



## Press Information

### 2019 FIA Formula One World Championship Australian Grand Prix Thursday Press Conference Transcript 14.03.2018

**PART ONE: DRIVERS – Lewis HAMILTON (Mercedes), Sebastian VETTEL (Ferrari), Daniel RICCIARDO (Renault), Max VERSTAPPEN (Red Bull Racing), Robert KUBICA (Williams)**

#### **PRESS CONFERENCE**

**We're gathered under very sad circumstances, following the news that Charlie Whiting, the FIA's Director of Formula One died during the early hours of this morning. I'd like to start this press conference by asking each of the drivers present for their thoughts and memories of Charlie. Lewis, could we start with you, please?**

**Lewis HAMILTON:** I've known Charlie since I started in 2007. I made some comments this morning on my Instagram. It may have not worked, as I think it's down but obviously incredibly shocked this morning to hear the sad news and my thoughts and prayers are with him and his family. What he did for this sport, I mean, his commitment... he really was a pillar, as Toto said, such an iconic figure in the sporting world and he contributed so much for us, so may he rest in peace.

#### **Q: Sebastian?**

**Sebastian VETTEL:** Well I guess I was as shocked as we all are still now, when I head the news this morning, especially because I spoke to him yesterday and walked the track for the first couple of corners together with him. Difficult to grasp when somebody is just not there anymore. To add to what Lewis said. I've known him for a long time and he's sort of been our man, the driver's man. Obviously there are regulations and all that and then there is us and he was the middleman. He was someone you could ask anything of, anytime. He was open to everyone at any time. His door was always open. He was a racer. He was just a very nice guy. Shocked. I don't think there's that much to add. I think all our thoughts, the whole paddock, the whole circus, the whole family of Formula One; all our thoughts are with him and especially with his family in these difficult circumstances.

#### **Q: And Robert?**

**Robert KUBICA:** Well, as Seb says, and Lewis, it's a hard moment. I saw Sebastian walking with Charlie yesterday and I thought I would not interrupt them because I would see him on Friday at the Drivers' Briefing. Unfortunately this will not be the case. It's very sad. He was kind of an icon of Formula One. He was, as Sebastian said, a racer, but also keeping up everything in the regulations. He was really the kind of a

person you could always trust and commit. A very sad moment. My thoughts are with his family, but that's how it is unfortunately.

**Q: And Max, please?**

**Max Verstappen:** I think as everybody said, I think it was a big shock, also because I spent the day with him in Geneva a few weeks ago and we had a good chat, just about a lot of things. When I left at the time, I was like "see you in Australia for another season of racing" and when you hear this news it's just unbelievable – just 66 years old. I guess we just have to appreciate every day and every morning you wake up and that you enjoy life, and that it's not only about Formula One but there are a lot of other things in life and this is just one part of it. And yeah, I think at the moment what is most important is that the thoughts are going to his family and friend and close ones.

**Q: And Daniel?**

**Daniel RICCIARDO:** I echo everything. Not the nicest news to walk into. Taken aback by it, for sure. I'll try to make it slightly more positive. As Seb said, he was there for us, and we gave him a hard time. We would really press him and push him and make him work, but he was always really receptive and you always felt like he was on our side. I guess we were like a broken record with a lot of the things we would complain about but he never really shut it down. He was always ears open. I think he did a lot for the sport. We'll have some very nice and positive memories of him. I remember my first Aussie GP, in 2012, going up. I remember we were with Franz and he goes "go and introduce yourself to Charlie; it's the start of a new season" and start the relationship on a good news. Time goes fast, but as Max touched on, it's important just to appreciate it, each moment. You do take it for granted. I'm sure we'll all race with a lot of passion this weekend and it's just a reminder as well that we are all very lucky to be in this position.

**Q: Thank you all five of you. A couple more questions now to each of you, and Daniel, we'll stay with you. Your home race, it's always a busy build-up but how have the last few days been for you?**

**DR:** Busy! But it's alright; I'm actually used to it now. It's expected. But, you know, busy is good; it means people care and that they're excited about the start of the season. A lot of things have changed. I've changed team and that's created a lot of other change within the F1 paddock and other drivers moving teams. It's been a pretty cool and pretty busy off-season for sure. Done some activities – drove a V8 Supercar yesterday; Max was saying he was a passenger today in one, so just chatting a little bit about that. It's fun. It's fun when you can balance some of the not so fun media commitments with a little bit of enjoyment. But now we're getting close. We're within 24 hours of driving the car, so excited to get on track, but also excited to see the pecking order. I think we could draw some conclusions from testing but not much, so we'll see where we stands.

**Q: I was going to ask you about the conclusions from testing. How close are Renault to the top three teams now?**

**DR:** Not sure... Not sure, so we'll see how we go. The second week, the last couple of days, we had a few new parts on the car and they seem more promising for our development, so that was encouraging. I think we left the test more encouraged. We'll see. Judging the top three cars, I don't even know where they stand at the moment, but yeah, a few more days and you'll know.

**Q: Thank you, Daniel. Robert, coming to you: it's your first race since 2010, can you describe your emotions heading into this weekend?**

**RK:** Yeah, it has been a long time, a long time away from the sport. Emotions... to be honest there is not really a lot of time to think about them, you are focused on the job, focused on the things to do. Try to learn as much as you can about new F1. Things have changed quite a lot since I was racing here last time. Just trying to prepare; trying to be ready. We didn't have a the perfect start to winter testing, so there are a lot of things to be checked, to see how they will be and yeah, let's see.

**Q: As you said, it was a difficult period for the team in winter testing – the car arrived late in Barcelona. What's a realistic goal for you and the team?**

**RK:** Unfortunately we were late for the winter testing and it's not like you recover this delay in one week, so there are still things being sorted out. The guys are pushing really hard, especially on track but also in factory. It is a difficult period but we have to make sure we are doing everything we can in the current situation. We cannot change it, so we have to make we concentrate on what we have. There is no point in wasting energy or time and then thinking of a difficult job. We just need to do our job and this is the approach of each member of the team we are having. We have to make sure we maximize our opportunities from what we have.

**Q: Max, coming to you, the management at Red Bull Racing has been very bullish about the new package, what are your thoughts?**

**MV:** I guess we'll find out, won't we? I think so far, we had a good winter test, not too many issues, and I was just very happy about how everybody was working together, which I think is very important, and a good start. Of course, integrating the new engine into the chassis but it didn't seem like it was giving us problems, so very happy about that. I could do most of my running, so that was very positive but in terms of performance, I think it's a bit difficult to judge at the moment where we exactly are. I didn't have any time to do performance runs, or whatever but yeah, we're happy with what we did. Of course, I think it can always be better, I think everybody has that thoughts. I guess here – but not only here in Melbourne – we'll find out throughout the beginning of the season where we will stand.

**Q: What's the atmosphere like in the team at the moment, with the new partnership with Honda. Do you feel it's a bit more bullish that it was in the recent past?**

**MV:** I think everybody's just very motivated, very positive and very focused on the job as well.

**Q: Sebastian, coming to you, fastest in winter testing. Do you feel you're in a better position now than you were at this time last year?**

**SV:** Yeah. Quite frankly because I think last year's winter testing didn't go well for us and we actually had some issues with the car to fix and obviously we got a bit lucky during the race weekend with the safety car to grab the win – but yeah, I think in this regard we are more prepared. Our car seems to work fine: no problems at this stage. Having said that, obviously we can't do better than last year's result. So, it's a tough weekend ahead of us. Always the start, you're a bit nervous, you don't know exactly where you are. You don't know what's going to happen but yeah, I think we are... y'know... the spirit is good, the atmosphere is good, we're happy to be here and start racing.

**Q: And just a quick word on the technical regulation changes that have happened over the winter. Do you feel that it'll be possible to follow another car closer this year than last year?**

**SV:** Well, testing isn't about following other cars and overtaking. So I didn't get much of that – but it didn't seem to make a difference. Hopefully it turns out to be better and easier this year. We will see. Obviously the DRS is a bit different. It's a bit bigger delta – so let's see. I didn't have that much experience in testing to make a full conclusion.

**Q: Lewis, difficult to read Mercedes' testing form. What's your take on it?**

**LH:** I don't think there's much to... it's not difficult to read it. I think it was quite clear, however it's difficult to know what everyone's doing, so naturally we won't fully know until we get out in the car tomorrow and, come qualifying you get a better picture, and usually, over the first few races is when you really start to get an idea of where everyone stands – but we said that we have work to do and we weren't talking BS. We have work to do.

**Q: From an internal point of view, how important has continuity been – both stability on the driving front and the technical front?**

**LH:** On the driving front, continuity is what works. We have a great pairing and I think the contribution Valtteri and I together, it's worked well for years and there's no reason to change it. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. In terms of the team, we've got so many incredible people within the team, and the energy... it's inspiring to see so many people so pumped, pulling together. The communication is better than ever. Just after the test I went back, and Toto rallied the troops and we all sat together and it's really impressive to see so many people so passionate about their jobs and so passionate about racing and wanting to do a better job and always wanting to improve. And knowing where they can improve – it's really, really cool to see. Really encouraging. I just know they're the soldiers. They're the real, true fighters within the team, and I know they're going to be giving absolutely everything to make sure that we continue to progress.

**QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR**

**Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Lewis, you talked about the need to improve after testing. Valtteri said he’s already seen improvements from you guys. Do you share that confidence, do you think that they’ve already found gains? And for Seb, you talked about being more prepared this year. Does it feel different coming here, arguably as the hunted rather than the hunter?**

**LH:** Well, naturally after a test, you always improve the next day as the car gets older and older throughout the test. It wears and then you go away, you analyse where you’ve been. New information gets put in the wind tunnel, the engineers have new information and they work upon it. So, everyone takes a step after testing. The car will be fresher here, we’ll have a much better understanding of it – but I think it’s the same for everyone. We didn’t bring upgrades. It will be interesting to see how the Red Bull upgrade works, and I know some other people, Ferrari usually bring an upgrade for the first race, so it’ll be interesting to see.

**SV:** Well, at this point, I think we are all hunters and all hunted. We have zero points. At this point I don’t feel like either. But hopefully going away from here we’ll be in the position of the hunted. That’s the target.

**Q: (Andrew Benson – BBC Sport) Sebastian. Your team boss has said that, in particular situations, you’ll be favoured. What do those particular situations mean? In what way will you be favoured at the start of the season?**

**SV:** I don’t think there’s much point in going into certain situations. I think it’s very clear, and I think Mattia also made it very clear, we are free to race, free to race each other. I think Charles will do his best to help himself and help the team and that’s the same for me. I will do my best to help myself and to help the team. So, in the end we’re racing for Ferrari and that means we try to get Ferrari back to where we’ve been trying to get it back to for the last couple of years. That’s the main priority and the rest, it’s a long, long season and I think it’s a bit pointless at this point to start pointing out certain scenarios.

**Q: (Dan Knutson – Auto Action / Speed Sport) If I could ask all of you briefly, what do you think of the new rule of a point for fastest lap?**

**MV:** I don’t know. I think it can be nice but it can also work against you maybe when you’re fighting for a title – but I guess time will tell how it’s all going to work out – but for sure you can play a bit with it, as a team.

**LH:** It’s 21 extra points, so I think it’ll be interesting to see how people try to get those points, so it should be interesting.

**DR:** Yeah. At first, when I just heard, I thought it was the whole... it’s good that they’ve restricted it to the top ten. So you do have something potentially to lose if you go in to pit for a fresh set of tyres to get the fastest lap. Yeah, we’ll see. Haven’t really thought that much about it. See how it plays out. I don’t think it will decide a championship – could do, but I don’t think it will.

**SV:** I don’t know. I don’t expect much change. We’ll see after a couple of races if there is actually a change.

**RK:** I think unfortunately it doesn't affect us a lot. At least for now. But yeah, extra point. It can unlock some strange scenarios at the end of the race with some cars pitting and it will open up. We'll see three, four cars suddenly coming in. It will depend. It will be a kind of domino. But as I said, I was not really interested about it.

**Q: (Alessandro Sala – [tercerequipo.com](http://tercerequipo.com)) Talking about the hunter equation for Mr Crocodile Daniel. 1980, Alan Jones, the last Aussie to win in Australia. After 40 years, it's time to try, with the permission of some of the other guys, to win. We hope to see a good dive in the Albert Park lake. Do you?**

**DR:** With myself, not with my car right? I might need some help from some others, probably, this early in the season – but yeah, there's a chance of some overtakes. I think early on there won't be too many front row starts. So they'll certainly be some cars in front. The win might be optimistic in a few days' time but yeah, being the hunter, that's still going to be a lot of fun this year. Try to keep that up. More than ever with, I guess, probably the midfield battles we'll be in initially. That'll be cool. Does that answer your question? I'll try to win, of course.

They're already kind of crazy, Australians but yeah, if we could pull that off, lock your doors.

**Q: (Joost Nederpelt – [NU.NL](http://NU.NL)) Max, you said some things could have been better. What could have been better?**

**MV:** Some things. I cannot go into detail, can I? No, I can't.

**SV:** Otherwise what? Daniel comes after you with his knife!

**Q: (Giles Richards – Guardian) Lewis and Sebastian, how important to each of you is it to stamp your authority for the championship early on this season, in these opening four races?**

**LH:** It's a long season, so I don't particularly feel it's the most important thing. I think it's really about finishing races and analysing and making sure you are getting as many points as you can, of course, but I'm not really one for needing to stamp authority.

**SV:** Yeah, pretty much the same. I don't think we will win it here, I don't think we will lose it here. It's a long way. Hopefully we have a strong package, a strong team that carries us into a position at the end of the year to fight for it.

**Q: (Stylianos Alepidis – [F1fan.gr](http://F1fan.gr)) Sebastian, the last couple of championships you did not reach your target. You had the weight on your shoulders from the Italian media about the expectations of the tifosi. Now under the new leadership of Mr Binotto, do you think that with the new attitude of the communications department towards the media that the more intense later stages of the championship will pan out somehow differently?**

**SV:** I'm not sure the media is going to make a big difference unless you can somehow transfer points to my account. I think it's a new year, obviously (there have been) some changes. Of course we will be focused trying to do our job as good as we can. I think there's a lot of passion inside this team that's willing to get out and expressing ourselves, I think, through winning, is the best we can do so that's the target but as I

said, there's so many races, such a long way, so many things we are depending on but as much as we can control things we try to take them in our hand and get our job done. As I said, so far the atmosphere is good, the spirit is right inside the team and yeah, we try to carry that into the season. In terms of expectations, I think it's normal when you finished second the year before that the way to look at it is that it is a disaster because you finished second so in that way, finishing second, third or fourth is all the same disaster. The winner takes it all, so in that case Lewis has been in that position the last years and we try to turn it around.

**Q: (Rene Oudman – Racing News 365) The first Grand Prix of the season means the end of the winter break, a time in which you have more spare time. What was the nicest, funniest or weirdest thing you've done in the winter of 2018/2019?**

**RK:** Complicated.

**SV:** You had a longer winter break though.

**RK:** Yeah, I did have a bit longer than the others. Actually this winter was quite busy so... I think starting working with the team, knowing that you will be a race driver definitely makes a big difference to the past seven winters. The nicest one, probably, was a week of cycling, which was nice, combining a bit of hobby training with pleasure.

**SV:** I don't know. I guess just spending time at home, making my own breakfast which I quite enjoy. Yeah, pretty boring maybe but I enjoyed it. Went skiing a couple of times, the weather was good, the snow was good.

**DR:** Similar, just being home and it's summer for me so... yeah, Australia. Actually what was really nice as well was I didn't go to an airport for six weeks and that was... I think that was the longest in ten years that I've been off a plane, so that was actually really pleasant. I enjoyed being outdoors. I got the bikes and mountains bikes. I feel like doing things that move fast, just that sort of stuff, hanging out with friends, maybe snapping the neck off a couple of beers but that's about it. Makes more sense when you drink it... But yeah, just literally switching off especially after last year, that was important for me to wind down.

Can I just lighten things up as well? Robert mentioned that he's had a pretty long winter break. I don't think we all know to the extent of what he's been through to get back here, so I just think it's awesome to see him back. I've known him from when I moved to Europe back in 2007 which feels like a long time but yeah, just a testament to his character and I won't ask for everyone to applaud but I really think it's awesome for him to be here. We can applaud, yeah.

**LH:** I don't really remember a lot of it. I mean the winter break finished quite a while ago, since we got... February, once you're back in the factory and working with the team, focused on making sure that you're fit and ready for the first race ended a while ago so it feels like a long long time ago but there's skydiving. Done some surfing. I wanted to do it here but I couldn't find a netted area to go to. I just can't go where there are sharks, man, and every Australian I meet they're like 'nah, nah, you'll be alright. If a shark comes up to you, punch it in the face.' Australians are really kind of crazy, huh?

**DR:** I'd like to say I'd do the same but no, they scare me too.

**LH:** But yeah, otherwise pretty much the same as everyone else. The break is a really precious time you get to spend with family and friends and it's the time you don't get

to think about racing and then once the season starts you're on tour the whole year and you never really lose sight of your targets.

**MV:** I guess I like mid- to end-of December is a bit of time off and you can spend time with family and friends but from like January onwards it's just training so I don't feel like it's a break any more because you're just busy. Some more exciting things happened, some less exciting things happened but should I share them? I don't think so.

**Q: (Rebecca Clancy – The Times) Lewis, as has been mentioned, Ferrari have said they will favour Sebastian at certain times. Have there been any similar conversations at Mercedes or are you guys just free to race?**

**LH:** We're free to race like every single year so that was even said at the beginning of... back at the factory and it's repeated today and that's how I like it. It means we both have a fair shot but it's been the same every single year and it's only to a point where one driver doesn't have the chance to win the champion any more if we're lucky enough to be in that position and things shift but generally we're always free to race so I think that's great.

**Ends**