



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L' AUTOMOBILE

2017 FIA Formula One World Championship
Bahrain Grand Prix
Post-Race Conference Transcript

DRIVERS

- 1 – Sebastian VETTEL (Ferrari)**
- 2 – Lewis HAMILTON (Mercedes)**
- 3 – Valtteri BOTTAS (Mercedes)**

PODIUM INTERVIEWS

(Conducted by David Coulthard)

Sebastian, your 44th victory. Normally 44 is a lucky number for Lewis but you've just added another win, your third time here in Bahrain, but most importantly the second of the season out of three races, great day.

Sebastian VETTEL: Yeah, really a great day. I don't know what to say. The last half of the in-lap when all the fireworks were there and track was lit up, it was. I just love what I do. I didn't find any words. It was a really great team effort today. Right after the start I could feel that 'yeah, we're quick, we can have a word'. So really tried to put Valtteri under pressure. He didn't do any mistakes. It was difficult down the straights to get near him. But then we obviously went for the undercut, early pit stop, worked fantastic, very good job. But when the safety came initially I thought 'not again!'

Yeah but this time it worked for you...

SV: I'm not sure.

You pitted and then when you cleared another lap we had the safety car.

SV: I think I was lucky because the others were just close to the pit lane so they couldn't really benefit let's say. I don't know. I was a bit surprised when I came out ahead of all of them because I thought with the safety car we might have lost the advantage. After that it was good. The car was really amazing to drive. I had a good feeling yesterday, so for many laps it really worked well. It was just a pleasure. I could control the pace in the end. Lewis was obviously a bit of a threat again towards the end, with the traffic you never know. But a very controlled race, the car, as I said, was a dream today. Happy Easter and thank you very much.

Q: Lewis, pit lane, what do you think of that? Those five seconds were pretty costly today?

Lewis HAMILTON: Yeah definitely, but firstly a big congratulations to Sebastian, he did a fantastic job today, and also a big thank you to Valtteri for being a gentleman out there. Obviously a very difficult race, it didn't start out the best, but the pit lane was my fault, so apologies to the team for losing the time there. I tried my hardest to catch up but it was a long old way to go, it was 19 seconds. But I gave it everything I could but Ferrari did a great job today. So we're going to push hard together, re-gather as a team and come back fighting.

Q: You know, I'm noticing this year that even when you're getting the wins, you're very composed; you're not too disappointed. What is this then? Do you really feel that this is going to be a long-game championship?

LH: Of course the disappointment is there. Losing points for a team, particularly when you could have won the race is definitely painful, but it is what it is and all I can say is I gave it everything I could. Yeah, I mean, I'm getting old I'm catching you up.

Q: You'll never catch me up! Lewis congratulations. Valtteri, after the high of yesterday, a disappointing day. We heard you on the radio talking about struggling to keep the rears alive. What happened with the race balance? Talk us through that.

Valtteri BOTTAS: Yeah, it was really a tricky race for me; struggling with the pace all through the race. I think in the first stint we found a bit of an issue with the tyre pressures and that explained the rear end struggle. But ever since that I was just rear limited and I was out of the tools on the steering wheel, so it was just oversteering all through the race, which is why the pace was slow, which is a real shame because for sure the target for today was a lot, lot higher.

Q: It's difficult to win in Formula One. You had a lot of support after that pole yesterday, especially within the team, so you're feeling well settled in Mercedes?

VB: Well, for sure I think this was overall the best weekend yet with the team, but there is much more to come.

Well, we wish you luck with that journey. Back to Sebastian. You seem a little bit surprised by the ultimate qualifying. After qualifying the pace to Mercedes was a little bit down but you're right in this championship, you're leaving this grand prix leading the world championship.

SV: Yeah, it's a long year; I'm not really looking at that. As I said, I'm really enjoying, the car has been a pleasure. It was very good yesterday and I was a bit down because the gap was so big. I think we could have been a bit closer. But something inside me told me we have a good car and we can do well. Right from the first lap I felt the car was there and yeah, I think the Easter hunt was on. They were hiding some eggs but it looks like we found them today. No, really, really happy. Big thank you to the team, they have been working incredibly hard. The guy that has been up here, Matteo, works day and night at the track, in the factory. So really a lot of commitment from every single one and it's great to see everything coming together.

Q: Well, we can hear the marshals who have been supporting the grand prix celebrating by revving a motorbike here. You've got to say we have a tremendous welcome here in Bahrain, so it's one your better grands prix?

SV: Well, I guess. I've been reasonably successful the last couple of years. I love the trophy, I think it's one of the most beautiful trophies we have, so when I crossed the line I was really happy because I knew we were going to get it, so I think we can leave here very happy. Not yet, because we've got the test next week, but yeah for now we just enjoy.

Q: Are you doing the test?

SV: Yes.

You're relentless aren't you?

SV: Well, I thought halfway through the race that I'm really looking forward already next time to jump in the car, which is in two days, so I'm looking forward to it.

PRESS CONFERENCE

Q: Congratulations Sebastian, obviously you got ahead of Lewis at the start. Tell us a bit about that and also the final stint, just judging the pace as he was coming through like a rocket, having come into the pits after you, how you measured that pace and measured your gap to him?

SV: The start, obviously it was crucial for us to get between, to not allow them to get in their rhythm, pull away, do their thing. So, upset them a bit. I think we all had more or less the same start. Mine initially was maybe a tiny bit better than Lewis, which put me just about side-by-side – but their car is really long so it's a long way to get side-by-side – but then I think I benefitted from the fact I had a clear track ahead, Lewis was a bit stuck with Valtteri and it's a bit of a tricky one to judge, so I could just take lots of risk under braking and get the move done. Then, the final stint, obviously we had quite a decent gap plus the safety margin of Lewis' penalty – which I wasn't sure why but it didn't matter at that point – and I just tried to control the gap to Valtteri, maybe pulling away a little bit and at that point just controlling the gap. He was very fast when he came out. I was expecting him to be quick on a new set of supersoft tyres but probably not that quick and he was closing in. When I faced the traffic I lost a lot of time but then obviously he had to face traffic as well. In the end it was safe enough. At the beginning of the stint I really didn't push at all, just took it easy and responded to what those two guys were doing, which obviously helped me at the end because I had a lot of tyres left.

Lewis, coming to you, as Sebastian said, you had a tremendous amount of pace today but perhaps there were one or two too many setbacks to give you the chance to win: the start, obviously the penalty as well and the tyre choice for the final stint which you questioned on the radio. Maybe you could just drill down into those three for us.

LH: Yeah, a challenging weekend. The start was OK but Sebastian was in my blind spot so I didn't know whereabouts he was. I didn't know where anyone was behind me. Valtteri got a good start and it was really just about covering him. I obviously lost position to Sebastian there. It was really hard to follow but we're generally all similar kind of pace, and then yeah, completely my fault with the Safety Car. Supposed to have a five-second gap and I think I had a four-second gap. Just a misjudgement from myself. Valtteri was great to... obviously I had very good pace, particularly the second and last stint and I honestly believed I would be able to catch Sebastian up but obviously with a five-second penalty that made it twice as hard as it was already going to be. As I said, apologies to the team but I tried the best I could to recover it and we still got good points for the team today with a second and third but we still have this great fight and Sebastian did a great job and he had fantastic pace.

And just on the tyre choice. You have a four-lap fresher only set of softs compared to Sebastian rather than a new set of supersofts. The team's saying it was based on, presumably, Valtteri's middle stint.

LH: The tyre felt great so I believe it was the right choice. The team have generally been making really great choices this year. I thought it was going to be a supersoft but honestly I think the tyre was the best one, particularly for 16 laps pushing at the pace I was going was a long way to go. I don't know if the supersoft would have lasted that long.

Part of what informed that decision was, I guess, your supersoft stint Valtteri. Not the easiest but before that, Toto Wolff has said you had a problem with the generator on the grid that meant your tyres were over-inflated or had too high tyre pressure in the opening stint. Tell us about that.

VB: Yeah, so I don't know the exact issue but I was just told there was a problem with the tyre pressures, which I could really feel in the first stint since lap two. I was just sliding around with the rear end, struggling to get on power out of the corners, so the pace wasn't good and Sebastian was really putting pressure and they could undercut us as well and trying to extend the first stint, I just couldn't keep up with the pace. The tyres were just dropping. Then on the second stint it was a bit better initially. I think the second stint was not that far off. Still struggling with oversteer but much less than in the first one, and then the last stint, again, used the tools I had to adjust the car balance but still couldn't get the rear end to work. Really strange race for me and the pace was disappointingly poor for me. Yeah, not a good day for me.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Michael Schmidt – Auto Motor und Sport) Question to Lewis and Valtteri. If you compare this race with Melbourne, is the softest compound a weakness for Mercedes? You seemed to have the same problem like in Melbourne that the rear tyres were going away.

LH: I don't really remember what the issue was in Melbourne. I think it was more front tyres – but I'm sure it was the rears as well. Here was maybe more rears, I would say – but yeah, I would say it's similar.

VB: At least for me personally yes. The softer compound has been more of a struggle with the tyres and also the hotter it is, more of a struggle. So something definitely for us to understand.

Q: (Frederic Ferret – L'Equipe) Valtteri and Sebastian, can you tell us how difficult was the battle between the two of you?

SV: For about the first stint. I passed you in the pit stop, didn't I?

VB: No, we were side-by-side at some point.

SV: Ah, the safety car, after the safety car. Yeah, that was hairy. I thought I did reasonably well on the restart. It was a bit tricky because we only got the message very late: 'the safety car's coming in' and then, you can't just be stupid and break the field down, do a stop-and-go but I tried to use a little bit of momentum. I thought I had a decent gap leaving the last corner and then... I don't know, it felt like I had more headwind than in the whole race on that particular lap. I was fairly confident halfway down the straight, just looked in the mirror to check and he was coming. I saw sparks behind me everywhere and then I obviously had to defend. Yeah, then I wasn't quite sure where he was under braking but I guess we were side-by-side so it was a lot closer than I expected, leaving the last corner. But fortunately, I stayed ahead.

VB: Yeah, obviously it was getting close and I tried to make a move into turn four.

SV: I was just thinking, then there was another one, exactly, because I had a bad exit and it was quite close tight. I think you locked a little bit and then I locked a little bit into turn four.

VB: I was obviously outside so then it's always tricky. There was some good racing but that was a short moment unfortunately.

SV: I forgot about that...

Q: (Livio Oricchio – GloboEsporte.com) To Bottas and Lewis: when the safety car came in, Sebastian had stopped on lap ten and the safety car came out on lap 13 and you entered the pits on the 13th lap, with the safety car. It looked like it would help a lot but for some reason it didn't, maybe the opposite. Without the safety car, maybe Bottas could get out from the pits in front of Vettel. Do you have the same feeling? Did you have a slow stop?

VB: Yes. Under safety car on the first stop, there was a problem with the pit stop. We lost a lot of time and maybe it would have been very very close. Maybe I would have been just in front but the team is still investigating what was the issue there. I think there was also some traffic as well because the stop was slow. One of the Red Bulls came into the pit lane and we couldn't exit immediately so double the time.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – GloboEsporte.com) Without the safety car?

VB: I don't know, to be honest.

Q: And Lewis, I think you had... one of the front tyres was a bit slow coming off or going back on again or slight delay?

LH: I couldn't tell what the issue was but there was a bit of a delay. There was a domino effect, you know. If I had had a five second gap Valtteri would have pulled in, the Red Bull would have pulled in. I would have pulled in before the Red Bull, I would have got out before the Red Bull. It cascaded for me in the domino too early.

Q: (Heikki Kulta – Turun Sanomat) Sebastian, Kimi last year was many times in front of you. What have you done that nowadays he's always behind you?

SV: Well, I guess for a start, compared to last year, I've started the race. That helped. I had my - so far the only - and I hope it stays that way - DNS last year here so not even starting was quite a disappointment. And then, I don't know, he was behind the Red Bull in the opening of the lap and so obviously we've seen that it's quite tricky to pass. I was a bit faster in the opening stint than Valtteri but I couldn't really get close enough and I guess he probably lost a bit of time and then I just saw the final result. I don't know what happened to his race but I think he came back to fourth, not finishing too far behind Valtteri so I think for both of us the car probably worked really well today and yeah, I think it depends on... from my own experience, how the opening lap goes and so on, but this has usually been a very very good hunting ground for Kimi, so maybe the time loss on Friday for him with the issue he had in the car didn't help but yeah, you do your own race and then I'm sure we will talk about it afterwards.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – GloboEsporte.com) Sebastian, in the race simulation on Friday you didn't look like you had a very good performance from the car and also qualifying seemed to confirm it. We had this impression, looking at the long runs. And suddenly, in the race, the performance was there. Did you change the car dramatically or did the conditions on the day change and help you?

SV: No, from yesterday to today, you can't change anything. Friday to Saturday we did a bit but yeah, it's not that sudden. If we could go faster in qualifying we would because

qualifying higher up is always advantageous. But yeah, I had a good feeling yesterday so I was a bit surprised by how big the gap was because the car felt really good and for today, I had a good feeling because Friday was a bit mixed, I wasn't so happy with the car. We improved it for Saturday and I thought OK, if it stays like that then today can be a good race and after a couple of laps I felt everything was making sense and yeah, obviously I was in Valtteri's gearbox for all of the first stint and not falling back too much so that was obviously good for us, a good start with the opening lap, getting between them and then yeah, the pace was certainly key today to win.

Q: (Sef Harding – Xero Xone News) For Sebastian, it looks like the Prancing Horse has really come alive and it looks like you're going to have a hero's welcome back in Maranello. What has this done for the team and the morale of the team heading into Sochi?

SV: Yeah, I think at this stage Sochi is quite far away so I'm not willing and I don't think the team is really looking to Sochi right now. I think we enjoy the moment. Yeah, obviously we did a massive stint over the winter. I think last year was a very good year for us. It wasn't good in terms of results, don't get me wrong, but I think for the team, getting together, a lot of things that had changed now seem to start clicking. Obviously it helps when straight from the box, in testing, we had a good feeling. We looked reasonably competitive. Australia obviously was a massive boost for all the team and yeah, you can see when they are singing down there, and the whole factory has really come alive so that's great and we need to just make sure we keep it going and yeah, keep enjoying that way, but for now, I think the team has obviously done a really really great job, a lot of hard work, commitment and as I said, things start to click and hopefully that sort of success now in the first couple of races helps us to build up some sort of momentum that maybe these guys had in the past and the last couple of years, so they will be the ones to beat. It's a long season, but for now, as I said, looking forward to tonight.

Q: (Heikki Kulta – Turun Sanomat) Valtteri, Sochi has suited you very well so far. Do you expect to have your best weekend because of that?

VB: Well, for sure that's the goal. I still haven't definitely got... there's no race results as I've been hoping for so it's always the next one. Anyway, it would be the target to have a strong weekend but Sochi has normally been pretty good for me. I really like the track layout and I have always been comfortable there so we will see. It's a completely different type of track again, completely different kind of temperatures, different asphalt so many different things. We'll see.

Q: (Ralph Woodall – L'Equipe) Valtteri, how did you feel when you were ordered by the team to let Lewis pass you?

VB: Well, I think honestly as a racing driver it's maybe the worst thing you want to hear. That's how it is. For sure I did it because there was potential. Lewis could challenge Sebastian. In the end it didn't happen but the team tried which I completely understand but personally it is tough but that's life. I didn't have enough pace today and we need to find the reasons why that was.

Ends