



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

Press Information

2015 Australian Grand Prix Thursday Press Conference Transcript

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DRIVERS – Max VERSTAPPEN (Toro Rosso), Kevin MAGNUSSEN (McLaren), Valtteri BOTTAS (Williams), Sebastian VETTEL (Ferrari), Lewis HAMILTON (Mercedes), Daniel RICCIARDO (Red Bull Racing)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Let's start with the defending champion. Lewis, if you're able to successfully defend your title this year you'll be a three-time world champion. Has that always been your career goal? Is that fair to say?

Lewis HAMILTON: I would say that I always wanted to do what Ayrton did. Ayrton was my favourite driver and I guess as a kid I always wanted to emulate him.

You won here in Australia back in 2008, the year you won your first title, but you haven't won the race seen then, despite being on pole a couple of times. Can you talk about how important it is for you this year to start on the front foot, as opposed to last year where you were chasing for a while in the first part of the season?

LH: It's the same. I don't see a particular exaggerated importance [compared] to any other time. Of course you come here and you'd like to start on the right foot, but as I did want to last year, but there is a long, long way to go so it's not the most important start of the year.

Daniel, some bittersweet memories of this race from last year, but you must feel that you've grown a lot as a driver since then. What's your mindset going into this year's Australian Grand Prix?

Daniel RICCIARDO: Excited, definitely, just to get the season going. For sure, for all of us, it's great to have time off over Christmas but then testing starts and you get the taste for it again and you just want to go racing again. Obviously really happy to be back home here in Australia and, yeah, get another season going. A lot of confidence coming off last year, so ready to have a good one and get on track.

Based on what we saw in the winter testing, it looks like it's going to be a battle, at least to start with, between yourselves, Ferrari and Williams. How do you see it from inside the team and how confident do you feel?

DR: Yeah, it looks pretty close within that group. We'll see what happens on track, but it does look like the Mercs have a bit of pace again this year but for that last spot on the podium it looks pretty close between, as you said, us, Ferrari and Williams and I'm sure there'll be a few other players coming into the mix. We'll see everyone on track, like for like, this weekend and I think that's what's going to be exciting. I've been asked so many question [about] 'where do you think you

stand', but testing doesn't really show everything. I think what it did show is, yeah, Mercs are quick but other than that it's all pretty close behind them.

Thank you for that. Sebastian, obviously you had a pretty productive test session for Ferrari. Is there a cautious optimism within the team going into this season or is that putting it too strongly?

Sebastian VETTEL: No, I think generally the atmosphere is very positive. Obviously there has been a lot of change over the winter but people have been working very hard and I think we have definitely improved as a team, so now we'll see when we get the chance to put the car on the track, we can see where the others are, see what the others run, especially on Saturday. Finally you know a little bit more. Winter always is a bit tricky to understand everything.

It looks as though you're enjoying the experience of being a Ferrari driver. I wonder how much have you looked into the history of the team in the period you've had to think about it and what has that added to the experience?

SV: Well, I think there's a lot of history in the team and it's obviously, for me it's an honour to race for Ferrari. I'm very happy at this stage and I can't wait to get in the car and finally start racing with the team but equally we know that we have to work hard because our ambition is very high and we want to make sure that Ferrari gets back to the top.

Valtteri, coming to you, obviously your podiums last year helped Williams to their best championship position since 2003. Where do you and the team go from there?

Valtteri BOTTAS: Yeah, it was a good season, really a huge improvement from the year before and we just really want to continue in the same way, so keep getting better. I really think that's what we can do. We've been doing the right things obviously as we've made good progress so we will try to start the season more or less where we finished last year. That's the way we're operating and performing and I think that will be a good starting point for a new season and trying to improve along the way.

You couldn't quite get the win at the end of last season but have you felt enough from the car during the winter testing to tell you that you might be able to race the Mercedes at some point this year?

VB: It's still really early days and testing is not always easy to see exactly where you are but what we know and what everyone knows is that Mercedes is still ahead of everyone at this point but it is a long season, there are different types of track, you never know if there is an opportunity. So we will keep pushing and we'll see if it happens. I really hope so.

Kevin, coming you. Obviously you were on the podium here last year but you've not had very much time this year to prepare for your role as stand-in for Fernando Alonso. What have you been able to do?

Kevin MAGNUSSEN: I didn't get as many laps as I thought I'd get but I would maximum get maximum 150 laps in a day if everything runs perfectly. I got nearly 40 laps and I think all of those were low fuel, so at least I'm pretty prepared for that. I haven't felt the car on high fuel yet so that will be interesting to see how that feels. But you know I've driven race cars before, it's not a completely different thing. It's a different car but I think it should be OK.

It's no secret that McLaren and Honda have not done that much mileage in testing. What are the expectations going into this early part of the season within the team?

KM: I would say quite low. We're struggling obviously with reliability, making the car run for a long time. But this is a new start for McLaren, a new start in many ways and I think it's going to take

time. But I think it's the right direction that the team has chosen to go and I think it has a bright future ahead. But I think it's going to take time but I'm sure they'll get there.

Thank you. And finally, Max Verstappen, welcome. The youngest ever Formula One driver at 17 years of age. Do you feel ready for this?

Max VERSTAPPEN: I hope so! We'll see.

You put in big mileage in testing and looking at the analysis it seemed like the Toro Rosso had pretty good race pace. What are your thoughts about the car you've got under you going into your Formula One debut?

MV: Yeah, compared to last year, I did three Friday practices, the car is a really good step forward, especially on the long runs we did. It was very promising. I felt really good in the car, I could do a lot of laps. Yeah, I was really happy about that and it gives me a lot of confidence to go into this race.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Flavio Vanetti – Corriere della Sera) To Sebastian, given the results of the winter tests, how realistic is the aim of your team principle to catch at least a couple of victories during the season?

SV: Well, it depends on the form of the other teams as well but I think we've made a step. We're yet to find out how big the step is and then it depends. I think we've seen last year that there's chances to win races – not just for Mercedes. So if you put yourself in a very strong position, probably at the beginning of the season right behind, then, yeah, if something happens, you're there. I'm sure it's not what they want but these things can happen to all of the drivers, all of the teams.

Q: (Paolo Ianieri – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Question to Lewis, where do we stand regarding the renewal of your contract? We have been hearing for a few months now, Toto [Wolff] saying he would be ready to sign you, that your discussion, that you're getting closer. Can you tell us something more about it?

LH: I don't really know what... Toto gave you guys some answers this morning. I don't really know what to say. It's going good. It's not signed yet.

You think you will sign in a short time?

LH: I like to think so. I hope so.

Q: (Paolo Ianieri – La Gazzetta dello Sport) We have seen the mystery regarding Alonso's crash in Barcelona. There have been many rumours, if it was a problem of his, of the car, if it was a technical failure. One of the points that has been discussed is regarding the electrical shocks he might have received as a cause. Do you feel 100 per cent safe that something like that might not happen, have you been talking with your engineers? And you feel completely confident about avoiding a risk of this kind.

SV: I think nobody wants to send us on the track when they believe that something is not right. I think we have far too much of a team spirit – in all of the teams I would say – to let that happen. So, when the team decides that it's safe to run, it's safe to run.

Q: (Luis Fernando Ramos – Racing Magazine) A question to Sebastian, you're known to be a good friend of Kimi Räikkönen for many years. Are there any worries that this friendship might suffer from the natural strain of a competition inside the same team?

SV: No. To be honest, no. I've known Kimi now for a while. I think we respect each other. He's very straightforward, honest, which I appreciate a lot. For sure we try to beat each other on the track, I think that's normal but if there will be some issues I think we're old enough to talk about it and sort it out.

Q: (Michael Lamonato – ABC Grandstand) Question to Daniel. Red Bull, at least externally, looks like it's going through a lot of changes. Sebastian's obviously sitting on the other end of the table, Adrian Newey's taken a step back and now Christian Horner wants to scale back aero regulations – which sounds unheard of. How is the vibe within the team going into this season, given that on top of that, for the second year in a row it doesn't look like you're going to be favourites?

DR: To be honest the vibe is still good, it's still strong. Adrian's here this weekend, I've been asked a little bit about him and how much he's stepped back. I don't want to put him in a spotlight but I think he was at all the tests and he's here this weekend and it looks like he's already done more than he originally thought he would. So, I think he's still very much interested in the RB11. From what I can see, the team definitely wants to get back on top. Obviously it was an off-year from their standards last year and I don't think we're too keen to let Mercedes get any further away.

Q: (Azrul Ananda – Jawa Pos) To Valtteri. Williams last year were very strong, this year also I'm sure. Which track of all the season do you think you have the biggest chance to steal a win this year?

DR: Monza!

VR: The trend where we were quick last year was quite clear – so the tracks with long straights, low downforce, were normally the best for us. I would still think the same kind of trend is going to continue, so similar kinds of tracks where we are most likely, if we are going to win a race, it's where it's going to be. You never know. There's 20 opportunities, and we are here to work, to be as close to the front as possible and, if there's an opportunity, anywhere will do.

Q: (Pablo Grau – F1Aldia.com) Question for all of you. After testing what do you expect of the new Pirelli tyres?

SV: Well it's always a bit tricky to judge the tyres, judge the car as well, in testing because it is quite a lot cooler than it will be for the whole season but I think the tyres are a step forward. I think the rear tyre has improved, which I think should help.

Lewis, any thoughts? How are they working on your car?

LH: I think he answered it quite well.

Max?

MV: It's all new for me, so I think there is still a lot to learn. But so far, what I could feel from last year and now, for sure it's a step forward and I'm quite happy for the moment.

Get them to last alright?

MV: I hope so! I'll do my best

Q: (Don Kennedy – Hawkes Bay Today) Kevin, have you been in contact with Fernando and can you tell us anything about his current condition and do you expect him to be driving in Malaysia?

KM: I haven't been in contact with him, only on Twitter he wished me good luck and I said thank-you and that's it. I haven't asked him how he's feeling but I hear he's doing well so yeah, obviously at this race I wish him all the best. Can't really say much more because I don't know much more. What about Malaysia? You'll have to wait, I don't know. I'm not the right person to ask.

Q: (Daniel Ortelli – Agence France Presse) Has anyone of the big brothers here any sort of important advice for the little brother at the back, Max?

SV: Will you declare who are the big brothers? We are all older than him.

Q: Daniel, you're the one who most recently trod in the footsteps he's now treading in so your thoughts?

DR: Yeah. I think just... I'll look to the cameras but I guess I'm talking to Max but this is probably more cameras than he's ever been in front of in his life. They're pretty friendly, they're OK, so just go and enjoy it, I guess. Get behind the wheel and remember that's the main reason why you're here, is to be on track: Friday, Saturday, Sunday, so enjoy those few hours and I think then the rest will come.

Q: Lewis, any pearls of wisdom? You were five years older than Max, I think, when you made your debut. Is that right? Twenty-two?

LH: Possibly. I've only just realised, I'm the oldest driver here, the first time. I've kind of only just realised it. Jeez. (To Max) You were born in '97?

MV: Yup.

LH: Jeez. I signed my first contract with McLaren in '97. Bloody 'ell. I don't really have any words of wisdom for you.

SV: I think that despite the fact that he's still young, I think he has a lot of experience, he's quick, otherwise he wouldn't be here, so I don't think he needs much advice. Take it easy, maybe.

Q: (Shane McInnes - 3AW) Max, just on that, being just 17 years of age, flying around the world, being amongst guys that you've looked up to, how is it for you and taking it all in at the tender age of 17?

MV: Well, to be honest, since I was younger, I've never seen anything else because my Dad was doing it, I basically grew up into it. For me, it doesn't feel like anything new, I just deal with it.

Q: (Flavio Vanetti – Corriere della Serra) Sebastian, you have a good feeling with the new team. Is there any special fear in this stage of your new experience?

SV: No.

Q: (Paolo Ianieri – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Daniel, how do you see Sebastian in red and last year, you came through a very difficult winter test period. But then you immediately started well and for a big part of the season, you were the only opponent to Mercedes for the championship. Do you think that this year things might be better, easier for you, also knowing that you have already won last year with Red Bull and looking at the improvements that Renault should have done?

DR: I think I'll answer that one first. If you look back at last year, for sure we're in a better position. I think the times that we put down in testing, I don't think I have shoed that yet but obviously we're coming here this weekend with a lot more confidence and reliability and we've actually got a plan for Sunday whereas last year it was just 'OK, let's put the car on the track and hope to see the chequered flag.' Within the team there's obviously a lot more that's progressed since then. With myself, obviously I've moved along, I feel a long way and I'm a more evolved driver and have a bigger impact in the team, obviously spending the twelve months in the team that I have now. It's all there on the table, I think, ready for us to use and pursue, to put up another strong fight, so I'm looking forward to that this year definitely. I think for Seb, the only concern he may have is if he doesn't know how to cook a good plate of pasta! Other than that, I think he should be OK. Yeah?

SV: Just did it this morning!

DR: Oh really? OK. Then he's fine with the Italians.

Ends

