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Thursday Press Conference Transcript

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PART ONE: DRIVERS – Fernando ALONSO (McLaren), Lewis HAMILTON (Mercedes), Jolyon PALMER (Renault)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Fernando, these 2017 Formula One cars were intended to be more physical. Everyone seems to have coped fine so far, but is this the race that the drivers are expecting to be really tough?

Fernando ALONSO: Probably, yes. I think this one and the next one, Malaysia, will be the two races that will be more demanding physically, but as you said, I think there was more news in the winter than what actually we got when we went in the cars, so I think it's going to be OK and no problems for anyone.

And what news of you? Are you happy with the direction things are going with the McLaren? What have you been telling the team this past month or so?

FA: Not much.

Any idea when we will have some news from you?

FA: As I said, I will think what is the best option and as I have said many times, whatever I do next year is because I want to win. I will not be around in any series to be fighting for top 10 or top 15, nothing like that. There are many options out there that I am studying, that I'm looking at. As I said, Formula One is my first and only priority and I will wait and make a decision on that before making decisions on other series. And at the same time, I want to give time to my team, after the last three years, with some struggles we went through together, to have time for them to make decisions, to see the future, next year's car and after they take their decisions I will take mine. I want to stay loyal at least to that and not make any decisions without them making first their decision. So relaxed, happy and we'll see what's going on in the next weeks.

Thanks. Lewis, world championship leader at the moment and also like Fernando a two-time Singapore Grand Prix winner, you've had four years without this guy in your face at grand prix races, battling you for the wins. Is it too strong to say that you have missed those battles and do you believe that he might be battling with you again next year?

Lewis HAMILTON: I hope that he has got a car to fight with us next year, I think that only adds to the spectacle and the challenge. We want to see the best drivers and the best teams up there and it's been a shame not to have McLaren where they have historically have been. So I hope that whether it's with McLaren or wherever Fernando happens to be next year that he has the chance to be fighting with us.

Obviously massive weekends for you in Spa and Monza and particularly that win in Monza and the all-time record on poles. Speaking of poles, pretty critical here. I think it's seven of the last eight Singapore Grands Prix have been won by the polesitter and the only exception is you, when you broke down that time in your last race here with McLaren. So would it be too strong to say that your focus this weekend is on that single lap and perfect execution on Saturday?

LH: I've not really put any thought into it yet; the work goes into it today. I think qualifying, of course, if that is the case... you can't really overtake here, plus the cars are wider, so positioning is going to be very important, so getting the car set up right so you can execute in qualifying I guess is one of the key matters.

And there is the feeling that you might be up against it a bit more here compared to Spa and Monza from the Ferrari side, and possible Red Bull as well?

LH: I think Red Bull will be fast this weekend and it's knowing that it's not going to be easiest of weekends potentially, but man I'm coming with positivity and with the plan of winning this race. This is still regardless of if that is the case, the others potentially have a little bit more downforce, whatever it is, we have worked as hard we can to understand the car and we come here with full attack.

Thank you for that. Jolyon, there has been a fair bit going on behind the scenes in Formula One in the last few weeks particularly around Renault and the teams it's going to supply in the future. What does it all mean for you?

Jolyon PALMER: Well, firstly, I'm just focused on doing the job I'm doing, so I try not to pay any attention to that sort of thing. For me, I have seven races this year to try to do the best that I can. Yeah, obviously it has been a bit of tough year. The last two races were much better, even if they didn't show in the end. The performance has been there or thereabouts, so hopefully the car will be better on these tracks and we can finally get some points.

Your role is pretty critical now in that very tight midfield Constructors' battle. You've had, I think, five retirements, and four times this year you have been the first car to retire in a grand prix. Has it stopped you from showing what you can do in Formula One?

JP: Yes, because clearly when the car is not working you can't drive it, you can't try to score some points. I think there have been a few places, Silverstone, for example, I didn't even start the race and that was quite a strong race for us. Baku, I think 11 cars finished, I think a Sauber got the points and we broke down after, again, five or six laps. So definitely it's not been ideal to have that level of reliability problems, but also in the practice sessions, to lose so much puts you on the back foot for the weekend. But the team has been working very hard at the same time in trying to fix it. Every time something happens we are finding out why, learning from it and we keep getting different problems. But hopefully we have put a stop to that now and I think, like I said, the car is going to be strong, especially in these next few races. So we're going to have a good car, good reliability, good performance and finally I can show what I can do and score some points.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Graham Harris – Motorsport Monday) A question for Jolyon. Much has been said about your possible future, although nothing has been announced. Would you care to say something about it, and if what is being said in the paddock happens, so you have a Plan B for an alternate drive next year?

JP: I don't care too much to talk about it. I know what's happening. I think there will be announcement at some point in the future, not too long. For me, I'm excited about the future. I haven't thought too much, but I'm excited for what's to come.

Q: (Rik Spekenbrink - Algemeen Dagblad) A question for all three of you: driving at night, what challenges or difficulties does that bring to you, and do you prefer it over day racing?

FA: I don't think it makes any difference to us to be honest. We get used to the night driving quite quickly and the vision you have at that moment, so it makes no difference on driving. Probably this race it's nice to have it night. It looks good on television. It's a very unique event. So, probably in my opinion I prefer to race at night because we have been racing at night all the time. In different circuits, maybe in hot places, hot countries, maybe at night is also a good idea.

LH: Not really much more to add to that. I just feel the same way about it.

JP: Likewise.

Q: (Candra Kurnia – Jawa Pos) Lewis, in the last race in Monza, you said your Mercedes was a dream car to drive, and Valtteri also said that Mercedes found a different kind of stability. Do you think this would be a big advantage going into this weekend to fight Ferraris and Red Bulls?

LH: I don't think it's going to be a big advantage. Our understanding of the car will potentially help this weekend. But you never really know where you are going to be able to place the car. So if we can get the car in a place where are comfortable and a bit like where we were in the last two races then we will definitely strong in the fight.

Q: (John McEvoy – Daily Mail) Fernando, you obviously went to America to race and enjoyed the experience. Are there are options from America, maybe from Indy, if things don't work out in Formula One for you?

FA: There are options everywhere. And they are all very good. You just need to be patient and wait a couple of weeks.

Q: (Phil Duncan - PA) Jolyon, there are some suggestions that you won't be in the car in Malaysia and that you will be replaced by Carlos Sainz. Has the team told you anything about that, are you expecting to be at the car at the next race?

JP: Yes, I have contract. I've got seven more races this year. There have been suggestions for the past 35 races that I might not be at the next one, or in the next few, so this is nothing new for me, it's water off a duck's back now. It's the same, I think at probably most races this year it's been the case and nothing has changed.

Q: (Barna Zsoldos – Nemzeti Sport) Lewis, five years ago you had to retire from the lead because of mechanical issues – can you still remember the emotions on that day and the days after – because I think it was the period when you made the final decision to switch to Mercedes. Do you consider this to be the best decision of your life?

LH: I do remember the time. I can assure you it didn't have a bearing on the decision. Obviously, I'd been with McLaren for many, many years and lots of success – so one race doesn't mean that you make a decision that's going to affect your whole life. So, still at that point we had one of the best cars, I was leading, it was an unfortunate scenario because the team worked so hard to deserve that win, so it was really unfortunate. I think I was pretty chilled afterwards, as far as I can remember, but... yeah, it was a long time ago. The following days... I was already part-way through negotiations and still weighing up my odds but negotiations were looking good so I was already halfway probably to my decision.

The other part was: is it the best decision you've ever made?

LH: Yeah. Formula One is like a game of chess and it's really about picking your moves at the right time and hopefully you have enough options. We always have some options and we all have a decision to make. You hope you make the right ones. Of course, I felt strongly about the decision I made and felt fully confident in it. I could never have dreamed of it being as good as it was, or has been, but that was the hope. Again, another dream came true. It's been a really great experience and one I wouldn't change for the world, of course.

Q: (Andrea Cremonesi – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Question for Lewis. Yesterday Mercedes announced Bottas for next season. It was not a surprise, of course, but how is it important in this final part of the Championship to have a team-mate that is sure for the future, so that maybe he can help you – or fight with you?

LH: In all honesty, it doesn't make any difference to this season: doesn't change my job, doesn't change his job, so it has zero impact on that for me personally. I think maybe for him, I can only assume it's a good feeling to have your next year covered. So yeah, I'm sure he's... but again we knew it was going to happen so it's not changed anything.

Q: (Ysef Harding – Xiro Xone News) Question for all three of you to follow-up on an earlier question. Of course, the new F1 game shows Monaco at night. I'd like to know from you guys what other tracks can you think of that would be great to run at night?

JP: I prefer Monaco in the day, to be honest, because it's a spectacular place. You've got the harbour there, obviously, so I think it's pretty iconic in the day. This is a nice one to race at night, also Abu Dhabi: you've got the lights, got a lot going on there, and Bahrain as well. It was super-hot there this year, so it was even nicer to race at night – but the day's fine also, I don't have a big problem with that. I think the race where we race at night there's a lot of infrastructure, a lot of lighting, a lot of great, iconic things that work at night but I can't imagine Silverstone, for example, looking so spectacular, there in Northampton. But I think some races are good in the day, some are good at night.

Fernando, any you think might work?

FA: Ah, I don't have a strong opinion on that. It's hard to image some circuits that historically has been at night, like this one, changing for daytime. And vice versa. I think it's OK as it is. I don't imagine any current races at night.

How about you Lewis? Any thoughts about where might work?

LH: Not really put much thought into it. I think this track is great being at night. I think it makes a big, big difference. I think the day it would be a lot less exciting. Being at night time makes it a real spectacle. If you look at places like Bahrain, which is a beautiful place and a fantastic circuit, in the daytime, firstly it was just too hot to race really, and then, I don't know, just wasn't... when it's at night you really get to see the sand dune kind of things that are the real features of the surroundings of the circuit. So, I think there are some circuits we could do at night time that would be a bit better. I've not really thought of which ones. I think it's quite cool. Maybe a race where you have it one year in the daytime and one year it's in the night time. I think it's a cool feature.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) Jolyon, if I understood you correctly earlier on, you said that you knew what was going on with your future, that there would be an announcement soon, and then you said you also had a contract for another seven races but we know that in Formula One contracts are negotiable. If you know exactly what's going on with your future, then you must know whether you'll be in Malaysia or whether it's negotiable. Which is it?

JP: I said I've got seven races to do. I'll be in Malaysia. I'll be racing until Abu Dhabi. I've already said the same.

Q: (Graham Harris – Motorsport Monday) Question for Fernando. In Spa I asked Zak about your participation potentially next year at the Indy 500, assuming that you stayed at McLaren, and he was emphatic and said no. He said you would be required to be in Monaco next year because they expected to have better performance and it wouldn't be a situation like this year. A) does that affect your decision in whether you stay or whether you go to another team and B) does that mean, if you do stay at McLaren, temporarily the dream of the triple-crown is put on hold for a while?

FA: The triple-crown is a clear target for me in the future and there are three races there, so if one of those, the Indy 500 is together with Monaco, as we know, there is another one still to complete, so triple-crown is still on going at the maximum speed but yeah, I agree the same thing that Zak said: if I remain in Formula One it's because I believe I can win next year. So, that will ease the decision a lot because I will be in Monaco because I don't want to lose any points there. So, priority if Formula One, as I said before, and winning here, and triple crown is in the background. As I said, there are three races, not only Indy. So, there are many possibilities to do a fantastic 2018.

Q: (Ben Edwards – Channel Four) Fernando, at Monza you were a bit unhappy that Jolyon didn't give you the place back in the battle you two guys were having...

FA: Not with him. That was your theme the week later and the news, that they changed... with all the engine saga. The news turned a little bit. I was not happy with the stewards and the FIA.

Did you talk to the stewards any further, and will you talk to them more in the drivers' meeting?

FA: I will talk tomorrow but there is not much to talk, y'know. I mean, they make a mistake, they know already so there is not much to talk.

Q: (Rebecca Clancy – The Times) Fernando, just following on from what you were saying about Indy next year, not being able to do it, does that mean you're focussing on maybe doing Le Mans next year instead – because I don't believe that does clash with a race?

FA: There is nothing as yet confirmed. As I said, my plans didn't change. I'm waiting for my current team to make up their decisions and after that to negotiate whatever possibilities I have here, which is my first priority, and the triple crown, to win it one day, I think that will put me in a good level of a complete driver that can win in any series at any time. So those objectives are still there. As I said, for my fans and for motorsport lovers, they will have a fantastic 2018 season, so the plan is ongoing and very good news is coming.

PART TWO: DRIVERS – Kevin MAGNUSSEN (Haas), Daniel RICCIARDO (Red Bull Racing), Lance STROLL (Williams)

Q: Kevin, a good record here with points on your previous two visits. You and Romain both looked good in Monaco as well so is there some optimism at Haas this weekend, especially given the tight midfield points battle that you're in?

Kevin MAGNUSSEN: Yeah, I'm quite positive about the weekend but to compare with... Monaco was quite OK for us but a lot of things have changed since then. Other teams have been developing, so have we but it's difficult to say that we're going to be as competitive. But we'll see. I'm positive.

Q: We talked in part one of the press conference about the importance of qualifying here in Singapore. Amazingly, you're the only non-Sauber driver yet to reach Q3 - without engine penalties I mean – so presumably that's a massive priority for you this weekend?

KM: Yeah, it is. We've had the pace a couple of times but just had some issues with the car and reliability problems that meant that the times that we were actually strong enough to do it we didn't do it. It's not something I think about too much, it's more the points that count for me. It is something that I would like to happen. I'll let it happen when it does.

Q: Daniel, coming to you: new go-faster haircut is it?

Daniel RICCIARDO: It's pretty aerodynamic. I won't take the top off. It's a bird's nest up there!

Q: Front row of the grid the last two years here at Singapore, last three years on the podium; does the car you have this year allow you to dream of more than that?

DR: I think so, I believe so. We've certainly got stronger and stronger and I think (that on) the high downforce circuits we've been pretty good but getting better. I think, also, looking at the last race, on the low downforce circuit we had really good pace on the Sunday which was a little surprise to us. With that, coming here, with a few updates as well, we should be there. It doesn't seem like these sort of circuits, this year, are a strength of Mercedes either so I think it could bring Ferrari and us really into that battle. I hope, at least, it's going to be a tight and exciting one.

Q: And looking ahead to 2018 and the question of progress, what progress will satisfy you next year?

DR: You know, we want to win, want to win and win more. We've fortunately got one this year. I believe we can win another and then obviously next year to start accumulating more and obviously fight for a title, that's what we really want. Yeah, we're certainly going in that direction, particularly since if I look back at Melbourne, that feels like another season ago. We're in a completely different position so progress has been good, I think we've got to keep that going to Abu Dhabi and then make another step across the winter to start strong for 2018.

Q: Lance, youngest ever front row starter in Monza last time out and a solid run to seventh from there, how did you enjoy life in the fast lane and was seventh the maximum?

Lance STROLL: I enjoyed the weekend, it was a really solid weekend, Saturday, Sunday, especially Saturday, that was really the highlight of the weekend, if you ask me. In the wet was a good opportunity. We really pulled it out of the bag and that was great. I enjoyed that. I don't think seventh was the maximum, no. I think fifth was possible with the pace we had. Unfortunately I got squeezed by Lewis at the start so I had to back out and I was kind of boxed in and Esteban managed to get around the outside of me so that wasn't perfect. Again, the pit stop took I think 4.4 seconds so mathematically we were supposed to get in front of Esteban or at least have a shot, side by side, coming out of the pit exit but that didn't happen and on top of it we lost a position to Kimi so it wasn't a perfect race, we were pretty compromised being stuck behind Esteban throughout the whole race but again, that is racing, you do face adversity so it was still a great result and if we could continue scoring solid points like that, P7s, P8s until the end of the year I think we will be really happy as a team.

Q: On some tracks this year you've been right there from the get-go; is that just a question of feeling or is it something more technical than that and from what you know of Singapore, do you think this is likely to be another one?

LS: It's a bit of both. It's a combination of driving, feeling and the car as well. I don't know here at Singapore. It's a bit different everywhere. Generally, yeah, I quite enjoy street circuits: Monaco, Baku. It's fun when there's a consequence when you make mistakes, I think it makes it a bit more exciting. Obviously it's frustrating when you do hit the wall and stuff, I'm not saying that but I quite like the buzz of being close to walls and the whole rhythm you have to get into on a street circuit. It's always good fun so I'm looking forward to driving round here. Hopefully the car can be competitive this weekend. I know it's not exactly our kind of track. We've seen over this season that low downforce, long straights, slower corners – that's really been our strength and higher downforce we've really really struggled. But I'm positive that with the whole team and everyone we've thought of solutions to improve that for this weekend. We've just got to what we do and see what happens.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Rik Spekenbrink - Algemeen Dagblad) What challenges and difficulties does a night race bring to you and do you prefer it over daytime racing?

DR: It doesn't really change too much in terms of... you know the visibility here is really good. Some areas, maybe the light is a tiny bit more dim than others but it's fine. Actually, I think during the night here it's cool with all the city, the lights and all that, it makes quite a spectacle so... I think if we did the race in the day it would probably lose some of that so I'm happy driving here at night and I don't think you're compromised with visibility anywhere. It's pretty well lit.

KM: Yeah, same, not a big difference.

LS: My only experience under the lights was in Bahrain and I didn't do too many laps in that Grand Prix. No, it should be really cool under the lights and the city all lit up. I think everyone really gets into it so I'm really looking forward to it.

Q: (Ysef Harding – Xiro Xone News) Daniel, earlier this year, at the beginning of the year, you released a clothing line of yours that you designed for the Australian Grand Prix and I'm wondering how's it going? Can you give us an update on it and do you plan to expand on it? And you two, have you ever thought about the aspiration of the avenues of clothing, fashion design, to expand upon as athletes?

DR: Thanks for mentioning it, I'll give you a free hoodie if you want one. We've kind of seen, over the last – whatever – couple of years, call it, there were a few requests coming in, I guess, from fans: will we ever bring out something for some fan merchandise, away from team stuff as well, more personal for a fan? We decided to do kind of a basic range for now and just keep it simple and see how it goes and so far it's going good. I've got some fans, which is nice. We'll see.

Obviously if there's demand we'll expand it and create some more, different, unique, probably more fashionable items but it was just to kind of keep it pretty simple for now and see how we... a real entry level and see how it goes. It's cool, today I saw some guys wearing the T-shirts and the hats and it's fun so... What colour do you like? I'll hook you up, it's alright.

KM: Could do something. I see a lot of Danish people at the tracks always. I recently had an interview that some people created T-shirts with a quote from that interview and...

DR: What was the quote?

KM: I can't even remember!

DR: You don't remember it? Sure?

KM: Do you? OK. I'm not going to produce any of those T-shirts but could do something different.

Q: And Lance, what about you? There's a fair bit of clothing knowledge in your family, isn't there?

LS: Yeah, I don't think so. Maybe, down the line. Play it by ear. Right now I'm good with my Williams fashion. It's good at the race track but we'll see, play it by ear. You never know.

Q: (Graham Harris – Motorsport Monday) Liberty are starting to engage much more on a digital basis and their own digital platforms; coming to social media for drivers, to the three of you, how heavily are you involved in social media? Do you do your own tweets, are you actively involved and do you see it as a way to engage fans and bring new, younger fans into the sport in the future?

LS: I'm not on Twitter. I'm all about the fan, don't get me wrong, but I try to stay out of some of the noise in this world but for sure, I like Instagram and stuff, post a picture, people get to see what you're getting up to, that's always nice, but for sure, to expand Formula One across the world and give a bit of a view to the fans of what's going on is always nice. It's about balancing it out, I guess.

DR: It's been good. I agree, I think it's a balance. The good thing about it is we control it, I control my pages and we can put out what we want and keep what we want so that's a good thing. We do control it. Some are doing more into their personal life than others. I think it's good to keep some mystery still as well, not show everyone everything. I did something in Spa, like a time lapse of the race day, in my driver room so I'm sure hardly anyone had even seen my driver room before so that gave them a little insight. It's not giving away anything but it's just something unique. I like what F1 did in Monza; I think they put the GoPro on Lewis's champagne bottle and sprayed that... so that was like a driver's point of view of what standing on the podium's like so little things like this. Even for me watching it, I was like that's really cool so I can imagine a fan watching that, it's pretty awesome. I think they're doing great things and I think it's only going to get better. For us, personally, as long as we stay in control of our own things then I don't think there's anything wrong with it or any danger of it getting out of hand so I think it's pretty good.

KM: Yeah, I agree, I think there's been a change for the good in what F1 is giving to the fans on social media etc and I think that's very good.

Ends