



Press Information

2019 Azerbaijan Grand Prix Sunday Press Conference Transcript 28.04.2019

DRIVERS

1 – Valtteri BOTTAS (Mercedes)

2 – Lewis HAMILTON (Mercedes)

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TRACK INTERVIEWS

(Conducted by Paul Di Resta)

Q: Valtteri, an absolutely perfect day you've had. Lights out to flag, a bit of pressure from Lewis, but controlled and payback from last year and that win that went away?

Valtteri BOTTAS: Yeah, indeed. It was actually a tough race, even though maybe not much happening at the front Obviously Lewis was putting pressure all the time, so I could not do any mistake. But honestly, everything was under control so I'm happy to see the chequered flag and get this first place.

Q: You're the calmest person I've seen. Back in control of this championship as well. You've had a very good start to the year. It's all about keeping the momentum up. There's no better guy than Lewis putting the pressure on, but to get that job done, what does that mean going away from this grand prix, back to Europe?

VB: It obviously means a lot. It's incredible as a team on which kind of level we are performing now. I already said to the guys I'm so proud to be part of that. We're all performing really, really well. For me as well, it's only my fifth win, so of course it feels good and it carries on well.

Q: I hope you can enjoy your Sunday night; you certainly deserve it after this weekend. Lewis, your team-mate did a solid job all weekend, he just pipped you in qualifying but you never let him out of your sights today and you were fighting all the way to the end.

Lewis HAMILTON: Yeah, congratulations to Valtteri, he drove a fantastic race. He made no mistakes and truly deserved the win. It was all lost in qualifying, so there's really not much more for me to say. But it's a great result for the team. Honestly, this is the best start to a season we've ever had.

Q: I want to pick up on the team. Four one-two finishes. How much credit do you owe to these guys year after year after year to give you a car to do a solid job like that?

LH: It's a team effort. Everyone back at the factory has been working non-stop every year. Every year they come back more hungry for success and it's a true testament to strength and depth within the team. So really proud of everyone and really great to be a part of it. It was a really great race. For once we've been able to push the whole way. It's pretty cool.

Q: Sebastian, P3 at the end after qualifying. It looked like you struggled in the first stint, regained a lot of strength mid-race and you were able to put the pressure on Mercedes.

Sebastian VETTEL: I don't know. You're right. The first stint was really poor. I really struggled to initially get the tyres to work. I think they were too cold and I damaged them, and by the time they were hot they were damaged, so it was never really working. I was really uncomfortable, inconsistent, just couldn't get a feel and confidence with the car, so that's not usually so good around here. After that, I was surprised. I was already looking forward to a difficult stint on the medium tyres, but no problem to switch them on and they lasted until the end no problem. So much happier, much more confidence and I think we had some pace to at least go with them, sometimes put a bit of pressure. We obviously had to keep an eye on Max behind. With some of the overtaken, lapped cars he was getting a bit closer but in the end we had enough pace on the medium tyre to react, to keep him behind. It was crucial to keep that third, good for Charles to get that fastest lap at the end, to snatch it away from the Mercedes boys. Still plenty of work for us to do, obviously we are not quite where we want to be. But at this point we just need to maximise what we can.

Q: And I guess looking forward to a more familiar track, Barcelona, where you had such a strong winter and it looked like you guys were going to be the benchmark this year?

SV: I hope so. Obviously the last four races, on average, we were not quite there, so I think we are not the favourites going to Barcelona. But the team is in good spirits. We have another couple of stuff getting on the car, so we need to chase them down. We are looking to hopefully a smooth weekend. Our first four weekends haven't been that smooth. But it will be crucial to catch them and turn things around.

PRESS CONFERENCE

Q: Valtteri, you said in China that the start of the race cost you the race there, but you looked determined to make sure that didn't happen today?

VB: Yeah, honestly I could have done a better job at the start today. I think I was a little bit on the cautious side. I didn't want to get the wheel spin started, so I was rather smooth on getting on power, not to kind of mess it up. But Lewis had a good start, so that's why he was on the inside and we were pretty much side by side actually through Turn 1, so I was just carrying the speed on the outside, and same thing in Turn 2, leaving enough space. It was nice and fair and I was obviously pleased to keep the first place.

Q: That was the start, but then at the end you also came under pressure from Lewis as well. How tough was that pressure and were you two racing right to the flag?

VB: Yeah, you know, it was a pretty long stint, the second one. So you can sometimes play a little bit, when you push more, when sometimes you try to save the tyres a bit more, because it's always a bit unknown how the tyres are going to behave when they are coming towards the end of their life. At times I could really notice Lewis trying really hard to catch me and he was really close at times, like in the end. So I had to really respond and push as well. The main thing for I was focusing on was just purely my own driving, not falling for the silly mistakes. I managed to keep it together, so for this I'm really happy.

Q: Well done today. Lewis, we'll start at the start as well. Just how close was it between you and Valtteri and how tough is it to judge how hard to push against your team-mate?

LH: It's always difficult to judge. But Valtteri did an exceptional job all weekend and today he was very fair in giving space and after that he was faultless. So today he truly deserved the win. It was a great race. It was really cool that we could push as hard as we could all the way to the end. It was great that the team allowed us to do that. Also just the team's performance throughout the whole weekend, the engineers, everyone back at the factory who are just constantly delivering 100%. This is truly the strongest season we've ever started with but really deserving in the sense of just how hard everyone has worked in the delivery, so really proud to be a part of it and this is a really great result for everyone.

Q: You mentioned the start to the season. That's four straight 1-2s. Is this also the best form as a team you've produced in the time that you've been there?

LH: I think so, yeah, definitely. Valtteri's really, clearly stepped up this year and is really happy in the car and really delivering and driving fantastically, so it's going to take some really great performances from both of us to out-perform each other. And that's how it should be. Hopefully at some stage Ferrari will be in the mix with us. I think this weekend, I do think they had the performance to be on the front row with both of their cars. From our data we saw that Seb didn't get a tow, for example, which is worth four or five tenths or something, so he probably would have been on pole had he got that tow and the race would have been maybe more exciting. So, again, it takes one hundred per cent deliver throughout the weekend, which we, I think, were as close to that as possible. They're going to have to pick it up if they want to fight us.

Q: Seb, moving on to you, Lewis says that Ferrari will have to pick it up if they want to fight Mercedes. How well did your race go today and how close to the maximum did you get out of your car?

SV: Well, he's right. We need to pick it up obviously. We saw in the first stint that we really struggled to follow. I was really quite... yeah it was difficult to find a rhythm, difficult to extract grip from the tyres. After the stop it was a lot better. I expected it to be a tough and long afternoon but after that the car was quite good and I was able to push and I think we stayed with them, and with the blue flags maybe in the end we weren't particularly lucky, the places around the track, I saw Lewis had some quite

good tows with lapped cars here and there – but what goes around, comes around. I think overall the second stint was better for us than the first one. We lost, I think, all the potential to put pressure at the beginning of the race. But they were very strong and did absolutely right by pulling a gap. After that for us I think it was just to try and put them under some sort of pressure and bring it home.

Q: You're clearly close to Mercedes, based on the finishing positions here. What do you think is going to be key to breaking this run of form that Mercedes has shown?

SV: Well, we need stronger pace, simple as that. We need to be faster. I'm convinced we've been, partly this weekend, looking very strong but overall not strong enough. So, it seems that for us it's more of a conscious effort to get the car in the right window, whereas maybe for them it seems to click a little bit easier. Especially a place like around here, you need the confidence in the car. I'm not yet there. I can feel that I'm not driving at my best because simply the car does not answer or does not respond the way I like. And then I think it's unnatural. I think everybody's been there. I think all drivers know that sort of feeling: when it's not there, then your judgement is normally right, to not go there because you end-up losing the car. So, yeah, I seem to be more sensitive at the first races than at the test. The test was really good but that's a long time ago now. We need to look forward and improve the way we handle things, the way we work to just get faster. That's it.

Q: Valtteri, returning to you, Championship leader heading back for the European season – just how much confidence do you take from this start to the season?

VB: Confidence is good. I'm happy to just carry on. Obviously, yeah, it's been a good start personally for me for the season, it's a long season ahead. I do realise that. But something I'm really proud of is the level at which the team is performing. It's, for me, incredible. We need to be really, really proud of that – but not think about it too much. Just keep doing what we're doing and the list of things that we can do better as a team is still long. So we need to focus on that. So let's keep going.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Lewis, it was fine margins between you and Valtteri today. I think you lost a bit of time the way the VSC ended and then Valtteri got the tow just as you were closing in on the last lap from the Williams. Do you think it was fine margins that made the difference today? And Valtteri, what was the feeling when you saw you had a slower car up ahead to get DRS from on that last lap?

LH: Yeah, I think ultimately Valtteri did a better job in qualifying on that last lap, which put him in the position to be able to fight and then fine margin at the start, which... yeah, I'll have to work on. And then I lost two-and-a-half seconds, or whatever it is, under the VSC, so had to regain that and, with only nine laps to go, that was not so easy. So, that was my fault and something I'll work on. There's some things I can fix on the dash to make sure that doesn't happen again. But, nonetheless, it was a great result for the team.

And Valtteri, your thoughts when you got traffic towards the end of the race.

VB: Yeah, there was some traffic, obviously you lose time mostly – but sometimes actually you can gain from it, like here if you can get a nice tow on the straight and get the DRS. It's always a very welcome bonus when Lewis is putting pressure behind! It's not always it works for you. Sometimes he gains from it. So that's how it goes. Yeah.

Q: (Phil Duncan – PA) Just to the two Mercedes drivers -- we saw Toto deliver a radio message in the final laps. I was just wondering what the rules of engagement were for you two in the closing laps of today's race.

LH: It wasn't a message to us. We were allowed to fight to the end.

VB: Yup.

Q: (Christian Nimmervoll – motorsport-total.com) Lewis, with hindsight probably that first lap fight with Valtteri was the defining moment of that race. Do you think you could have pushed a bit harder or been a bit more aggressive if it was another driver than Valtteri, your teammate?

LH: Definitely. Most definitely. It's very very difficult -- ultimately you always have to remember when you're in a team as big as this that you are only one, and there are so many people that depend on us, so selfishly I could have for sure pushed a lot harder and Valtteri would have lost position, maybe I would have gained position, most likely he would have got overtaken by a Ferrari or something like that, so we have to work together. So whilst I wanted to overtake him, I had to be cautious at the same time, to give him space so that we would block the front row and stay there. Ultimately I lost out in that, but that's a sacrifice you have to sometimes make in order for the team to win. I think if it was a Ferrari there it would have been a lot different. And that will be how it continues for the rest of the year -- I think Valtteri and I have always had a lot of respect for each other, and we continue to do so. I think you can see that. That's how we deal with it -- we discuss it before the race, we agree as gentlemen, and we stick to it.

Q: (Luis Vasconcelos – Formula Press) For Valtteri, when you were speaking to di Resta before the podium you said it was tough but you had it under control all the way. Did it get too close for comfort on the two laps that Lewis had DRS?

VB: Yeah, sure, I didn't want him to get DRS, that was not planned. He had a very good middle sector that lap and managed to close and here even if you're like 1.2, 1.3 behind exiting from Turn 16 then you're gaining time before the DRS detection. I wanted to keep him out from DRS, so it was my bad. But he was pushing hard, so that's how it goes.

Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Seb, the feeling for you and Charles earlier in the weekend was that the team had made a step here, that the upgrades were working as you liked, and it just seemed like the circumstances of the weekend just sort of

went away from you. Do you still retain that positivity from earlier in the weekend or do you feel like there is a sort of similar amount of work to do as before?

SV: Well, absolutely I think it was a step forward with our car, but I think more of a dominating factor is just the way we seem to be able to get on top of or into these tyres. I think there's a lot of performance in that. The struggle we had here in those low speed corners is less of an aero problem, more of a mechanical grip issue. So a lot of homework for us, obviously, in the last couple of weeks, but I'm sure that once we get everything together the car is strong, and then we will be much more in the fight. At this stage, obviously, averaging the first four races we were just not quick enough.

Q: (Luis Vasconcelos – Formula Press) For the two Mercedes drivers -- in the last two years your cars were called 'divas', but you've won on the first four very different tracks. Is this car the most complete one?

LH: I mean, it's an evolution of the last couple of years cars, so it should be better, and it is in many ways. I would say it's more our understanding of the procedures that we have to implement that allow us to deliver more from it. I think we're able to extract a bit more from the car itself, and that's just from diligence, due diligence we've done so much better through testing in our understanding and analysis. Everyone's just taken a step forward and it's great to see.

VB: It always can be better! For sure it's maybe not still the easiest car to get to work, but once it works it's quick, so something similar we've seen before and in the end, like Lewis said, it is an evolution from years before. There's obviously work to do, but I think this year so far, the four races we've had, it's not only the car. It's all the areas the team is working on, how well we are performing in all the other areas than just the car. I think that's maybe been the biggest thing so far this year.

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