



## Press Information

### 2019 French Grand Prix Saturday Press Conference Transcript 22.06.2019

#### DRIVERS

1 – Lewis HAMILTON (Mercedes)

2 – Valtteri BOTTAS (Mercedes)

3 – Charles LECLERC (Ferrari)

#### TRACK INTERVIEWS

(Conducted by Paul Di Resta)

**Q: Lewis, another solid job, another pole position, you've got to be delighted with that? Valtteri's pushed you all the way this weekend.**

**Lewis HAMILTON:** Yeah. Firstly, a big hello to everyone, bonjour. It's not an easy track. Obviously there are a lot of run-off areas but it's quite technical and Valtteri has been quick all weekend. So just chipping away, chipping away, and my last two laps were the ones. The last one I was up nearly half a second but I lost it in the second-to-last corner, so I'm happy that I got the potential out of the car; the team did a fantastic job.

**Q: Was that the wind? Everyone was complaining on the last run that it was getting more edgy, losing lap time at the end. Was that where you lost it?**

**LH:** I think so. The wind has been picking up and it's quite gusty around the track, so you have to be quite dynamic with how you attack the lap. There are certain points at which you can attack and there are others where you kind of have to give way a little bit to the wind. I took a little bit too much into that last corner and the gust just took the back end. But nonetheless I still was up, which was a good thing. Yeah, just really happy. I think we've just been working really hard on the engineering side and making sure... Bonno and those guys did a great job. This one's for Carl in our team, who had a big clean-up earlier on and looked after us. Just overall, great teamwork.

**Q: A master class again. Valtteri, it's looked a very solid weekend, you've looked in a class of your own, but just at the end Lewis stepped it up that level and you couldn't quite get him?**

**Valtteri BOTTAS:** Yeah, I think Lewis had a really good lap in the end. It's been super close between us all weekend, all about fine details and hundredths of a second. The qualifying, the win changed completely to the opposite direction and there were a couple of corner where my line didn't quite work then, so I had to work them out. But I think initially Lewis got it right today, but yeah, as a team it's good.

**Q: I guess still very confident for the race tomorrow? The car has been under you all weekend and similar conditions expected.**

**VB:** Yeah, it's been a really, really strong package we have had here this weekend so obviously enjoyable and hopefully it will be the same tomorrow. It's a nice long run into Turn One, so hopefully I can do something there.

**Q: So visually tonight you've got to focus on the lights and get your reaction time improved?**

**VB:** Yeah, I think the race start is going to be one of the key things tomorrow for me so focus on that.

**Q: Charles, you got the biggest cheer when you pulled up here and I know this holds a very special place in your heart, it's close to home, but these guys have been untouchable this week and haven't they?**

**Charles LECLERC:** Yeah, definitely. At the end pretty happy with my lap. Unfortunately today it was not enough but we need to keep working and I'm pretty we'll close the gap at some point, but yeah, today I think this is the best we could have done.

**Q: And expecting similar conditions tomorrow, we know the straights are pretty long here. Can you challenge them on the first lap, can you get involved and make it a fight for them?**

**CL:** Well, that's definitely the target, so a good start will be very important. We are quite strong on the straights and they are quite strong in the corners...

**LH:** I'm looking forward to a race with this one!

**CL:** Yeah, because in Bahrain we couldn't race so much! Yeah, hopefully tomorrow will be a good race.

## **PRESS CONFERENCE**

**Q: Well Lewis, both of your laps in Q3 were good enough for pole position. Can you just describe the challenges of that session for us?**

**LH:** Yeah, we're all working our butts off out there. It was very hot here. The track is up at 50, nearly 55, nearly 60 degrees, but it's still challenging with these tyres, making sure you optimise and get everything out of the tyres. We've just been chipping away at improving the set-up of the car. Bit by bit.... Qualifying was when it was at its best, so a really great performance there. I think just generally the guys are really great at the timing and everything, getting us out in the right window. I don't know if people watching realise how important getting out at the right time is. You know, positioning on track is everything. I think through Q1 and Q2 Valtteri just had the edge and I was still dialling in the car, but once I got to Q3 I knew where I had to find the time, and it's just about going out and doing it. The first lap was fantastic, really, really happy with it. However, I knew it was still relatively close and I needed to find some more areas in which I could improve. I went out for that second run. The second run, I was on for one of the best laps I have done for a long time. And it's crazy: it never gets old, it never gets easier, and it's always such a challenge, regardless of what position you are battling for. I was up four-and-a-half tenths coming into the second-to-last corner, but it's really gusty out there, and I think I just lost the back end, partly through that or maybe going too quick. Nonetheless, really, really happy. If anything it gets harder and harder to get these poles. Valtteri has been doing some epic laps in practice and qualifying through these first races and the Ferraris have been on our tail – obviously a bit of a bigger gap today – but I'm still thinking the race is going to be a close battle, so I'm really grateful to be where I am.

**Q: Your pole time is 1.7 seconds faster than last year. How much of that is car and how much is that track surface?**

**LH:** The track surface for sure definitely helps. The cars have evolved. They are an evolution of last year's car so it is continuously getting better. Last year when we were here we had a solid package but the changes we made from last year's faults have just made it better this weekend and yeah, ultimately I think I drove here last year... It wasn't the first time I'd been here but it was the first time I had raced here. So coming here I had that knowledge, so you naturally improve your understanding of where you can push and where not. I don't know what percentage is but it is an improvement all round. Again, in the team's performance, in how we've dialled in the car and how we've delivered through the session has also improved this year. That's why we're such a strong team because on all elements we're firing on all cylinders.

**Q: Valtteri, coming on to you. As Lewis says, you've been on fire throughout practice and Q1 and Q2. Where do you feel the car performance slipped away in Q3?**

**VB:** I think the car was behaving well – but all weekend I felt pretty good in the car and in a happy place but obviously I always knew it's going to be close when it comes to qualifying as it's been all weekend. I think ultimately in the end Lewis in Q3 managed to get some better laps and he deserved to be on pole. From my side, in Quali 3, the first lap felt OK but the wind direction changed throughout the qualifying, Turns Eight and Nine, I think, struggling all weekend a little bit. At some point I found some good lines there but they didn't any more work with that wind direction. So small

details here and there. There's no massive things. In the second run I was a bit unlucky with no cars ahead, so I had no tow at all, so losing on all the straights. Tried to make the most of the losses in the last couple of corners and lost it. It's unfortunate: obviously was hoping to be on pole but second is a good place here, it's a long run into Turn One.

**Q: All three of you in this press conference are going to be starting the grand prix on the Medium tyre tomorrow. In these temperatures, how much of a challenge is tyre wear going to be tomorrow?**

**VB:** If we would be on the Soft tyre, it would be a big challenge. So I think with the Medium, even if it's warmer, based on what we felt yesterday, it's pretty robust. I know all cars at the front are on the same tyre, so no big drama there.

**Q: Charles, coming on to you. Great performance by you all weekend. How confident were you coming into qualifying today?**

**CL:** Well, I was completely aware that my weak point in the last few grand prix was putting the car in the right window in Q3, so I really worked hard for that and I was very happy to see that there were improvements this weekend on that. My Q3 lap felt good. As Valtteri said, the wind was quite different during the whole Q3, so it was quite tricky and lost quite a lot of time in Turn Eight – Turn Nine but overall, apart from that, it was a good lap, and the car felt good for the right moment, which is in Q3. So, on that, I'm very happy. Then the gap is still quite big so we need to work and hopefully tomorrow it will be an exciting race.

**Q: Talk to us a little more about the race tomorrow. How confident are you of taking the fight to these other guys here?**

**CL:** It's going to be difficult because their race pace on Friday was very, very, very strong. I think a good start will be very important and then we'll see what happens, and then we'll see what happens. Obviously if we're in front at the start it will be easier – but it's not going to be easy.

#### **QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR**

**Q (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Lewis, as mentioned just now, you were able to recover from being behind Valtteri from FP2 onwards. Did you feel that you had a bit in hand from practice or did really need to turn it around and pull something out of the bag in qualifying?**

**LH:** No, I think it was very close. It was very close throughout practice and, as you saw at the beginning of qualifying, we are within half a tenth, or point-zero-six between us. I definitely didn't feel like I had something extra just sitting there. There were just areas to improve and I knew where they were, I just hadn't done them yet. So, what was most important was that I did them on my first lap in Q3, which is obviously the most important one. And then the second lap was also even more in that direction. Unfortunately lost a large proportion of the time – but still improved nevertheless. I think Valtteri's been... our cars are very, very similar in set-up and so we kind-of also push towards the same direction, which is really good for the team, and staying ahead of him is not so easy, do definitely had to pull something special out in Q3.

**Q: (Luke Smith – crash.net) Charles, we heard you a couple of times in qualifying asking Ferrari to get Sebastian to create more of a gap to you. Did you feel he compromised your qualifying at all?**

**CL:** No, not at all. The only thing is that I think, twice – can't remember when exactly – we were very tight on time to go through the finish line, so that is why I was just asking the team to say to Seb to just push because I would be very tight on time, so that was the only reason. But no. He, of course, did not compromise my quali.

**Q: (Ben Hunt – The Sun) Lewis, do you feel untouchable at the moment? You're kind of crushing it out there. I just wondered how you feel every time you get in the car. Is it a close fight? You keep saying it is but when we're looking at the time sheets you just keep delivering.**

**LH:** I definitely don't feel untouchable. I never have felt that way. I do feel strong but each weekend I come in and I feel that I'm starting on right foot, Valtteri goes and puts in bloody good laps every time! So, I'm constantly being pushed by Valtteri and obviously the last race obviously a lot closer. There's some races where we as a team are not being pushed necessarily as hard as we'd like to be by

the others. Nonetheless, still there's the battle within us. If you look at a lot of the races, it's been half-a-tenth to a tenth-and-a-half between Valtteri and I – so still have my work cut out, still have to perform, still have to deliver. So the work ethic is exactly the same and the stress is just exactly the same as if we were fighting the Ferraris or... yeah... usually I get better when I get into the season. I'm definitely getting a lot more comfortable with the car as we get into the season and I don't expect that to stop.

**Q: (Joe van Burik – Racingnews 365.nl) Charles, would you say there's a specific area in which you are lacking compared to Mercedes, or is it just general pace?**

**CL:** I think it's general grip around the corners, to be honest. We are quite quick around the straight or in the straight but in the corners struggling a bit more. This weekend there's something interesting that we didn't understand completely yet but sector one and two we don't seem to be so far off, or at least, during the whole weekend FP1, FP2, FP3 but in the sector three we were losing quite a lot most of the time. I don't know how it looks in qualifying but it was like this in FP1, FP2, FP3 so we need to work on that and try to understand where is the issue.

**Q: (Thierry Vautrat – Sud Ouest) Lewis, I would like to know... you didn't sleep well on Thursday night, how worried were you to lose your Canadian victory?**

**LH:** No, that wasn't what kept me up. I just... I don't know. I don't sleep a lot in general but this particularly night I was excited to sleep like I am every night and I was just tossing and turning. I was awake and then actually when you're awake and you're frustrated with not being able to sleep, your mind rattles and obviously I had lots on my mind but it wasn't necessarily about that, it was some other things that were going on. But nonetheless, I got really great messages from friends who naturally worry when I post something like that. I think more the reason that sometimes I express that is just because I realise firstly that I have a platform that a lot of people are going through a lot of stuff in their lives and it's never too late or soon to try and encourage, so that's what kind of... it was the kind of words of empowerment more, just how I sometimes get low and then I'm like I'm going to get through it, I'm going to fight through it. I got a lot of real positive responses from a lot of my fans who... they'll write and it will be like 'I'm going through a really difficult time right now but you've just lifted me up' and so that's a great feeling when that happens. And my friends did the same for me, lifted me up. Came in, had a good day yesterday, slept like a baby – not exactly like a baby but like a baby last night – and came here today on a real positive.

**Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Lewis, just to pick up on the same sort of topic; when you posted on Instagram the first message referred specifically to what you were concerned about, coming to the circuit, the reaction you might get on Friday. Was that in any way related to the fact that you were at the memorial (service) on Thursday? It's not the first time that I guess you've faced criticism or anything for what you've decided to do so is it anything to do with that?**

**LH:** No, I think the weekend started off a little bit different, you know. We arrive usually on a Thursday morning or the Wednesday night and then I obviously got here on Thursday evening. We got through our programme, no problem, but if you're used to a normal four day programme and you change it it's not always the easiest. For sure, it was definitely odd coming here when I heard that there was... Ferrari was spending time focusing on something else. Naturally, for me, with my team, I would be having them focus mostly on trying to improve the car but then we came here and obviously we had that but then I think when I arrived in the morning I heard that Karun Chandhok had... it was Karun Chandhok's video that was the new evidence, and I was pretty relaxed after that. Yeah, I just put it behind me. But the last race was obviously... it's not always easy when you hear boos, for example, but that's a part of the game and if anything it generally spurs me on. But I know I've got a lot of great support when I come to these races, and particularly as I said, on social following I've got a lot of great people following me there so even if you feel crap, it's not a bad time to say something motivational and that's really where I was.

**Q: (Ben Hunt – The Sun) Charles, how much of Ferrari's pre-race preparation has been disrupted by this futile appeal and also the other thing I wanted to pick you up on was Lewis says that he's only going to get stronger. Have you at Ferrari and you individually got anything that can stop that, anything that you can fight back with?**

**CL:** Well, on the penalty thing, I was not concerned personally, so no I didn't feel any difference in terms of preparation for the weekend. I felt that the team was completely focused on that. What was the second question? Well, I think, of course, there's definitely more to come also from us. Whether it will be enough or not, only time will tell, but we are working to get better, race after race. We have brought some updates this weekend, some have been good, some others not and we need to understand why the ones that haven't been positive, why they haven't been, and try to understand this to get better in the future.

**Ends**