



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L' AUTOMOBILE

2017 FIA Formula One World Championship

Japanese Grand Prix

Saturday Post-Qualifying Press Conference Transcript

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DRIVERS

1 – Lewis HAMILTON (Mercedes)

2 – Valtteri BOTTAS (Mercedes)

3 – Sebastian VETTEL (Ferrari)

TRACK INTERVIEWS

(Conducted by Jenson Button and David Coulthard)

JB: Lewis this is your first time qualifying on pole in Suzuka. Absolutely immense, great job buddy, but it's not just that, you have just shattered the qualifying lap record of Felipe Massa, set back in 2006 by 1.7 seconds. How does it feel?

Lewis HAMILTON: Incredible. Firstly, look at this crowd – we have such a great crowd. It's been a really good day and every lap was fantastic. You were rapid here, Nico was rapid here, I never really got a great balance in the past and I never did great in qualifying, so to finally get the balance behind me, with the great work of my engineers, and the great timing from all the mechanics, I finally got on track and did the time. And the car is crazy here, I wish you could feel it, man!

JB: Yeah, watching you through the Esses, it looks unbelievable, the changes of direction. But from the word go in qualifying it was there.

LH: Yeah, it's my first time. I'm running out of opportunities to get this pole, so I was like "I've got to make sure I make it stick today". Valtteri did a great job. Obviously he is going to have the penalty at the start but still he has a great opportunity in the race to get up there with us.

JB: Let's go and speak to Valtteri. Good job buddy. We had breakfast, sort of, together this morning and obviously it's not been the easiest weekend for you, but pretty awesome to come away with P2.

KR: Yeah, it's been a really difficult weekend and obviously went off this morning. The guys did a great job getting the car back together. My driving was really getting better through the qualifying. I think there was still something to be found. But P1 and P2 at this point, but obviously with the gearbox penalty I'm starting seventh.

JB: Yeah, it's not easy as we know starting further back, but the car looks immense around here and you, as you said, have done a fantastic job today. But watching from the outside, watching the cars through here it's the only time I really, really miss driving these beasts.

VB: I tell you, you are missing a lot!

JB: I know, good job buddy. Sebastian, how are you doing?

Sebastian VETTEL: Fine.

JB: These two were just unbelievably quick today, especially Lewis. He's definitely sorted out his qualifying around Suzuka. P3 but obviously you're starting the race from second. We all know that's not a bad position to start here. How are you feeling, buddy?

SV: Ah well, I mean qualifying has been quite good to be honest. I'm reasonably happy. I tried everything on the last run. I know I had to take a bit more risk, but it didn't work, I ran out of track at the exit of the Esses. But I knew that if Valtteri got past, we would still be on the front row. I would have loved to have been a bit quicker, but quite amazing with the new cars around here. I love the track and it's been a very special day. Thanks for the support, there are a lot of Ferrari fans, so arigato.

JB: And as we know, Turn 1, you never know. Starting on the front row there is always the possibility of making it stick at Turn 1, so have a good one buddy, good job. Lewis, do you want to jump in here DC?

DC: Lewis, that was spectacular to watch. Standing in the commentary box there were moments when I couldn't believe how fast that car was going through the corners. Big congratulations, it sets you up perfectly for tomorrow, looking forward to the race?

LH: Yeah, it's going to be a different view here. I've never really had this view here, you know what it's like. We've worked hard for the car to hopefully work well in the race. Those Esses really kill the tyres, so I'm hoping we're in a good position for that. Naturally the Ferraris will be rapid, as they always are, but I plan to keep them behind.

PRESS CONFERENCE

Well Lewis, you obliterated the lap record. Every lap you did during that session was faster than the one before. It looked very smooth from where we were sitting. Talk us through the session and how good was that last lap?

LH: It definitely was a fantastic session. I don't know if people watching realise, but how your team time everything in terms of what time you go out, positioning, the preparation with the mechanics – all that stuff has to work perfectly. The team were just so on form, as they always are, but that worked perfectly and enabled me to get out in the right time and in the right space and deliver the laps, so hugely grateful to everyone for all their hard work. And the laps: yeah, very much on it. Didn't make one mistake each lap, just got better and better. It's really about building a foundation, which you do in Q1, and then building upon it lap after lap and hopefully you don't have any mistakes. It was just every single lap apart from the last lap, which was up, but I think it was Q3 run one, which was the lap. Just incredible to come here with this car. This track has always been one of the greatest, if not the greatest circuits, and with this car it's just mind blowing. I wish you could feel what we feel. It's always been one of the craziest rollercoaster rides but with the downforce we have now – I think it's three seconds faster than we've been before – it's insane the speeds, this car is throwing us around inside. But the way you are able to throw the car around is like the craziest rollercoaster ride, which I love. So I hope the cars continue to get better, as they have this year. It's incredible for me.... Ten years or whatever it is, my first pole position here. So tenth time lucky, so I'm grateful for that.

Well, it was a great qualifying performance. I think a lot of people will be wondering what's the race pace going to be like, particularly after what happened in Malaysia last weekend. Are you confident you've got that as well?

LH: Well, we got some running in P1 and P3. P1 felt better than P3. The car is a lot different this weekend and a lot more enjoyable to drive. Last weekend was a bit of a disaster but we still got pole, which was unusual. Generally, I believe, we take step a bit slower when we get to the races, whereas the Ferraris do the opposite. I think that's really the philosophy of how our cars are designed, difference-wise. I think in the race we're going to be OK. But for sure the Ferraris were very, very quick in the last race so it will be interesting to see the pace they have. Kimi did a decent run, as well as Sebastian, today. We'll see. We've put ourselves in the best fighting position and obviously it's me and Sebastian on the front row – I wouldn't want it any other way.

Q: Valtteri, coming to you, it's been a topsy-turvy kind of day for you, that accident in final practice and then pulling it all together and getting that lap together at the end. Talk us through how difficult it was to claw it back from the low of final practice.

VB: Well, first of all I want to say well done to Lewis again for the pole. And I really want to thank the team. Like Lewis said, they've done a great job through the qualifying. We're always the right time on the track and in perfect gaps. Just everything went very smoothly so that allowed also me to just really focus on the driving itself. With the incident, I had in practice three, there was some extra work for the guys. They did really well to get the car together. It worked perfectly, so thanks for that. It's been a tricky weekend, not quite so clean so far, and going slightly over a kerb in practice three can make a massive difference. Had to reset, go for it. I used the soft tyre in quali two, so that mixed my rhythm slightly, I think but could get some improvements step by step. The lap in the end, it was not perfect but not that far off.

Q: Sebastian, talk us through your session. Third fastest. You're going to be, as we've heard, on the front row of the grid tomorrow, due to that penalty for Valtteri but first of all, qualifying, how was it for you?

SV: Pretty good, I'm pretty happy, to be honest, the car balance was getting better and better. Obviously, we were lacking a bit of performance but all in all I think it was a positive day. I think the car should be a bit better in the race. The last run in Q3, I tried a little bit more than there maybe was but I obviously knew the gap behind was quite big and Valtteri wasn't really a threat because he gets the penalty tomorrow. So, took a bit more risk, didn't work but still happy with third and then a front row for tomorrow. We'll see. I think our starts lately have been quite good. We'll see what we can do.

Q: And are you confident you'll have the legs of the Mercedes in race conditions?

SV: I don't know which sort of pace they will have. Obviously, you always know what you are doing but they have been a bit up and down: last week they weren't very quick; this weekend they seem to be back to normal, so I think so far this year has been very close. I expect it to be very close tomorrow. For us, I think normally we are a bit stronger in the race compared to quali, so that's where I guess we get together and see what we can do, at the start and then during the race.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Michael Schmidt – Auto Motor und Sport) Lewis, last week you struggled and nobody in the team really seemed to have an explanation for it. This weekend, only seven days later, you are flying. Do you know why?

LH: I think we have an idea. I think there's a lot of analysis that's gone in to understanding it so I think we do understand, yes. It's not something we can particularly rapidly change, but we're in a cooler climate here, so that's definitely one thing that adds to it.

Q: (Graham Harris – Motorsport Monday) Question for Lewis. Your first pole at Suzuka, you've never really hooked it up here, you've had competitive cars in the past – what's so different this year? You seem to be absolutely blinding through every corner.

LH: It's interesting because every single time I've struggled here. Struggled with finding the right balance, generally not always... often not starting on the right foot and then just struggling where to find the placement. Sometimes I've started on the right foot and led the car in completely the wrong direction. Yeah, so it's always been up and down. This is the first time – and I would say definitely the first car that I've really felt that it's been underneath me all weekend. Small tweaks here and there but in the right direction. So, I think fundamentally a better job done globally. Particularly with my engineers. My engineer understanding what I need from the car and vice versa: what I need from my engineers and the car. It's worked out better this time. My knowledge of the car is better than it's been before – which has enabled me then to go out and do the job, so I'm really... it's really, really a confidence builder for us as a group, me and my engineers and mechanics. I don't mind that it's taken that long. I hope that I can capitalise on today's great work.

Q: (Heikki Kulta – Turun Sanomat) Valtteri, how important was it for you to beat Kimi as you seemed to be on the same tactic as him?

VB: Yeah, of course it is good to start ahead. I think he also got on the softs in Q2 so we are mostly likely going to be on a similar strategy for the race, so I've definitely got the upper hand in the race in that way but we'll need to see how their race pace is and again it's going to be a long race but it's just a real shame... it would have been better to start one and two as a team, that would have been nice but that is what it is.

Q: (Mark Mann-Bryans – Press Association) Lewis, your car in the last few months has been labelled capricious, a diva – I believe you even said on Thursday it's a bit stubborn. But is it days like today when she makes it up to you?

LH: Definitely, definitely. It's been a great car in qualifying this year particularly, and qualifying for me is probably the most enjoyable part of the weekend, so being able to put together laps like today is the one you wait for, all weekend: Q3, round one and two are really what motorsport is all about. It's about ultimate performance from myself but also from the car. So it is definitely great when she comes together on days like this which is important. We were perhaps on the back foot here, perhaps won't be as great a position to be in but let's hope that she's not stubborn tomorrow.

Q: (Heikki Kulta – Turun Sanomat) Sebastian, how important would it be for your championship campaign to have a normal qualifying for both of the Ferraris?

SV: Well, I don't know. Obviously there was a small issue this morning that led into the problem with Kimi's car, certainly not ideal but it is what it is. I think the car is quick so even if... I think last weekend showed that even if you – well, not necessarily qualify out of position – but if you start out of position then you can still get back. I'm sure that he can have a strong race from where he starts.

Q: (Graham Harris – Motorsport Monday) To all three of you: with missing FP2 basically yesterday and this morning's practice session having two reds, did this affect any of your programmes, leading up to qualifying and do you feel you have enough laps in and also the changing characteristics of the circuit? FP1 was essentially dry and the rest were wet or damp. How did this affect your qualifying going into qualifying?

VB: Yeah, definitely you would always prefer to do more laps, there's always more track time, possibilities to learn more and make the car better and fine-tune your driving, get the confidence, so definitely for me, missing practice two and then half of the practice three wasn't ideal. Then you need to make the most out of the limited time you have and try and improve during the qualifying.

LH: Fortunately, it didn't get in the way of it really. I got a bit of a run in in P3 in the rain. If anything, that might have been a benefit to me, because if I'd had P2 in the dry maybe I wouldn't be on pole, because we would push the car to make changes and whatever and wouldn't have ended up where we were so pretty grateful for the rain that came. Often when you miss a session, it does definitely put you a little bit further down the ladder from where you potentially could be but I think I managed to still reach there so I do think it was potentially a benefit for me, missing P2.

SV: Don't think much impact. I think we got enough laps for performance runs. Obviously the long run preparation wasn't as usual but by the end of the season you know the car, you know the tyres so it's not a big deal. I think the biggest change for tomorrow will be the conditions. I think there should be sunshine which makes everything a bit hotter, so let's see how that goes.

Ends