



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

Press Information

2015 Spanish Grand Prix Thursday Press Conference Transcript

07.05.2015

DRIVERS – Felipe NASR (Sauber), Nico ROSBERG (Mercedes), Daniil KVIAT (Red Bull Racing), Carlos SAINZ (Toro Rosso), Fernando ALONSO (McLaren), Roberto MERHI (Manor)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Fernando, shall we start with you? Last time out you only missed Q3 in Bahrain by a few tenths of a second and finished only a few seconds away from a points finish. Is that the end of that chapter of McLaren-Honda and does the more competitive chapter begin here this weekend in Spain?

Fernando ALONSO: Well, let's hope so. I think in Bahrain we had a nice step and that brought us closer to the Q3 cut-off and also to the points and we need another small step to reach that goal. Obviously it's not what we want, we want to be on the podium and win races, but one step at a time and hopefully here in Barcelona we can see this step, as you said. But we need to see what the others are bringing here to this race. Obviously it's the first European grand prix, which normally everyone brings some good updates, as we do as well, but it's just a matter of which one made the step a little bit bigger.

There was some glowing praise for you in the past week from McLaren boss Ron Dennis, how has that relationship evolved since your return to the team?

FA: It's been great. I have been always very lucky to have the support of all my teams and all of my bosses, especially when I am in the team. When I say no to them they change their opinion a bit but that's how the sport runs and I understand but what is important is to be happy with your job, to know and to make sure that your discipline and your professionalism is at the highest level when you are working for a team and that the people who pay you at the end of the month are happy.

Daniil, coming to you. It's been a tough start to your Red Bull Racing career, the car has let you down several times. Is that what's prevented you from getting the most from yourself or is there more to it than that?

Daniil KVIAT: It hasn't been an easy one so far, like you said there have been a few weekends that were quite tricky, for many reasons. We just need to get it right and then we start looking deep into the things and hopefully it will happen very soon.

So what goals have you and the team set yourselves for recovery going forward?

DK: No real goals to be honest. We just try to take the best out of the package that we have, we try to extract everything and then we see where we are. No particular goals or anything like that.

Thank you for that. Coming to you Felipe, four races in, a fifth place among four top-12 finishes for you and 14 points on the board. How satisfied are you with the opening phase of your debut season?

Felipe NASR: I'm quite happy with it. It's been a good first four races. We have been maximizing our opportunities in these early stages of this championship, but I expect things to become more difficult as we move on. We know our limitations; we know what we can do. So far I think the team gave me enough preparation and I think I was ready to take those chances early on.

As you say, Sauber have obviously capitalized on their early-season form and reliability. What lies ahead then do you think in this next phase of the season, up to the summer break, in terms of development and being able to fight, to continue to fight, for points finishes?

FN: Well, Barcelona is always a good picture to see where everybody is sitting and it's not going to be any different I would say in the way that we are also bringing a few updates on the car but we don't know how big is this step compared to our main competitors and we just have to capitalise on these opportunities we have when they show up. It's never easy to be in those points, so any points really matter for us. Let's see. We were quite good in testing here in Barcelona, so it's one for me to look forward to.

Roberto, coming to you: How do you sum up the first four race weekends with Manor this season and what are your feeling on a home race as a Formula One race?

Roberto MERHI: Yeah, obviously the first race we could not race in Melbourne. Then we did Malaysia, which was my first grand prix and was a great experience, it was good for us, for the team. It was really important to finish the race there. Obviously after that we did Shanghai and Bahrain and I think Shanghai was quite OK, in Bahrain I was struggling a little bit. All the tracks I raced were new for me, I never drove on those tracks and now coming here to Barcelona, it's the first track I know in the world championship and I am quite confident to do a good result and to have a strong pace in this race and I am quite happy to race here at my 'house'. I think it's going to be a good race and also the first normal track I would say in the calendar because Barcelona is a normal track with a good combination of corners, with a very slow last sector. Then we can know better about the car and also push more the limit here.

The pace of this car is clear, relative to the rest of the field. Can you tell us about the next steps, development parts and the scheduled arrival of the 2015 car, do you know when that's going to be?

RM: The team right now is pushing hard right now to put the new car on track as soon as possible but it takes a little bit of time. As you know we started two weeks before Melbourne and I mean it was everything done in a hurry but I think they are doing already a very good job to be racing and to be finishing the races and everything but yeah it looks like around August we will have the new car. We hope to have it around there but they are trying to work as hard as they can to put the car on track as soon as they can.

Thank you very much. Carlos, highest placed Spanish driver in the championship heading into your home grand prix. Can you talk a little bit about your feelings racing a Formula One car on home soil?

Carlos SAINZ: Well, it will always be a very special weekend for me and a very special race to remember. I remember being here 10 years ago for my first grand prix when I came to watch, getting into these huge hospitalities, meeting some important people, meeting my idol here on my left, Fernando, for the first time, when he was in Renault. That was a big shock for me and an amazing experience and probably thanks to that it's where I take the decision that I really wanted to be a Formula One driver one day and I really wanted to make this dream come true and 10 years later here I am achieving this dream and having my first chance in my home grand prix.

Are you proud to have inspired that Fernando?

FA: Yeah, obviously I feel proud of seeing Carlos here. Obviously the talent that he has has no questions in all the categories and now in Formula One. Everyone is surprised by I'm not. He's the future of our country and I'm happy to sit together here.

Second question to you Carlos: Barcelona has not over the past 10 years been a great circuit for Toro Rosso – never had a top 10 qualifying and only two 10th-placed finishes. Do you see anything in the development parts that you've brought here this weekend that encourages you to believe you can buck that trend this weekend?

CS: Well, I didn't know that, that's something new. We know it's a track that should suit our car fairly well considering that there is a bit less straight, more fast, flowing corners, fourth-gear corners, where you need the downforce. We know we have the downforce, we just need to make it work. We need to make the car balance correctly. Probably in Bahrain we didn't get it right, so well. Here we are bringing our upgrades as every other tea. But yeah, the season will develop and big teams like McLaren and Red Bull they will start cutting back and going to the places they are supposed to be and it will become difficult. As Felipe said, for

us it's now about using every chance we have and I am confident that here in Barcelona we can have on with this track layout.

Thank you. Coming to you Nico. Your 30th career podium last time out in Bahrain. Did you take encouragement from the way that race panned out which you can build on now?

Nico ROSBERG: Yeah, for sure it felt like a good race. I felt comfortable in the car, you know, and of course it's enjoyable to attack like that and pass the red cars so for sure it's given me a boost coming here to Barcelona.

Well, we're entering the period of the season now, up to the summer break, where you did you best work last year arguably – five poles and three wins – how can you harness the spirit of that early summer 2014 and get yourself back ahead of your team-mate this time?

NR: It's just a matter of maximizing the weekends. It's not really come together until now. Parts have gone well but other parts not so well and I just need to put it all together and of course I'll start to try and do that from here onwards.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Ian Parkes – Autosport) Fernando, you're here back at the track where you had your testing accident in February. Any concerns at all about what might unfold this weekend with the car, with the track? We also read stories during the recent mini-break that you are planning to visit the hospital staff who looked after you when you suffered your concussion. Can you just elaborate on that a little bit as well please?

FA: No concerns. That was an accident that happened three months ago and unfortunately it was a little bit longer to recover. The impact was a little bit unlucky and it put me one month out of the car. But yeah, coming back here with full confidence and full motivation to do well. To perform and to deliver a good result in front of the home crowd. Yeah, the week that I was in the hospital I had one of the best staff I could imagine in the hospital. They were so kind to me and I plan to have dinner with them, probably on Sunday. I stay here on Monday for one event with a sponsor, so Sunday night after all the stress and the race pass; more in a quiet place probably on Sunday I will have dinner with all of them.

Q: (Peter Farkas – Auto Motor) Nico, a question to you. Of course you have had a fighting race in Bahrain but you still finished behind Lewis. I think if you analyse the times I think we can come to the conclusion that maybe it's not only Lewis who became faster since last year but also you became a bit slower compared to yourself. Do you agree? Do you think just Lewis got so much faster or you have some problems maybe? Is it a psychological thing or have you analysed and come to a definite conclusion as to what the problem might be?

FA: Thank you very much for your kind question! I don't think it's something to generalize [about] or anything as such. Of course the results speak for themselves. It's pretty clear. That's it. For me it's Barcelona. It's a race on its own and I come here after a personal feeling boost from Bahrain. I just want to optimise this weekend and that's it. Not thinking much more than that.

Q: (Simon Arron – Motor Sport magazine) Question to Fernando and Nico, Bernie Ecclestone has recently mentioned that it's possible, beyond 2015, Monza could be removed from the calendar. You guys have both stood on the podium there, can you tell me what Monza means to you and how you'd feel if it was removed from the schedule.

NR: Well, Monza is one of the legendary tracks. Of course it is important to the F1 calendar, just as the German Grand Prix is important. I, of course, definitely wish that we continue to race there. In front of the tifosi also, the atmosphere is always awesome so it's important to F1, that race.

FA: Yeah, same opinion. I think it's one of the best races of the year. The podium is amazing there with all the fans on the main straight. It's the home of Ferrari – it's very important for Formula One. But, as Nico said, also the German Grand Prix is very important and it's not any more this year, so, who knows.

Q: (Sebastian Scott – racedepartment.com) Question for all the drivers. Pirelli have said this week they're going to be aiming to use the softer compounds throughout the next races. Do you feel that will aid some drivers more than others – and also aid some teams more than others? And how do you feel about that?

FA: Nothing really to comment. It's their decision. I'm not a huge fan of changing philosophy in the middle of the championship, of which tyres or which compounds you need to bring to the races. You should stay with the original idea and the philosophy. But, y'know, as I said, it's like that. Probably for our car, if I'm honest, maybe it's better the soft compounds. So maybe it can be a benefit for our performance – but I don't say that. I say that they should stay with whatever was the original plan because they could change the result of the championship.

Carlos?

CS: As far as I know, obviously Monaco and these kind of races we're always going to be with the soft and supersoft, so no big changes. I don't have experience in those tracks with soft and supersoft so I don't know if it's the ideal compound or not – but yeah, I'm happy. We tried the supersofts here in the winter, I really enjoyed the grip it had, so the quicker the better, always.

Nico, your thoughts.

NR: Nothing to add.

Felipe?

NR: No, nothing.

Daniil?

DK: No problems

Roberto?

RM: No.

Q: (Haoran Zhou - LETV) Question to Nico. You did a 22.7s in winter testing which opened everyone's eyes and your team-mate did a 23.0s on scrubbed tyres – more than a second in front of everyone. Are you expecting something of the same here? That you have a clear advantage or you think things have changed?

NR: No, we expect it to be similar now to the last couple of races. We still hope to be in front in qualifying and in the race it's going to be very close. I think it's going to continue. Of course here everybody has bought some updates, so that might shuffle things around a little bit – but the general trend is probably going to stay very similar.

Q: (Vladimir Rogovets – Sb Belarus) My question is to Fernando Alonso. Red Bull needed four years to win its first championship. Mercedes the same. In the opinion of Eric Boullier, one or two weeks ago, McLaren-Honda also needs four years. My question: Fernando, are you OK to wait four years to be the champion with McLaren-Honda.

FA: Well, you know, if I could sign now that in four years I will win, yes – but it is not guarantee. This is Formula One, it's a very complex sport and I will do my best every weekend to help the team to achieve some good results. If we can fight for a championship, we can become a champion in one year, two years, three years, or four years, you never know. It's not really a plan that you put in your head: 'OK, I will wait X time to become champion'. I'm trying to enjoy every weekend. Even now, y'know, the first races that I did, how the team is growing up, how all the young people, all the Japanese, they are determined, they are motivated to this challenge. And now I arrive at my home grand prix, so even if I am not able to fight for the win, I enjoy every single minute with the fans, with the performance updates that we bring here, so every race is a challenge and I'm enjoying this process. If I can fight for a world championship or not, only time will tell us – but I'm a very happy person so it's no problem to wait.

Q: (Angelique Belokoptov-Auto Digest) Question for all drivers: imagine that this afternoon I have to describe each of you to my readers. Can you describe yourself in three words. Three adjectives that can show them who you are. Start with Fernando please?

FA: Thank you! I cannot answer. This is your job. If you came here and we tell you who we are, it's very easy but I think if I have to describe me as a driver, you can put whatever adjective because it's a different opinion for different people and we will never agree as sportsman to tell exactly three words and agree every one. This is quite complex. In terms of who I am really, who is Fernando outside the paddock... this is a secret...

Carlos?

CS: Yes, it's the same. I prefer other people to judge me and my personality, my driving style, my approach, than to really describe myself. I think it could sound a bit... not correct to describe yourself. I prefer the others to do that... Me as a driver, I know who I want to be and how I want to do it but to describe yourself as good, talented or whatever, it can sound... not correct. A bit arrogant. So I prefer you guys to analyse me and come to your own conclusions.

Nico?

NR: I really tried hard to think of sometimes – but I can't come up with anything. So no. Sorry.

Daniil?

DK: I obviously hear this question quite often... sorry, it's better that... it's a boring question really. I don't know what to say. Like the other guys said, it's better to let other people think. Every person thinks different things.

FN: What can I say really? We're all different to each other. Everyone has a particular think different as a driver or as a person. It's up to you guys to judge it.

Roberto, anything to add?

RM: I am quite new here. I think I need time to say something.

Q: (Bob Constanduros – Bob Constanduros & Associates) Fernando, for the benefit of the photographers, can you tell us why you've kept your shades on? I believe you've tweeted a picture?

FA: It's a sponsor campaign! No... even if they will be happy... no, I have a stye – a little inflammation of my eye. They recommend not to be too much on the artificial light. I try to protect a little bit the eye today and tomorrow to be ready for Saturday and Sunday.

Q: (Louis Dekker – NOS) Question for Carlos and Fernando. Carlos, I saw a picture of you as a child shaking the hand of Fernando years ago. Now this weekend you can beat him on the track. If that happens, how would that feel. Also to Fernando.

FA: It would feel terrible!

CS: It would feel great!

CS: I don't know if I will fight him on track or not. I just know I fought him in Bahrain. You don't realise it's Fernando, you just see a McLaren and try to beat him. Out of the track it's different. He's the man. He's Fernando, and we have a good relationship. Inside the track everyone is a competitor. If we race in a go-kart race, for charity or something, you try to win and to beat everyone. Here it's the same. It will feel a bit strange in the paddock and everything but for the rest, I'm very happy to be here, I'm enjoying a lot this beginning of the season and my first grand prix, my first race in Europe, sharing all these good moments. It will be interesting.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – GloboSport.com) To Nico, sorry to come back to the subject, you said ‘maximise the weekend’. Sometimes it works well and sometimes not so well. What is not working so well that can justify these results? And to Alonso, if, when a driver wins a championship, he can be even more efficient the next season?

NR: It’s just a weekend itself coming together. Optimising it. For now it’s not really come together yet. That’s it. Just put all the pieces together. There’s not specific areas or anything like that. It’s just general.

Fernando?

FA: I don’t know. It depends on the personality and the character of everyone. It could help you to take some weight out of the shoulders and to take some pressure out after winning a championship, the following year you are more relaxed and perhaps you could perform better – or could be the opposite: you relax a little bit, you lose a little bit of that extra motivation and you are a little bit slower. It depends for everyone.

Q: (Valenti Fradera – L’Esportiu) Roberto, is your seat guaranteed for the rest of the season or is it confirmed race by race?

RM: No, at the moment I am driving for Manor F1 team and until they say the opposite, I will be the driver. Normally it is my seat.

Q: (Daniel Johnson – Telegraph) Fernando, how important is this weekend for you and the team to show good signs of progress? And secondly, lots of more casual viewers of Formula One will find it hard to understand why you as a two-time champion are having to fight to get into Q2 and fight to get into the points. Does that ever leave you feeling disillusioned?

FA: Well, I think this weekend is important as it was in China and in Bahrain, not so much for the results or the points or the qualifying position; it’s more an update on the performance that has to be consistent and has to deliver what we expect from the car. That is what happened in China and in Bahrain, that everything we brought to the car delivered as expected. So coming to this weekend, our hope is that everything we bring here keeps going into the car in a healthy way and performing better and then the final result depends on many other factors: luck, the performance of our competitors right now and that’s a little bit a second priority right now.

Yeah, from the outside it’s normal to be out of Q1, Q2, it’s a little bit disappointing for everyone but more for us inside the team because the expectations are always very high with the McLaren-Honda partnership coming back together. It’s normal that everyone expects much more than what we are doing now but we are in the fifth race, so the championship is long. We still have high hopes that things will change quickly and we will start performing a little better. On my side, as I explained in the first question, I’m enjoying the challenge a lot. We started at the very bottom and we are climbing the mountain and we are doing it a little bit faster than everyone expected, so this is thanks to all the work that the team is doing and I feel very proud to be here.

Q: (Manuel Franco – AS) Roberto and Carlos: do you think that Fernando will be World Champion again?

RM: Obviously Fernando is driving for McLaren at the moment and they are not really competitive compared to Mercedes or Ferrari or most of the teams. It depends a little bit on him and also it depends a lot on the car he is driving. If McLaren gives him a good car in the future, he can win perfectly another World Championship but if he doesn’t have a car good enough to be competitive, you cannot do anything against that. He needs to be in a good team at the right time to be competitive.

CS: Same. Nothing much to add. I really think that Fernando... you give him the weapons, he will always do the job, even when you don’t give them to him, he always performs, like he’s showing again this year. So yeah, I’m fully confident that if McLaren can put everything together, they will be a good partnership, for sure fight for the championship. If you win it or not, that depends on the year but he will fight, for sure.

Q: (Manuel Franco – AS) Fernando, do you think it would be possible that Roberto or Carlos could be World Champion in the future?

FA: Very similar answer to be honest. It depends on which car and what moment of your career you are but they have an advantage, they are young and they have more time to succeed and more time to play around, so hopefully we can see them fighting for the championship, why not?

Q: (Nikolai Sarozas – Espolita) Fernando, I believe you had a chance to drive the legendary McLaren-Honda MP4/4 recently. Can you tell us about the feelings in the cockpit, how was it to drive with a simple steering wheel, manual gearshift and so on? Were you able to feel the power and the grip of that car? How was it? Was it quicker than the current one?

FA: It was an amazing experience. Obviously it's not quicker, to answer straight away, because those cars, in their actual configuration of the circuit, they could run up to ten seconds slower than the real cars that we have now, so definitely the car felt slower but yeah, it was an amazing experience. I grew up watching that car winning championships and races with Ayrton and Alain Prost so to sit there and to experience some laps - I think I did eight laps, each of them felt amazing, difficult to forget that day. It was difficult with no power steering, with a manual gearshift, with three pedals so there was some action there to get used to in the first couple of laps, a lot of torque in the engine. I remember when I went out of the garage and at the exit of the pit lane, I went probably a little on the throttle: there was no power, no power so I went to full throttle and suddenly came all the torque and I nearly spun. It was a risky moment and it was the installation lap so it was a day to remember.

Q: (Ralf Bach – Sport Bild) Fernando, two questions to you. First one is that it's very difficult to rate a McLaren car itself, so do you think you could win with a McLaren car with a Mercedes engine at the moment. The second question is are you surprised by the steps that Ferrari made, especially on the engine side over the winter, and can you explain why?

FA: Yeah, I think the car has the potential to perform at the top level. We had everything together, obviously, we have a very complex package with the power unit and the philosophy of the car with the new entries recently with Peter Prodromou and other staff on the team that have changed a little bit the mentality and philosophy of the design and the car. So I think it's the time that we are right now putting all the pieces together and have a good package, hopefully in the future, even if we have to sacrifice some months now. I really think that we have the potential to fight with the top teams in future.

And then about the Ferrari: not so surprised to be honest. We had a tough year in 2014 but even with that we were third and fourth in the championship until five races to go. Now, I think they are second and fourth so they made that step forward. In performance, it looks more because I think also Williams and Red Bull are a little bit under-performing right now but it's interesting and good for the championship to have not only Mercedes domination. Hopefully they can keep improving even more.

Q: (Mike Doodson – Auto Action) Some drivers have already used up three or four engines this year and they face some pretty daunting penalties if they have to take fresh engines which they obviously will have to. My question is do you think it is a good or fair rule to penalise sportsmen for the failings of their equipment? And I guess we will probably have to ask this question to Daniil first.

DK: Well yeah, it's a fair point. The situation is not easy, for sure, for us. We used quite a few already but it is what it is. So no complaints, we will see what's going to happen with the fifth engine or not but once again, it's something out of our control and we just stick to what we have and we just try to take the best out of the rules that we have for ourselves. So we just keep on working.

FA: Not really. It's a good question, maybe a little bit unfair, maybe not. It's the same for everybody. You know the rules before starting the championship so we just need to do a better job than our competitors. It's the same with testing. We are not allowed to test. So it's the only sport... it's like if you play tennis and you cannot test the racquet before Wimbledon. Everything is like this. You just need to approach the thing in the best way possible and to prepare yourself better than the competitors.

NR: Just to add something: maybe yes, I think our sport is always linked between car and driver and if the car breaks down, I also suffer because I can't finish the race, and it's the same all the time. Of course, I'm happy to have a Mercedes Benz engine in the back because we're still on our first engine and it's looking good, so that's great.

Q: (Peter Farkas - Auto Motor) Fernando, coming back to that old McLaren from the eighties: obviously the public still doesn't really like these new turbo engines and the perception is that those old cars are much harder to drive on the limit than these ones. Do you agree, after driving it, was it really harder to get on the limit with that, so what can you say to those critics who say that 'come on, these cars nowadays are not really hard to drive on the limit'?

FA: Well, obviously I was not on the limit because that was quite risky to do the filming day for our sponsor and maybe crash so I was at fifty percent, just enjoying the laps. I don't think that it was more difficult than our (current) car. I think that when you drive a machine to the limit it's difficult. To all the people at home that maybe see that the cars are too easy now, I think it's a combination of things, a combination of very high quality television which I think all the cameras now look perfect, even the on-board cameras you see are like a train, they show no vibration, nothing, so everything has improved. You see an onboard camera 20 years ago and it looks like crazy, it's exactly the same now but the technology is much better now. But yeah, to all those people I invite them to come to a go-kart race with us and they will be scared when we drive a go-kart at the limit, even a go-kart that seems a simplest thing in the world but every motor sport machine that you drive at the limit is extremely complex.

Ends