



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L' AUTOMOBILE

## 2017 FIA Formula One World Championship

### United States Grand Prix

#### Friday Press Conference Transcript

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**PART ONE: TEAM REPRESENTATIVES – Toto WOLFF (Mercedes), Robert FERNLEY (Force India), Gene HAAS (Haas), Zak BROWN (McLaren)**

#### **PRESS CONFERENCE**

**Zak, you've confirmed Fernando Alonso for next year. Some suggestion that it's a multi-year agreement. Can you give us any insights into the scope of this agreement and his ongoing status with McLaren?**

**Zak BROWN:** Yeah, we're very happy to have Fernando on board. It was actually done months ago and we just decided to announce it yesterday. Actually that's not true, we just got it done. But obviously we've been speaking with him all season about it. We've structured an agreement that allows us to race together for the foreseeable future but everything moves very quickly in Formula One so right now we're just focused on 2018.

**Now, we asked the same question yesterday to him: the Renault engine has won twice this year and had 10 other podiums, so are those the kind of results you are going to be expecting/demanding from your engineering department for next year?**

**ZB:** Yeah, we're here to win races; that's what McLaren has always achieved. Obviously the last few years have been very difficult. We have the drivers that we want, we have the support from our owners, financially, that we need, and we now have a power unit that has been winning races consistently, and championships, over the last decade, so I think we are well suited to get back on the podium next year.

**Thanks for that. Robert, coming to you, obviously another fantastic season for Force India, consistent points scoring and a clear position in the championship now. But if you stand still in Formula One you go backwards, so as management, what steps are you putting in place for the future development of this team, and how much does it depend on the package that Formula One presents you in the coming weeks?**

**Robert FERNLEY:** I think there are two elements to it really. One is that our goal, from our point of view, is to obviously maintain fourth and that's not because we don't want to move forward but it's probably going to be very difficult. I think we almost have two leagues of Formula One at the moment, the sort of premier league with the top three teams and then the first division. And those are separated primarily with a significant payment coming in from FOM and until that's bridged I don't think you are going to see any difference.

**You had another team orders moment in Japan where Sergio was requesting to be allowed through. He didn't mind the refusal that came because he said afterwards that it wouldn't have changed the team result but can you give us a view on that decision-making process and how that team harmony is being managed now?**

**RF:** Well, it wasn't really an order as such. Checo was pushing the boundaries a little bit. It was a very easy thing for us to say "just hold position" and Checo was very comfortable with that. It was already organised before we even started the race, if that's where we were going to be, that would be the positions we were going to hold and as Checo rightly says it wouldn't have made any difference to the team's position in the end result.

**Gene, great result last time out in Japan, what does Haas do then for 2018. Robert has said he would like to maintain position and that would be a success in itself, but in what areas can you and your team move further up the grid?**

**Gene HAAS:** Well, obviously there's a lot of dancing around in the garage in terms of engines and teams and packages changing, so I think that probably makes me more nervous than anything. Obviously if McLaren gets on the podium that's probably going to push us down one position. You have Sauber going with a current-spec engine and Toro Rosso going with the Honda engine, which looks strong again, so it could be a real challenge next year to even maintain where we're at now, so I think that's really what we're looking for in 2018. Obviously we have to get better. We've got to race better, we've got to understand the car better and if we can improve that maybe we can maintain our position where we're at now.

**The idea of setting up the Haas Formula One team was to broaden the reach of your business beyond the domestic market, so has Formula One so far worked for you in that sense?**

**GH:** It's actually worked quite well. We had a machine tool show over in Hanover, Germany about a month ago and we had a Formula One car there and I probably spent about half my time explaining to customers what we're doing in Formula One and I think it has put a little bit of intrigue into our business. People want to know who we are and what we are doing and I think it just leaves an imprint in people's minds of well, "I know what these guys are going, and maybe I'm going to watch them". It all works in terms of branding, marketing, even in a small niche business like machine tools.

**OK, thanks for that. Toto, it's been a pretty impressive campaign from Lewis Hamilton, especially since the summer break – things like that pole position in Malaysia with a car that was clearly very difficult that weekend. Do you feel he's gone up another level this season and what do you think has brought that about?**

**Toto WOLFF:** Yes I feel he has gone up a level. It's the fifth year that we work together and in the car and outside the car he's just made a big step forward and it's very pleasing to see that. I think it comes down to the dynamic we have in the team. He gets on with Valtteri and that means there is no controversy at all trackside. We have a really good spirit between the engineering and the drivers, a good collaboration, and it's lifted the whole team up.

**We've seen today that Max Verstappen has committed to Red Bull Racing until 2020. Helmut Marko said the other week that Daniel Ricciardo is on the market, would you rule out Mercedes taking an interest in him for 2019 and beyond?**

**TW:** We've renewed the contract with Valtteri. That means that our whole focus is on Valtteri and Lewis for next year, first of all to finish this year as good as possible, and then next year on the two and we haven't thought beyond 2018.

## **QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR**

**Q: (Dan Knutson – Auto Action and Speed Sport) The FIA is going to announce the new engine rules soon. What do you expect to see and what would like to see as far as engine rules for the future are concerned?**

**ZB:** Very much looking forward to seeing what the new engine rules are going to be. We've all heard snippets of what that might look like. I think everyone is in agreement. We need less expensive engines in general. We need less expensive racing budgets and certainly power units are an element of that. I think manufacturers in the sport are critically important, always have been, but at the same time it would be great to have an independent engine or two, that if you weren't in a situation where you had a manufacturer or you had other options, would be healthy for the sport, as it has historically been. So hopefully rules will be put in place that will allow both manufacturers to continue to enjoy the success and benefit of Formula One, while allowing some independents to come in and provide some maybe more economical but yet competitive situations for engines for teams to choose engine partners from.

**TW:** I think we are in a pretty good position at the moment because we have multiple manufacturers engaged in the sport, committed to the sport, contrary to many racing leagues where manufacturers have exited so we mustn't forget that this is a solid pillar of Formula One. But I agree with Zak. We're pretty easy with whatever rules come in. We believe that what the studies have said that technology is important as part of the USP of Formula One, so we shouldn't make it low-tech, but equally making it possible for an independent

manufacturer to come in, such as Aston Martin for example, would be good for the sport. The more brands we can attract, the more interesting it will be. The way we tackle the situation is we are very interested to hear what the FIA and FOM's position is going to be and then go with whatever they suggest.

**GH:** We've heard a lot of different technical variations on what the engine will be, so it's hard to speculate. I think it's certainly going to be simpler, they'll probably drop the heat generating unit and I think that's good but I kind of agree with the other voices here that we need to have a specification that allows a major manufacturer to come in an design an engine – and not only the engine but also the transmission – as just having the engine without the transmission really does limit your choices. So it would be nice to have a specification even for the transmission, so that you could get the entire package from the one vendor. These days the engine and transmission really are integral to one another and it's difficult to separate them and make them work smoothly.

**RF:** I think everything has been said. I would agree with all three.

**Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) A continuation of this topic. I believe that one of the discussion points had actually been all-wheel drive, driving the front axle through some motor-generator KERS situation. Toto, I believe that Mercedes is certainly not anti that. What about the other three? Are you in favour of an all-wheel drive Formula One? Or does that go against, to use a hackneyed phrase, the DNA of Formula One?**

**Do you want to start Toto and confirm the situation?**

**TW:** I think what I said before, technology is important. If there is an emphasis on maybe not having the -H any more, the heat recovery any more, how do we compensate for 60 per cent of electric energy that is being lost. There are various possibilities and front motors is one possibility. It's not that we are absolutely stuck on implementing front motors but we have to discuss all possible technologies that can compensate for the lack of power.

**Robert, your thoughts on this.**

**RF:** I think that all technologies are welcome – but I think it's also the key element of what we're looking at from the engine point of view is to keep the cost down. So, if going to four-wheel drive or whatever combination we have of that is going to increase cost, then it defeats the object of where we're going.

**Gene?**

**GH:** Well, four-wheel drive is entirely doable but like anything else, the details are the math involved. We're talking to Ferrari a little bit about that and they basically came back and said, well, if we get rid of the heat generator and exchanged that for a front-wheel drive regenerative motor, then there simply wasn't enough energy to be recovered. So, you know, you have to be careful. It's the same trap Formula One got itself into when it selected this engine. It seemed like a simple idea but when you started doing the engineering it became very, very complex. Caveat to Mercedes, they got it right. The other teams struggled for a long time. So, I think we have to be very careful before we say "let's just throw a four-wheel drive car out there," because it could be another one of those ones where one team will probably hit a home-run and the rest of us will be struggling with trying to catch up with that. I think simple's better.

**Zak?**

**ZB:** I don't think we yet have a strong technical view. I think we're more focussed on the criteria that we discussed earlier, as far as budget and competitiveness. I think that needs to be addressed. And then what technologies you use within those parameters, I think is to be discussed at a later date but we're certainly not opposed to four-wheel drive.

**Q: (Andrew Benson – BBC Sport) We keep hearing references to Liberty or the F1 Group presenting their vision of the engine formula going forwards next week – but I thought the FIA made the rules, and I know the engine manufacturers have been discussing the future engine formula for some months now – so can you explain that apparent paradox and exactly what's happening please.**

**TW:** There is certainly an interesting fact-finding mission between FOM and FIA. We haven't been involved and we haven't heard anything. So we are keen to understand what the views are. There are two meetings scheduled in for the coming weeks to hear the opinions. So, I can't really tell you more.

**Robert?**

**RF:** We have no involvement in it whatsoever, so we're as blind as you are.

**Gene?**

**GH:** I guess there's a technical delegation that gets together and discusses these things which we're not part of. It's up to them to come together. I think it's usually the owner-builders that come to agreement on what they want to do and then the FIA rules on it. At least that's somewhat my understanding. That's probably where the confusion comes from: owners have their agenda, what they want to accomplish, and then the FIA obviously has what it wants – but it's not really all that technically knowledgeable sometimes. Then the result is that we wind up with a product that doesn't make anybody happy. I think this, and I didn't address it earlier, I think the cost is incredibly important and trying to make a package that all the teams – or at least the lower teams – can afford is fundamental to even our survival.

**Zak, if it's not clear what's coming down the track, what would you like to have coming down the track? Maybe that's another way of phrasing the question.**

**ZB:** I think you have to assume Formula One and the FIA are collaborating and communicating, so while one party may deliver 'here's what the plan is', one has to assume both have been working very closely together, so I doubt it's been authored exclusively by one party. Yeah, I think it's been well-spoken about. The challenges and issues in the sport. Let's hope there's greater collaboration moving forwards, so when rules are introduced, technologies are introduced, they've been well thought through and from what I've seen, from being in Strategy Group meetings, being the new kid on the block, is not everything is always looked through, through as many lenses as it should be: technical; how is it for the fans; what commercial ramifications does it have? Things like the engine fin, that now blocks the branding on the rear wing – and I don't think anyone has thought about that – but when you're out talking to your partners, the rear wing used to be a very attractive sales position, less so now because of that engine fin. The conversations that I've been in, no-one has that conversation, so hopefully by everyone working more together, everyone will ask the right questions and we'll end up with the right outcome.

**Q: (Olav Mol – Ziggo Sport) Question for Toto. Double question. All your customer teams, you have the best power engine on the grid. All the customer teams are trying but hardly get podiums, let alone wins. You said you'd never give an engine to a competitor who could beat you. Is that likely to change in the final two years of the current engine formula. The other one, because of that, you want to win but if you don't win, would you prefer to lose to Ferrari or a customer team?**

**TW:** Tricky question. We are here in order to extract the best possible result and we have to consider obviously who to supply with an engine and one of the considerations is to not end up in a situation where it would further escalate the costs of our chassis division and end up in a spending war between the bigger teams because the engine factor is neutralised. So, that is one of the considerations we had in the past. Number two, who would I like to beat us. I don't know, it's very difficult. I think you have to, as a sportsman, honour whoever does a good job. A good enough job to beat you deserves to be there. This is why we all love the sport. It's brutally honest. The stopwatch never lies. I can cope with whoever does a better job because it's deserved.

**Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) Toto, taking what you've just said. Mercedes is in Formula One for three reasons aligning: sporting; commercial and technical. Under which circumstances then would Mercedes leave Formula One? If what didn't happen?**

**TW:** When we re-entered Formula One as a team in 2010 it was a not a light-hearted decision. On the contrary, it was well thought through that we wanted to come back with a works team. So, there is no discussion at that stage about leaving the sport. On the contrary, it's our core business: we build road cars and we build race cars.

**Q: (John Massengale – Speed City) Being an American F1 fan, it's been exciting to watch what Liberty Media might do, everything from the small changes like adding miles per hour to the world television feed to things, like now, serious radio being announced and now the new over the top television changes. I want to ask, particularly Gene and Zak, about what you guys think about what Liberty Media's done and anything we can expect?**

**GH:** It's all good. I think they've taken a very very positive approach of being pro-active to changing things. I think they've opened the sport to more fans. I love the weekends. I think the weekends make it more of a family event. It's interesting what they're doing. And obviously they've done quite a bit. I think they've done

more in this last year than we've seen in the few years I've been in Formula One. It's all good and I know they want to add more races, there's a lot of things on their agenda. It will be interesting to see when they actually put something down in writing for the teams and how they will respond to it but I think it's all been very very positive.

**ZB:** Yeah, I agree with Gene. We've seen a lot of activity this year. They're trying new things, really engaging with the fans. You can tell there's a real focus on the fan and I think if we get that right and we have hundreds of millions fans around the world, create new fans, then that creates a healthy eco-system for more sponsors, healthier teams, everyone can sell more products so we would have a great fan base and they are really focused on expanding that and I think it's very early days, looking forward to the off-season, they're not 12 months into the job yet, so they're drinking from the fire hose and I think onwards and upwards and we're going to have a very healthy sport moving forward.

**Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) Toto, you were talking about two upcoming meetings. One I imagine that you referred to as the engine presentation on the 31<sup>st</sup> but there's also a strategy group meeting. Given the fact that the four of you represent teams that have got totally different business models, what would each of you like to see come out of that strategy group on November 7<sup>th</sup>?**

**TW:** Well, I can only speak for ourselves. The most important thing is that there is clarity on what the vision is from Liberty going forward, on chassis regulations, on engine regulations. We are pretty open to hear their opinion, as long as we have enough time to adapt and adjust and make our opinion be heard. That will be the priority from my point of view.

**ZB:** I agree with Toto. My only build would be a timeline in which to implement... we're never going to get all the teams totally aligned so I think it's a case of you've got to kind of get 80 percent of the way there and then as owners of the sport make some decisions and then we get aligned so I'd like to just see it happen in a fairly quick manner so we can get on with it. And 2021 is around the corner. It would be nice to maybe see some of the things implemented before then. So I think just making sure it doesn't drag out, which historically has happened in this sport when there's been regulation changes and that becomes disruptive.

**GH:** Well, they definitely need to finalise their ideas on paper because I think it's going to take the whole of next year to sort those out and then you're into '18 and then there's only a couple of years before '19, '20 comes around, so it's very important for them to put things in writing so the teams can argue about them and back and forth with Formula One and FIA and teams and we can start some kind of a basis of opinion of what we want to do. We're very interested in cost caps and engine specs and technology limits but it's almost congress and trying to pass a tax reform or budget or something, it sounds like it could go on forever.

**RF:** Probably very similar to everyone else. I think what you're looking for is to get an in principal agreement on the strategy group which clearly determines the headline items of what we want to achieve and within that, the timing of when it's got to be achieved by. I think those are the key elements to come out of the strategy group on the seventh. If we don't achieve that, then it just keeps pushing it out.

**Q: (Andrew Benson – BBC Sport) On this strategy group meeting, the presentation of so-called ideas, how much of a fait accompli are these ideas? Is it a take-it or leave-it or is it, as Gene says, a starting point for more discussions?**

**RF:** I'm hoping there's been enough discussions over the last six months or more with all the various teams so I'm hoping that they've got a good feel for where they want to go and that we're actually going to be voting on the principles of where we want to go. The headline items and as I say, getting the timescale in place for those to be adopted, so I would hope it would be a little more. I don't think it's a fait accompli by any means but it's certain that we should have a very clear direction.

**Q: (Ysef Harding – Xiro Xone News) From all of you, just to get a maybe more specific idea or what your expectations would be at this strategy group meeting coming up in a few weeks? Anything in the top three things that you would like to talk about, like to hammer out, and as Gene pointed out, that this could be like trying to pass a Senate bill. Are you willing to go long hours into the night to hammer out something, to get something done and not leave it for the next meeting?**

**TW:** Well, most recently, I don't think congress has come up with lots of decisions. We need to do a better job there. I think we need to respect, like you said before, all of us have different set-ups and this is what makes Formula One and actually you cannot be stubborn on your own position.

What was the question? I think it needs a good discussion, on the lining of the vision we have going forward and then find the right compromise.

**ZB:** Yeah, I would agree with Toto. I think we're all very keen to get on with it. I think we're all very vested in the sport and will stay and always work as many hours as we need to. I think I've got a commercial flight booked back so if it goes late I'm going to have to hop a ride with Toto. But no, I think there's lots to discuss. I think it would be difficult to narrow it down to a top three.

**GH:** I don't think we really have that much of a voice in the strategy meeting. I talked to Guenther quite a bit about it but I think it goes back to what we said earlier, we need to get all these ideas down on paper and from then, I think that will be a tablet or something that you can go forward with. Right now, everything is just up in the air and it's speculation so until someone actually commits to paper what the ideas are, you really can't talk about them that much so if they could just come up with a one page summary of what they want to do I think that would be what I would like to see.

**RF:** I would like a bit further than that. I would like to see a very clear proposal with 'this is what we want to do, yes or no' and we vote on it, maybe only in principle at the beginning with the clear objective of getting there within the timelines but I don't think it should be a discussion programme. I think we've had enough time, over the last six or eight months to discuss it.

Ends