



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

Press Information

**2016 Japanese Grand Prix
Thursday Press Conference Transcript**

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DRIVERS – Jolyon PALMER (Renault), Carlos SAINZ (Toro Rosso), Pascal WEHRLEIN (Manor), Kimi RAIKKONEN (Ferrari), Fernando ALONSO (McLaren), Lewis HAMILTON (Mercedes)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Fernando, there's been a lot of talk about your starts this year and the fact that in the last five GPs you've made up 29 places on the opening lap! Making up places is something you've consistently done – in circumstances you've had to do it of course – but can you explain a bit about your starts; is it experience, instinct or is it just pure risk taking?

Fernando ALONSO: I think it's a little bit of everything probably. A little bit of luck as well. Sometimes you try to recover places and you try to choose a line into turn one – left or right – and you never know what is going to happen in front of you. It's a little bit of luck also that you need. Over probably 16 years of Formula One, I recover many, many places so it cannot be only luck every single year. Yeah, probably doing a lot of Playstation and starting last – it's good practice!

The results seem to be coming through now more consistently for McLaren-Honda, outside of the top three teams on a more consistent basis. Are you seeing the things you need to see at this stage from the team to give you confidence you can fight for podiums more regularly next season and what's the plan for the new engine you ran in Sepang?

FA: I think let's say we are happy with the progress we made this year and definitely we are able to fight with some competitive teams there, like Force India, Williams, and now we finished now like four times seventh after the top three teams in the last five races. Definitely a step forward that we are enjoying, this process of starting to be competitive but I think looking for next year I don't think we can see anything that is clearly positive or negative. Everything will change massively so we need to work and to be very focused on next year's car in a way now that is only theoretical – simulators and wind tunnel numbers and dyno numbers etc. I don't think the performance of the actual car is a reference for next year. So that's one thing. Yeah, we want to be more competitive next year. I think the biggest step has been done, from last year to this year, but we need another big step next year, which is going from the last Q3 spot and some points to fight for podiums and wins. I think it's still possible. We have the potential, we have the facilities, we have the talented people. This project, as we have said many times, it's a question of time that we will be able to win. Hopefully we are trying to make it as short as possible and let's see. With the new engine, actually it's just an engine that we fitted in Malaysia just for reliability issues more than performance. Also, we didn't have engines to finish the season, so we chose Malaysia to fit new engines, to pay the penalty and then have the rest of the races without any more concerns. We plan to use that engine here but, as I said, the engine has exactly the same power, so we will fit the engine and we will try to do our best.

Thank you. Lewis, coming to you: this has been a happy hunting ground for you recently, with victories in the last couple of years as you moved towards those two world titles. How do you feel going into Suzuka this year?

Lewis HAMILTON: I feel same as probably last year. I feel good. Excited to get on track, the weather's great today, I love being here, so ready to get going.

What did you do then in the three days since Malaysia and what conclusions did you come to when you were thinking about the race: were you concerned about the championship position or were you satisfied about the way you drove, that you did everything right?

LH: I haven't been thinking about the last race. Usually when I leave the racetrack I think about a lot of other thing. I have a lot of other stuff going on. I was in Tokyo, enjoying my time. I love being in Tokyo. One of my favourite cities, it's in my top three favourite cities in the world. That's about it.

Any thoughts on the way you performed in Malaysia?

LH: Yeah, it was good, happy with it. I hope that I can continue performing like that.

OK. Pascal, looking ahead to the new car Formula One cars of 2017 that Fernando referenced earlier on, you've done quite a lot of development work for Mercedes and Pirelli recently, what are your impressions of the changes, particularly with reference to the tyres?

Pascal WEHRLEIN: It's faster, but I think I cannot tell you in detail how it was. So yes, it's faster and therefore more fun, but apart from that I can't tell you, sorry.

What about your own racing programme for next season? Are you likely to stay put with Manor but are there other options for you?

PH: Let's see. At the moment there are discussions going on and in the next few weeks I think I will know more.

Fair enough. Kimi, you've already scored more points at this stage, you've gone past your 2015 points total, with five race to go and you've scored in more grands prix than your team-mate has, do you feel satisfied?

Kimi RAIKKONEN: I think it's a bit difficult to be satisfied with where we are right now. Obviously we want to be in better places, fight in the front, but this is what we have right now. We always try to do our best but obviously the places where we've been recently are not, for sure, where we want to be as Ferrari, but we have to keep working and giving our best and hopefully, sooner rather than later we will be up there.

Picking up on what Pascal was saying, or not saying, about 2017, you are one of very race drivers that has done test work on the 2017 tyres with Ferrari's mule car. What can you tell us about the difference in feel, for example, and what we can expect next year

KR: It's very early days. There's nothing to really compare, apart from some lap time from the previous race there or testing, but obviously the conditions are different and a lot of things are... there's a bit more grip but to be fair it's very early days for Pirelli's new tyres, so I think we are only going to really see what we have once we have the proper cars next year and the tyres in the first test and the cars are far from what they will be next year, what we're using in testing. I think it will be faster, but how much and how it's going to be, how the car is and the tyres together, it's too early to say.

Q: Jolyon, coming to you, congratulations on your first championship points finish in Malaysia. You were actually in a points-paying position for much of the race – what made the difference for you last weekend in getting the result?

Jolyon PALMER: Firstly, I'd say performance-wise we were definitely quicker than we have been. I think on Friday we knew that on quali and also on the long runs we were looking quite good. And then in the race a mixture of keeping the tyres alive and good strategy because starting 19th there was quite a lot of work to do. We did one stop and we used the soft tyre which was quick to the end. So, I have Carlos putting me under a bit of pressure but we managed to keep the pace up and make the one-stop work.

Q: You're 3-3 in qualifying with your team-mate for the last six races. Do you feel now that you're getting a chance to show what you can do? Again, what's making the difference?

JP: Well, I feel that the early part of the season was quite difficult but I think after Monaco everything's been pretty close all the time with Kev. So, I don't think the last six races, it could be the last ten races is more accurate really, between us there's never much. Malaysia I think qualifying wasn't my strong point to be honest. I think I was doing quite well until qualifying but at least I recovered in the race. I think we're showing what we can do, both of us, pushing hard, always close and I'm sure it's going to be the case to the end of the year.

Q: Carlos, you qualified strongly in Singapore but got caught up in that start line incident and other results have slipped away recently. Are you getting a bit frustrated with the second half of your season?

Carlos SAINZ: No, I wouldn't use the word frustration to describe that tough end of the season we're suffering at the moment in Toro Rosso. Singapore was obviously a very big opportunity missed, starting P6, we knew we had the pace to finish at least in the top six, which is when you are fighting with McLaren and Haas for those P6, P7, it's a lot of points but you cannot keep thinking too much about it. We went to Malaysia; we knew we were not going to be as fast as in Singapore and it got confirmed – but yeah, we are trying to extract the maximum performance out of the car every race, we know our performance can vary a lot from circuit to circuit and we just need to go race-by-race seeing where we stand in every race.

Q: We've heard a little about the 2017 cars, they're obviously going to be quicker but how are you feeling about the physical side of driving next year? Looking at Malaysia, quite a few drivers said it was tough – I'm interested to know with much faster cars, higher cornering speeds next year, to what extent next year are you all going to have to step up the training in view of that?

CS: I think for sure we will need to. It's not a secret we will need to do a step in our physical condition for next year. Already Malaysia this year we were in qualifying nearly as fast as the lap record; the race, because of the tarmac change, was 3-4 seconds per lap quicker than last year and you could already feel it. It's a challenge that I always welcome. At the end it means OK, more time in the gym, more time on a bike – but it means that also in the race a physical limitation comes into play and it's where you can make the difference. So, I will welcome it. Also the challenge of driving a faster car is always more difficult, always more selective with drivers, so it can only do good for Formula One.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Manuel Franco – Diario AS) First question for Fernando Alonso, second for Carlos Sainz. Fernando, what's your opinion about Ferrari's situation because when you leave all people say were wrong – what's your opinion now? And for Carlos, last year you were first in FP1 in your first time at Suzuka in rain – are you praying for rain again in the race?

Fernando?

FA: Nothing really to comment. They are struggling a little bit now but it didn't change probably the situation in the last couple of years but yeah, I wish always the best for Ferrari. I will have always Ferrari in my heart. So, hopefully they can improve. Thanks for asking. It's been a long time that they didn't ask me about Ferrari. Especially after they won Malaysia last year.

Carlos?

CS: I have very good memories of Suzuka last year: first time in Japan; first time in this circuit and first in FP1 in the rain. So... yeah. I know the lines, I know that Toro Rosso normally performs pretty well in the rain, so I would welcome it. I always welcome the rain but particularly these last five races. We need some of that now to score a strong result. There's some showers around for Saturday and Sunday, so I think also for Formula One, and apart from me it's always good to have some mixed-weather races.

Q: (Kate Walker – Motorsport.com) Two questions for Fernando please: first of all, I was wondering what you think of Honda's philosophy and of their engineering ability? And secondly, I was wondering if you could say how you find working with Honda compared with working with Renault and with Ferrari?

FA: I found it very interesting from day one working with Honda, the philosophy and the approach they have to racing in general and I think to some extent to life. It's interesting and I'm a big fan of Japanese culture and Japanese traditions and I think they translate that also into their racing philosophy. They've been following their programme, sometimes for us as sportsmen or fans. Sometimes it's frustrating because we want everything now or everything tomorrow but that is not this magic solution in Formula One. Everything requires some time but yeah, they are doing the job, they are doing the maximum. They are, as I said, they are following the times, everything made in Japan, only with Japanese people and it's their mission, let's say, so I'm extremely happy to feel part of this project from day one. Now that the results are coming, I also think they are a little bit more motivated and they are starting to be more creative, let's say, in terms of design and progress. So, happy and compared to other big manufacturers, big car manufacturers, I think it's just that. The way they work, the discipline, working and the loyalty also. All the engineers we have in our team, they've been working for Honda all their lives, from university. So the university they chose, one way to the other, they chose Honda and they will be with Honda for all their lives so that's quite different to our culture and also I'm learning a lot.

Q: (Luc Domenjoz – Le Matin) Lewis, in Sepang you said after the race that possibly 'the high power', using your words, would prevent you from winning the championship, so at this stage of your life, how important is religion for you in your culture, in your day-to-day life?

LH: It doesn't change, nothing's changed. I just said it appears that currently the guy above doesn't really want me to... perhaps doesn't want me to win right now. But I've made a point on my Instagram so I don't really have much more to say about it.

Q: (Dan Knutson – Auto Action and Speedsport) Kimi, you say you can't be happy with where you are right now. You're currently fourth in the championship, third is within reach so two questions: would it make a difference to you if you finished third, fourth or fifth? And would it make a difference if you finished ahead of your teammate?

KR: Not really. We are here to try to win and anything less than winning is obviously not why we are here or why all the guys in Ferrari work hard to try to be best. So obviously not winning... second is better than third but it's not an awful lot in the end. It's been a more solid year and more consistent, and things are running most... but like I said, we want to be back in the front and fighting consistently for putting ourselves at least to have a good chance of winning. So that's the aim and then obviously after that it depends on many other things also but we are lacking speed a bit but we're not giving up and we keep trying and improving and I'm sure we'll get there. It just takes time. In a way it's been better than the last few years but it's still not what we want.

Q: (Dan Knutson – Auto Action and Speedsport) Lewis, is there anything you can share with us what you're looking at?

LH: Hunh? Yeah, no, just... it's quite funny, just some snaps of us drivers, it's quite funny. That's about it. Hey man, we've been doing this a long long time and it's the same each time so got to keep adding new things to it.

Q: (Phil Duncan – PA) Lewis, I've noticed you've posted a series of messages on Facebook about your team last night. I was just wondering why you decided to do that?

LH: Been planning to do it for a while. We've been building that up for a couple of weeks already, so it just turned out to be the appropriate time to do it.

Q: (Daniel Johnson – The Telegraph) Lewis, a lot of your fans, after the race on Sunday, they kind of felt the sense of injustice about your engine blowing up and some of them saying that they think Mercedes are favouring Nico, as they've said at different points in the year. I just wonder what your message to them is?

LH: Well, they just go on my Instagram. I've put all my feelings on there so... They have the right to their own opinion but as you see from my posts, you see how passionate I am about this team and about my guys so...

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