



Press Information

2019 Australian Grand Prix Saturday Press Conference Transcript 16.03.2019

DRIVERS

1 – Lewis HAMILTON (Mercedes)

2 – Valtteri BOTTAS (Mercedes)

3 – Sebastian VETTEL (Ferrari)

TRACK INTERVIEWS

(Conducted by Paul Di Resta)

Q: Lewis, every winter you go away, every winter you come back, driver-team combination, you come out, you get pole position here and you deliver a performance that's just incredible.

Lewis HAMILTON: Oh man, I'm shaking, it was so close out there. We've got this incredible crowd here today; thank you everyone for coming out and creating this atmosphere. What a beautiful day. Coming from testing, from winter, we had no idea where we would be. We were hoping of course to be where we are, we've been working towards that; the guys back at the factory have been working so hard. And on the weekend also they have just been working to perfection. Valtteri did an exceptional job out there; it was very close. It's great to see the top 16 or 17 are within a second; I think that's an improvement in the regulations, so it should be an exciting season.

Q: Sixth consecutive pole position here in Melbourne. Eight times you've been on pole, matching Michael Schumacher and Ayrton Senna for pole positions at a track, what does that record mean?

LH: I didn't even know about that. That's news to me. All I can say is that my family are here and I wouldn't be doing what I do without my dad, who taught me everything, and he's here with me. So big thank you to him but I couldn't have done it without this great team.

Q: Well done, all the best for tomorrow. Valtteri, P2 on the grid, front row start. I think more importantly a very strong day for the team. You almost did it but just missing out on that last run with a little bit of performance.

Valtteri BOTTAS: Yeah, we really made some good progress. I had a difficult practice three and we could turn things around for the qualifying. All the session was feeling good. The quali three, lap one, was really nice, I enjoyed that. Unfortunately not quite enough for pole, but Lewis had a good lap in the

end and I struggled a bit in the first sector in the last run. Anyways, it was fun and I look forward to tomorrow.

Q: You've been away, you said you were going to have a different winter reset. You've come back fighting and you've made him work for it, haven't you?

VB: Yeah. Of course I'd prefer to be on pole, but the race is tomorrow and I'm starting on the front row. But I have to say that, as a team, after a quite tricky winter testing they have done an amazing job to turn the car around and be in this good shape.

Q: All the best for tomorrow. Sebastian, second row of the grid, third [place]. I think everyone thought after what we saw at Barcelona that Ferrari were going to start strong. Where do you feel [the team is] after the last couple of days?

Sebastian VETTEL: I don't know. Congrats to Lewis and Valtteri, they had, by the looks of it, a very today qualifying. For us it was OK. I had an off in Q2, which wasn't planned but I tried. I don't know. The car feels alright, it's not that there is anything wrong (*inaudible*) but today I thought it was OK. I think compared to those guys we were just not quick enough. The race is tomorrow, though. I think we have a good car nonetheless. This track is very specific so not worried too much, but for sure it's not great. I would have loved for it to be the other way round.

Q: To play the long game is a big thing this year. You've won this race more than a few times. Can you win this grand prix tomorrow?

SV: Of course. I think we can. You never know what's happening. Last year we got a bit lucky but the race is over when there's the chequered flag. I think we have a good car, we have a good race car and we are in good form. Obviously Mercedes are the clear favourites after the result today and the pace they have shown so far. But we are here to race. Otherwise it would be quite dull. I think all the people would agree. We'll see what happens tomorrow. I think our starts are pretty handy, so we'll go from there.

PRESS CONFERENCE

Q: Lewis that was a huge second lap in Q3. How satisfying is that?

LH: The second lap was definitely a lot better than the first, which is not always the case. It's always quite difficult on the second lap to pull that amount of time out. But on the first lap I made a mistake, which is unusual for me. It was OK, I just brushed it off and kept moving. We just kept working away, chipping away at our pace and our balance throughout the weekend. As I said, coming from Barcelona, we made some really big steps forward in the last couple of days with set-up and we brought that here and it seems to have worked. There was also a little bit of work done after that two weeks, were we analysed everything and made some small corrections. I really was not expecting to see the performance difference that we have here. It had been so close throughout the whole weekend between us all. It's amazing to see how close the top 16 are, I think there was a second between us all at one point. That's a real positive for rule regulations. It's a bit difficult when you

have a session like that to grasp exactly what just happened but I'm very proud to be up here and very grateful for everyone who has worked so hard throughout the winter and this couldn't be a better way to start the year. But Valtteri was doing some incredible laps out there, so I really had to pull something special out at the end to stay ahead of him.

Q: High praise from your team-mate Valtteri. Just talk us through the session and that second lap in Q3 in particular.

VB: First of all, I think, a bit like Lewis I'm a little bit blown away about the performance we had today. Obviously yesterday was looking good but it's always practice. It was the first session this year that really counts, in terms of lap times, and I don't think anyone in the team could have imagined we'd be in this position after the testing we had but everyone's been working so hard and that made this possible. But it's only one session: tomorrow is the main day. From my side, I really enjoyed the qualifying. I had a difficult FP3. Wasn't really happy with the car. We made some changes and really felt more confident in the qualifying and got some nice, clean laps. The first lap in Q3 was pretty good. I was quite happy with that. I knew that there was still something to improve in the second run but for some reason just lost some time in the first couple of corners. I think Turn One and Turns Three and Four. I did a little bit slower out-lap due to traffic, so maybe the tyres weren't quite ready – but Lewis did a great lap in the end, so well done for that but, I mean, we're just all happy in the team to be in this position.

Q: Sebastian, we saw a little off for you in Q2. How did that affect the performance of the car going into Q3?

SV: It didn't. During winter testing I was joking with Valtteri that I was quite jealous he did some rallying in the winter. Maybe it was in the back of my mind and I wanted to try some myself – but not the right time. I tried, obviously, to find the limits in Q2, and went a little bit over the limit. Fortunately the car was fine. Q3, run one, or generally Q3 was fine. Overall, that fortunately did not impact our qualifying.

Q: And how surprised are you by the gap to the Mercedes drivers?

SV: Certainly surprised. I think everybody is – probably even themselves. I think yesterday we didn't have a good day. Today felt better but in terms of gap and pace, it was very similar. For sure there's some homework for us to do to understand. I still think we have a great car and we should be better than this – so I'm looking forward to tomorrow. We'll see over... I don't know how many laps... 56? 58? 58 laps we have some time to get a proper read of where we are – but certainly Mercedes are the clear favourite if you have such a big gap and comfort throughout qualifying. All the sessions. We've got to live with it today but tomorrow is a new day. We've done it before, around here especially, so, we'll see.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Sebastian, you talked about you still think you've got a great car. Did you feel that here, you're missing

something that you felt you had at Barcelona, or is it just that Mercedes have made a surprising leap up the order, basically?

SV: Well, it's difficult to compare. We have something like 10, 15 degrees more ambient, hotter track, different circuit, so overall different conditions – but the car felt really good at testing and probably around here, so far this weekend it didn't feel as good – yet. As I said, yesterday was a difficult day for us. It was tricky. Today felt a bit better – but there's not an awful lot of time to try different things. Obviously you have to get on with it and the sessions come fast: especially in qualifying, you can't really change much. If anything, you get a better understanding of maybe where you're losing out or where it feels uncomfortable. So for us, I think, there is still a bit of margin but certainly the gap is there today, and it was a surprise. We didn't expect it coming here but now it is that way. And, as I said, we focus on tomorrow and don't worry about the gap now.

Q: (Heikki Kulta – Turun Sanomat) Valtteri, first time you are in the front row here. How big a difference does it make in a circuit like this – especially compared to last year when you were nowhere after qualifying.

VB: I was in the wall after qualifying! I was somewhere! Historically, it's not been the best track for me, honestly. I've never felt like I've had a great qualifying or race here for some reason. But, I mean, I think I managed to build it up well this weekend. Really started from zero this weekend, trying to learn session by session, and was pretty pleased with the car and driving and the main thing, in the qualifying, especially the first lap in Quali 3, I was really enjoying the driving and that's when the lap-times were good. So, yeah, obviously there were still things I could have done better, as Lewis showed in the last lap, but it was close enough – so much better, for example, than the year before.

Q: (Christian Menath – motorsport-magazin.com) Question for Seb. Would you say it's fair to say you have a bit more problem to extract maximum performance out of the soft tyre – because yesterday the long run looked a bit better compared to the others and today in Q1, when you had the medium tyre on, you were not that far away?

SV: Well, it's difficult to read Q1. I think people are playing around with how much, first of all, how much they push, how much they push the engine especially. I think everybody was surprised how much the track picked up as well in Q1. So, Q1 is not a great session to read into. I wouldn't say we have a problem extracting the grip from the tyres. Obviously there is a lack somewhere, because we are too slow – but didn't feel like it. I was very happy with the laps that I had in Q1 on the medium compound – but hard to have a reference because nobody else was really on that tyre at that time, so yeah, for tomorrow, we'll see. Tyres so far this weekend were no headache and should be quite straightforward tomorrow. I expect a solid race from the tyres.

Q: (Laurence Edmonson – ESPN) Seb, could you just explain exactly what it is that you're lacking because you mentioned yesterday that you didn't have the confidence in the car? Could you just go into some detail on what is missing, and is it the same on heavy fuel?

SV: I thought the sectors might still be there. I think a little bit of everything. I don't think the straightline is a problem so I think we are quite competitive down the straights but I think we're just losing in the corners. There are 16 corners around here and I think it's a fairly even spread so probably by the looks of it... and so far it was more in the medium and lower speed stuff rather than the high speed stuff which, I would say, also speaks for a strong car in general. I haven't got the balance yet which maybe I would like to have, especially in lower speed, and not the confidence and trust which again, around here, can make a big difference because it's a bumpy track and I hope they don't resurface it because it's part of the character of this track. It's fairly evenly spread around the track but I would say more towards the lower speed corners and it's easier, I would say, to lose time there. But given the gap is so big, we must lose time in more than one place, for sure. Tomorrow? I don't know, I think in the race it could be closer but also the long runs that both of them had yesterday looked very strong and ours looked OK but not as special as theirs so we will see. I think today the car was better and I expect it to be better also tomorrow so we should be a bit closer.

Q: (Daniel Paez – Caracol National Agency) Lewis, do you agree with Sebastian, do you think the track should not be resurfaced? Do you like it that it's a little bit bumpy in Melbourne, that's it's part of the character? How do you feel about that?

LH: Yeah, I like the track the way it is. I think it's a great circuit because there are not particularly massive run-off areas. If you put a wheel wrong, it generally does bite you which is great and how it should be. The bumps are part of the character of what Melbourne is so if you were to iron those out it would lose a lot of... you know, it does make it trickier for us but that's a part of it, you need that. I don't like these circuits which are super flat and super smooth, don't cause us troubles. For us this weekend we have to raise the car because it's too much into the ground under braking, that's what you should have to do and you have to live with a certain amount of vibration and your fillings coming out but that's motor racing, hard core motor racing.

Q: (Michael Schmidt – Auto, Motor und Sport) Lewis, it seemed that before your last run on your out lap you almost came to standstill twice in the last sector. Valtteri said before that he thought he had a too slow out lap but in the end it didn't seem to affect you. What happened there?

LH: I think I came out of my garage behind at least two cars so I was really conscious of trying to keep a gap to them. I think one of them was Grosjean or something like that, maybe Magnussen ahead or something like that, and I was really trying to make sure that I got the right gap to them and they were backing up also. They came round the last corner and I just wanted to slow up and make sure I maximised it because I think on a couple of laps I didn't have the perfect lap and particularly in Q1 and Q2 I had some messy laps with traffic so I just really wanted to make sure it was perfect and ultimately it was a good gap in the end, no issues. The tyres have been really good this weekend so no complaints. I know I've complained a lot about the tyres but they've been really good so it will be interesting to see how they perform tomorrow.

Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Lewis, Valtteri mentioned that he was a little bit blown away by the performance today. I know you'd said in the build-up you didn't consider yourself favourite. Do you share that assessment? Has this come a bit out of the blue for you, the size of your advantage today

LH: Absolutely. There was absolutely no... since practice from the day one to the last day when we left, when we went back to the factory, we knew we had work to do, I felt like we were... I felt good that we had a decent package to work with but we were wary that we might be slightly behind, that's what we honestly thought, when they showed us the summary of how testing went. We were behind Ferraris from our analysis, we truly believed we were behind. And from then until now, we haven't changed the car, we've understood the car more, we know what we have to do to move the car forwards but we haven't brought any upgrades or anything like that but as I said, the last couple of days felt really good at the track. Yesterday, Ferrari were just with us I think. It looked like they were a little bit heavy on fuel initially and then they dropped their fuel and then we were quite on par in performance and we thought we were closer than we thought we would be after testing. And then all of a sudden they lost a bit of performance in running, I think this afternoon or this morning, which we were not expecting and so it is a real shock. When we look at the GPS, it's a lot of the mid-speed corners. When you look at his lap from Barcelona the car looked planted so I was just saying to him were you on fumes or something? It is a difficult circuit and it's quite gusty here as well so it could be a number of things but I'm really really grateful for where our car is and where it enabled us to be today. I know that Ferrari are going to be pushing hard and progressing over the coming days and tomorrow I'm sure they will be putting up a good fight as they are always strong in the races.

Ends