



Press Information

2019 Spanish Grand Prix
Thursday Press Conference Transcript
09.05.2019

DRIVERS – Carlos SAINZ (McLaren), Sebastian VETTEL (Ferrari), Pierre GASLY (Red Bull Racing), George RUSSELL (Williams), Valtteri BOTTAS (Mercedes)

Q: Carlos, welcome home. You've said that this is the most important race of the year, just tell us why that is and tell us what you've been up to in the build-up?

Carlos SAINZ: Thank you and welcome to Spain, bienvenidos. Yeah, a special race for everyone I guess, but for me in particular because it's my home race. I'm one of those lucky drivers on the grid to have a home race to enjoy with the fans and the Spanish people. It's my fifth now and it's incredible how time goes by so quickly. I remember my first time here in 2015 like it was yesterday. Yeah, looking forward to enjoying it, spending some extra time with the fans and the media of course and that's it.

Q: Have you had more attention now that you are the only Spanish driver on the grid?

CS: Honestly I don't feel it. I don't feel like I get more or less attention. Probably this weekend I'll be quite busy. But it's not something that really affects me much or it's not something I'm noticing in particular, but if it does happen I guess it's not a bad thing.

Q: You've finished in the points every time you've raced here in Barcelona. How confident are you of continuing that trend this weekend?

CS: Well, I think one of the main reasons for that is that this track has always suited the car I've been racing with. I think I've struggled in the past with top speeds and long straights in the cars that I've been racing with and in Barcelona that deficit was always reduced. So it meant my cars that I was racing here were a bit better. But also I think I've always been comfortable in this track. I've had some success also in lower categories. I like the track, I like the challenge, I like racing with the fans behind me. I think after this week, what happened to Liverpool, you can also see that having a crowd behind you also helps and at least to me it always helps.

Q: Good luck for this weekend, thank you for that. George, coming to you. It's been a difficult start for you and the team this year. How important is this race in establishing a development path for the car? Are you aware of anything new?

George RUSSELL: Well, there were a few things on the plan but unfortunately, after the incidents in Baku, they sort of shuffled things back a bit. But it's normal that every race that we have some things to test. At the moment we're probably slightly different to other teams because we're trying to test to understand our limitations and to try to bring something greater a bit further down the line, because obviously we are quite far behind at the moment and we need to find a sizeable chunk.

Q: What about from a driving point of view, how are you developing as a driver?

GR: I think very well to be honest. I think it's a great opportunity for me, being slightly under the radar, slightly less pressure off my shoulders. Really I'm only fighting with Robert let's say. I'm not really interested in that. I want to

be fighting with the guys further up the grid and I'm working really closely with the team and with Robert actually because, as I said, we're not interested in fighting for 19th place.

Q: You're working closely with the team, but what about with Patrick Head? He's back as a consultant with Williams. How have those discussions gone with him?

GR: yeah, Patrick's a great guy. He's going to bring some motivation and some great spirit to the team, with obviously all of his knowledge. So much history with Williams as well, so I think it will be a positive step.

Q: Thank you very much. Pierre, coming on to you. We've seen progress with you at every grand prix this year; you've been chipping away at it. I wonder if you could give us a little bit more detail on what have been the issues with the car, and is it now more to your liking?

Pierre GASLY: Yeah, quite a lot of things happened since the beginning of the season I think, overall. Things don't really come our way so far, but we can see progress. I can feel I'm getting more comfortable inside the car and the direction we are taking is working and making me feel better. I think we saw some progress in Baku. We had penalties and unfortunately I had to retire in the race, but we are going in the right direction.

Q: You say you had progress in Baku. A lot has been made of Ferrari's power unit upgrade this weekend, but Honda brought an upgrade to Baku. What can you tell us about it?

PG: As we said in Baku, I think it was mainly on the reliability side. So I think everything is going as expected on the PU side. I think Honda is pushing massively into bringing new upgrades this season as well. But I think we are really pleased with what they have achieved since the beginning of the season in terms of performance and reliability. Of course we always want more, and we know Ferrari and Mercedes are also pushing and are still a bit faster than we are. But I think with the development we will catch progressively.

Q: Now, you've raced Max Verstappen for many years. How would you assess the job he's doing this year? Has he surprised you?

PG: I mean I've always known he's one of the most talented guys, but yeah, I must say he is really good at extracting the maximum from the package at the moment. For me it's really good to be next to him at the moment, use his experience with the team, with Red Bull Racing, with the car, to see a bit what he does to extract the maximum from the package that we have. He has been driving really well, really consistently, so it's definitely a good benchmark to me.

Q: Thank you Pierre, best of luck this weekend. Valtteri, coming to you: world championship leader, best ever start to a season, double the number of points as this time last year. People look for a reason why things happen. Do you have an explanation for why things are going better this year than last year?

Valtteri BOTTAS: There are many things in this sport that can affect things for sure. Sometimes you're more lucky for sure, sometime very much less so, but I honestly think why I've been able to improve year by year is work. Work with the team; work with my ability; focus on all the single details, and if you work hard it's only a matter of time before things start to go right. Obviously I'm pleased with season, how it has been started compared to recent ones, that's very positive. But also one of the things is as a team – the level we have been able to perform at in these first four races has been really impressive. It's not only me, it's the team, but it's a good battle with Lewis at the moment.

Q: You have a new race engineer this year. How has that shaken things up on your side of the garage?

VB: Yeah, I have a new engineering team completely, race and performance engineer, and whenever you have new people around it makes you think about some things differently. It can open up some new routes on the set-up and

the direction. It has started really well. We have been learning a lot as an engineering team all the time and it's getting better and better. So far, so good.

Q: Now your boss Toto Wolff says Mercedes have been lucky at some races this season. Would you agree with that?

VB: Well, I think we have done a great job as a team and at the level we've been performing we deserve these results at the moment. Sometimes we might get lucky, like Bahrain, where obviously it was due to other teams failures that we got the one-two, but it meant that we were the most reliable car at that race. So it's not about luck, I think it's mostly how the team is performing.

Q: Thank you. Sebastian, we're heading into race five, what's the mood in the Ferrari camp?

Sebastian VETTEL: Good.

Q: You've got a lot of upgrades coming this weekend. Do you need a faster car or a more driveable car? What are you hoping for from these upgrades?

SV: Well, we hope to improve the car obviously. We introduced some bits in Baku already last race and another set of new parts here. Obviously we want to make the car faster here and there. I think we were reasonably quick but not quick enough overall to put the cars on the front row at every event. We're lacking a little bit, but I think overall the package is promising. We know that we have a strong car; we've struggle a bit to put it together, so to answer your question, probably a bit of both.

Q: It's clear that you have a big fight on your hands, particularly with Mercedes. How is the team reacting to that compared with previous seasons, from an internal perspective?

SV: Well, every year is different. As I said, the spirit is good, the team is in good shape, so we're looking forward to come here, we're confident about the parts we've brought here, we are introducing a new engine as well, so we've got some stuff that we think should help us to be stronger than the last races. And as I said, the spirit is good. Comparing to previous years, at this point last year we were in a better place, we had won some races and overall we'd been more competitive, but nevertheless I think the spirit is as good or better than last year.

Q: Before I open this up to the floor, it's the UN's global road safety week, something that all of you guys contributed to earlier on in the year when you helped produce a video. I've got a question to each of you, which is: what can everyday road users learn from Formula One drivers.

SV: Obviously we try to go as fast as we can, which is not a good idea on the roads, so my initial response would be 'not that much!' But we are very professional, we try to obviously control every situation that we are in, and I think we are very lucky that we can push ourselves to the limit on the race track, so there's no need to try to do something funny or odd outside the track. I think, as much as we respect ourselves on the track, you should respect other people that are participating and trying to get from one place to another. The road, or the track, you're not on your own. That's something that you hear many times from racing drivers at any time they raced in Formula One or other categories, that they respect the other people that raced with them. In the same way, you should respect other drivers that share the road with you.

CS: Basically, what Seb has said. You must not behave like an idiot on the road on the road. Respect everyone – and wear your seatbelt. I think those two things are the most important.

VB: We never have mobile phones in the cars – so that's something everyone can learn not to use them.

PG: Yeah, I agree with all the comments. I think most of us have been also involved in some loss from road car accidents. In my case, I have been, and I think safety is the most important thing. Respecting others, and yeah, just be responsible when you're on the road. You're not by yourself, you have other people around and yeah, I think it's important to take care of the lives of other people around, and also of your own life. As Seb says, we don't give a great example on track because hopefully we have the chance to drive really fast on track, but when we get to the road, we must be really responsible and be careful of others.

GR: I think it's important to respect the road. On a race track, you know what's around the corner, whereas on the road, anything could be there: could be a small child crossing the road or whatever. You have to respect the road: it's not a racetrack.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Livio Oricchio – Globoesporte.com) To Sebastian. You said in February your feeling about the new car was very good since the first moment. You got the fastest time after eight days here. What happened that you didn't get in the races the same good performances – and do you believe you can repeat this weekend what you experienced here in February and March?

SV: The honest answer is we don't know entirely. Obviously the car was really good in testing. We arrived in Australia and we struggled a little bit to feel the same. I think the first four races for us have been a little bit up-and-down. There were stretches where the cars felt really good and other parts where the car hasn't – but deep down we know that the car is strong. So, we are trying to put the bits together and trying to understand. We haven't found the silver bullet – but in the last ten years I never found the silver bullet so I don't think it exists. It's really getting down to the detail, trying to understand more and more, trying to understand the conditions that we face, and trying to obviously improve and make sure it doesn't happen again. Now, this weekend will be interesting for us because obviously we had such a good feeling and it's not so long ago. I'm pretty sure I remember how the car felt and it will be interesting to see how it behaves the next couple of days. But I'm quite confident if we can get to that level then we should be very competitive. As I said, on top of that, we have some new stuff, so let's see. I can't give you an exact answer.

Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Question to all five please. It seems very possible this could be the last time we have the Spanish Grand Prix at Barcelona. It seems a race at Zandvoort, a Dutch Grand Prix, could replace it in the future. I'd just like to know what you think about the prospect of an F1 race at Zandvoort and what you would miss about this place?

PG: I think it would be quite a shock to lose the Spanish Grand Prix because Barcelona is probably the track we have all driven on the most since Formula 4, Formula Renault, all the categories. So, hopefully an agreement can be found. I don't mind having more races, I like races, I like racing and hopefully we can get the two in the calendar. And Zandvoort is pretty exciting if it happens. It's a really narrow track. I've been there only once but it's really challenging on the driving side. So, I think to put some F1 cars there will be pretty cool and exciting.

VB: I've no information on the details and the politics of what's going on, but obviously it would be a shame. It's been in Formula One a long time, this track, and there's so many fans in Spain and around Barcelona. It's a nice grand prix for all the fans to come to, also from elsewhere. So, that would be a shame. On the other hand, I've raced with F3 in Zandvoort and it's a pretty cool circuit. There's a lot of of culture now, especially with Max being in Formula

One for a few years now, so for sure that will be a nice one – but the two combined would be obviously ideal for everyone.

CS: Obviously for me it would be a big loss in the calendar – but as far as I know, negotiations are still on-going. I think that's been confined. From me, wishing that all the institutions are going to do their job, they're going to agree on something. I think it's in the benefit of Barcelona, of Spain, of Formula One. I think a Spanish Grand Prix has a lot of history in Formula One; I think this track has a lot of history in Formula One, and it would be a shame to lose it. So, hopefully they can agree on something. Maybe not next year because it's too late, or hopefully yes, just agree on something for the future.

SV: It would be a shame for Carlos. For the rest of us, we've been here many times and I think we'd still do the testing but it's a nice venue, it's a nice time of year to come here, so it would be a shame. Maybe we could go somewhere else in Spain. Maybe they could build him a race track close to Madrid. Easy for you as well...

CS: Maybe in the future I can build one myself!

GR: I think it would be a shame to lose this circuit because it's a great one – but on the other hand, Zandvoort is probably in my top five favourite circuits. I think it's a really incredible circuit, it's got so much character. Obviously safety is incredibly important these days in Formula One but I just truly hope we don't get rid of the gravel runoffs in Zandvoort in the two high-speed corners because that's what makes the circuit so daunting and so incredible to drive. Like I said, it would be a shame to lose Barcelona but equally I'd be very excited to race in Zandvoort.

Q: (Heikki Kulta – Turun Sanomat) Valtteri, on Sunday it will be Mothers' Day, at least in Finland. Would victory be a perfect present for your mother?

VB: Of course it would! Traditionally this grand prix is the Mothers' Day grand prix and normally my mum comes here. She's coming this year as well, and that would be a nice gift for her. Also nice for me, to win another one.

Q: (Phil Duncan – PA) Sebastian, you're already 35 points behind in the championship race. How imperative is it you win on Sunday. Question to Valtteri as well: do you think Lewis views you as a genuine rival for the championship?

SV: Yeah, I wasn't aware but I knew we were behind. At this point of the year, it doesn't really matter by how much. I think it's quite straightforward, we need to start scoring more points. The later we start doing that, the worse it looks. The sooner, the better. It's pretty straightforward to be honest.

VB: I think that's something you're better to ask Lewis – but I would guess so.

Q: (Lorenzo de Linares Alvarez - momentogp.com) Carlos, as Sebastian said earlier and with the rumours of not having Barcelona next year, you won the Formula Renault at Jerez; would you like to race there in Formula One?

CS: What I would like the most is to have Barcelona. I think this city, this track, deserves to be in Formula One. If you could add Jerez, then even better because I (would) have two (Grands Prix in my country). And if you don't get Barcelona, I wouldn't mind having Jerez back. That's pretty much my order of priorities if you ask me now. But this city and Spain, I think, deserves to be Barcelona in the F1 calendar.

Q: (Ian Parkes – New York Times) Seb and Valtteri, after pre-season testing, as drivers, you guys generally say that you won't know where you are as a driver, where the car is at, the team as a whole until after the first few Grands Prix of the season. We've had those first few Grands Prix now so could you kindly provide an assessment of where

you feel you're at at the moment on the back of those first few races, what you feel your chances are of winning the world title?

VB: Well, I think that obviously if you look at the results, it looks like we've been dominating as a team, four one-twos in a row but I think on the pure pace of the car, I think there's not that much difference between us and Ferrari. It's really been depending on the race weekend. For sure Melbourne we were stronger. I think on pure pace in Bahrain they were better and after that it's been pretty close and all about fine details in qualifying and what's been happening in the race. I would see us as not far from par with Ferrari and depending on tracks, it's going to change and obviously this weekend with the upgrades – from my understanding, Ferrari is bringing a new power unit - see how that works and we have some new parts as well so see how those work. Can't really count off Red Bull on this type of track and also Monaco in two weeks. It is early on in the season and as always with some regulation changes it's going to be about the development, how much we can improve from Melbourne to Abu Dhabi.

SV: I think that first when we were testing we were ahead. Second we were going testing I think we were a match. First race we were behind, second race slightly ahead, third, fourth race behind both in qualifying and race so at the moment we are slightly behind but we also know that it's not a long way and then things could come our way so that's why I said it before, the spirit is good, everybody is fired up and willing to fight and therefore I believe our chances also are as good as anybody else's.

Q: (Luis Vasconcelos – Formula Press) Traditionally this is not a Grand Prix where we see a lot of overtaking but this year DRS is a lot more powerful than before. Can we look forward to quite a bit of overtaking this year on Sunday?

GR: Yeah, probably obvious that we haven't done much overtaking this year so I can't really comment on that.

SV: Yeah, I think we will see some. It depends on the race, obviously, but I think we should see some, we should definitely see more here than if we go to Zandvoort. It's just true, no? It's like Monaco isn't it?

CS: Overtaking? Yeah. Tiny bit easier this year with the DRS effect and maybe the cars being a tiny bit better to follow but overtaking in Barcelona is always difficult. You need a big tyre delta here to overtake. I think the races are one-stop and if everyone is on a one-stop unless there's a big pace delta you are not able to overtake. If there is a race of two or three stops, one-stop, a mix, then you have a big tyre delta and that tyre delta helps you to overtake. It depends a bit on the strategy, on the tyres, but for sure the DRS is helping.

VB: I think it's going to be difficult still, on this type of track, but it is the nature of the track and that makes qualifying more valuable and like Carlos said, it's a lot about strategy. If we see one stop, two stops then it could be more interesting but we'll see.

PG: Yeah, I agree. Barcelona is always difficult but from one year to another it can always be different so we will see this year but maybe with all the cars being slightly closer, slightly bigger, the DRS effect could make things a bit more exciting.

Q: (Mike Doodson – Michael Doodson) Carlos, you've done your best to be optimistic about the future of Formula One in Spain but we've lost Fernando, we're about to lose this place and worst of all, there seems to be no free-to-air television Formula One in Spain. I've lived here and I know how difficult it is to find it. Do you think that there's anything that can be done, like for example you or your team bringing pressure on Liberty to make sure that Formula One gets a good deal and can be seen by ordinary Spanish people on free-to-air television?

CS: Well, you have me, which hopefully helps, to keep this thing going and keep the momentum that Fernando built with his success in Spain. Free-to-air television is none of my business, that's purely Liberty and Formula One deals with the TVs which I have absolutely no access to, where I cannot put pressure. Spain normally hasn't had a big culture for paying for watching sports like maybe now they have in the UK or in other countries but yeah, let's see how that develops. And for the rest, yeah, just keep hoping, no? For myself, I'm going to try and do everything I can,

maybe a podium this weekend helps but I think it will not happen. I don't know, I don't know what I can do apart from just talking with the institutions and maybe ask and pray to keep this thing going.

Q: (Lennart Wermke – Bild) Seb, Frankfurt's playing in the Europe League semi-finals tonight. Will you watch the game and could it provide some extra motivation for you if Frankfurt makes it to the final?

SV: Yes, yes. Yeah, I will be watching, of course. Yeah. Obviously for Frankfurt it's a huge achievement already to be in the semi-final. Anything can happen. Obviously it's not easy but yeah, I'm rooting for them as many others will so...

Q: (Roksana Cwik - SwiatWyscigow.pl) We had a question about Zandvoort and I would like to ask about Rio and if we lose Interlagos. What is your opinion about it?

(Q: It's been reported in the media about the future of the Brazilian Grand Prix and it's been speculated that maybe a move to Rio is on the cards).

PG: Yeah, I saw some news about it but I don't know exactly what's going to happen. I love Brazil in general. Sao Paulo is a really cool track, quite challenging. I've been there only twice, drove twice there. I'll be happy to continue to go there. I don't know what's the plan with Rio but I think I will need to wait a bit longer and see what's going to happen.

VB: I think the same thing. In Sao Paulo there is obviously a lot of history in Formula One, many great races have been done there. Many I remember seeing as a kid and so on but Rio would be nice. I have been there once and it's a beautiful place. No idea for me either what's happening behind the scenes but I'd be there for sure.

CS: I like Sao Paulo, I like its track, this old school layout, the history it has from the nineties and also the famous title fight there in 2007. I think it brings great memories. I don't know, I think it depends on the track they build in Rio. If they build a cool track with cool racing, I think the city's great, from what I've heard. Just ask for a cool track with cool racing, good overtaking and a fun track for the drivers then I think we wouldn't miss Sao Paulo as much as we will if it doesn't go so well.

SV: Yeah, I wasn't aware that it's going to happen. I heard some rumours but I think it's a shock. I think Interlagos is a great place, a lot of history. I think the old track at Interlagos is even better than the current one but I couldn't think of anything other than maybe the track being a little bit short that Interlagos is almost missing. Yeah, I'm really looking forward to the last race we have there. Who knows, in the future, if we go back? It's a great place, so it's a real shame. I'm sort of a fan of hanging on to old things. It would be nice to go back very soon. Maybe have two races in Brazil, since the crowd is usually quite amazing.

GR: Sao Paulo was where I made my FP1 debut in 2017 so I have some fond memories there. I think it's an amazing circuit but I think Rio's a really cool place. It's somewhere I've always wanted to go so if the rumours are true, I would be looking forward to it.

Q: (Oliver Reuter – Express, Cologne) Seb, you compared your Ferrari with a Rubik Cube. Are you confident that the Ferrari guys are so clever that you can fit all the parts in the right direction? Did you try it yourself and are you confident that they can fix it this weekend?

SV: You mean the Rubik Cube or the car? The car I've tried, the Rubik Cube, yeah, I've tried as well. Easy, sub-two minutes. Yeah, I think we have a lot of clever people on board. As I've said before, I think this track will be interesting for us because the car was really working well pre-season so we will see how it works this weekend and how it feels in comparison but yeah, we're working flat out, trying to make sure that we have the fastest car on the grid and we win all the races that are left.

ENDS.