



## Press Information

### 2019 French Grand Prix Sunday Press Conference Transcript 23.06.2019

#### DRIVERS

1 – Lewis HAMILTON (Mercedes)

2 – Valtteri BOTTAS (Mercedes)

3 – Charles LECLERC (Ferrari)

#### TRACK INTERVIEWS

(Conducted by Martin Brundle)

**Q: Lewis, the word that springs to my mind is master class.**

**Lewis HAMILTON:** It's definitely been a really, really good weekend. I've been racing a long, long time but it just never gets old. It's always such a challenge out there and I just love that trying to find the edge, just bridging the gap and really being on top of this machine. But I couldn't do it without this incredible team, this group of guys here. All these guys... don't be shy! And all the guys back at the factory. We're creating history together. I'm so proud of everyone, so proud to be a part of this team; this group of people, and Valtteri did a great job this weekend as well. Yeah, I'm hyped.

**Q: It was warm out there. I can feel the heat still coming off your body. It was pretty tough out there today.**

**LH:** Yeah, well, it's a beautiful day here in the south of France. I'm still sweating a huge amount out there and it's so warm still in car. It's very, very bumpy. It's actually an awesome track to drive within the race. There are some real technical areas where you can gain an advantage on others.

**Q: We heard you managing a few things – gearbox changes early on, settings, then you reported your seat had broken in one place, then the blisters on the tyres – so it wasn't totally easy.**

**LH:** Well, it wasn't easy at all. There are always things happening, everything is on the edge. You've got to imagine these cars, as you know, everything is running to a temperature, everything is about wear, reliability is everything, so saving the engine where I can, looking after the tyres. I had quite big blisters on the front two tyres. In was a little bit worried. I remember last year, I think a Force India or something, yeah Lance, had a tyre blowout, so I was a little bit worried about that, but nonetheless this has been the best start to the year, so we've got to enjoy it.

**Q: Indeed, six wins so far this season, the fourth straight victory there for Lewis. Coming home in second place, Valtteri, what can you tell us about your race?**

**Valtteri BOTTAS:** Not that much happening from my side honestly. The start was the best bet for me but Lewis had a good start as well and ultimately Lewis was quicker today. I couldn't really match his pace. Something for me to have a look at obviously before the next one. But very proud of the team and myself... Yeah, it's just important to understand today what I can do better for next time.

**Q: No particular issues then. Any idea where this great champion is finding this extra speed from the car?**

**VB:** It's something I need to look at. He was really strong and consistent today, and also yesterday in qualifying. He's not unbeatable; I know that. I just need work hard.

**Q: Charles, congratulations, tantalisingly close to second place, you gave it everything you had.**

**Charles LECLERC:** Yes, I gave it everything. Obviously the first run was quite OK, I felt OK with the car, but the Mercedes were just too quick and the second stint was all about tyre management. I think we did a very, very good job on that. Towards the end, I was catching Valtteri, I think he struggled a little bit to turn his tyre on again after the VSC, so I saw an opportunity but unfortunately there were not enough laps for me to try something. But I think seeing where we were on Friday after the race simulations, I think it's a great day for us.

**Q: Was there a moment where you thought 'I'm going to have him, I'm going to take second place'?**

**CL:** Definitely. I mean in the last two laps I was catching quite quickly, so I believed it until the last metres.

## **PRESS CONFERENCE**

**Q: We're going to start with Valtteri. Second place today. You had Charles less than one second behind you at the flag. Did you have an issue or were you simply managing the gap to perfection?**

**VB:** Yeah, from my side it was quite an uneventful race in the end, but yeah, we were suffering with some front tyres blistering in the last stint, so we were a little bit concerned and just wanted to be on the safe side so we would definitely make it to the end without any failure on the front tyre. So had take care a lot of the fronts in many of the corners and maybe being a lot on the conservative side, losing some big chunks of time, just by managing and being on the safe side. And in the end, that's why it became a bit close with Charles, closer than we wanted. After the VSC we struggled a bit to re-start the tyres and lost some temperature.

**Q: Were you pleased with the pace of your car in race conditions today, and how did it compare to yesterday in the practice session?**

**VB:** Obviously very pleased for us as a team. We've been having another super strong weekend, getting the maximum points pretty much once again, so from that side it's good. But my gap to Lewis, for sure not pleased with that. I think in the beginning once tyres were fresh there was no issue keeping up with him. Today my issue was keeping the front tyres in a good state. Always halfway through the stint my front tyres were starting to be finished and the gap started to build. That was the difference to Lewis. He was quick today and efficient on the tyres and that's how he made the gap.

**Q: Charles, second consecutive podium, well done. One more lap and you think you might have a go at the man on your right?**

**CL:** Well, it's always quite difficult to know. One thing for sure is that I was catching quite quickly at the end. The car felt pretty good. I had paid quite a lot of attention to both axles of tyres before and I was just focusing on the end of the race, to have the tyres in quite a good shape and I think on that we did quite a good job. To be honest though I did not expect to catch Valtteri. As he mentioned he had some issues with the front tyres. That's why I caught him quite dramatically towards the end. It was a good surprise and when I saw that I pushed even more. At the end we finished very, very close. I tried to show myself in the inside of the last corner, but obviously I was too far to try something.

**Q: Charles, it's been a really good weekend for you personally, in terms of pace relative to your teammate. How encouraged are you by that and also the improvements that Ferrari have made this weekend?**

**CL:** On the first one, I'm very happy because I've had a few difficult weekends, the last ones, especially in qualifying. I changed the approach for here. I changed also a little bit my approach on the car set-up and I think it went in the right direction, so on that I'm very, very happy that it paid off and we could see it on the result this weekend. Then on the car improvement we have brought some new parts this weekend, some were good, some other were not, but clearly Mercedes are quite better for now, so we need to work and to try to catch up.

**Q: Lewis, your sixth win of 2019, the 79<sup>th</sup> of your career. The numbers keep climbing. Lewis, it was an emphatic victory, another emphatic victory. Fastest lap the only thing that eluded you this weekend. Just talk us through the race. There was quite a lot of radio chat about tyres and broken seats. What can you tell us?**

**LH:** I'd still say it was relatively eventful. I think something broke in my seat – like one of the seat stays, so as I was going through one of the corners, all of a sudden the thing kind of dropped and was moving around a little bit. And then the start was good, then the first couple of laps with the tyres was not so easy – I don't know how it was for the other guys but sliding around a little bit at the beginning. And then after that I kinda got into my rhythm and after that was quite comfortable. Was not expecting the medium tyre to go as far as it did but I was able to continue. The stopped me, for sure, too early. I could have kept going for at least another five, maybe even ten laps, I had a lot of life left still in the tyres. And then we got onto the next tyre which felt good initially but then I got a lot of graining on the tyre. But I was just really working on my craft and really working on... I was continuing to learn about this track, and where you can and can't push; where you save, where you don't save and all those kinds of things. With that, I started finding more and more time, and every time Valtteri and Charles but a good time in, I was a tenth or two ahead. So I just kept it consistent, and right at the end, I hadn't really thought much about the fastest lap. Being that we know Vettel had a free stop, and so, the thing is, with me, my mentality is that it doesn't matter whether they have a free stop, I'm still going to go for it. The team's like: don't even bother. And so, anyway, I came out of the last corner and half way down the straight I decided to go for it. So, I probably lost a little bit in power mode but, other than that, it was a really good lap. It's always good to be able to push and eke more out of the car. It was a lot of drifting, because the tyres were quite old. Other than that, really grateful. We actually didn't come here with any upgrades, we just continue to refine this car. My feeling within the car is improving as I get more into the season, particularly in qualifying but also in the race. So just a big thank you to all the guys back at the factory for their continued hard work. It doesn't go unnoticed. I know we've had a lot of success, and they're used to it but I hope they continue to keep pushing. That's what I'm doing.

**Q: You said earlier that you're making history with this team. Can you just describe what it's like to ride the wave that you're currently on?**

**LH:** I'm not really a good surfer, so I can't really relate it to riding the wave necessarily. I think the thing is people see success and they often don't have a real understanding of how much work goes on in the background. Maybe you can try to imagine but then you've got multiply that by ten or a hundred or whatever it is. Obviously we've got an incredible boss and I think it tapers down from the head. We owe a lot to Toto, of how he manages this team and how he manages us as drivers and allows us to race and allows us to race. But also when you have authority – not authority but respect for each other within in the team, where you really listen to each other. We've created a working relationship where we learn so much from each of these races and we take it back and we churn out time. I've definitely experienced in the past, in my career, that's not always been the case. Communication is everything. I think that's what we have: a great team of communicators and hard workers. There's not a single person I think that is complacent within the team. They could be out there drinking right now but instead they'll be working on the car onto the next one. They're just sheer hard workers. Honestly never through I'd see such a great team and be so fortunate as to be in such a great team. So I'm really, really grateful to witness it and be a part of it, and to Mercedes who have supported me since I was 13. It's really cool to continue to... particularly because it's 125 years of Mercedes-Benz. So, I think we, Valtteri and I, help them to continue to break more records.

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

**Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Lewis, you mentioned about going for the fastest lap right at the end. You talked, when you spoke to Martin Brundle immediately after the race about the fears with the front tyres, the blisters, managing that. How was it balancing that need to preserve the tyres with the desire to push? I guess you must have felt fairly confident that you were able to go for that lap right at the end?**

**LH:** I asked if anyone else was having blistering and they didn't reply that Valtteri or anyone else was having the same, so I was a little bit nervous with that. Particularly as it started getting quite deep on the right side. And then it appeared on the left side, and I'm thinking: shoot. I remember last year Lance, I think it was, so in the Williams I guess had the tyre blow up in Turn 10, so I was a little bit nervous for

that. Even though I think we had the thin gauge tyre last year as well. A little bit nervous with that. I basically reduced a bit of my speed for a period of time where I wasn't really leaning too heavily on the front tyre. And then, right at the end, the car's at its lightest, and it's only one lap, so I went for it and pushed a little bit more – but not really taking the cake. Fortunately it all held together and I just a little bit off. So we could definitely have had the fastest lap at the end there but anyways.

**Q: (Ben Hunt – The Sun) Is there any part of you that thinks about – or doesn't think about doing showboating. I'm talking the likes in other sports where you see sports starts almost taking the mickey out of their opponents, like pulling over, slowing down, letting people catch up – or are you constantly fearful that you've got to be there to hammer home the lap times and try and keep that gap as big as possible?**

**LH:** First, I don't hold fear in my heart. I just focus on trying to be great and improve as a driver. So it's nothing to do with fear. I don't think I've ever been one for showboating, so I think, with the world that we're in today, you can't win and you lose either way you do it. People having an opinion about one way that you do it or another. I prefer to just keep my head down and keep chipping away at things. Naturally I would love... I really enjoyed the last race and races like that. I've never made it a secret. That's the races I think in general people enjoy most. And, of course, these ones are not the ones that people enjoy the most – but I think it's really important for people to realise it's not the drivers' fault. This is a constant cycle of Formula One for years and years and years, even before I got to Formula One, and it's because the way Bernie had it set up and the decisions they were making back then, it's still the same. Until that management structure changes, it will continue to be the same, in my opinion. That's not my job to do that. My job's to come here and do the best I can as a driver.

**Q: (Christian Menath – motorsport-magazin.com) Question for you Valtteri. Just to be clear on that last laps, you said the front tyres were the problem afterwards – but did you also lose time during the VSC because of the VSC procedure – or was it just the tyre?**

**VB:** I lost a little bit of time in the VSC but I don't think I was the only one because it was, like super quick, so first you slow down a lot to be positive on the delta, you're changing the engine modes, then suddenly it was saying VSC ending. So, put in the right mode. I started to go flat-out because I was a lot positive, so I think I got down to maybe +3 on the delta which is bigger than usual. So, lost a bit of time there – but the main issue was the blistering, a lot of front tyre wear. Once you lost a bit of temperature under the VSC, you struggle to get gain it back when you don't have the surface of the rubber any more there. So, that was the bigger difference, so couldn't really restart the tyres.

**Q: (Luis Vasconcelos – Formula Press) Valtteri and Charles. Valtteri, yesterday you said the start was going to be the key so what went wrong there, or were you waiting for something to go wrong for Lewis there to make the pass? And for Charles, you had an interesting first couple of corners with Max, so can you explain how that was from your point of view?**

**VB:** Yeah, for me, just the initial pull away, I felt there was decent grip so I went quite deep on the clutch but for some reason I just didn't get the kick from the engine for the initial part but it was fine, all OK, nice and smooth start but Lewis had a good start as well so there was not enough difference on the start to gain any ground and then after that, like I said, Lewis was strong today on the pace and especially on the front tyre management. My tyres were running out quicker.

**CL:** Yeah, I was quite surprised how quick the lights went off but I quite liked it, I think it's good, it's a good surprise and it gives something more to the start, but apart from that, I didn't have a great start. After that I had a slipstream, I tried to place myself round the outside of Valtteri for the first corner but I didn't take the risk to go round the outside, because he would have outbraked me and pushed me wide, for sure. I would have done the same so I decided to slow down a bit more, go behind him and then I saw that Max actually had a bit more grip and was round the outside of me. Actually I only saw him for one corner so I don't know if he was there for a long time but I only saw him for turn two and then he was round the outside of turn three but yeah, I pushed in turn three and then I didn't see him again after.

**Q: (Phil Duncan – PA) Lewis, I think I'm right in saying that you've dropped just 21 points this season from the first eight races which is a pretty remarkable start. I know obviously you say the team is in a great place and obviously lauding Toto but how do you think you're doing personally as a driver in the sense that you're dominating so much this season?**

**LH:** Yeah, I think I just tried to... reflecting on last year was the best year that I had had and I got myself into a really healthy place, condition physically and mentally, but there were still races that could have been better, there always is. So coming to this season, thinking trying to see if I can bring all those deliverables, continue to deliver on the deliverables but then see if I can chip away at improving even more. I definitely didn't expect us... even when we sit in the debriefs or when we are in the garage, we are like... when we were in Barcelona in testing, we did not think this would be where we were. When the team spoke to me afterwards and said how's the car, I didn't really have any good things to say and there was a real worry for the first week and a half until the last day when we kind of figured out how to get the car to work. And then since then, the first few races, practice has been so-so, Valtteri has been super quick and much happier with the car and I've been thinking, Jeez, why have I not been as on top of it as he has, for example, or I have been in the past. But little by little, just keep working at it, keep chipping away and it's getting better and better but the races just continue to be my strongest point, since some point of last year, and that's really comforting and so that's an area that I've particularly enjoyed. I really do hope that we have more close races like the last race. I really hope Ferrari bring some extra downforce rather than keeping the straights fast, get some speed through the corners so we can start racing each other.

**Q: (Ben Hunt – The Sun) Lewis, you mentioned that you want a close fight, you might have to slow down. Any chance of that happening in Austria?**

**LH:** Well, firstly Austria is going to be roasting. I think everyone's going to have to slow down because it's going to be so hot. One of the issues that we have is that our cars are too heavy and so the brakes are beyond the limit, they're always overheating and they're talking about going heavier in 2021 which is the wrong... I promise you is the wrong direction. But anyways, we're going to struggle, I think next week will be a struggle because – but I think it's for everyone, it's super hot there, really hard for the brakes so how we are going to manage next week I don't know. You saw a couple of years ago we had two failures in one race so it's a hard race for everyone so we don't go there with all the confidence in the world, we know that we might have a difficult weekend. It's long straights, they're good at long straights but we don't plan on slowing down, we definitely don't plan on slowing down. You look so bored, Ben. Sorry.

**Q: (Ben Hunt – The Sun) Off-mike. You led every single lap, these guys are doing their best but it's just the sport we're involved in at the moment. You know it, I know it, we all know it.**

**LH:** Yup, but instead of – and I don't know if you do – but when you write the story and you say that... if you say that it's boring... no, but if you do, I totally understand it and I remember growing up watching. Don't point the fingers at the drivers because we don't write the rules, we have nothing to do with the money shifting, all that kind of stuff... should put the pressure on the people that are at the head, who should be doing the job. I think they are trying to but for many, many years they've made bad decisions. Do I have confidence that it's going to shift massively? I have faith that it's going to get better, I really, really hope so and to the point that I went to Paris last week to get involved. I was in that meeting, watching all the bosses of F1. I think there was the FIA and all the Formula One teams, and trying to get involved in... I have nothing to gain by it by being there but if there's anything I can help... they've been making all these decisions and never once had a driver's input in that room, so if that can be the decisive point that helps shift it and the fans can get better racing, I will be proud to be a part of that.

**Q: (Livio Oricchio – GloboEsporte.com) Charles, your team always says to us that one of the problems of the car is they do not have the tyres in the correct window temperature. Looks like this weekend it works properly. Did it permit you and your team to have a precise diagnosis about what the problem is with the car?**

**CL:** I think there's not only this and I think we have been clear on that. We are clearly fast on the straights and not enough in the corners so we need to work on that. We tried to do a step towards that this weekend. As I've mentioned, some parts worked, some others didn't and we need to understand why and from then try to build up and try to understand why the gap is so big at the moment and try to close it.

**Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Lewis, just to pick up on what you said about going to the FIA meeting and the summit. What did you learn from it? Did you go there with a sort of expectation in mind of**

**what you wanted to get out of it or were you there just to observe, listen and how much did it encourage you about 2021 and beyond?**

**LH:** What happens behind closed doors... obviously I can't say a huge amount about it but it starts off with the fact that for the first time all the drivers are united, so the GPDA, which obviously started a long, long time ago. We have Alex Wurz who runs it for us because he has a little bit more time than we do and he's a great spokesman for us but we all sit together in a room, particularly after the drivers briefing, and we talk about the issues. Then they bring up the rule sheet and what the things... and we are basically trying to get in the door and trying to be a part of it, and for many, many years they have not wanted us in that room, which I guess is why it's never happened, because they're engineers and they're the guys that make the decisions and we're just drivers. But the fact is we know how the car feels and so we have good positive criticism and negative criticism that can only help influence a decision. You can't make a rule change about something without having all the facts behind it and what effect it will have and so... Anyway, so we just go in there to try and be a guide and if we can be a part of the rudder when they come up with an idea we can say actually that would feel terrible in the car and they would be like 'oh really.' Was it encouraging? It was encouraging that they allowed us to be there and they were really, really welcoming, which was great, and I'm hoping that they will continue to have us there, some of us drivers or a couple of us drivers each time. They've extended the decision of making the rules. I think they need to because they're nowhere near where it should be in my opinion and they've got to make some serious changes to the decisions that they've already made of how 2021 should be. But what I'm encouraged by is that Ross and his team are working - for the first time - on a real aero package that hopefully will have an impact on following, for example. But as I said, the cars going heavier is not a great thing. We need to get the cars lower, I think. People really enjoyed the speed of the cars between the early 2000s I think it was. It still needs to be Formula One, the pinnacle of sport and the fastest cars that there are around the world. So hopefully we will be part of it, hopefully we can make a real cool change and it's not only that, it's the format of the race weekend that maybe can shift a little bit for the fans, it's how we bring the fans in, it's all these things which can be better.

**Ends**