



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L' AUTOMOBILE

2017 FIA Formula One World Championship

Bahrain Grand Prix

Saturday Post-Qualifying Press Conference Transcript

DRIVERS

1 – Valtteri BOTTAS (Mercedes)

2 – Lewis HAMILTON (Mercedes)

3 – Sebastian VETTEL (Ferrari)

TV UNILATERAL

Q: It must be a brilliant feeling for you Valtteri, describe the emotion?

Valtteri BOTTAS: Yeah, obviously really, really happy. It's the first pole in my career. It's my fifth season now in Formula One. It took a few races but got it and hopefully it's the first of many. But just want to say big thanks to the team for giving me this car, to drive it on pole. We're both starting on the front row. I think we made a really good job this weekend, to really focus on the evening conditions and we really managed to get a lot of lap time out of the car in the slightly cooler conditions and hopefully that's going to help is tomorrow as well, so grateful for the team.

Q: This is what you came to Mercedes for, of course. How did you do it? What was the key this evening for you personally?

VB: You know, it's not an easy track to get everything right. It is quite technical; there are quite a few difficult braking points, turning ins to the corner, it's easy to have a lock-up or just miss the apex slightly. So it is just getting the lap together and to get the car well balanced. It was a good enough lap for the pole today, so that's good.

Q: Well done to you. Lewis, fastest in the first runs in Q3. It looked like a little correction towards the end of the lap. Is that where it got away or was it elsewhere in the lap that you felt it slipped?

Lewis HAMILTON: Well, firstly a big congratulations to Valtteri, he's been working so hard, he's gelled so well with the team and today he was just quicker. He did the better job, so hats off to him. Yeah, the first lap felt great and I looked up and the time was so close and I thought 'wow, he's doing some... that was a good lap, he did a great job'. But I was losing quite a bit of time through the first sector, that was generally my weaker point, which is actually unusual; usually it's a stronger point for me. I'll work on it for tomorrow, but Valtteri found some great pace, particularly through the first sector, the second and third ended up being quite good but just overall a little bit down. But a great

battle and that's how close I think qualifying should always be. It forces us all to be more on the limit. I'm generally happy with the job I did and it's great for the team to be one-two.

Q: Very well done. Speaking of close, Sebastian, it was very close in Q2, I think it was six one hundredths of a second, the top three. Was it a little bit dispiriting for you when you saw they suddenly found another four tenths of a second when we went into Q3?

SV: Yeah, it was. I think overall I was very happy with how qualifying went, with how the car felt, because we had some issues yesterday. Nothing wrong but we just tweaked the balance for today I think in the right direction, so I was happy how it turned out to be. Felt good; Q2 I thought 'OK, this will be tight'. I was very happy to go into Q3. Then I was very happy with my first lap. I crossed the line, looked up and saw both of them were ahead and then when I got the time, yeah, I was a bit down to be honest because four tenths was a lot more than I expected, also given how good the lap felt. Then, on the next run I just tried a little bit too hard everywhere but equally I had nothing to lose. I was quite safe also to cars behind. So I was quite confident, also the lap felt good as I said, so I tried a bit harder. It didn't work; I went slightly slower. Obviously if I go a tenth quicker it's not enough, so I tried to do a bit more but yeah, hopefully we can do a bit more tomorrow.

Q: Well done. Back to Valtteri, obviously a lot of satisfaction at your first pole but no champagne at this point. I guess you go to be tonight dreaming of your first grand prix victory tomorrow?

VB: I think the main thing is that I need to personally, and as a team, we need to enjoy for a very short period of time... you need to enjoy what you have done so far in the weekend. But the main thing is tomorrow so there is not point to start dreaming about anything. We need to look at everything, whatever we can do tomorrow, work together as a team and plan a good strategy, a plan for the race tomorrow. For me it's all about just focusing for the race and getting the maximum out of it but definitely a good place to start and I think as a team we can be really strong tomorrow and we can get that one-two, the first one for the year.

PRESS CONFERENCE

Q: Valtteri, I think if you were to plot your qualifying in the last three races it would just be about three-tenths off Lewis in Australia, less than two in China and now you've gone and got the pole. Describe to us how you've chipped away at that, how you've worked at that.

VB: Well, for sure, every single qualifying is always different circumstances and different track, different scenarios but I definitely feel I've been getting more and more comfortable with the car, how it is behaving and also working with the team and fine-tuning the setup of the car. I'm getting better with that as well with the engineers. So overall just, yeah, feeling more confident in the car and today it felt good, especially towards the end of the qualifying in Q3. Got some good laps, felt that I could extract pretty much the maximum out of the car. That's always a good feeling and for sure it always takes a bit of time to get there.

Q: Lewis, obviously you managed to find that little bit of a margin today that Sebastian was talking about in qualifying – but generally, it is pretty close in terms of race pace, what we've seen so far, particularly on a track like this: higher temperatures; looking after the rear tyres is important. What kind of a battle are you expecting tomorrow in the grand prix?

LH: Well obviously today we had a bit of a margin to the Ferraris but generally in race trim they seem to be a bit quicker but I guess we'll see tomorrow. Perhaps it will level-out a little bit more. It's definitely going to be a close battle. Valtteri's long runs were very good and I think... I don't necessarily know how good their long-runs were but I heard that they were quite quick, the Ferraris so it's definitely going to be close, all of us, and looking after the tyres is definitely very difficult. Whether it's a one or two stop will be interesting to see. Temperatures, all those different things. Hopefully we'll have a great battle tomorrow.

Q: Sebastian, maybe you could articulate for us, it seems to have been quite tough for everybody – and Valtteri referenced it earlier on – to put a perfect lap together, to join all of the dots, and particularly this weekend going into qualifying. Can you just articulate why you think that is today?

SV: Well I think generally we struggle less, everyone struggles less in the evening because the temperatures are dropping. Something we've seen now for two days is that generally we struggle a bit more, everyone with the hot conditions. The tyres don't hold up as well as they used to in the first two races, so in a way, it's probably a bit more similar to how it probably was last year, that you can't attack all the way through the first flying lap. So I think that's a difference. At Valtteri touched on, this track historically has been fairly technical. Corners like 9-10, they are probably built to lead drivers into mistakes so it is very easy to get it a little bit wrong and overshoot a bit, so those two things combined I think make it quite tricky. Yeah, at the end of the day it's probably risk-assessment. When you are steering towards the corner and then you have to make a judgement how much you trust the car, how much risk you take, and in the end if you take a lot and you get the reward, it feels great. If you take you a lot and it goes wrong, you lose time.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Heikki Kulta – Turun Sanomat) Valtteri, congratulations, I counted that is has been 168 races without a Finn in the pole. How important is it for you to put Finland back in the polesitters group?

VB: Thank you Heikki, and congratulations to you as well! Sure, it feels good. I didn't even realise it's that long – nearly ten years.

SV: Who? Where? **[Heikki Kovalainen, Silverstone]** Oh.

VB: It's good to break that, it's a lot of races without a Finn on pole so that is good and obviously very proud always to drive for Finland, for my country and very glad for all the support I've got from there. So yeah, happy.

SV: Where were you in 2008. F3?

VB: Formula Renault!

Q: (Ysef Harding – Xero Xone News) This question is for Valtteri. Valtteri, first off, congratulations on your first pole with the team. It really looks like you are starting to find your groove out there, really find your mojo. Do you feel that that's starting to come alive for you in the car? That you're finding that groove, you're bonding with the car out there on the track now?

VB: I definitely feel now much more comfortable in the car, with the car than, for example, qualifying in Melbourne. So yeah, the more laps, the more time you spend with a car and driving it, you get to be more at one with the car. So, definitely feel better and better, like I said earlier. Yeah. Felt better here than, for example, last week in China in

qualifying. It's good. I need to keep doing that progress and keep trying to get better all of the time.

Q: (Michael Schmidt – Auto Motor und Sport) Sebastian, any explanation why the gap was bigger here than in the two races before?

SV: No, not really. I haven't seen obviously where we lost most of the time but I think a little bit spread everywhere. I think Sector One, Sector Three stood out so Sector Two wasn't too bad. Yeah, there's more straights in Sector One and Three, so I don't know if they had an update for here that allowed them to push harder but it seems that we lost a little bit of time everywhere and maybe a little bit more than usual down the straights. Yeah. I think for tomorrow the most important thing is that the car felt good today and I think we should be closer. Hopefully it's going to be a tight race and then we'll see.

Q: (Khodr Rawi – motorsport.com) Question to all three drivers. Are you surprised by the lap times set today in qualifying? Because the pole position is faster by around seven-tenths compared to last year pole position. Where you expecting faster lap times? Thank you.

LH: It's seven-tenths? We're seven-tenths quicker than last year? I can't remember. I wasn't even thinking of that. The car feels better here than it did last year but I don't have an answer for why it's not a bigger gap than it was in the past. At least they're faster.

SV: I think it was expected that we go quicker this year, depending on the layout: sometimes a bit more, sometimes a bit less. Probably this layout is one of the least favourite ones this year in terms of how much faster we can go, compared to the year before.

Q: (Chris Medland – Racer) Valtteri, you said in the week that you bounced back very quickly from the error you made in China and put it behind you on Tuesday, I think. You allowed yourself to be annoyed on Monday but does this really help to properly put it to bed and look forward to have a result like this straight away afterwards?

VB: Well, I think it's always nice to have a good result whether you've had a good or bad weekend before but for sure if you've had a bit of a struggle in the last race it's always nice to start the weekend in a good way but anyway tomorrow is the day that then matters but it's good. I'd rather be on pole today than anything less, so let's see tomorrow.

Q: (Phil Duncan – PA) To all three of you: does Valtteri's pole now mean that this is a three-way fight? We've all been saying it's just going to be between Lewis and Seb; is it going to be a three-way battle now for the championship?

LH: It always was, at least three, maybe four. Yeah, Valtteri's been right there with us from the beginning so nothing changes.

VB: I think it's obviously very early days to speak about the title fight, how it's going to be. It's going to be a massively long season. As I said at the first races, it's going to be a massive year in terms of development for the cars and which team is going to develop the most and that's going to be the fight for the title. Too early to say about the title fight but for sure we are now the two best teams and I feel I'm now in the game.

SV: Well, today is the day for Finland and Formula One. Keeping it Finnish, I would say yes.

Q: (Heikki Kulta –Turun Sanomat) Lewis, like I said that the last time you lost the pole to a Finnish driver was 2008; do you still remember how that felt? Does it feel the same as now?

LH: Cold! Yeah, I remember 2008, Silverstone, I remember it very very clearly. Heikki did a fantastic job. He was quicker throughout the weekend and we had a different set-up from testing which he chose and he was just quicker and it ended up being one of those... Back then you divided the cars by two laps of fuel and often I would have... sometimes I would have the lighter fuel load; on that weekend, he was just quicker and we needed as a team to be at the front so he ended up having the lighter fuel load and did a great job but obviously I got a great start in the race. You know, when you asked the first question I had a really crazy thought: I'm sure at home he (Heikki Kulta) has like a wall and every day he goes home and he ticks off – 'damn, it's another race that...' He's got a whole wall, 130 or 180 or whatever it is, 168 crosses so I'm sure on Monday you're going to be repainting the wall, a nice clean one!

SV: Does the word excited exist in Finnish?

VB: Kind of.

LH: It's probably something really simple. What is "exciting" in Finnish?

VB: (Inaudible)

SV: See! It doesn't exist!

LH: It's not one that's really used much in the vocabulary.

VB: I don't know really.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – GloboEsporte.com) To Lewis and Bottas: in 2014 we had a wonderful battle between Lewis and Nico here at this Grand Prix. Are you free to fight tomorrow or after what happened in Barcelona and Austria last year there are some internal rules: you can put the car here, you cannot there? It depends what position your teammate is in?

LH: Are we allowed to fight? Nothing's changed in the sense that we are allowed to fight. It's the same as it was last year - as always as it remains respectable but yeah, we can fight hard out there. None of us wants to not finish the race. It's just about being sensible and making sure we bring both cars home but generally yes, we are allowed to fight.

VB: Yeah, I agree. I'm really happy that we are allowed to fight and I'm sure we can do it hard, hard but fair and try to avoid what we did last year with Lewis in turn one. We actually collided.

LH: I'm behind this time...

VB: I'm sure we can be alright.

SV: I wouldn't mind!

Q: (Ysef Harding – Xero Xone News) Lewis, this looks like this is starting to get interesting now that Valtteri's got a pole and he may have a good result and you've gotten very happily because of the battle with Sebastian Vettel. You looked about as happy as a warrior getting ready to go into battle. Do you look forward to it possibly being a three-way battle at the end of this weekend?

LH: I do, I do. I think it's great how close it is between the teams because then it brings out the best in each driver and I just feel... when you feel like you're at your best and you do a good job and you're fighting against someone else who is doing just as good a job it's that much more exciting and the more drivers we have in the mix then the more tense it gets. Fortunately... don't think for a long time it's been more than three or four drivers but anyway I'm really happy it's more than just the two of us. There's going to be lots of ups and downs throughout the year but Valtteri's definitely keeping me on my toes and I'm thoroughly happy for him today. As I said before, he really deserved that lap and his first pole... I know how special it is to have your first pole position. It is just amazing. You dream of it as a kid and I know that he will be enjoying it and tomorrow could be his first Grand Prix win but obviously I will try my hardest to win the race but whichever the case, he's going to have one at some stage this year. If it's not tomorrow it will be...because he's getting stronger and stronger.

Q: (Michael Schmidt – Auto, Motor und Sport) Sebastian, according to the power unit report, a turbocharger and one of the E-motors have been changed in your car. Is that a concern this early in the season?

SV: Not really. Obviously it was not planned but yeah, it doesn't set us back. I think we're doing fine. I think we pushed very hard over the winter. I think we did a very very good job, especially on the engine side, power unit side. I think there's been a very big step so it feels great, feels like a lot more power than last year and yeah, obviously the year isn't over yet but as I said, it shouldn't be a problem.

Ends