



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

Press Information

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

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DRIVERS – Sergio PEREZ (Force India), Esteban GUTIERREZ (Haas), Carlos SAINZ (Toro Rosso), Esteban OCON (Manor), Nico ROSBERG (Mercedes), Marcus ERICSSON (Sauber)

PRESS CONFERENCE

There is an incredible sense of excitement ahead of this Mexican Grand Prix. Checo, last year, those scenes of you being swamped on the drivers' parade by the fans, just describe what that sense of adulation is like coming into this race.

Sergio PEREZ: Yeah, first of all, I'm so happy, I've been waiting the whole season for this race and finally to be here with all my people, arriving to Mexico City – as soon as I arrived here on Tuesday for an event, I can see all the energy from all the people is getting bigger. Formula One is getting bigger, it's growing. It's something that makes me very proud and I'm so much looking forward to give them a lot of happiness on Sunday. Hopefully I can give them a strong race, a strong performance. They always say that racing at home is an extra two tenths that you have on you. There really is, because the energy that I feel throughout the weekend is just phenomenal and I'm sure that this weekend will be a lot of that and I will be there to give them my best. The weekend goes so fast to me because I'm full of events and full of commitments that I just want to enjoy every single moment and give my best to them.

And Esteban, same for you really: are you going to find those two tenths in what is your first Mexican Grand Prix?

Esteban GUTIERREZ: Well, it's an incredible feeling to be here and see how all the people are excited. I feel honoured to be able to share this great weekend, this great moment, with all the people that are going to be here supporting us – family, friends, fans – it's just an incredible feeling. It feels like a whole big party through the whole weekend. So, yeah, everybody is excited. I'm very grateful for the support and I'm going to give my best to give the best result possible this weekend and I'm lucky to be here, with another opportunity, thinking that it's going to be in Mexico, in my home country and enjoying all together.

Esteban, staying with you, one year ago you were announced as a Haas Formula One driver, how are your plans shaping up for 2017?

EG: I think Gene has been very clear in the media, they want to wait a few races. Fortunately, we have other options, which we are now considering strongly, and I think it will be important to close something soon, because we cannot risk to just wait a few more races until the end of the season and risk to fall in between two chairs. So we are doing our best and things are looking very good for next season.

Have you put a deadline for those negotiations to end?

EG: Yeah, that deadline should be in the next two weeks.

Checo, back to you, your current team-mate is moving to a works team in 2017, so what do you see in Force India that convinced you to stay there?

SP: I see a good potential. If you see, since I arrived up to now, every season we have been moving forwards. It hasn't been easy. Right now we are fourth in the Constructors' and to go up the next top teams are locked out, they don't have any vacancy, so really I felt like my next move was going to be sideways or probably backwards. I see going to a new generation of cars that my best future is staying where I am, knowing the people that I am working working, having the stability, and as well Force India has done so much for my career I want to be loyal to them.

Moving on to Esteban Ocon, you've made huge progress in the six races you've driven in Formula One and you're being linked with pretty much every available seat on the grid. How are those negotiations going and who will ultimately decided your future? Is it your decision or is it Mercedes' decision?

Esteban OCON: Well first of all I'm already really happy to make the progress we made with the team. Together we have done a really strong job. It hasn't been an easy thing to arrive half way through the season but I'm happy with the progress. Mercedes is managing my career, so at the moment I'm trying to focus on the remaining races and, yeah, we will see from there on how it goes.

Do you feel ready for a bigger team or do you think you'd benefit from another season with Manor?

EO: I don't know, you know, as I say I'm focusing as much as I can on the remaining races. If you do a strong job there will always be talks and opportunities.

Marcus, you ran as high as 11th in Austin last weekend. Do you feel that Sauber are now starting to make real progress for the first time since the buyout?

Marcus ERICSSON: Yeah, I think so. The last few races we've really been taking steps in the right direction, starting from Singapore really. Every race we are getting closer to the top ten, both in qualifying and in the races, and as you say, in Austin we had another really good weekend. In Q1 I was P14 on pure pace and that was really positive and then in the race I was running in P11 for a long time and I think it was with less than 10 laps to go I was still 11th but then obviously we struggled with the tyres and I dropped back a couple of positions. But as a team we have been pushing really hard and moved in the right directions. Also, the updates we brought to the car we got to work now better and better, so we really see we are going in the right direction. But we just need to continue that now, really push our maximum these last three weekends. It's no secret, we need to aim for that point to jump Manor in the championship and that's what we are aiming for, but we are definitely moving in the right direction.

Well, you're absolutely right, the team really does need that point. Where do you think is your best chance at the remaining three races?

ME: I think every one of them will be a good chance, but obviously on pure pace it's going to be difficult because we still miss a couple of tenths it feels like to really take the fight for the top 10. It should be some races where there are some retirements or something like that and that should be a chance for us to benefit. We need to be there and do our maximum and be as high as possible in the races that we can take advantage of these surprising things that can happen. If this race is more chance than other races it's difficult to say but we just need to be there to take the opportunities when they present themselves.

Carlos, a tremendous race from you Austin and a great battle with Fernando Alonso. You've often said that he is your inspiration. Do you get an extra sense of satisfaction when you are racing him as opposed to the rest of your peers?

Carlos SAINZ: Well, it's already a big satisfaction to be a Formula One driver, because you are racing against the 21 best drivers in the world, but yeah, maybe that battle with Fernando was that tiny bit more special. I've been growing up looking up at him since he's in Formula One in 2003. I've seen all his races and suddenly I saw myself in a position to fight on the last lap against him in Austin for a P5. It was special, but at that point you don't really realise the thing you are doing. Maybe when you go to bed and you think a bit more about it, it's that tiny bit more special, but it was an exciting one I enjoyed it a lot. I didn't have all the grip available to put up a stronger fight, but I definitely enjoyed it a lot.

Toro Rosso confirmed last weekend that Daniil Kvyat will be your team-mate next season. It's going to be one of the most experienced driver line-ups Toro Rosso have ever had and when you combine that with the Renault engine coming your way, how does that affect your ambitions for next year, what do you think you can achieve?

CS: I think Toro Rosso is in constant progress at the moment. Obviously this year we have been a bit hampered by this power deficit that you all know by now. But if you look at the car and how it was performing in Austin, it's a pretty decent car I must say. I really enjoy driving it. So as James Key and his team they do a very similar job to this last couple of years and the Renault engine works well, I think Toro Rosso has a good line-up next year to exploit this full potential of the car with Dany and myself and I really think we can move a bit forward in the Constructors' Championship. We have the right people on board and we just need a bit of straight line speed, a bit more things coming together to put together some stronger results.

Q: Nico, it's been a great season for you so far and the upshot of that is that you can clinch the world championship here in Mexico this weekend. You wouldn't be human if you didn't think about that. How does it change your mindset?

Nico ROSBERG: I'm well aware of that, and yeah, it's been a great season so far, which has put me into this position, y'know? It's exciting to be in this championship battle now with Lewis towards the end of the season. We've been there before but anyways, it's very cool. And that's it. As I've said before, that for me, my way at the moment of achieving the best possible performance is really just to focus on the things that are within my control – and that's, here in Mexico, try and win the race, and that's it.

Q: Given the intensity of your battle with Lewis, how is the atmosphere in the team at the minute? Are there echoes of 2014 or is this different somehow?

NR: The atmosphere is really, really good. As an example we had a great party on Sunday night after Austin. All the mechanics, engineers together, it's great. The team has come a long way and, in every area, we're just so strong now. Even just this team feeling. Pulling in one direction, having a good time together. Everything. The atmosphere is awesome. I think everybody is thrilled by this battle which we're finding ourselves in.

Q: What about the dynamic between you and Lewis?

NR: Not something I think about too much really. I try and do my thing and get the best possible result. That's it. Of course it's intense – but at the same time there's an easy-going side lately.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Flavio Vanetti – Corriere della Sera) To Nico Rosberg, in Austin we heard some quotes from Bernie Ecclestone. Can you reply to what he said? He said if you win it could be good for you and

for the Mercedes team but not necessarily for the sport because there's nothing to write about you. What do you say about it?

NR: I spoke to him personally and he said that's not exactly the way he said it. And anyways, for me it's not something that's important to me. For me, I focus on my thing and that's it.

Q: (El Grafico – Enrique Gutierrez) Checo, what is your great fears in your life?

SP: To be honest it's snakes, probably! Apart from that I don't fear anything. To me, I don't have a lot of fears, to be honest.

Second question, what do you think about the death?

SP: Nice questions. It's a point in life that you don't want to reach but everyone will reach death in their life. Sooner or later everyone will reach it but it's a point of life no-one wants to reach.

NR: I wish all Mexicans a great celebration of the dead.

SP: He asks the question because we have this celebration this Sunday, I think.

Q: (Daniel Johnson – The Telegraph) Question for Nico, you've been racing your entire life: you've been in Formula One for ten years, been fighting for the championship for the last three, what would winning the World Championship mean to you?

NR: It's a childhood dream. But that's where it ends for me. As I said, what's important for me this weekend is winning the Mexican Grand Prix.

Q: (Frederic Ferret – L'Equipe) Question to Nico. How do you work with Lewis with the battle? Do you copy his settings, do you watch his telemetry or do you work all alone, apart from him?

NR: It's as-usual. Everything is open, everything is shared and that's it. So nothing has changed.

Q: (Jonathan McEvoy – Daily Mail) Here we're a long way up in the air. What's it like to drive at altitude or is there anything that you feel when you're driving and is there anything extra that you need to do to be ready for that?

NR: Have you noticed that on your run this morning? What do you do 21k? No, for sure you notice it. So it's one of those races where the fitness is important and it's one of those I've worked towards. But it's OK because there are long straights also to relax – so it's not the toughest race of the year.

Checo, do you have anything to add about racing at altitude?

SP: You obviously feel it. Whatever you do, not only racing, running, whatever activity you do, you feel it a lot more. As Nico said, the circuit probably helps us with the layout. It has one of the longest straights in the calendar so physically it's not one of the toughest: we've been through those already: Singapore, Malaysia – but it's quite demanding as well, the race here.

NR: But it's just as difficult for car. Not just for us drivers, because the car having less air volume density makes a big difference. For cooling.

Q: (Lazaro Montano – Record) Nico, how special will it be to get the championship here in Mexico, considering that last year your good streak started here? After Austin, you began to win here in Mexico? How special would it be to complete the year with a championship here?

NR: I have great memories from here last year. Winning here was awesome, and also to get so much support from the Mexican people, even after that, through the whole year, social media, it's really nice to see, so I look forward to meeting everyone again this weekend. The podium is one of the best in the year, in the baseball stadium, it was absolutely phenomenal and in terms of the

championship, it's not within my control if I get it this weekend, so for me it's all about just winning the race and then we see what happens.

Q: (Luis Alberto Aguirre – Reform) To Marcus, do you see any chance for yourself to go to Force India next year? Is there any possibility; do you see that seat as a possibility for you?

ME: I think all the drivers who don't have a contract for next year are looking at the seat. Obviously Force India is the second best available car at the moment, so it's definitely an option but also Sauber is exciting for me looking at next year, because they have a very strong project building. So yeah, for me and my management, they are keeping their options open and talking to different teams that have seats left and hopefully sooner rather than later I will know what will happen for next year for me.

Q: (Ben Hunt –The Sun) Nico, two questions to you: do you think it's unfair when people say that you're only leading the championship due to Lewis's failures? And also, just to bring you up on Bernie's point, 2016 he said it would not be good for the sport if you were to win. Last year he had another pop at you and said it would be bad for business if you won the title. He seems to be doing you a bit of a disservice, don't you feel?

NR: Well, you're talking a lot about what other think and their opinions. I'm here to win races and not to please everybody that's out there. There's always going to be people that have opinions that will be going against me in some way or other. Those are two examples that you've given me and that's the nature of the business, it's always going to be like that so I like to focus on the people who really support me. And that's it.

Q: (Ben Hunt – The Sun) Bernie's come out and said that he'd like to see walls put around circuits. Now I know that you're quite keen on driver safety; what do you make of that? He would like to see walls to stop people going off track, increase the drama, to increase the danger. It sounds a bit bonkers to me but I just wanted to get your opinions.

NR: Well, my opinion is that there are ten other areas which we should look at before... if we want to make the sport even better than it is before we start looking at turning back time on safety. That would be my view on that.

SP: I certainly agree with Nico. There are so many more areas where we can improve the sport before starting to put safety at risk. I think we can definitely make the circuits a bit more challenging for the drivers, not necessarily with walls but making the driver pay for mistakes if you go off, having a gravel trap and losing time, that kind of thing I think is good for the sport because that forces the drivers not to make any mistakes.

CS: I fully agree with Checo on that one. For me, obviously safety comes first but also challenges for drivers. I just did a track walk this morning and you know when you see so much tarmac run-off where you can go wide like in Austin, it's good for safety but I'm convinced we could use some devices to make it a bit more challenging, to make sure you use a bit more of the track. At least you pay something, you don't gain an advantage. At the moment it's too risky for us to just miss the braking point a bit, nothing happens, continue and you don't even lock up the tyres. I fully agree on that one with Checo.

Q: (Thomas Goubin – AutoHebdo) Sergio, about next season, for you, at what point will it be difficult to replace a competitive driver like Nico and what kind of a driver would you like for next season as a teammate?

SP: Obviously having someone at the level of Nico is going to be difficult but I just want someone who comes with the right attitude to help the team, that gives good feedback and understands what's going on with the car and hopefully if he can be fast as well, who pushes me, that would be great. I think that has worked really well with Nico because we push... (Esteban interjects) A Mexican as well, maybe would be good. Someone who pushes you, I think that's for the benefit of

the team and I think a lot of the success that the team has had has been because Nico and I have been pushing each other really hard. Since practice one up to the race, it's always within half a tenth and that's always good for the team.

Q: (Luis Alberto Aguirre – Reform) Regarding that subject, would you like to become Checo's teammate; would you like to be Esteban's teammate, Checo?

EG: Yeah, why not? It would be fantastic. Any teammate is good. Sure.

Q: Is there any chance we can see you guys wrestling out there later on?

SP: Why not?

Q: (Juan Pablo Sanchez – Millenio) Nico, what do you think are the keys to repeat (your victory) here in Mexico on Sunday?

NR: Well, we've seen this year that the results from last year don't really make a difference to this year except for a positive memory, so we're all starting from zero and the keys... I think to have a good rhythm through the weekend, starting from FP1, building it up and then the usual things: good qualifying, good start, race pace, those things.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) Carlos, we're in the land of the chilli and your nickname is Chilli. A reader called attribalF1 would like to know who gave you the nickname, when and whether you think it's descriptive?

CS: Yeah, this name comes probably from my friends, maybe on nights out or something, they get a bit too drunk and they come up from Carlos to Charlie from Charlie to Chilli and that's how it ended up being... I don't like chillis, this the interesting part, that I hate spicy stuff. Yesterday I went to have some tacos and I couldn't have them because they were too spicy. Chilli is not my favourite.

Q: (Jon McEvoy – Daily Mail) Again to Nico, it seems that your mindset is very much each race and your mind isn't on the broader story. Is that a decision that you've reached, the way that it works for you or is it as a result of you having had a word with an expert in the area of mind management? I was just wondering how you stumbled on or decided that the idea that it was one race at a time and that was it.

NR: It just feels right, it feels right to focus on the things I can influence to keep it simple, be in the moment and it's been working so just stick with it.

Q: (Diego Mejia – F1 Canal Latin America) To maybe Nico and if Checo can answer it as well: how would you expect the track to have evolved twelve months on, how will it be different or not from last year and how would you expect the supersoft tyre to be a factor after last year's experience?

NR: Normally the track surface gets a bit rougher and that will make it a bit different on the tyres, so that's the main thing we need to learn and discover and see how that's gone.

SP: Same as Nico. I think the track will be rougher and that will have an impact on the degradation and now that we have a compound a step softer that might help the degradation so we might see different strategies. I think last year a lot of people went for one stop and now probably that's not going to be that easy to be on a one stop.

Ends