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Post-Race Press Conference Transcript

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DRIVERS

1 – Lewis HAMILTON (Mercedes)

2 – Sebastian VETTEL (Ferrari)

3 – Kimi RÄIKKÖNEN (Ferrari)

PODIUM INTERVIEWS

(Conducted by Usain Bolt)

Lewis, so this right here, is your fifth win in Austin, how are you feeling about the championship?

Lewis HAMILTON: I feel amazing. Firstly, look at this crowd.

It's brilliant.

LH: These guys have been amazing. Since 2012 this crowd has been growing year on year. We had a beautiful day today; I love this track. I think this track is now my favourite track to be honest. I just... Honestly, I loved the swing of the corners today. Because the wind is blowing that way, it gave us the best platform to work with. Big congratulations to the team. They have worked so hard, everyone back at the factory, the guys here, they really true deserve... they've been the best team this year.

Going to Mexico now, you're in pole position to win, so how you feeling?

LH: I feel great man. How are you feeling after our drive?

I'm still a bit nervous.

LH: Honestly, bro, I'm honoured that you're here. It's a humbling experience. It's a dream job and I know that many of you perhaps would love to drive a Formula One car and all I can tell you is it's the greatest experience and feeling in the world and I wouldn't be here without my family. My brother's down here, my mum's all the way back up there – sending you guys love.

Thank you Lewis. Sebastian, a pleasure. So, you kept the race alive until the end. It was a real exciting race. You really pushed yourself at the end?

Sebastian VETTEL: Yeah, I did. At the start it was looking good, obviously we got past Lewis. But then fairly quickly we had to realise that we couldn't go his pace today, so well done and congrats to him. Then I think we were a bit in no-man's land, not quite sure. It was close after the first stop again, but then obviously stuck again and towards the end we decided to pit again and fit a fresh set of tyres, which was a bit more exciting, the last couple of laps especially but overall not the result we wanted.

Did you feel like Mercedes came here with a good strategy today?

SV: Well, I mean, there was no real secret other than that they were quicker than us. I think we have to admit that today in the race we couldn't go their pace. So I don't think it's down to strategy, it's just... You should know, whoever is fastest usually has a good chance of winning.

Thank you very much. Kimi, congratulations. At the end it was a really dramatic race, but are you happy with the points?

Kimi RÄIKKÖNEN: Yeah, obviously I was pretty disappointed just after the race when I thought I'd finished fourth, but there was some issue with Max. It was a great race. My car was very good all the way, I just had to fuel save a bit in the end so I had to back off but apart from that the car was working very good.

Your final thoughts on the race? It's the 62nd win of your career.

LH: Well, I'm trying to catch you up, dude. You led the way. It's been an incredible year so far. Really enjoyed driving the car. I was not expecting to have the pace we had on Sebastian today. The car felt fantastic. We got the right balance at the start... Still three to go, so three more to win. Let's go guys.

PRESS CONFERENCE

Lewis, you sixth win in the United States, your fifth at the Circuit of the Americas. You've only missed out once at the Circuit of the Americas in all the time we've been coming here. Mercedes clinch the Constructors' Championship today. You made two very nice passes for the lead during the course of the race, which doesn't happen every day, so maybe drill down into those and I think, fifth place in Mexico and you're world champion.

LH: First of all, I want to say a big congratulations to everyone in the team, all the partners, everyone back at the factory and everyone here. There has been an incredible push for this kind of performance this year. We've really pulled together more than I've experience or seen over the last five years this year to really pull together and create something quite special. So, really proud for everyone, especially in going from one era of car to another, which has not been done before, just shows strength and depth and I'm really proud to be part of it. The race was great. I have to say probably one of the most fun races that I've had for a while. I mean there's been quite a few fun ones this year. Didn't get away to a great start, not really sure why, but Sebastian got a great start. But I was kind of chilled about it, just knowing in the past that you can overtake here. Yeah, it was great just having those... I don't know how many laps it was, but having that battle. Trying to get close; trying to get in the DRS. It was very reminiscent of 2012 here, seeing Sebastian up ahead and wanting to have a wheel-to-wheel battle. I had a lot of fun trying to get closer and obviously it came down to the overtake in Turn 12, which again was the same as 2012. That's what I love for. That's what I didn't enjoy most. I was a little bit surprised Sebastian didn't defend more, I would have, but still it was fair and then after that I think I had a little bit of a battle with Verstappen, which was like karting days, from one corner to the other. It was good fun. But overall I think today the wind changed around 180 degrees and it really made the track so special to drive being that through the high-speed section... Yesterday, coming out of Turn 1 you had massive wheelspin and today you had great traction and then going the 'Esses' with a headwind, it's fire through there. It's incredible. You're throwing the car around and I guess the car is at its optimum performance through there, like it would be in the wind tunnel, so that's where you get to enjoy it the most. Then you got to different corners and you have a tailwind, so you are having to push and pull. But just really grateful for all the support that I've had this weekend. My mum has been here, my brother and a bunch of friends. Usain has come out to support, with Puma, so that's been great. Woody Harrelson came out in support. My close friend Gayle King, my best friend's come, so a lot of support here and particularly in the crowd, a big thank you to everyone.

Q: Sebastian, I guess your side of the story on the overtake. Great start, and also we have to ask you why you reacted when Verstappen made that extra stop, why you felt you had to do that, to react to cover it. And also, that insane move on Bottas through the middle with the lapped traffic, which was reminiscent of Mansell on Senna in Hungary back in the day. I don't know if you've ever seen that but it was another one a bit like that anyway. A lot to digest.

SV: Yeah. Started off well with a great start but then we were just not quick enough. Obviously, I felt the car and the tyres suffering quite a lot after three or four laps only, and Lewis was easily able to stay with us, close the gap and easily get into DRS, which usually is not easy after the fast section, so he was just quicker. And then, yeah, not so easy to see. I tried to block. Maybe I could have done a bit more – but on the other hand I think he was just so much quicker that it didn't really matter. So, yeah, disappointing to lose the lead when you have it but I think with the difference in pace they had on us today, it wasn't probably our race to win. After that, yeah, I struggled. Stopped quite early. It got close around the first stop with Lewis again and yeah, after that, managing the race, trying to get to the end – but I felt the tyres on the first stint were quite bad so I wasn't sure on the second, and we talked about it by radio and decided then obviously to do something different, which at the time, was difficult to predict what was going to happen but I think if you look in terms of where we were three or four laps to the end, it's probably the right choice. Obviously we had two cars racing

for the podium today and we managed to both be up here. Trying to help Kimi in the end a little bit with a tow on the straight which worked but I think then the tyres... Max and my tyres I guess were just so much fresher it was quite easy to get past. The move on Valtteri was quite spontaneous. I wanted to go around the outside, I saw the lapped traffic, hesitated for a second, didn't know where to go then I thought 'OK, there's a little bit of a gap, I just go for it.' When I was in the middle of them I thought, 'OK, just try to get out of here.' It worked. It was very close. It also felt special. I think Valtteri was trying to wait and block the inside, so I had a bit of momentum and yeah, made it stick, so that was quite nice. Obviously overall not the result that I wanted today.

Q: Coming to you Kimi, obviously, you decided to not cover Verstappen. So, what was the thinking there? Sebastian had, you didn't. When he made his extra stop I mean. And then, can you give us your side of the story, because obviously it's a quite a controversial end there with him losing the position on the podium with a five-second penalty for exceeding track limits and gaining an advantage. Can you give us your perspective on that please?

KR: Well, I have no idea what happened with him. Apart from obviously he got past me in the third-last corner but, to be honest, my car has been all day very good. Not really any issues: the handling was good; the tyres lasted well and really the only thing was that I had to fuel-save in the end really quite heavily. So, I had to back off and, once Seb got behind me I let him past easily in Turn One and then tried to get some tow from him on the straights to try to save a bit more fuel – but that was really the only tricky point today, when I had to slow down in the end. Apart from that, my car was good. But like I said, I have no idea what happened with Verstappen, why did he get a penalty, I don't know.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Omar Alvarez – Graining.es) Question for Lewis Hamilton. Now you have the most wins in the US Grand Prix, ahead of Ayrton Senna and Michael Schumacher, what makes you different from both?

LH: Apart from the obvious, I think... I don't know. I think we all possess unique qualities in ourselves. Obviously I'm massively proud and honoured to be there amongst these incredible elite drivers that I grew up watching, and I would say we all have something very similar within us, in terms of pushing the limit, pushing the boundaries. What makes me a little bit different. I don't know. As I said, I'm my own person, I'm a little bit outgoing. I guess I dress differently. I have different opinions – but it's difficult to say how we would fare in a race all together, what differences you would see with us on track together. I wish we had the opportunity for that – but that's all a dream.

Q: (Did not declare his name) Lewis, you have 66 points more than Sebastian, the mathematics is totally in your favour. Can you please comment if you yourself maybe half-champion already or not? And to both Ferrari drivers, are you surprised by the fact that in this race Mercedes was more able to manage the tyres than Ferrari?

LH: Not Mercedes. Lewis! I'm kidding. No, I don't really let my mind get there. At the moment, I'm just focussed on winning, clearly, and I'm enjoying driving more than ever. I just really... the challenge, the pressure's intense. Just always want to elevate yourself and shine brighter each time you get in the car. Today I had to make a couple of changes; adjustments with the temperature ramping up as it did. I just got it right on point. I guess all the experience of all the years really came into play because I got the balance just perfect. If I hadn't made those changes I probably would have gone backwards. Yeah, so, there's still three races to go. In my mind, I've still got three races to win. Still a lot of points available. So I don't think until it's ever properly done and sealed you can ever get ahead of yourself.

And to the Ferrari drivers. Why was Mercedes able to look after the tyres better than Ferrari today?

SV: Well, I don't know the complete answer. I think, for my part, I wasn't expecting to struggle that much, especially in the first stint. I think towards the end it was a bit more normal – but obviously by then the race was lost. I think coming here, looking at the track, it was probably more Mercedes ground but the last couple of races gave us a lot of hope and confidence and I think we've been OK. We were fairly close yesterday, closer than we expected. And unfortunately, today we were not gaining compared to normal where on Sunday we seem to be a bit closer – but not today.

And Kimi? I think you were saying it was more about fuel saving than a problem with tyres.

KR: I don't think my tyres were at all in a bad shape. It all felt good and it wasn't really any problem to push harder but, like I said, I had to fuel-save quite a bit in the end and that was the only limitation. For me, all race, the car was very good, so no complaints.

Q: (Jorge Mendoza – La Prensa de San Antonio) Question for Sebastian. Sebastian, I know you had a lot of pressure on your shoulders this weekend. How was your approach for this coming race? I know you had to deliver, and you delivered a good second place with the car you had. Did you do something different from the previous races in regards to your mind and your attitude? What was the difference making you to deliver? Because you did a very great move this morning in the first turn. Did you risk at all? You weren't able to pull it through. What was your approach for this race?

SV: Thank you very much. Yeah, to be honest, I wanted to win, so not that different to other races, obviously the situation coming here is not what we wanted it to be, which the last couple of races not really on our side. To be honest it was fairly straightforward. I was confident we have the car, we have the speed and yeah, yesterday was important to get the front row. As we saw today, I was quite confident today would be better but it wasn't the case. I probably realised a couple of laps in, and more or less a lap before the lap that Lewis passed, I was suffering more with the tyres than maybe he was or other people were in the race. So I need to understand why that was – but yeah, for sure it's bitter. Nevertheless, we tried to fight and in that regard, at least it was a lot better than the other races where we didn't have a chance to fight. Today we had. We got beaten fair and square so congrats to Lewis – but obviously yeah, there were a couple of things I think we could have done, should have done better. We were missing the Friday this weekend, which probably didn't help – but the mindset was fairly straightforward. It was an easier weekend in that regard because we knew, and I knew we had to deliver – but I wanted to deliver as well. So yeah, that maybe made it a bit easier.

Q: (Luis Vasconcelos – Formula Press) Kimi, the reason Max was penalised was because he was judged to have completely cut the corner when he overtook you. At that moment, did you feel it was a fair moment? And also can you comment on the move that you did on Ocon and later in the race on Bottas?

KR: Obviously I was half surprised... I saw him in the mirror and I tried to slow down the whole thing before the previous corners just to try to save enough fuel to be honest and then I thought I had enough cover on that corner, and I lifted because for the obvious reason that I said but suddenly I saw a bit of him in the mirror and I was a bit surprised. But obviously at that speed I was more looking forward than rearwards so I was pretty pissed off that he got past me but I didn't have a chance and I slowed down but let's say I was utterly surprised that I got to go on the podium but like I said, I haven't seen it. It was part of the whole story but I don't really know where he went. I think passing – was it Ocon? – was quite straightforward. I was expecting that it was going to be a lot harder but maybe he didn't expect me to go inside but it was actually quite OK. I just had to make sure that I had enough speed there, that he was going to notice that I was there before he turned in. It was a bit more of a struggle with Bottas to get close enough and then finally I went and outbraked him and I managed to get past but that took a little bit of a while. I think they were a bit lacking... they were very fast on the back straight so it was very hard to... I was catching him but too late. I could follow him around the rest of the circuit but...

Q: (Graham Harris – Motorsport Monday, Motorsport week.com) To all three drivers: the start of the race today with the pre-race ceremony was a little different to normal. Usually this is a time when you want to be yourself with your trainer and talking and quiet. This was anything but that. Could we have some comments? What did you think, pluses, minuses?

LH: I think it was amazing. There was a little bit of waiting in the hallway, waiting for everyone to go out. That part felt a little bit long but I think they just made the SuperBowl here, they made the race, I think the entertainment was the best I think we've seen, with the drum line, the whole band. Yeah, I think the whole set-up. It was great to see something different. For many many years, the whole ten years, it's been the same old boring thing on the grid except for now you have the national anthem but not really too exciting. I think this one was just much more like an NFL game which is exciting, with the fireworks and everything so I think they did a really great job and I think even from this they will learn and grow from that but we also had such a great turnout today. Not quite sure there's such a great reception here in Austin but the fans, that big grandstand and up into turn one, they really make the atmosphere. When I'm driving down that straight, I can see them, also when you come down to turn 12, massive grandstand, that makes you feel like you're in the most exciting arena. Then they let them all out on the track... immediately after this I'm going to see everyone.

SV: I think for the people it might be nice if they like it and obviously it's a nice idea. For me, yeah, I don't really care to be honest. I like jumping in the car and racing. I'm not a big showman.

KR: Yeah. I really don't mind it as long as it's done at the right time in the right place but it doesn't make everything a big hassle because usually we have to run around quite a bit on Sunday and it's far from ideal

but I don't mind these things as long as they are done well and actually if it works out it's nice. I think it's something different but everybody knows my option, what I would take.

Q (Lennart Wernke – Bild) Follow up on the previous question, is that something you might see in Germany maybe next year? Did you like it that much that you maybe enjoy it at Hockenheim next season?

SV: No, I don't think so. I think Germans are very difficult to get excited so...

LH: I don't have a problem with it.

SV: Yeah, I think Americans appreciate that sort of atmosphere and entertainment a lot more. I think Germans are maybe a little slower on that front.

Q: (Priscilla Von Sorella – Huffington Post) Lewis, over the course of your lifetime or career or even a single race, how do you find it in yourself to overcome certain challenges and how do they make you a better driver?

LH: Naturally, I've got good people around me, making sure you have... keep the family close is always an important thing. I'm very close to my faith. I rely a lot on God. I think my brother's always been a kind of real inspiration. My brother was born with cerebral palsy and growing him, seeing him fall, he would always stumble and get back up. He would never even blink an eye or complain. And I know in my lifetime I've met a lot of other really inspirational individuals who have either suffered some kind of form of disability or certain setbacks in their lives and taken a lot of inspiration from that, so I think it's really about... I love the battle against adversity. There are so many people in the world who obviously have that and to find a way within yourself to rise above it, rise above the negativity, remain positive, able to try and keep a positive frame of mind can overcome so much. And again, if you have good people around you, love really conquers all. I've got a lot of love this weekend within the close people who are around me, who really lift me up. And again, from the fans who I've met here that, from the moment I leave my hotel to the moment that I arrive at the track, they're standing there with a banner at the gate, that kind of stuff just fills me up so... I'm only human, so there are days that I stumble and I struggle but I never give up, I just always get back up and there's always a brighter day ahead.

Q: (Alejandro Bulle – Graining.es) I want to ask the three of you if there's anything special that you like about the Mexican Grand Prix, thinking that we are very close to it next weekend?

SV: Usually there's a lot of people – we haven't been there too many times but... The track's a bit so-so but there's a lot of people, a huge city and yeah, hopefully we will have a lot of support again this year. It's a fun place, so overall I've been enjoying the time there so looking forward to going back. Is there anything in particular? Not really. Tacos, maybe.

KR: No, it's a new place, not new this year but a few years back. It's a different feeling but the people are very passionate about it and it's not been very strong races for me there so hopefully this year a bit better, but it's something different, for sure.

LH: Hey man, I get a lot more excited than these two about it. Mexico, you've got sombreros, you've got great music, there's real culture. The people, love their tequila. Every Mexican I've met they're always smiling so it's always a great time. I actually get to spend... I do a bit of my winter training in Mexico, beautiful place. The city... it's quite breathtaking just how big the city is and how many people are there. Driving into that arena that has that huge grandstand and it's always full, from the bottom to the top. And the food is great, tacos but on my plant-based diet, I don't know how it's going to go in Mexico. But what I can say is that I feel the best I've ever felt. Maybe some people can take that upon them too.

Ends