



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

## Press Information

### 2016 Chinese Grand Prix Thursday Press Conference Transcript

14.04.2016

**DRIVERS – Marcus ERICSSON (Sauber), Nico HULKENBERG (Force India), Kevin MAGNUSSEN (Renault), Valtteri BOTTAS (Williams), Kimi RAIKKONEN (Ferrari)**

#### PRESS CONFERENCE

**Valtteri, you drove some hard races to come back from difficult positions in Australia and Bahrain. Given that those races were slightly compromised, where do you feel Williams lies in the pecking order now, from your experiences in those grands prix?**

**Valtteri BOTTAS:** Yeah, it's been quite a tough first couple of races, and especially for me pretty unlucky, things happening, and just looking forward to getting a nice, clean weekend and seeing what kind of results we can actually do with a proper weekend but it seems that it's going to be a really tough year, very close. Ferrari and Mercedes are definitely more far away now than in the last two years. So that's unfortunate but we just need to keep trying and getting closer and yeah after that we are in that field of a few teams – Red Bull and Toro Rosso, they seem to be very close – so every single bit we can improve this season is going to make a big difference.

**Tyre strategy is a thing that's talked a lot about this year because of the new regulations and that obviously had an impact on your race last time out. How difficult is it for a team, given that the decisions for these early races had to be made quite a long time ago, and will that decision get a little bit easier once the characteristics of your car become more apparent?**

**VB:** I think we will learn a lot from every race weekend, how the compounds are working and if the strategy is working or not. I'm sure the tyre selections we are doing now are already much easier than what we had to do in the winter. Yeah, definitely everyone will improve. Maybe we haven't maximised it yet, but I'm sure we can do better.

**Thanks for that. Marcus, if we can come to you. A little bit of disappointment in Australia but P12 in Bahrain. Was that an encouraging result for you given where the team is at the moment?**

**Marcus ERICSSON:** I think so. I think we had a good weekend in Bahrain. We were in the fight there for points for quite a long time, I was running around P10 for most of the race. But then we couldn't score. But yeah, I think it was a good weekend. Obviously we want, as a team, to be higher up, but we've been struggling a bit in the beginning of the year. But with that in mind we were quite pleased with that. Hopefully now, coming to China, we have good memories from last year where we had both cars in Q3 and both cars in the points in the race. So hopefully this is a track that should suit us even better than Bahrain so it's been a tough start but we're looking forward to a good weekend.

It appears that every sector of the grid has some pretty tight battles at the moment. Is that your experience? Are you looking at another close fight with McLaren this year or have Manor closed up sufficiently that they are now a threat to you?

**ME:** I think that McLaren has done some decent steps so they are a bit far away from us at the moment. It seems like we are in a group with Renault and Manor is close behind. And then we are trying to fight the midfield. The Force Indias were struggling obviously in the race for different reasons but the group ahead of us is not too far, so let's see on this track if we can be a bit more competitive.

**Thank you for that. Nico, same question to you really. Where you are in the grid at the moment has got a lot tighter. Is the fourth position that the team is targeting for this year, is that a realistic proposition or given the first couple of races are you having to readjust that?**

**Nico HULKENBERG:** No, I feel it's still realistic. It's tough and it's a big challenge but you know our first two race also were compromised. In Melbourne we still got away with good points, but the red flag definitely cost us. And obviously Bahrain was a very poor day for us – having a lap one incident and then being offset on strategy and being in traffic, offset with tyre life compared to everybody else made it really difficult. Had that not happened for sure we were in a points scoring position and I think we could have challenged for sixth or seventh position again. There are good signs. It's still early day in this season, so I think and I feel there's still more to come from us.

That performance in Bahrain... there were new parts brought to that race, but the performance on a track that ostensibly suited the car seemed to be slightly off there, were those the reasons for that or is there more to it?

**NH:** Not really. The update that we got for Bahrain, we knew it's not going to be a gamechanger for us. But, yeah, midfield is very competitive. Toro Rosso has improved a lot over the winter, certainly Haas is there too. It's very competitive basically and if you don't get the best out of the car and yourself you straightaway find yourselves a couple of positions back.

**Thank you. Kevin, coming to you, welcome back after a season away from the grid. How are you settling in so far? Have you been there long enough to see how the processes work, are you comfortable with all the operations?**

**Kevin MAGNUSSEN:** Yeah, I mean, it's a really nice atmosphere in the team. You can really feel how everyone is excited about the backing from Renault. It is a team that has been struggling for a few years, so now everyone has got this boost and is really happy. So the atmosphere is good in the team. Basically we have a good car. It's not fast enough yet - we know that. Our biggest weakness at the moment is qualifying. In the race we are generally more competitive than in qualifying, so that's what we need to work on at the moment, But it's a long-term plan, but we knew this was going to be sort of a transition year where everything is being ramped up again and yeah, patience is importance at this time, but we will get there.

**Before the start of the season everybody within the team was very much downplaying any expectations and saying that this is a transitional year, but the results that the team has had in the first two races suggests a little more encouragement than that. Are you overachieving at the moment or underachieving? What do you feel about the performances so far?**

**KM:** It's difficult to say whether we are overachieving or not. I don't know what the real expectations were. We knew it was going to be difficult, but I think I was expecting to score points straight away, maybe not big points, but I do think we should have scored points, at least in Australia. If we hadn't had the puncture on the first lap I think we should have scored points. It's difficult to say whether we are overachieving or not, but I think we knew, as I said, that it would be difficult to begin with and then we'll see what progress we can make. I know we have stuff coming later on in the season. How much that's going to bring is going to be interesting to see. As I say, we

don't know at the moment. We'll just work with what we have, improve that as much as we can and wait for the upgrades and see what they bring.

**Q: Kimi, before the start of the season, in testing, you and Sebastian and the team in general were quite positive about the improvements made with this car – I wanted to get an idea, from your point of view, where those improvements have come from. In what areas is the car more to your liking, more suited to your driving style?**

**Kimi RÄIKKÖNEN:** We're still positive about what the team has built over winter, that hasn't changed at all. Obviously it hasn't been ideal, the first two races, for us as a team. We had two podiums but two not scored, not finished. That's not what we want. Obviously there is quite a bit of work to be done on that side – but the speed is there. Not in qualifying exactly – if you take the last qualifying in the last race. Until that it was pretty OK. I think we have a good package, we just have to improve it and make it even better but, the car has improved in all areas: it's not just one thing that has improved over the winter. It's a brand new car again: engine has improved, the car itself. It's the teamwork that has brought us a better package. Still not as good as we want to be, not the best that we wanted to be – but this is definitely a good car and we go from there. If there is something I would prefer more, we prefer it when we have a better car and a faster car so that's good and obviously some handling things we weren't happy with last year we tried to improve – and have improved. But there's always things to improve and do things better.

**Q: You once famously over the radio said that you wanted to be left alone in the car. That wish has slightly come true with the restrictions on radio traffic. Has that made a big difference to the amount of work that you have to do as a driver in the car? Is it a positive? Do you feel more in control?**

**KR:** I think a normal race, no issues, everything running smoothly, shouldn't really make an awful lot of difference but unfortunately you don't often have those races and if there's something going wrong obviously it will be more difficult to sort them out and fix it – but I think the first few races we've been pretty OK, no issues on that side. For me, I don't mind. Some races you want the radio when you need it – but I think there are ways of... certain things are allowed to be discussed and so far it's been OK. At least for me. It's fine.

## **QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR**

**Q: (Alex Popov – NTV/Match TV) For the three guys who were at the drivers' dinner yesterday, it was a big buzz on the social media about this dinner. So, first of all, who has the idea, if it was just fun or it was something to discuss among the GPDA. And to Kimi and Kevin, if you regret to miss it due to certain obligations.**

**Kimi, do you want to start with that? You missed the drivers dinner...**

**KR:** I don't regret anything. I had my work to do and it goes way forward in front place rather than dinner. You have to ask the people who were there what happened. I was in Taiwan.

**Valtteri. Is it a regular occurrence? Is China now the race where the drivers get together. It used to be Korea that there was a drivers dinner.**

**VB:** It was just a dinner. Y'know, why not? Nothing more than that really?

**Were you aware of the buzz it created on social media?**

**VB:** Not really, no. Just a dinner. We decided more or less together to do it.

**Q: (Haoran Zhou – Top Driver) Question to Valtteri, Kevin, Nico and Marcus, still on the dinner. In a secretive and isolated Formula One world we live in, we are intrigued by how this kind of**

gathering was... who called the dinner, who chose the restaurant, who paid the bill? These sort of trivial questions. Because you all seem very secretive and suddenly you appear in a group selfie and generate huge traffic on social media. What was discussed in the driver dinner? Was it drivers united or was it casual discussion. Thank you.

**Marcus, maybe you want to start because I'm intrigued to know who picked up the bill...**

**ME:** It was split! It was more us drivers, we want to show that we are united and, yeah, it was more casual. We decided we wanted to get together, as many drivers as possible. Obviously we knew it was going to be difficult to get everyone there because of other things that we have to do leading up to the race weekend. It more more a casual dinner, very relaxed. I think it was Lewis who picked the restaurant. That's what happened.

**Nico, good choice of restaurant?**

**NH:** Yes, it was good. Basically we set it up in the last event when we saw each other. Shanghai is obviously a place where we know everybody is there on a Wednesday night. We wanted to repeat it. I think we did it in Korea 2014 or something and ever since been trying to do it and now is the time we got it done.

**Kevin?**

**KM:** I didn't go. I went to a nightclub with Renault.

**Valtteri?**

**VB:** I think I already answered, and everything was already said yeah, nice dinner.

**Q: (Chandra - Java Post) For the gentlemen in the back row: the battles at the back of the field were better in Bahrain. We had a Sauber, Renault and also Manor and now, I think the races are now also quite good at the back; what do you want to say about that?**

**Q: I think Marcus talked a little bit about that, do you want to speak more about that, is it more exciting now than it was last year?**

**ME:** Obviously we would prefer to race higher up the grid but I think it's good that the grid is closer. I think Manor have done a good job closing up the gap and I think that's good for Formula One, that the whole field from P1 to P22 is closer. I think it makes it more exciting for people watching and also for us drivers. Like I said, we don't really think much about the gap behind us, we need to focus on trying to make steps forward and improve ourselves, that's the main thing.

**Q: Kevin obviously your two races so far have been a little bit difficult because of where you've been starting from, that problem you alluded to with qualifying. That competition towards the back of the midfield, is that particularly intense?**

**KM:** I guess so, a little bit more tight than the other years. I haven't really thought about it.

**Q: (Ben Edwards – Channel 4 TV) Nico, we've got the 2017 regulations due to be signed off at the end of this month. Obviously you're an experienced Formula One driver, you drove Le Mans last year; I just wondered about your thoughts on what you see with the 2017 regs for as much as we know, we don't know exactly what they're going to be like but we're talking about cars being four or five seconds a lap faster. What are your thoughts on that? And do the drivers have any input, either through their teams or any other way into affecting them before the decision is made?**

**NH:** I think definitely any input is welcome, what drivers would like to see and appreciate, especially race pace, if that goes a bit quicker, they're fully in the right direction. That's all I can say. 2017 regs, we don't know much about it yet and it hasn't been decided what direction they will go in. Yeah, that's it, pretty much.

**Q: (Zhu - Top Driver) The weather is going to play a part in this weekend, possibly wet qualifying. With Lewis's gearbox penalty, it bodes very well for a good race. Do you think you are prepared for the changeable conditions for this track?**

**KR:** I think we have quite often had some rain here so it's nothing new. We had it in Australia, obviously if it rains in qualifying and practice it changes the game a little bit but I don't think the end result will be affected an awful lot. It will be more exciting, more difficult, we will see how it pans out. If it rains, hopefully it rains the proper way and not in the middle because then you will not see a lot of cars running.

**VB:** I think we haven't really seen how competitive we are in the wet yet, so that would be nice to see if we've made any progress, because it's been something that we've been struggling with for the last two years. We will see; obviously if there's rain on Saturday, for example, it's going to affect the race strategy quite a bit with maybe more graining but then that's going to be the same for everybody.

**Q: Kevin, do you think that that will have the possibility of solving the qualifying issues that you said you were facing?**

**KM:** It's difficult to know. Rain always sort of mixes things up but it could go both ways, so I'm not too bothered really.

**Q: It's not something you'd bank on...**

**KM:** No, because it could go both ways.

**NH:** Yeah, we'd have to take it as it comes but it usually mixes the grid up and it's quite interesting. I personally like the wet, so whatever.

**ME:** Not much to add. I think it could mix things up but let's see what happens.

**Q: (Elwyn – China Daily) Given that this could be the second last time that this race will be held in Shanghai, I just wanted to ask the drivers if they have any particularly attachment to this track or the city in general and do they wish to see this race continue to be held in Shanghai after 2017?**

**VB:** Well, it's a good track to drive. It's pretty high speed corners and good for racing so yeah, it's a nice race overall but no special attachments really, from my side.

**Q: Marcus, it's quite a challenging track technically, in terms of the configuration. Is it a place that you would miss if it went away?**

**ME:** Yes, I think it's a good track to drive and I think it's- as you say - quite technical so for a driver there's quite a few corners where you can use different lines and there are quite a lot of combinations which are quite tricky. I think it's a good track to have on the calendar and I would miss it if it goes away.

**KR:** I think it's a good race circuit for making good races. As for driving, it's nice but we go where the races are, we don't decide it. I think Bernie decides where the money comes from so we go, we follow.

**NH:** What the other guys said.

**KM:** Same.

Ends