



Press Information

2019 Austrian Grand Prix Thursday Press Conference Transcript 27.06.2019

DRIVERS – Sergio PÉREZ (Racing Point), Charles LECLERC (Ferrari), Max VERSTAPPEN (Red Bull Racing), Alexander ALBON (Toro Rosso), Kevin MAGNUSSEN (Haas)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Alex, if we could start with you. Let's start by talking about the frustrations of entering a race weekend when you have an engine penalty. How does that affect your mindset?

Alexander ALBON: Yeah, obviously it's not the same as a normal weekend when you have to focus on long runs. I think it opens the margin, as a team we can focus a bit on the long-run pace, which maybe we struggled a bit in Paul Ricard with that. It's not too bad, because it just means we can almost treat it like a test day, the first three free practice sessions and do stuff maybe we wouldn't risk on another weekend. So yeah, it's OK.

Q: I guess you take heart from what happened in China, pit lane to the points?

AA: Yeah, you could say that.

Q: Now, Alex, we're one third of the way through the season or just over. How do you reflect on the early races and the whirlwind existence that is being a Formula One driver?

AA: Yeah, I think the beginning was quite a shock. I think it's like everything: you start to get used to it. The circus seems a bit more normal the more you do it. By this point now you're in the rhythm, it's not so daunting all the press stuff. It's OK.

Q: What about the car? How long did it take you to get comfortable in the car?

AA: Car-wise, relatively comfortable was straight away to be honest. These cars now they are so fine-tuned that you can get up to speed relatively quickly but then to find the extra bit does take a bit more time. But on top of that it's more about how you speak with the team, how you extract performance with the engineers, that kind of thing. That takes a while, and that's something that I'm always learning really – what does the car need to get an extra couple of tenths on qualifying.

Q: And in terms of performance, what can you tell us about the development of the car?

AA: Yeah, I think like everything we are always improving and then it's a fight against the other teams. Obviously McLaren and Renault were very strong in Paul Ricard and

we're hoping to bounce back strong here at our home race weekend. Of course everyone is getting upgrades, so it feels like an upgrade chase at the moment. So we'll see.

Q: Sergio, in France you finished 12th for the third race in a row. You seem always on the edge of the points, just how frustrating is it getting?

Sergio PÉREZ: Yeah, it's obviously very frustrating when you are not scoring points. It's what you come here for and going home with no points hurts a lot. I think we have been going through a very difficult couple of races, the last three especially. But especially in the midfield it's so tight, so a little improvement will be a big jump. I know the season is very long and we are still there or thereabouts in the midfield, so I'm still confident that we can turn around the season.

Q: Do you feel the team is paying the price for the uncertainty of last season?

SP: In a way yes, because you know, these days every team is so strong in the midfield. There are not bad teams anymore or teams that are too far away. Everyone is really there. When you have such tight margins having an upgrade one or two races late hurts a lot. So, yeah, I think we are. But as I say, I'm still very hopeful that we can turn the season around.

Q: And what's this year's Racing Point like to drive?

SP: We're struggling a bit to try to pick up the best bits we have at the moment with the package that we have. It can be quite inconsistent, the car, at time, but nothing unusual, just normal stuff.

Q: Kevin, it's your 50th race for Haas this weekend and probably hoping for a better one than in France last weekend, which was described by your boss Guenther Steiner as the worst in the team's history in Formula One. Is that a description you would agree with?

Kevin MAGNUSSEN: It was certainly very disappointing and I think it's because we have had very high expectations for this year. I think all the way from winter testing the car felt so good and looked so competitive. And also, at quite a few races we've had a great car in qualifying and qualified easily best-of-the-rest but then we've struggled a lot in the race. So I think in terms of it being the worst race in the history of Haas F1, I don't know. I think if you ask him now he may see it differently. I think we have had some tough races in Mexico. I remember Mexico is like a bad race for us historically and we've had some really rough races there – qualifying on the back row and finishing almost the same. I wouldn't say it was the worst race but maybe in terms of feeling. It felt very bad, because two races ago we qualified sixth in Monaco and looked very good for a very strong best-of-the-rest position there and then suddenly you find yourself in a tough position – hard to get out of Q1 and struggling massively in the race as well. Yeah, I would say very disappointing and I can see where he is coming from.

Q: What is the mood in the camp coming into this Austrian Grand Prix? Is there a sense of frustration building within the team, both among the engineers and the drivers?

KM: There is a little bit of a sense of uncertainty, because we don't know what to expect. We know we have got a good car aerodynamically and a car that can perform well sometimes but then we've found ourselves in situations where the car isn't performing at all and we can't really point at the problem. It's very confusing. We all talk about tyres and stuff but it is a bit confusing as to why we are so strong sometimes and even on tracks that look the same as, you know say Barcelona, where we were strong, we struggle sometimes. It's not like you can find a trend and zoom in on the problem. It's a little bit confusing but we are working very hard to locate the problem and take a direction of where to look. It's easy to say that the tyres aren't working but there's got to be more to it than just temperatures and stuff. There are a lot of things to look at on a Formula One car so it is a bit difficult at the moment but this track has been good to us in the past, so fingers crossed it's the same this year.

Q: What's your gut feeling about this year, because you were fourth and fifth last year?

KM: The gut feeling is good. It's been strong for us in all years I think. Even when I wasn't here they were strong so... I don't know if it's just a coincidence or if there's something in the track that suits the way we design our car. It's a bit difficult to say. But at least it's exciting to come here knowing that we've had strong races here in the past.

Q: Charles, do you expect to give Mercedes a harder time here than you did last weekend in Paul Ricard.

Charles LECLERC: Oof, I think at the moment it's quite difficult. They seem very, very quick. They were extremely quick in Paul Ricard, especially on race pace. I think we are focusing on ourselves, trying to do the best job possible but to be honest it's quite difficult to be at their level.

Q: How much of a boost was it for you to finish less than a second behind Valtteri Bottas last weekend?

CL: I think he was struggling quite a bit on the second set of tyres with some blistering. We weren't, I think we managed quite well our race. So it shows that still everything is possible but it's just very difficult and if they don't run into issues it is a struggle for us to challenge them. So we are just trying to do our best in our races every time. On my personal side it was good to have a good weekend after a few where I have been struggling a bit more. So yeah, it was nice but now I just need to keep working and keep doing that.

Q: You said in France that you changed your approach to qualifying. Are you confident that whatever you changed will work here?

CL: Oh yeah, I think it's just a general approach. I don't think it's something that I only changed in Paul Ricard and I will probably change it for here. I'm pretty sure it's positive, so hopefully I can show it here too.

Q: And when you are at a track like this, which is the shortest of the year in terms of lap time. How does that change your approach? Does it put more pressure on you during qualifying because the grid is that much closer in terms of time?

CL: I love it. It's one of my favourite tracks actually. I really enjoy having the short track, it really reminds me of the karting days, but no it doesn't put any more pressure for qualifying or less, I just enjoy racing here.

Q: Max, you won this race last year, what chance a repeat in 2019?

Max VERSTAPPEN: erm... not that much, I think. Yeah. It's a bit difficult, I think. We need quite a bit of luck for that.

Q: Just tell us a little bit about the performance of the car – because you've now had five fourth place finishes...

MV: Great!

...how frustrating is that for you?

MV: I wouldn't call it frustrating. It's not that I'm miles off. I always have... I don't know if it's a Ferrari in front or a Mercedes but they're not that far away. We just need to keep pushing hard to try to get more performance out of the car but also out of the engine at the moment. We are clearly lacking a bit of pace from both sides. But still, I always try to get the best out of it. And, of course, I'm not here to be fourth. I want to win races. It's not nice to drive around at this fourth spot, always just missing out – but that's how it is at the moment.

Q: Does the RB15 have a particular weakness – or is it just not quick enough everywhere?

MV: No, it's not that it's not quick enough everywhere. When you look to Paul Ricard, yeah, clearly lacking top speed – but also maybe two or three corners where, compared to Mercedes, we are lacking just cornering speed. If you compare to Ferrari, they are like a rocket on the straight but in the corners we are a bit more competitive. So, yeah, like I said, we just need to work on both sides to try to get back on to that podium.

Q: And you're expecting a large Dutch contingent in the grandstands this weekend?

MV: yeah, there will be a lot of orange. Of course, it's always great to see and it always brings a smile to my face while driving – so hopefully I can give them a good result on Sunday.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Jonathan McEvoy – Daily Mail) To all five drivers. Today the mayor of London said that he would like a race on London's streets. How would you like a race on London streets – or would you rather stay at Silverstone if it was one or the other?

KM: I think generally I'm a fan of street circuits, but y'know, I guess it depends on how it's going to look. Street circuit, to me, sounds like a good idea.

Better than Silverstone?

KM: Silverstone's pretty cool, so it would need to be very, very good.

Alex?

AA: I think I'd like to stay at Silverstone. I think it's one of the best, if not the best track of the year. So, yeah, I'd like to stay there.

Max?

MV: Yeah. I mean Silverstone is a great track, so, if they want a street circuit it needs to be an extra grand prix then.

Charles, your thoughts?

CL: yeah, city tracks are my favourites but Silverstone is one of those tracks where it's so enjoyable to drive in a Formula One car that I would not like to not see it on the calendar – so probably Silverstone.

And Sergio?

SP: Yeah, Silverstone is a fantastic venue – but at the same time, racing on the streets will be very nice, especially in London. It will have to be a very nice street circuit to put it in instead of Silverstone.

Q: (Flavio Vanetti – Corriere Della Sera) Charles, I just read the quote of Nico Rosberg, he says that Ferrari has no chance at all to recover the gap, looking at the Championship. Is it the case with 13 races left – or not?

CL: Well, we'll believe it until the end, of course. We are all aware that the gap is quite big and it's going to be very difficult to catch up – but we won't give up until it's mathematically impossible. So, we'll give everything – but of course the gap is big.

Q: (Julien Billiotte – AutoHebdo) Max, you say you're not here to finish fourth – so how long before you run out of patience and start considering options outside of Red Bull? Basically, could you drive somewhere else as early as next year?

MV: To be honest, I think it's more important to see what the team also will bring in upcoming races. I'm not too worried about what's going to happen next year or even beyond that. At the moment I just want to focus on this project because I think there is still a lot of potential and we are just getting started. But like I said, of course, I don't want to keep driving until I'm 35 or 40, y'know? So we'll see.

Q: (Péter Vámosi – Racing Line) Question to all the drivers. There were now some decisions from FIA which were really controversial and some part of the drivers said it's OK, some said not. How do you like the idea to have only ex-Formula One drivers as stewards – maybe even with always one ex-World Champion?

SP: I think that would be great. We've been talking about it for many years, to have the same stewards, to have that consistency throughout the races – but it's very hard. It's been very difficult for the past years to make it happen. Hopefully in the near future it's something that will be in the sport because it will make it just more consistent and not rely so much on the stewards' decision.

CL: Nothing to add.

MV: For me, I think it's not good to have the same stewards all the time – because it's the same in football: if you have a referee who doesn't like you, and you always have

to play with that same referee, I don't think it's a lot of fun. I think it's the same in Formula One: if you always have the same stewards, it's not going to work out. I think the change of stewards is not too bad. But most of the time, it's a problem of the rulebook, where you're sitting at the stewards and they have a view of things but they can't give a different penalty because it's written in the rules that they have to give this certain penalty. Then by just adding old – not old – ex-Formula One drivers. I don't think it's going to change a lot because, at the end of the day, they have to give the same penalty.

AA: Not really too much to say. Just, I think the experience of a racing driver always helps with regards to... they know when a driver is trying to do something or not, if it's on purpose or not. And yeah, in general I think it would be a... maybe not all of them but I do think the experience does help for tricky calls when it's always 50:50.

KM: Nothing to add. I agree with Max. On everything.

Q: (Phil Duncan – PA) Max, after the last race Lewis Hamilton was quite critical of Formula One, saying the set-up was in a bit of a mess and called the last race 'boring'. Leading the new school of drivers, how would you sum up the sport and what do you think needs to change?

MV: I think... of course it's great to set lap records and stuff – but maybe if we are only going one or two seconds slower but we can at least follow each other a bit closer, that would be great – but I think that's also not just purely car related, because I think also the tyres, if you are really close to someone for two or three laps, they overheat too much and you start sliding too much. So most of the time you also just back out because anyway, you know that if you stay there, you have to pit earlier and stuff. So, then it compromises your whole race. So, it's a combination of both the car where we need to find a different way of creating the downforce – but then running closer to each other. And then yeah, the tyres. I think we can do a better job on that. So, hopefully we can support Pirelli in that. And then, still the differences between the engines are still too big, so if you also close that up a little bit by making it not that complex. I mean, I understand we have to stay with hybrid engines but I think it can be done in a better way.

Q: (Arjan Schouten – AD Sportwatch) After the not-so-spectacular race in France, Ross Brawn was very clear when he said he hoped for some input from the drivers. Max already gave some input, but what do you think of the idea to involve all drivers in this and what will you guys suggest right away when there will be some sort of meeting?

KM: I didn't... I wasn't listening. Sorry. (Question repeated) I think it's good. We have opinions and obviously good experience also. I think we could contribute in a good way so I think that's positive. And I think generally we want to.

AA: Yeah, not too much to add to Kevin. I think we all sit in the same boat while we all want the racing to be more interesting so yeah...

MV: In the GPDA now, where all the drivers are together anyway, we do talk about it already and I think it's not necessary that all 20 drivers go in there, because at the end of the day, if we all share the same ideas, maybe we only need two or three to be

there but yeah, like also Ross said with Lewis, of course, yeah, if he can represent all 20 drivers together maybe with two other drivers together then it's a good thing because at the end of the day we are driving the cars, so we actually really feel what's going on while racing. The engineers, of course, they design everything but they don't get to feel what we feel while driving.

CL: Yeah, exactly. As Max said, we are in the cars so I think we have a pretty strong opinion on what's to do and I think we have a few points that we are all agreed on which will be heard and I think that's the point of us being there and I think it's a good thing.

SP: Yeah, as Charles said, I think we have a couple of points in the GPDA that we all agree – all drivers – and I think we are the ones who can give the best feedback because we are the ones racing the cars. It would be good if at least a couple of those points – they are not many – but if they can listen to us a bit more that would be great, to make the sport better.

Q: (Ian Parkes – New York Times) As was mentioned previously, Lewis was quite critical but he wasn't the only one, there was quite a considerable amount of criticism that followed the French Grand Prix, given that it was effectively, for anybody watching, quite a boring race. It's also been suggested that the sport now is somewhat in crisis given that Mercedes, once again, are completely dominating, in particular this season especially with all their one-tuos. As drivers, do you feel the sport's in crisis? And I know, Max, you've kind of answered previously but what would be your answers and not just for 2021 but for anything early doors going forward?

SP: I wouldn't say the sport is in crisis but it's certainly losing interest from a lot of people. You have some races that are incredibly boring at the front of field but when you look at the midfield, I mean when you look at the last race, what happened at the midfield until the last lap, they decided who won the battle, so I think that was incredible. I think the problem is more with the top teams, the difference that there is. I think the whole pack has to be a lot closer together, give equal opportunity to everyone and have more teams capable of winning. The way you do that is by making the rules a bit more complex and not so much gap between teams. That will be the best way to create interesting races.

CL: Yeah, as I said, certainly the sport is probably is not in the best shape, there are a few things we can do to improve it quite significantly. As Checo said, already from having a closer field would help, cars that can follow closer to each other will help also for overtaking and these are done by a few things and these other points agreed inside the... FDA!? No?!

MV: Ferrari driver academy?

CL: ... the GPDA and that's exactly what we want to make here, to the guys at the top of Formula One.

MV: I agree it's not great but I think Formula One has always been like this because before this Red Bull was dominating the sport. Before that you had Ferrari dominating the sport. Before that, what was it? You got Williams, before that it was McLaren again. You always have those years of domination unfortunately. I don't agree with it but it's like it is, there's always one team which gets the rules... understands the rules better than others and does a better job so it's up to us, now, I guess, to find a way

where not every team starts speaking for their own advantage, because at the end of the day, even with the new rules coming at the moment, everybody is just speaking for their own advantage. Maybe it's just better to leave out all the teams from the discussions and just say these are the rules and you deal with it.

AA: Very much what Checo said. I think the midfield has been quite good this year, it's just the top six drivers are quite routine and there's quite a lot of consistency with us all. If there was a bit more unpredictability with it, it would definitely make for a bit better racing.

KM: Nothing to add.

Q: (Adrian Rodriguez Huber – Agencia EFE) Checo, scoring points again, would that make you happy enough or can you look further ahead? Or do you just not know where you are standing at this point?

SP: No, definitely scoring points this weekend would be a good step. We're finding issues with the car every weekend so we are getting... I think in Paul Ricard we were closer to the points. I think without my penalty we should have just been getting into the points so we're definitely making progress but I think that if we are able to score points this weekend it would put us back on track. We've got some bits coming for the coming races so it should be a good step forward.

Q: (Erik van Haren – De Telegraaf) Max, I believe you're not the only Verstappen who is racing here this weekend. What do you expect from your father? Do you think he'll still be quick?

MV: Well I don't know if you can call it a race but it's good to have fun, isn't it?

Q: Max, can you just tell us what your father, Jos, is driving?

MV: He's driving in... is it called the Legends' parade? Yeah. So, many cars on track. They've hired my Dad to drive as well. He likes driving. Like I said, a bit of fun. Won't hurt.

Q: (Scott Mitchell – Autosport) Max, last weekend you obviously had the full experience of running Honda's upgraded engine through qualifying and the race. Before the weekend, you and Honda had made it clear that it wouldn't be a massive out-and-out performance step but where do you see your deficit to Ferrari and Mercedes at the moment? Is it more skewed to qualifying than the race and is it still that balance of car and engine that's holding you back?

MV: I think I explained that in the beginning of the press conference where I see I'm losing, compared to Mercedes and Ferrari. Probably somebody recorded it so you can look back at it.

Q: (Maria Reyer – Motorsport-Total.com) Charles, you were talking about your qualifying performance and that you were working on Q3. Could you maybe elaborate a bit more on what you're working on and do you feel more confident coming into this race weekend?

CL: Yeah, overall on the approach for the set-up, to try and anticipate the track evolution. On some tracks it's bigger than others and I think most of the times when the track evolution was quite big, I was not in the best place or not in the place I wanted to (be) for Q3. I felt quite good in Q1, Q2 was worse, Q3 was even worse so

now I've just tried and analysed that, to understand what did I have to live with in Q1 to have the car I wanted in Q3 and it worked.

Ends