic, and perhaps you could just tell us the latest. Let's start with Esteban.**

**Esteban OCON:** Yeah, that is true, so far. I still don't have any news to tell you, unfortunately. For sure I am trying to get a seat for next year but if I don't, I will be sitting on the side, but the sure thing is I will be back for 2020 and I will push my maximum to be back in 2020 anyway.

**Lance?**

**Lance STROLL:** Right now, still have five more races to go so I'm going to take it weekend by weekend. Yeah, we'll see what the future holds.

**Stoffel?**

**Stoffel VANDORNE:** So far not much news from my side, to be honest. Formula One seems very unlikely, obviously, and like I said last week, there's been a lot of talks with different series, different teams, and there are a lot of possibilities. So, I hope I can tell you a bit more in the next couple of weeks.

**Q: Esteban, the car is performing very well at the moment, had a good race in Russia and you have a very good record here at Suzuka: qualified fifth last year, finished sixth. So, what are your expectations for the weekend?**

**EO:** Yeah, definitely big expectations. We have a strong car since a couple of races now. We had a strong upgrade now and we are fighting to be the fourth fastest team each time so definitely looking forward to be racing on this track. As you said, I have great memories, so I can't wait. It's a track that suits my driving style quite well, and it's one I've been successful at, so I look forward.

**Q: Lance, Russia was a tough weekend for you and the team. Can you tell us, what are the car's shortcomings, and how difficult is it to drive at the moment?**

**LS:** In terms of result it was a tough weekend. We didn't pick up any points or anything but I still think we had a decent race, y'know? The position is not what we're hoping for and not what we're aiming for but y'know, we had some pace during the race. I was behind Fernando throughout the whole race, challenging him, trying to get by – but the nature of the track, it's very, very difficult to overtake. Yeah, and y'know, where we stand now, I believe there's no more upgrades for the rest of the season, but we're still going to be doing everything we can every weekend to try to improve the balance of the car. I'm going to try to get everything I can out of the package that we have for the rest of the season.

**Q: Stoffel, I believe you came down on the bullet train this morning from Tokyo, I just wanted to explore your love affair with Japan. You raced here, of course, a couple of years ago in Super Formula. Just what is it about Japan that you love so much and perhaps you could tell us a secret about Suzuka as well – because you won your last race in Super Formula here at Suzuka.**

**StV:** Yeah, I've got some good memories from Japan, racing here in Super Formula. I think first of all the fans are always pretty amazing and it's quite exciting to come back here and see what they bring for all the drivers. I think they really support everyone. So, definitely good memories from my year in Super Formula. Also, one of the greatest circuits. I think the feelings you have here in a Formula One car is probably the best you can have. Very challenging and looking forward to being back here this weekend.

**Q: Sebastian, we saw quite a gap in performance between yourselves and Mercedes last weekend in Russia, particularly over one lap. How confident are you of closing that gap here at Suzuka – particularly at a track that's been very kind to you in the past.**

**Sebastian VETTEL:** Well, within a week you can't do too many things differently, so we hope that the track suits us a bit better and we have a better weekend than in Russia. I think we nevertheless managed to get and squeeze everything out of the car. I think in race pace we were hopefully a bit closer – so let's see where we start off here.

**Q: One of the highlights for us, observers of the Sochi weekend, was seeing you and Lewis going wheel-to-wheel. He spoke after the race about how much he enjoys the challenge of racing against a driver of your calibre. I just wanted to get your thoughts on him. How much are you enjoying the challenge of racing Lewis Hamilton this year? And in what areas does he impress you the most?**

**SeV:** Well, first of all I think you always enjoy when you race somebody on track and you tend to enjoy more when you come out ahead – so I'm sure he had more fun last weekend than I had. But yeah, obviously, it's tough to have a wheel-to-wheel battle on the track but then if you do, you appreciate it a lot more, so I think... it's been intense races and challenging races we had but not that much wheel-to-wheel racing but yeah, as I said, I enjoyed it. I didn't enjoy it probably as much as he did. I would have liked it to have lasted a little bit longer, for more laps, but that was probably the only chance that we had. Apart from that, obviously, it's always difficult to compare. These days, I think racing is very different to maybe the way it has been many years ago. You don't spend much time with each other even though you share the track for all the sessions, you don't see each other very often until the race, and then even in the race it depends on how the race unfolds – but I think it's also fine like that, in a way, that some races are more intense than others. I think if every race would be intense then they would all be normal again. Naturally, obviously you enjoy it more when you come out on top.

## **QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR**

**Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Sebastian, you talked about getting the most out of the car last weekend in Sochi. In the last swinging fight with Mercedes, over the last couple of weekends have you been surprised to be behind Mercedes at a couple of tracks where they struggled at in the past, especially when you seemed to have a performance advantage in Belgium and then again in Italy in qualifying?**

**SeV:** I think I answered it many times. I think I've said many times that we have a strong car, but I don't think, against the people's opinions, that we had a dominant car at any point this year. I think the highlights that you mentioned or the races that mentioned, in qualifying we were not ahead. In the race I think it was very close and I think it has been very close all year. I think there were too many races from our side where we weren't close enough. A race like last weekend, the way they could play with us in the race, usually means they had more pace. There were other races in the

season where we didn't have the pace they had. But I think we have always been very close, most of the races close enough to have a good fight. So we'll hope that we have the same performance here. Hopefully we are closer in qualifying, which matters obviously to place the car well to then have a strong car and show that pace, because once you are behind, for the reasons I mentioned earlier we don't have a lot of wheel-to-wheel racing, it's not that easy to follow close, and then if you are racing for the same tenth, even if the cars were easier to overtake it wouldn't be that straightforward because ultimately you go as quick as the guys around you, but hopefully we are a bit closer.

**Q: (Julien Billotte – AutoHebdo) Sebastian, do you think that Ferrari is not pragmatic enough when it comes to team orders? We saw in Sochi that Mercedes was quite open to ask Valtteri to move aside and if we think about Germany or Italy, you guys seemed a bit more reluctant with Kimi, so do you think they have the edge in that area?**

**SeV:** Generally, I think it is a sensitive topic or subject, obviously for the reasons that we have seen after last weekend. I don't think we have been in the same position as they have, probably, during the race, so I think it is more a question for the team and not for me.

**Q: (Phil Duncan – PA) Sebastian, given that you have finished behind Lewis at five of the last six races, how do you, personally, as a driver, keep your confidence up and do you head into this weekend thinking it's now or never in terms of the championship?**

**SeV:** I don't like the now or never approach. I don't think there's much sense in that. I didn't know it was five out of six, now I know, so the secret before just now has been not to count. No, I think you attack every weekend, every weekend is different, the track is different, the circumstances are different, so I'm very happy to be here. I love this track, it's my favourite track in the world, so I'd better enjoy it and not spoil it by starting to count the things that are against me and focus on the things that are working for me.

**Q: (Andrea Cremonesi – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Seb, the weather forecast, it seems that it will be bad until Sunday, only Sunday there will be the dry track. In rain conditions, the last few races you were not very lucky. It is a handicap? And the second question, technically did you lose a little bit the direction in these few races after Monza?**

**SeV:** How do you know about our technical direction? Sorry, but I don't think it's true; I don't think we lost direction. We made progress with our cars, the steps that we planned, the steps have been coming. Now, you never know where you are in comparison to others, maybe they have done smaller steps or bigger steps, I don't know, but I'm pretty sure speaking to all our engineers that we are where we would like to be or where we wanted to be. Of course you would like to be always further with more performance, but that's the same for everyone. And the first question, I think there is nothing that speaks against us in wet conditions. I think as you said, here and there it didn't play into our hands but it won't be like that forever, so I'm not afraid if it's wet.

**Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) A question for all four drivers. It's one of the few tracks where we don't have two DRS zones. I know if you had DRS down the back straight, maybe 130R wouldn't be flat or would be more of a challenge but do you think there should be a second DRS zone at that part of the circuit?**

**LS:** I would say so. Whether 130R is flat or not is car dependent and depends on how much risk you are willing to take. I don't think that's really the reason why we should debate whether there is a DRS zone or not on the back straight. I think it could only help overtaking. It's already a track where due to the nature of the track it's very difficult to follow, with all the high-speed corners and all that, so if there is a way of helping overtaking, helping the show, it would be good.

**Esteban?**

**EO:** I think it would be quite a challenge to have DRS there, even harder than Silverstone, Turn 1 really. Let's see what's going to happen in the future, it could be interesting.

### **So you would like to see a second DRS on that straight?**

**EO:** As Lance said, it could only help overtaking into the last chicane. In the race it would not probably flat, especially following other cars, but in qualifying it could be an interesting challenge.

### **Sebastian?**

**SeV:** I'm not a big fan of DRS, so I don't know. Now we are in Japan, I think Mario Kart, if you remember, it might be more fun to throw bananas out of the cockpit, so maybe it's a better idea to have bananas than DRS. I don't like it, I think it's artificial. I think we should find a different way to make the cars follow each other closer and not rely on DRS.

### **Stoffel?**

**StV:** I agree with Seb. I think the fact that we are talking about DRS probably shows how difficult it has been for cars to follow each other and to race each other, so I think in the future if we could have much closer racing and do the old school overtakes, that would be the best.

### **How difficult was it to overtake in Super Formula here?**

**StV:** It wasn't easy, because obviously the cars are all the same as well and the competition was tough as well, but there were possibilities and those cars didn't have DRS as well.

### **Q: (Masahiro Owari – Formula Owari Masahiro) This is the 30<sup>th</sup> Japanese Grand Prix. Do you remember which Grand Prix, which year, did you see your first Japanese Grand Prix on TV, and do you remember who won?**

**StV:** I don't remember it! No, I don't. One I remember was when Kamui was racing and got on the podium. Which was 2012? Quite late. Yeah.

**SeV:** I watched all of the races that Michael ran later with Ferrari but I always fell asleep in the second part because it was very early and usually he was in the lead. It was sort of clear after half the race or after the first couple of laps. But I remember the one where... when did Ayrton win here? '88? Yeah, this I don't remember. I was one. Later, did he win again? 1991? Yeah. 1993? Maybe that one. '88, for sure not, because that would be unrealistic, I was one year old. But '93, that sort of makes sense. That was the first memories anyway and I remember how he lifted the cup, and I think the cup here is beautiful as well, the trophy. It was the same back then as it is now. Yeah, I remember that. Not so much the race but I remember the moment on the podium.

### **Q: Do you get a kick that the track is pretty similar to how it was back then when Ayrton was racing on it?**

**SeV:** Yeah, I do. I think it's one of the... it's my favourite track and I think it's one of the original tracks that haven't been messed with. I think it's... like Stoffel described earlier, I think the feeling you get inside here, in the car, is probably the best all season, when you throw the car from one side to the other up the hill and then you've got some really characteristic... how you say?...

**EO:** Iconic.

**SeV:** Iconic, thank you French, iconic corners like Spoon, 130R nowadays maybe not as tough as it was back then but overall it's a great track.

**EO:** Yeah, I don't remember the first time I've watched this track or this Formula One Grand Prix but the first thing that comes into my mind is always the fight Alain against Ayrton Senna, obviously, in the last chicane and also the first corner the following year, that's the first thing that comes to my mind, like for sure, historic stories.

**LS:** Yeah, same. I don't remember a race in particular. We saw Schumacher take off and win the race round here but that's probably when I started watching Formula One but I've watched the replays of Senna and Prost fighting around here and making contact in the last chicane. Those are historic moments.

### **Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines, Racefans.net) You may have seen that the Strategy Group has discussed changing qualifying into four Qs so it will be four out, then four, then**

**four and then finally leaving eight for the final Q1 shoot-out. What do you think about that? Will it make any difference? Will it help you? How do you feel about it?**

**LS:** That's the first time I've heard of that format. There's more entertainment for the fans and gives the drivers a bigger chance, maybe can mix up the top three teams a bit more and increase the risk of getting into the last qualifying session. Could spice things up.

**EO:** Could be a good challenge for the midfield teams, you know, so you could have two drivers in Q4 so it could be fun but then I don't know how it would change things for the top teams. It would probably be the same.

**SeV:** Just wondering what we will discuss in ten years' time, whether we will be talking about Q9 and Q10, if that makes sense. I don't know. Probably not but I don't know, maybe we should go less. Without going too deep, my personal opinion is that nowadays I think we need too much entertainment to be happy. I think it would be nice to settle for something less as well. My preferred qualifying was back in the days when they had one hour and you could do what you want. Obviously qualifying for some people will never be as exciting as the race but for other people it's more exciting than the race so it depends on your tastes, but I think it's about getting the perfect lap and I don't think it matters how many qualifying sessions you have. Now we have three and the one that most people look out for is the last one, so if you have Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7 what's going to change?

**Q: Do you think the current format needs changing?**

**SeV:** No but that's my opinion, so I might be wrong.

**StV:** Yeah, not much to say to that, really. I don't think this is the biggest problem so far. As Seb says, I think we don't really need to have an extra session. We're out in Q1 anyway so... It doesn't change for me.

Ends