



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

Press Information

2015 Japanese Grand Prix Thursday Press Conference Transcript

24.09.2015

DRIVERS – Nico HULKENBERG (Force India), Max VERSTAPPEN (Toro Rosso), Will STEVENS (Manor), Valtteri BOTTAS (Williams), Sebastian VETTEL (Ferrari), Jenson BUTTON (McLaren)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Sebastian, congratulations for last time out, only a few days since your win in Singapore. Is your performance there something you can translate to this track?

Sebastian VETTEL: Well, it's a completely different track here but we'd hope. But I think you have to remain realistic. In a way it was a big surprise to see Mercedes struggling, which I don't expect to be the case here. Again, it would be a big surprise. But if the chance is there we have to go for it. As I said, the nature of the track is completely different here. We'll have to wait. The weather could bring a lot of surprises as well. It's going to be a tough weekend.

We know that you love Suzuka - you've won four times out of six I believe and you also won a championship here in 2011 here. So, what can you expect this weekend?

SV: Well, based on that quite a lot! Yeah, I love the track; it's a driver's circuit. I think we all love the track. It's one of the old school circuits on the calendar. It's a lot of fun. If you want to know what a Formula One car can do then the first sector I would say sums it up and says pretty much all. In my point of view [it is] the best track in the world and great fun to be here.

Thank you very much. On to Valtteri Bottas. Valtteri, you had a good race last time out, finishing fifth. Do you think you'll be able to make the same challenge again here in Suzuka?

Valtteri BOTTAS: It was a good weekend for me. We knew Singapore would be a difficult one, probably the most difficult track for the rest of the calendar. Good to be here because we do think we can be more competitive here than we have seen last weekend. Really looking forward to it. Like Sebastian said, it's a great track to drive. Also, the fans are awesome here, so it's good to be here and we are expecting strong results.

Williams are currently third in the Constructors' Championship, 112 points behind Ferrari and 59 points ahead of Red Bull. With six races of the season left are you, as a team, moving into a testing period for the last six races, with an eye to next year?

VB: For sure we've been developing next year's car already for a long time and we have already done some tests looking more at the future rather than maybe only this season. Yeah, that is one of the targets for the rest of the year, to look ahead to next year but still we want to have good races and if we can find anything for this year's car for sure we will try to do it if it doesn't impact the development of the new car. Still many races to go if we want to gain our position. It would be nicer to be a bit closer to Ferrari also.

Thanks very much. Will Stevens: new team-mate and a new challenge for you. How do you feel about the rest of the season?

Will STEVENS: Yeah, I think the year so far has gone pretty good for me. I think Singapore last weekend for sure wasn't one of my easiest weekends of the year but you need weekends like that to improve and to learn from. So heading into this weekend and the rest of the year I don't know any of the tracks, apart from Abu Dhabi, so I have a lot of learning to do. But I always like coming to new circuits, especially here. It's always [been] a circuit I've wanted to drive, so looking forward to getting out there. The weather looks pretty mixed for the weekend so I'm sure we're going to have a very eventful weekend.

What about your future at Manor? Are you seeing lots of progress? How have things changed over the year in the garage?

WS: I think as a team for sure the next few years are going to be pretty exciting for them. This year was always going to be tough, using last year's car with the old Ferrari power unit, so it's going to be as tough as it can [be]. But looking ahead to next year, for me personally we're working hard in the background to try to sort out things for next year, which are looking positive, so we'll see. Hopefully we'll have some things to tell you soon.

Thank you very much. Max, another really good race and result for you in Singapore but pretty controversial. Do you want to tell us about it from your side?

Max VERSTAPPEN: Well, I really enjoyed my race. Of course the start was a bit disappointing but from there on I think we had a great pace in the car. Yeah, kept pushing and catching the guys in front of me and at the end to come back in the points was just a great result and, yeah, very happy with that.

Do you want to tell us a little bit more about what happened between yourself and Carlos Sainz and maybe what has happened since the last grand prix to talk about things within the team?

MV: Well I can tell you nothing has changed in our relationship or something. I was trying to overtake Checo, I was very close and I was looking in my mirrors as well. It didn't feel for me that it was close enough to give it a go, so I decided to stay there and at the end we had a conversation about it in the team and everything has been cleared and we are ready to go again here in Japan.

Thank you very much. Let's move on to Nico Hulkenberg. Nico, it was clearly a disappointing result for you last time out in Singapore, after the collision for Felipe Massa. You've picked up a three-place grid penalty as well. Have you had a chance to look back over the incident and have another view of it?

NH: Yeah, definitely. Obviously I looked at the video footage and I think I probably should have given him a bit more room, because he was on the inside and I had some space on the right. Visibility is also difficult when you are alongside each other and I thought I was ahead enough, but I wasn't clearly, in hindsight, so we take up the penalty here. But it's behind us, now we move on and make the best of it this weekend.

This weekend, today in fact, Sergio Pérez has been confirmed at re-signing for the team, so a bit of stability in Force India. Why do you think re-signing was the right thing for you to do?

NH: Well, I think for both of us. We work well together. I think we are a strong combination and I think we both have faith in the team and we see still a lot of potential that we can extract and move forward, together with Force India, and I think both of us want to continue growing with the team.

Q: Jenson, you've been the centre of a lot of media speculation over the last week. Can you tell us what your plans are?

Jenson BUTTON: What, today? Or after this...?

It would be nice to have an insight into your plans for the future...

JB: OK. Well... I can't give you anything else. Since the last race there's no more information to give you. You're going to have to wait for a little while I'm sorry to say but we're in good talks, the team and myself so, that's it. We're here to concentrate on this weekend. It's a big weekend for us. McLaren-Honda in front of Honda's home crowd at their circuit... we hope that we can have a good weekend. Obviously the weather mixes it up a little bit which I think is what we need to be properly competitive so yeah, we're focussing on this weekend and hoping for a reasonable result.

Q: Japan's always been a special place for you. Just tell us, over your time here, you've never finished outside of the top ten I believe, you won here back in 2011 when Sebastian was winning his championship – but why is it so special to you?

JB: I think it's, as Sebastian touched on earlier, I think it's a very special circuit for most drivers. It is the best circuit in the world as Sebastian said – not that he's driven every circuit in the world – but it's got a nice flow. I was asked the other day which is the best corner here. It's difficult: you can't pick just one corner, it's just the circuit itself. It's such a fantastic layout. From Turn Two all the way up the Esses, through Dunlop it's breath-taking. A very special circuit to drive on and even better to win on. I've been coming here since '94 when I raced in karts at the kart circuit just across the road. I remember walking the circuit then just thinking, yeah, it was built for a Formula One car. This was *the* circuit for a Formula One car – and it is. It's also very special because a lot of connections to Japan working with Honda for so many years. Obviously my wife is Japanese and yeah, I'm a big fan of the culture as well.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Dan Knutson – Auto Action / Speed Sport) Sorry Jenson, you said “we'll have to wait a little bit.” How much is a little? You also said you're in talks with the team. That would seem to suggest you'll be around next year as well?

JB: There's so many possibilities of what could happen next year. So many possibilities but I've got nothing else for you I'm sorry to say.

Q: (Ian Parkes – Autosport) Sorry Jenson I'm going to try and push you a little bit more. You did speak on Sunday about the fact you no longer had any joy in Formula One: the joy of winning, the joy of being on a podium. Is that a kind of indicator as to your mindset, bearing in mind that joy is probably unlikely to return next season if you were to stay with Honda, given the difficulties they're still likely to face?

JB: Yeah, I think it was worded slightly differently than that – but I don't think any driver has joy when they're not fighting for victories. That's what we're here to do, y'know, that's what we love. It's the challenge of fighting at the front and the possibility of fighting at the front. So, no. I don't like finishing 14th. I don't like finishing tenth. That's not what gives me joy, that's not what excites me – but there are so many other things that, if they work in your favour, or if you see a future, there's the possibility of joy coming back and that's exciting. That's a challenge. But no, after the Singapore Grand Prix I wasn't joyful. No.

Q (Trent Price – Rewind Media) Sorry Jenson, we'll get this out of the way now. Despite a particularly difficult 2015 you've had some extremely good years with Honda. 2004, latter half of 2006 respectively. Being here at your second home, how would you like to reflect on your time at Honda?

JB: We've definitely had some ups and downs in the past. 2004 was a great year. I got my first podium that year. I think we got ten podiums that season and finished third in the championship.

We were second in the Constructors' so pretty special year. 2006 was when the team actually became Honda and I won my first grand prix with Honda, and still the only grand prix for Honda in this era. So, a special day. The president of Honda was there. He came to two races that year and he was stood on the podium with me, so a great experience and a great memory. But we never achieved what we set out to do, which was fight for the World Championship. We had some good times, we have a lot of fun – but we never quite achieved that. So, I think this time is an important time for Honda. They will give everything, I think, to win the World Championship, a matter of time. I know they're working flat out. I don't think anybody can put a time on how long it will take but I know they're giving everything to do that so hopefully one day we'll see the president of Honda stood on the podium again.

Q: (Ben Edwards – BBC TV) Sebastian, when hybrids came in last year, with the Red Bull, you didn't seem that comfortable with it, certainly at certain points during last year. Last week in Singapore, you put on a display that showed you are absolutely at one with the car. Has anything changed in your driving style with the hybrid cars? And can you just talk through that change a little bit?

SV: I think obviously the cars changed massively from '13 to '14, not just the power unit but also the car itself. So I think for all of us it was the experience that there's quite a lot less grip available, which as a driver is obviously not the right direction to go in because you want to go faster. So there were some things that I had to get used to and for sure, at the beginning of the year, last year wasn't great, getting the experience with this generation of cars etc. On top, I had a difficult year for many reasons but yeah, I think much more in control and comfortable with this year's car compared to last year's for many reasons, but I don't think it's down to the power unit really. I think the power unit, for us drivers – well, it is what it is. I think we're not probably at the same standings as the fans in terms of sound etc. Obviously it is a step back but yeah, in terms of the technology behind it, it is incredible. The question still remains open, whether we need it or not, that's for everyone, individually, to decide, I guess.

Q: (Andrea Cremonesi – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Jenson, you were talking about the enjoyment of racing. Behind you is Nico who won at Le Mans this year. Is it an option to do the same as him, to do Formula One and some special races in other categories next year?

JB: I've never thought about doing both. I think with a 22-race F1 calendar you're going to be very limited on weekends and sometimes it's nice to have a weekend off from motor racing so I can't see that happening. Maybe Nico's going to be doing the same thing again next year but I think for every other driver it's going to be a super busy calendar if that is the case, that we have that many races. I don't think it will really work – for me, it wouldn't really work anyway.

Q: (Luigi Perna – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Seb, looking at this circuit and the next ones, what are the opportunities for Ferrari in your opinion? And second question: are you used to singing Italian songs or was after qualifying your first time?

SV: It was not my first time. I think my first time was probably after Malaysia. Yeah, I'm not a good singer so maybe I stop that now, since everyone has heard it.

JB: I don't think any of us are!

SV: Well, maybe Lewis is, I don't know. It was obviously out of the moment, it was a special day on Saturday and Sunday so I was singing both days but I think it was more equally bad both days.

To come back to your first question, I don't know, it's difficult to say. Looking at the results so far this year, we had a great car on every track, every nature of circuit: street circuits like Monaco, Singapore we've been competitive but on other tracks as well like I just mentioned: Malaysia. Probably Silverstone was one of the weekends where we lost a little bit of that but then again you look at so many races in the same year and you know we weren't completely off the pace so I think we can be reasonably confident but of course we have to remain realistic. I think we've

learned along the way so hopefully that means that we will be a bit stronger again but the favourites I think still have to remain Mercedes with their two cars.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) Jenson, you said that you’ve been having constructive talks with your team and also that there are lots of options for next year. This would indicate that you haven’t quite made up your mind about 2016. Is your future really in your own hands or are there certain contractual obligations?

JB: I can’t go any further with my comments on that. But I’ll be happy next year. That’s the important thing.

Q: (Ian Parkes – Autosport) Seb, drivers come and go in this sport, some quicker than others as we know, in Formula One it’s the nature of the business but what would it mean if – and still a big if – Jenson did decide to call it a day at the end of this season?

SV: First of all, I think...

JB: Try to be nice.

SV: ...we don’t know if that’s the case. I think you’ve tried to ask him but I think he has his reasons – whatsoever – not to go further. It would be a loss, for sure. I remember when I was a little kid and he was considered very very young, joining Formula One. I have to give you that he looked very young when he started with Williams. Nowadays though, you have guys who are 17 who are starting already, so in that case he was already old when he started, or I was quite old. Certainly, he’s a big character. We know that he’s quick, he deserves to be a champion and I’m sure that if there were more years when he had the package to win the big one, he would have had a big say in that. The quality is out of doubt. On top of that he’s a very fair guy on the track. Outside the track, I think we all like him for many reasons so it would be a big loss.

JB: Thank you mate. I’ll start crying in a minute, it’s so emotional!

Q: (Dan Knutson – Auto Action and Speed Sport magazines). Max, I know that the team and you and Carlos have sorted out everything from last weekend but did you also look forward and say ‘maybe if there’s a situation, one teammate will let the other teammate by just for a few laps’ – something like Red Bull did in Monaco this year?

MV: Yeah, exactly. I think one thing we needed to be a bit more clear on the radio. We spoke about it and hopefully it will not happen again but we will see. If we are a bit more clear then for sure.

Ends