



## Getting to know the Yas Marina Circuit

Every circuit wants to be Monaco, but no one seems to manage it. Sure, you can add a marina, call in the big yachts, and add branches of Amber Lounge and Stars and Bars, but it's not Monaco.

It never will be.

Because what makes Monaco so special is its history, from William Grover-Williams' maiden win in 1929 to this year's victory for Sebastian Vettel. That history can be found on every corner, on every inch of tarmac. Turn 7 will never have quite the same evocative ring to it as Rascasse, Tabac, or the Loews' Hairpin.

So the organisers of the Abu Dhabi race may have aimed for Monaco and failed to deliver. But what they have delivered is special in its own right, a circuit whose facilities are second to none, and with stunning views across what was once empty desert.

The Yas Marina Circuit is a marvel of modern engineering, from the spectacular Yas Hotel to the harbour that now sits in a location that was little more than sand dunes for millennia. Walking around the track, you can smell the sea. If that's not a miracle in the desert, I don't know what is.

But while the facilities are top-notch, and there are few inside the rarefied world of Formula 1 who don't delight in our annual visits, the track is less than popular with the fans.

The track may boast the second-longest straight on the calendar, but the dusty conditions and tight corners mean that overtaking is nigh-on impossible. Just ask Fernando Alonso, who spent the 2010 race watching his championship chances slip away as he was stuck looking at the rear wing of Vitaly Petrov's Renault.

Even the double DRS zones assigned by the FIA aren't expected to deliver much in the way of overtaking. Much like India two weeks ago, the cost of going off the line and into the dust is too punishing – push to pass this ain't.

The majority of corners at Yas Marina are taken in second or third gear, making the track less of a challenge for the drivers than the F1 calendar's beloved classics. Six of the corners are taken below 100kph, putting Abu Dhabi on a par with street circuits like Singapore, Monaco, and Valencia.

But the circuit presents its own challenges, thanks in no small part to the late evening start time. The cooling tarmac leads to reduced levels of grip at a racetrack that starts out every race weekend as slippery as can be. As the race progresses, you'd think that the added rubber would compensate for the cooling surface, but the two are not like for like. As a result, drivers have to manage changing levels of grip, daylight, and fuel weight in a challenging balancing act largely unseen by fans.

"One of the most demanding aspects of the weekend is that the race and qualifying are held at sundown so the track is cooling rapidly," Virgin team principal John Booth explained. "This means that the car balance and tyre grip levels are changing throughout the stints and one of the challenges of the weekend will be to keep adjusting wing angles and tyre pressures to keep everything consistent."

Braking and traction are vital in Abu Dhabi; the combination of two long straights and a succession of tight corners sees the cars powering down the straights on full throttle before braking hard and shifting to second or third gear for the corners. The low grip levels on track make stability under braking even more vital here than it is at a more traditional circuit.

In their race preview, Pirelli took an in-depth look at the Yas Marina Circuit from a tyre's point of view.

"The first corner is the start of a flowing sequence of bends," the release read. "The car is subjected to sideways accelerations of 4G, with the outside tyres guaranteeing grip along with the best possible roadholding at speeds of 250kph. Throughout the longest straight of the lap, the structure of the tyre is challenged due to the high speeds reached with full throttle maintained for around 15 seconds. The aerodynamic downforce generates a loading of 800 kilograms, entirely absorbed by the tyre structure, which at the same time has to soak up any bumps and imperfections in the track surface.

"For Turn 11, the cars go from 300kph to 90kph in 110 metres," Pirelli continued. "This is a 5G deceleration, taking the drivers into a slow series of esses that have to be driven with maximum precision. The final section of the lap requires an optimal balance from the car. A sequence of curves progressively heats up the tread pattern. The tyre temperature can reach 130° degrees centigrade while still ensuring the highest possible levels of grip, durability and car control that are vital for Abu Dhabi's asphalt."

Engines are also put through their paces at Yas Marina, despite the high number of slow corners. The track features four straights that see the cars reach speeds in excess of 285kph, which is the same number as can be found at that power-hungry temple of motorsport, Monza. The combination of high speeds and slow corners leads to one of the highest levels of fuel consumption on the calendar – stop/go isn't the most economical way to drive, as any road user knows.

There is also the added risk of sand clogging up engines, leading to cooling problems and possible failures. Teams fit special filters to keep the sand out, but it's something to be aware of nonetheless.

Two additional factors to take into account this weekend are the timing and the direction. Abu Dhabi is a twilight race, meaning it starts in daylight, goes dusky within half an hour, and is fully dark by the time the drivers cross the finishing line. The constant changes to visibility are an added challenge at a circuit that also punishes drivers with its anti-clockwise configuration: one of only five on the calendar.

The current configuration of the Yas Marina Circuit has been in use since the track's debut in 2009. The track measures 5.554km; presuming it runs for the full distance, the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix will last for 55 laps, bringing the total distance run to 305.470 kilometres.

Given that racing at Yas Marina only started in 2009, the group of past winners is miniscule: Sebastian Vettel has taken the honours in every race held at Yas Marina. Lewis Hamilton claimed pole in 2009, while Vettel did so in 2010.

Fastest laps in Abu Dhabi have been claimed by Sebastian Vettel (2009) and Lewis Hamilton (2010).

The current lap record at the Yas Marina Circuit is Sebastian Vettel's 2009 time of 1:40.279s, set at an average speed of 199.388kph.

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## F1 Abu Dhabi Blog – Thursday press conference at Yas Marina

For the penultimate time this season, it's the Thursday drivers' press conference.

Present were Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso), Paul di Resta (Force India), Timo Glock (Virgin), Heikki Kovalainen (Team Lotus), Tonio Liuzzi (HRT), and Vitaly Petrov (Renault).

Q: Tonio, one or two changes in the team. Have you seen differences within the team and how the team has reacted.

Vitanonio LIUZZI: I have to say the team is changing, on-going at the moment, the structure is improving every time and I think there are a lot of changes for next year, plans on-going in the next month. I think the structure improved a lot during the 2011 season, we are focussed on 2012. We want to improve and get better in the field and I feel these changes are going in the right direction for the future. Still nothing completely clear how will be the line-up for next year in terms of the set-up of the team, but I think we are going forward.

Q: Your future? Would you just clarify that? Did you say something has not been decided yet?

VL: No, I was talking about the team, not about me or the other drivers. For me I always said I have a long-term contract with the team. We started with this adventure and we knew that it could not be just a one-year situation if we wanted to improve. The team hired me to help them develop and bring experience in the team and I think everything is going well and everything is looking positive for the future so not much to say about it.

Q: So you are hopeful of staying and going forward?

VL: Yes, I believe so.

Q: Heikki, both drivers have been confirmed for next year. You seem to still be making progress as well with the team. Again, a

certain amount of optimism I would have thought?

Heikki KOVALAINEN: Yeah, absolutely. I think we made more progress than the other two new teams in these last couple of years especially this year. We need to take the next step, but I think the team is making the right kind of moves back at the factory and in terms of the structure of the team to go forward so I am confident and I am optimistic that next year we will move another step forward. It has not been too far away, actually, in the last few races. I have been able to race some of the cars ahead of us so it is not that much we need anymore to join the pack and then the middle of the field and to be ahead of them we need a bigger step. Hopefully over the winter we can make another gain compared to the teams directly ahead of us.

Q: Tell us your view of the way Tony Fernandes works. He seems to be a particularly dynamic guy running goodness knows how many companies. Not only the racing team, Caterham and even Queens Park Rangers.

HK: Yeah, he is an exciting guy. He is not afraid of making decisions and taking an adventure into an unknown. I think that, quite often, is how the good leaders and successful businessmen, how they work. To make a successful business you have quite often got to do something different to what the group of people is doing and he is certainly doing that. This morning was a good example of how Tony operates. I sent him a text regarding Caterham, his car company, and I said we should do that. He just texted me back, 'Done, tell Riad (Asmat)' and so, the deal was done. That's how he works and I believe he meant that. I really enjoyed working with him and it was one of the reasons I joined the team and I have enjoyed these last two years. He is a funny guy.

Q: Timo, do you feel you have done a good job this year overall? Obviously it has been a very difficult at the back of the grid and what are your thoughts on next year as well?

Timo GLOCK: Yeah, I am happy with my performance in general. I think I got the maximum out of the package we had. I just did my best in qualifying and the race. Sometimes we were a bit unlucky in the race, like in India at the last race. In general, as I said, with the package we got it out most of the time and now we have to keep concentrating on working for next year and make improvements like Lotus did this year and move on.

Q: And looking forward to this race. We have got two DRS zones here. I know there is not a lot overtaking going on at the back, but what are your feelings about two DRS zones here?

TG: I think you are right, you have to ask the guys in front, it is difficult for me to say. But I think it will be good possibilities here to overtake, especially with DRS and it could make the race quite interesting. Let's see, maybe we can overtake on the back of it as well but the possibilities are much higher here.

Q: Paul, you are probably better prepared for this circuit than any of the ones we have been to so far as you did about 110 laps in a Force India this time last year.

Paul di Resta: Yeah, I think coming here obviously having a bit of experience isn't negative having done the Pirelli test last year. But, really, it is all about the work you carry out on Friday and Saturday morning, Saturday afternoon in this case. We want to try and maintain position in the Constructors' Championship and our performance has been very close to Toro Rosso and Sauber and Renault if we get it right and really that's our focus at the moment.

Q: So it is quite tight between all you guys. You still feel there is potential for change there?

PdR: Yeah, I don't think you can really give up on any approach. I think you have got to be fairly aggressive. Already this year we saw it change a lot. We are in a strong position at the moment but we are very focussed on trying to get our performance level and equally bring new updates if we can. Really just to try and maintain that. These guys seem to be very strong in the race and really me and Adrian (Sutil) are doing our utmost to try and grab as many points as we can and race against these guys.

Q: Given that no announcement has been made about the drivers, although that has been brought forward, I am sure you put pressure on yourselves anyway. But does that put more pressure on you?

PdR: I suppose it does in a way. I have always said you always want to know as quick as you can but you have to respect Mr (Vijay) Mallya's decision and really he has said he is going to change. But, at the moment, I have a contract for the year so I am focussed on doing the remaining two races, which we should be, and really the future will take care of itself hopefully.

Q: Sebastien, we only have to look at the last few races to realise the team has made a lot of progress. So you feel, probably, in a position where you can fightback?

Sebastien BUEMI: Yes, now we have got the same amount of points as Sauber so it is already good for us. We are 10 points behind Force India. It was a shame what happened in India, but still I think we can continue to fight and, like you said, the car is really quick now. We have a good qualifying pace. We were both in Q3 in India and then, also in the race, we are normally quite quick as well so hopefully we can finish in the points and be in front of Sauber by the end of the weekend. Then for the last race we will see what we can do.

Q: The problem in India, does that have consequences for the rest of the year? Are you going to have to use a ninth engine perhaps?

SB: No, we were not planning to use this engine anymore so it is not going to be a problem at all.

Q: And your thoughts about the future, for next year?

SB: I don't think too much about it right now. Let's say I try to get the maximum out of myself and the car in the remaining two races and then we will have enough time to speak about next year. I believe we have got to be concentrated. We have a good chance to achieve a very good result for the team so I think it is really important to dedicate ourselves completely to this before thinking about anything else.

Q: Vitaly, we remember you last year with your red shadow. Would it have been very different with DRS?

Vitaly PETROV: Definitely, and with new Pirelli tyres.

Q: It would have been very different, would it?

VP: I think we need to forget already what's happened last year here. I know I did a good race by myself to improve and to show the team I could stay for next year. It was not to use tactics for Fernando (Alonso), and with the lack of overtaking here he couldn't do anything.

Q: There have been a few changes in the team this year; is that something that affects you most recently?

VP: I don't think anything changes for me. I think it will be better for the team. It's like football; when a new coach joins a team, what he does first of all is look at the team and watches where the players are playing. Then he puts the people in the right places, where they should be playing. Then teams become more competitive and play stronger. This is actually what we try to do inside the team. The team principal tries to change some people, to move them around and try to profit from this.

Q: What's the situation for next year, your future?

VP: For me, everything is clear. I have a contract for next year, I don't need to be worried, so I just try to do my job, try to gather a lot of information for next year for us in these last two races. I and the team are fully concentrated on the team for next year also so I'm quite clear.

Q: Heikki, does the change of name to Caterham mean that your business car will be very fast but not very comfortable?

HK: I've been waiting for the Caterham already this year. They haven't sent me one yet but I'm sure I will get one soon. I'm quite looking forward to taking one to Finland; I have a fantastic road leading up to my log cabin house, so I'm going to test it there, I think, when there's a little bit of snow banks around, on studded tyres.

Q: Will you have to build your company car yourself?

HK: No, I don't think so. I have a good car crew; they will do it for me.

Q: Heikki as a Finnish driver, your main target may be the Williams team next year?

HK: For next year, the target ahead of us doesn't change – whoever is driving in different teams. Obviously you're referring to Kimi at Williams; I have no idea whether that is happening or not. What's going on there... it doesn't matter who is driving the cars in front of us. We are targeting the cars ahead of us, joining that group and hopefully sometimes being ahead of more than one team if we have a good day. That's all I can say. If Kimi decides to come back, I think the main difference for me will be that the parties after the races will be a little bit better.

Q: After 17 races with DRS, how would you rate it, has it improved the racing in your opinion?

VP: I think that it's definitely a big step forward. I think we will keep this for many years, five or ten years. I think it's a good chance for us to overtake and good for you to write something about overtaking, so I think it's a good step.

SB: I think it's definitely a positive. We've seen a lot more overtaking; we've even seen some overtaking in Monaco. It's definitely good. Sometimes it feels like the DRS zone is not long enough but I definitely think it's going to help a lot this weekend.

Q: From a lapping point of view, is it better that the people who are lapping have DRS? Is that better from your point of view?

TG: In general, it's not that big a difference for us. In general, it's quite difficult overall, in the race, to keep out of the (way of the) top five, especially if you have a safety car and we are in the middle of the pack and it's just a big mess. DRS doesn't make a big difference for lapping cars.

HK: The only difference I see is that maybe sometimes they give us a big tow in a straight line when they go past, so it's definitely better for us.

Q: Sebastien, is the increased performance from your car related to the development of the blown diffuser?

SB: Yes, I think it's mainly because of that, but in general I think we improved the car very well from mid-season to the end now. I think we're now improving the car race after race and this is why we can actually catch up the other guys. We were maybe a little bit too slow developing the car in the middle of the year, but now I think we're doing a good job. It's only the second year that the team is building the car, so it takes a bit of time to get into the rhythm but I think we've definitely got a lot of lap time through the blown diffuser.

Q: Vitaly, you mentioned the football team but which one of the team would you prefer to be your team-mate next year, stay with Bruno or maybe change or maybe Robert will be back: your personal preference?

VP: I think that if you had asked me this question last year, I would definitely have chosen the most experienced guy, because when Robert was with me in the team, I learned quite a lot from him, so I analysed the data, watched the video, listened to how he talked to the engineers and what he... At the moment, now, for me, it doesn't matter, to be honest. I already know how to improve the team in general, to set up and how to work with my team, so this is why for next year or for this year, it doesn't matter at all.

Q: Timo, what is your opinion about your team-mate for next year? Is it important for you to have the same one because it's better to improve the team or is it better to have a new one or it doesn't matter to you personally?

TG: In general, I think it doesn't matter to me; it's a decision to be made by the team. Sure, on the other hand, if both drivers remain, then you have more consistency in the team but on the other hand, it doesn't matter to me, as I said. We have a long road in front of us so it's up to the team to decide.

Q: Most of you have grown up and raced in your early careers in Europe. Now, two or three years back, we had Abu Dhabi and now India, so how is this experience with venues shifting to this part of the world, Middle East and Asia? What's the experience of racing in these new venues?

HK: I have a good answer for this one. I much prefer to be at these kind of warm races because the golf courses are fantastic. I would happily stay near Bangkok and just race from there; the golf courses are great. I arrived here on Monday already and I've played four rounds of golf already, so I'm happy for this direction.

VP: It's a good answer!

VL: Maybe it's much colder in Europe but I prefer the European races. For sure, we have a different kind of circuit here in Asia, it's completely different, much more modern, beautiful circuits but I still love the historical circuits like Spa, Monza and the European races.

SB: I think it's good to try some new circuits, some new countries to visit. I think it's definitely a positive to come to these races and I think what we experience here is completely different. It's the best infrastructure in the world and it's definitely quite nice to be racing here, starting the race when it's still daylight and then we finish in the dark. I definitely think it's a positive.

PdIR: Yeah, I think it's always a good experience, but I think the questioner talked about drivers as well and I think given where junior categories are in Europe compared to Asia, it's not quite there yet but I think that is just generally through time and I think it builds up, the whole experience, how popular racing will get. Given how many people there are in India, I'm sure that with the first Indian Grand Prix, that will generate interest and for the future, you never know where that might lead to.

Q: Sebastien, as I understand it, you used to live in Bahrain, do you still live there?

SB: No, I've lived in Monaco for two years but part of my family lives in Bahrain and that's why I moved there three years ago.

Q: Is all OK there now: do we have a chance to go back for the race next year?

SB: I hope so. Bahrain is a nice circuit and I enjoy being there but first of all it has to be safe but I didn't hear anything bad for a few months now.

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## F1 Abu Dhabi Blog – F1 at Yas Marina

It was an eventful session in Abu Dhabi this afternoon, as cars were put through their paces on the sun-drenched Yas Marina Circuit.

One of the criticisms often levelled at the track is that the run-off areas are so wide, a car can reach Dubai before it hits a wall. There's no such thing as punishment. And it's a fair criticism, as we had an F1 filled with a series of dramatic spins that cost drivers little more than time and a set of tyres.

The tyres would normally be a concern – remember that Q3 has been rubbish all season thanks to tyre preservation strategies – but this weekend Pirelli came equipped with some extra sets of development tyres for use in F1 and FP2.

It was on those development tyres that Jenson Button secured his position at the top of the timesheets in a session that saw strong pace from both McLarens: the two drivers were split by Mark Webber in a late flyer that denied the Woking outfit a widely expected 1-2 this afternoon.

Hot on the heels of the driver pairings from McLaren and Red Bull came Fernando Alonso, who finished F1 half a tenth down on Sebastian Vettel. But it was far from smooth sailing from the Scuderia, who managed to finish in P5 and P6 despite set-up problems with the car, and not because of them.

The dusty track picked up some rubber from the morning's support races, but not enough – cars were spinning like tops for the full ninety minutes. But three of the most dramatic spins came via Alonso and teammate Felipe Massa. The Ferrari was a beast to drive, jittering around corners with no apparent downforce. Whatever the Scuderia have done to fix the front wing situation since India, it really doesn't seem to be working.

It is worth noting that Romain Grosjean and Jean-Eric Vergne did themselves proud in their brief time behind the wheels of a Renault and Toro Rosso respectively. The pair finished in P11 and P12, and within striking distance of their teammates. Vergne in P11 was less than three-tenths slower than the more experienced Jaime Alguersuari, while Grosjean finished ahead of Vitaly Petrov by a margin of roughly half a second.

Robert Wickens was the other rookie out on track this afternoon: he finished the session half a second down on teammate Timo Glock in a car that seems to be particularly ill-suited to the circuit. Both Virgins finished the afternoon behind the HRTs, which is highly unusual.

The other team that struggled this afternoon was Williams. Rubens Barrichello's session came to an end before the Brazilian was able to set a timed lap, thanks to an as yet unspecified mechanical failure that looked an awful lot like an engine giving up the ghost.

F1 times (unofficial)

1. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.40.263s [21 laps]
  2. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.40.389s [26 laps]
  3. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.40.403s [27 laps]
  4. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.40.755s [27 laps]
  5. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.40.801s [25 laps]
  6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.41.260s [17 laps]
  7. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.41.340s [23 laps]
  8. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.42.130s [26 laps]
  9. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.42.151s [28 laps]
  10. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.42.377s [26 laps]
  11. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.42.633s [26 laps]
  12. Romain Grosjean (Renault) 1.42.685s [29 laps]
  13. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.43.118s [13 laps]
  14. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.43.255s [29 laps]
  15. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.43.389s [24 laps]
  16. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.44.412s [28 laps]
  17. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.44.484s [18 laps]
  18. Heikki Kovalainen (Team Lotus) 1.44.565s [27 laps]
  19. Jarno Trulli (Team Lotus) 1.44.898s [25 laps]
  20. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT) 1.46.385s [28 laps]
  21. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT) 1.46.532s [27 laps]
  22. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.48.024s [20 laps]
  23. Robert Wickens (Virgin) 1.48.551s [23 laps]
  24. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) NO TIME SET [3 laps]
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## F1 Abu Dhabi Blog – FP2 at Yas Marina

Sometimes it only takes a few repeated incidents for spectators to define a new truism.

In 2011, that truism has been 'if Vettel crashes on Friday, he'll win on Sunday'.



And guess what Sebastian Vettel did on Friday evening in Yas Marina? That's right, he binned it into the wall at Turn 1, denting the barriers in the process. The Red Bull driver was unhurt, and the team were able to get him back out on track for the final eight minutes of the evening practice session.

Shortly after Vettel's incident, Ferrari's Fernando Alonso made exactly the same mistake, coming off at Turn 1 and running into the barriers only a few yards down from Vettel's crash site. But Alonso wasn't as lucky as his rival, and spent the rest of FP2 in the garage when the team were unable to get his car back out on track.

The rest of FP2 was a repeat of the morning session, with numerous drivers spinning on track. But spins are par for the course at a circuit where grip levels are affected by cooling temperatures, dust on the track, and a surface smooth enough for ice-skating.

Lewis Hamilton went top of the pops for McLaren, with teammate Jenson Button 0.199s behind. Despite his off, Alonso made it to P3 in the timesheets, chased by teammate Felipe Massa. The Red Bull pair were just behind, with Michael Schumacher slotting in to P7.

The Mercedes appeared to be very slow at the start of the session, but Schumacher ended the evening with a series of low-fuel runs designed to please the team's local investors.

Nico Rosberg was not so lucky – the younger German was saddled with testing duties for the bulk of the session, and completed 41 laps at slow speed as the team harvested all the data they could for the 2012 machine.

Vettel and Alonso's incidents aside, it was a drama-free session that largely saw teams complete extended runs in race trim.

FP2 times (unofficial)

1. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.39.586s [31 laps]
2. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.39.785s [30 laps]
3. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.39.971s [20 laps]
4. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.39.980s [34 laps]
5. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.40.104s [35 laps]
6. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.40.132s [26 laps]
7. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.40.553s [34 laps]
8. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.40.951s [34 laps]
9. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.41.021s [37 laps]
10. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.41.490s [34 laps]
11. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.41.565s [34 laps]
12. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.41.680s [33 laps]
13. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.41.947s [31 laps]
14. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.41.983s [34 laps]
15. Bruno Senna (Renault) 1.42.369s [36 laps]
16. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.42.798s [35 laps]
17. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.42.910s [34 laps]
18. Heikki Kovalainen (Team Lotus) 1.43.562s [36 laps]
19. Jarno Trulli (Team Lotus) 1.44.050s [38 laps]
20. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.44.265s [41 laps]
21. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.45.486s [34 laps]
22. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin) 1.46.142s [32 laps]
23. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT) 1.46.249s [21 laps]
24. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT) 1.46.328s [34 laps]

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## F1 Abu Dhabi Blog – Friday press conference at Yas Marina

It was the hot ticket of the weekend, as usual, but Friday's senior team personnel press conference in Yas Marina was filled with hot-button issues.

Present were John Booth (Virgin), Ross Brawn (Mercedes), Stefano Domenicali (Ferrari), Saul Ruiz de Marcos (HRT), Frank Williams (Williams), and Martin Whitmarsh (McLaren).

Q: A first question for all of you. To go back to your Geneva meeting and the talk about third cars; there seemed to be a certain amount of difference between teams about third cars. What was your view about third cars, Ross?

Ross BRAUN: I don't think third cars are out of the question, but I think what we mustn't do is create a situation that harms the financial and sporting environment for the smaller constructors because if we do something that makes their situation far more difficult than what have we achieved? We have achieved a smaller group of manufacturers and I don't think that's good. It can be a solution if we are getting short of cars, but I would far rather see a healthy group of constructors and as many as we can, that's my personal view.

Q: Stefano?

Stefano DOMENICALI: First of all, we didn't discuss it in Geneva, as it wasn't on the agenda. Just to clarify that point. As Ross mentioned, it is a point of discussion for the future of Formula 1 but, as always, I think it is very important to understand the pros and cons of all these things and it is fundamental to discuss with all the stakeholders, the constructors and the teams that are involved in Formula 1. But, at the moment, I cannot say more than that. This is, for sure, something that we need to put on the table and if it a solution for a better Formula 1 we will go for it. Otherwise we will see.

Q: The (Ferrari) president seemed to be in favour of it?

SD: Yeah, absolutely. He has stated that and, for sure, this is an element for discussion.

Q: Martin?

Martin WHITMARSH: I think there are some interesting ideas about a third car. We would all be excited to have (Valentino) Rossi or Sebastien Loeb or someone in a Formula 1 car. It would be great but, as Ross said, I think we have got to act responsibly. I think the DNA, the structure of Formula 1, requires the variety of teams and we have got some new teams and we have got some smaller teams and we recognise that it is very, very challenging to get the budget to compete in Formula 1. If, today, Ferrari, Red Bull, McLaren, Mercedes all fielded third cars then I think, in my view, it would be damaging for the sport. There are pros and cons and I think it is right to have the debate and people have different views but at the moment I think what we should be concentrating on is ensuring that we have got a viable and sustainable model for all of the teams in Formula 1.

Q: John?

John BOOTH: I think first of all we have a very healthy grid of cars at the moment. I don't really see any need to change the formula. From our point of view it is important that every entrant is a constructor.

Q: Saul, I don't know if you have ever thought about third cars?

Saul Ruiz de Marcos: Yes, us being a small team it has pros and cons. In abstract, we cannot say if we are in favour or deny it. I think there will be a discussion and let's see an actual proposal to see if we are against or in favour.

Q: Frank?

Frank WILLIAMS: Well today we see a number of very fine car manufacturers in Formula 1, but the men who run them run them for a profit and if sales are down costs are slashed. All I can say is that as long as we have money in the bank Williams will always be racing in F1. I hope for many, many years to come. I am not so certain than some of my brethren here can control their own destinies as much as they would like. There may be someone above them who has less of an emotion regarding Formula 1 as some people here.

Q: Ross, it was interesting to hear from Nico (Rosberg), who you have re-signed for an indefinite amount of time. He says how he is pleased with your future plans. Is Michael (Schumacher) equally pleased with your future plans as well?

RB: Yes, I think so. Any team that is not quite where they want to be, at least a serious team, looks at how they can improve their competitiveness and we have been fortunate in putting together some additional, very strong engineers and I think everyone is excited about that. We have got to make sure they all work well together. That's my role, primarily, to make sure that we can keep everyone going in the right direction. I think knowing the people involved I am very excited about the future. But every team when it is not performing where it wants to be has to look at how it can strengthen its organisation and if you look at the three of Mercedes, McLaren and Ferrari we have all done things to our team over the last 12 months to try and improve the organisation, improve the strength. It is a constant process and when you get there, when you get to where you want to be, then it is more fine tuning perhaps. We are very excited about the next few years. Michael is very excited, everybody is very excited, but we have got to start delivering.

Q: Stefano, one of the great mysteries of Formula 1 at the moment is Felipe Massa's front wing.

SD: Yes, actually it is very good here in the dark. You can see good sparks. It is adding a lot to the show.

MW: I don't think it's a mystery at all.

Q: Alright, maybe it isn't a mystery. In India you said you were going to investigate and yet it still seems to be doing the same thing here?

SD: Yes, it is true. I mean, it's pretty obvious. The reality is that we found something that was not correct in terms of the structure of that wing but apparently it seems that there is still a problem. It seems we haven't fixed the issue yet on that.

Q: Why is it Felipe's wing only?

SD: I don't know. The thing is the wing was supposed to go to Felipe's car. I have got engineers much more expert than me here that know that an effect on a wing can depend on a lot of issues, a lot of things, sorry. It depends on the set-up of the car, depending on tyre pressure and so on. Maybe it is a combination of all these elements for our engineers to understand and react as it is not what we would like to see.

Q: Is it uncomfortable to drive? Does Felipe feel that?

SD: No.

Q: Martin, we saw Sam Michael in the garage today. What is his role at the moment?

MW: Well Sam has just been with us for a few days so he is an observer at the moment. He has moved across from Williams as I think everyone knows. He will be the Sporting Director of the team next year. It is a good opportunity. I think we came to a good arrangement with Williams to allow Sam to come and have a look so that during the winter he can take a more informed view about how we make ourselves a better race team.

Q: So he is just watching at the moment?

MW: He is watching. I am sure, and would be disappointed, if he is not giving us some opinion and view. It would be very unnatural if he wasn't. But that's what he is here for. We are running the team with the structure that we have run all year. Clearly, we've brought Sam into the business because we think he can make us stronger, improve our competitiveness, and that's his challenge next year.

Q: John, a lot of teams next week are running young drivers here and you have announced your three young drivers. There seems to be a lot of different agendas for running young drivers, whether it is for a revenue stream or testing new bits or whatever. Some of the drivers aren't that young either, but tell us about your three and why they are there.

JB: Well, first of all it is my favourite time of the year, starting working with young drivers for the future. I think we have got three very exciting young drivers, all proving to be competitive in the arenas in which they have been competing this year and it will be great to give them a chance of tasting Formula 1. Maybe they can put themselves in the picture.

Q: Are you looking for a second driver?

JB: As we said before we are evaluating all our options and we will make a decision after Brazil. Jerome (D'Ambrosio) has done a great job all year, but, like I said, we have got three very exciting young guys chomping at the bit, so we will wait with anticipation.

Q: Saul, tell us what your plans are for HRT. There are a lot of question marks over the team?

SdM: Well for next year, since we entered into the team in July, we have been working basically on three fronts. One was improving this car and the car for next year and we have signed an agreement with Williams, which is an extension, in time and in contents, to what we already have. Next year's car will have KERS for the first time in the small history of HRT. We are also working on our headquarters. We are moving to Spain, which we know that from an economic, logistical thing is not the most efficient thing to do but I think it is in our ID. We have a Spanish licence and it is a way to get closer to our sponsors, which will be a Spanish and Latin focus. The other thing is our drivers which, also I think, after Brazil we will announce who will be our drivers for next season.

Q: Frank, again a bit like Mercedes there have been a lot of staff changes within the Williams team. What are your thoughts on the changes for next year – personnel, engines, even drivers.

FW: Well the engine choice we felt will be the right one. We have long-term memories with Renault and they have always served Formula 1 and ourselves extremely well. Various other personnel changes within the company. We will see how they work. I think it would be inappropriate for me to describe what is expected of any one individual.

Q: And drivers as well?

FW: Not clear exactly who will be in both cars. I am sure Pastor (Maldonado) will be in one car. Rubens (Barrichello) maybe, we haven't really made up our minds what we want to do before we talk to Rubens.

Q: Frank, 10 years ago you were interested in getting Kimi (Raikkonen) to your team. Now, 10 years later are you still interested to get him now you can do so?

FW: I knew this would come up. But my view, as you might well expect, goes as follows: a lot of supposition and I cannot make any comment about supposition, sorry to be so unhelpful.

Q: Are you following his rally career?

FW: I am not a rally fan.

Q: Just to follow up on that question. Martin and Stefano, Kimi drove for both of you, what advice would you give to Frank on this subject?

MW: Try and sign him. Kimi, we all know he is quick. I think people underestimate how intelligent he can be. I hope that he is hungry. I am sure he hasn't lost the capability to thrill us in Formula 1 so I think it would be fantastic for Formula 1. I wouldn't ordinarily presume to advise Sir Frank who he should sign but I think it would be exciting if he did.

SD: Of course, I would not give any advice to Frank. He has long experience. A lot longer than me. For sure, I know Kimi very well. He is very talented, very strong, and if he wants to come back he has something that wants to show to everyone about him, about the fact that he was the last driver to win the World Championship with us and he will want to show he is still one of the strongest.

Q: Can I follow up with a question for John and Saul. You are both moving your teams shortly. One is going into motorsport valley and one is going away from it. Who thinks they have got it right?

JB: Both are going south so it is something in common. Valencia is a wonderful town, but we will settle for Banbury.

Q: Can you go into some details as to why you are going to Banbury?

JB: We just feel it is the right thing for us to be under one roof now. We made a pretty bold move, in June I think it was, when we decided to take our destiny into our own hands and I think it is the right thing to move under one roof instead of the three we were in before.

Q: And Saul?

SdM: I think the decision is something positive. Normally, because of being one of the slowest cars and also because of that we have to go and look for something a bit different to the rest of the teams. They are in the same area, very similar background. In some time we will see if I was wrong, but I think it is the right strategy to do an approach which is slightly different to what everybody's doing. If I was one of the (inaudible) I wouldn't do it, but I have to try and do something different.

Q: Stefano, what is more difficult to cope with: the pain of losing the World Championship in the manner that you did here last year or a season where basically you haven't delivered what was expected of you?

SD: Well, I think that with regard to your first question, for sure from the sporting point of view when you come back to a place where you were really fighting for the championship and you have lost it and you have seen in your mind so many times that race that you can remember every little metre it is natural that the first time you come here you think back. But the nature of the sport to not look back, it is look ahead so it is already back and the fact that we didn't deliver really a good season this year is the most relevant point at this stage. All the focus is, as Ross mentioned before is to try to do everything that we can in order to make sure that we do the right move and the right step for the next season. That's why we have anticipated a lot of things that we could have waited, but that's the only target we have so that's the (inaudible word) we are living now.

Q: Two part question for Saul. The first question is about the time-line of moving to Spain. Last year you had a car that was designed and partially built in Italy, finished at the circuit, then it moved to Germany. This year it's the same car, which has been upgraded, also done in Germany. Now you talk about moving to Spain. What sort of time-line are you talking. Part two is why is Thesan in Formula 1 in the first place? Is it here for the long haul? Are you looking to sell the team? How did you get into it?

SdM: With regard the first question I think the difference compared to last year is, I don't want to enter into what happened as we were not here but I think that it was not part of a plan. Things were happening. Here it was a plan and our policy is to be very discreet in the things that we are doing so we are only announcing things that we have already been working on for some time and we reach a point where it is obvious that somebody will notice like we have a headquarters in Valencia so we have to tell. One thing is we are moving the race and test team and most of the back office to be under the same roof to this very nice building that we will have in Valencia. The different thing is that the technical office, we will still keep it in Munich where the car is being designed and developed since the end of August. Also, different to last year we hope not only be at the first race but also the first test with the new car. That's the answer to the first question. Regarding the second one we are financial investors. It is obvious. If you enter into our website you can see. But I think Formula 1 is a totally different business for us as it brings business itself so here we have no urgency at all. The investment is not in one of the funds that have a definite exit so we could be here for ever or sell it. I wouldn't say before three years as we



have to do this project. Of if we like it we can keep it forever.

Q: Saul, will there be a Spanish driver in your team next year, for sure?

SRdeM: I hope so. I don't know yet what we can guarantee. Our rookie test driver for next week is Dani Clos who is a young talented driver, who was second in qualifying for GP2 today. He will probably win GP2 next year so if it's not next year – in the next two seasons – eventually the team will have one Spanish or Latin American driver.

Q: I am curious about the details of the (F1) Commission meeting last week in Geneva, particularly with regard to the problem with Q3 and extra tyres. Could you tell us what was discussed?

MW: I think firstly, I should qualify something by saying that within Formula 1 we have a variety of different meetings and I think inevitably there is a lot of interest in what happens behind closed doors, a strange amount of interest in my view. I think we have to respect that some of these meetings are and should be private. But I think to try and answer and be helpful to the questioner, there has been a debate, not just in the Formula 1 Commission but there has been a debate in Formula 1 about whether there should be extra tyres for Q3. And this is based upon – as I think we all know – the fact that some teams have tactically chosen not to run in that session. I think, generally, when that's been discussed, it's been the view of the teams that actually qualifying is quite an interesting format now. Some of us will remember that we went through a stumble of changes for qualifying over a number of years and I think often they weren't thought through and we made it worse. So I think we should exercise quite a lot of caution before we change what is, frankly – certainly for those of us sat on the pit wall – pretty gripping. Even if you think you're a top team, the opportunity to go through Q1, potentially, on the harder, slower tyre makes it quite a tantalising session, whoever you are and I think that's quite a good format, it seems to work quite well and makes it a little bit more interesting. I think that by the time some of the middle teams have got through to Q3 they've typically done more running than maybe some of the faster teams, so on balance, I think the consensus view appears to be that we shouldn't change the format. We don't think there's a fundamental problem that some people choose to run tactically in Q3. So there has been a discussion, as I would summarise it, but if any of my colleagues want to elaborate, I hope that helps.

RB: I think Q3 is very exciting. Quite honestly, when you get into Q3 the fans' focus is primarily on the guys at the front and I think the ability for other teams to take a more tactical approach to try and compensate their performance is an added dimension. As Martin said, we should be careful not to fiddle with it because it's actually quite a good show. I think that last run in Q3 for pole position or whatever it is is a great show. I think the fact that some teams choose not to run in Q3 is not really very significant.

Q: Question for Frank and the three in the back row: you've all got Middle Eastern backers of some sort. With what's going on in the Eurozone at the moment and the risk of Europe falling into pretty serious recession and austerity measures, I was wondering what your take was on the impact on Formula 1 finances and sponsors and whether it's going to force you more and more to look beyond the Eurozone in future?

FW: Working backwards I've no comment to make as I'm not knowledgeable enough about where the money will come from in the long term future. I believe it will still come from Europe because the sport is based in Europe, most people who watch it are from Europe but I think the people behind me and the people who have gone before and come after me, they're very adept at sniffing out the dosh. There will always be money to keep their teams in business. The determination within those teams is immeasurable.

RB: I think the teams will find solutions. As Frank said, they're incredibly resilient. I daren't bring it up but we're working hard on the Resource Restriction; if we need to, that can be tightened even further, if we see that it's justified. So I think the teams are incredibly resilient and we will cut our cloth to suit the climate and that's what will happen.

SD: I think that it is not only a matter of Formula 1 but the world is moving, changing and that Formula 1 as another business company has to – let's say – adapt or try to anticipate the move in order not to be the last to arrive where potentially there is a new market of new potential interest. So in that respect, I think that, as you know we were one of the first companies that had the opportunity to receive investment from this area and now we are looking also in the other parts of the world because we as Ferrari, as you know, we have a business that is not only Formula 1 but above all is a car manufacturer that is selling cars in different markets and this is for sure one of the most important areas at the moment that has a future and it is important to keep the attention of this new world in Formula 1. I think, on that, that Formula 1, generally speaking, has a great potential and has to react in anticipation to all the other sport businesses to make sure that we capitalise the brand that we have at the moment.

MW: Firstly, it is incredibly tough out there for any team to go out there and get the funding to come racing, which we all love to do. I think one thing I would observe though, is that we had a crisis – or the world had a crisis – but Formula 1 had a crisis at the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009. We had Honda, Toyota, BMW exiting right at a critical moment for the world economy. In some ways, those of us that were involved at that time, I think it brought the best out in Formula 1 because for a while... we react well in a crisis and I think we did react well. Perhaps we are all a little bit too comfortable now – some of the teams – and another bit of a crisis might focus some minds on what we need to do together.

Q: John, what does Jerome d'Ambrosio have to do to stay with you next year?

JB: Well, Jerome has been doing it all season, he's done a fantastic job all year in his rookie season and I'm sure he will continue to do it in the last two races. If he keeps performing like that, he will put himself in the frame for a drive.

Q: I would like to talk about the RRA; Stefano said a couple of weeks ago that there was a big lack of trust within FOTA and that this question was endangering its very existence. I would like to know what you two think about it, Ross, and anyone else. Is there a solution to this question, to solve it, and when do you think that will be?

MW: Firstly, I think you have to put this in context. The technical regulations, sporting regulations of the sport are well developed, it's a pretty thick tome. I guess it's the nature, the competitive nature, the creative nature, the paranoid nature of Formula 1 – there will always be questions about whether a car is legal, is the wing too flexible – sorry Stefano – or other parts of it, but that's the nature of our sport and I think occasionally we have some moments of tension and I think that now we've tried to act responsibly and controlled the amount of resource, and inevitably we're going to push and probe and see what we can do. I think the nature of Formula 1 is that we have some very creative people who will try to find the loopholes and that's in the nature of the competition, so whether that's trying to find loopholes in the technical regulations, the sporting regulations, financial restrictions, resource restriction etc. Occasionally people will push that boundary and some tensions will occur. I think we can focus on those tensions, I think we can also focus on a lot of things that have been achieved in the last few years. There is some challenge. At the moment the teams need to want to co-operate for this to work and I think at the moment there are some tensions but I suspect we'll find a way through, we'll find ways in which we can have greater levels of trust, but this is a continuum, this will continue next year, the year after, just as if that's on the regulations, any aspect of this sport. We're all competitive, we want to beat each other, we're going to try and find out if we can maximise our performance within the constraints that are applied.

Q: Frank, you were the first team owner to have Middle Eastern backing back in the late seventies, early eighties. Did you ever

imagine that the Middle East would embrace motor sport and Formula 1 in particular to the degree that it has now, two races on a Formula 1 calendar?

FW: (Holding) Races is quite different to being a sponsor of a team but I am surprised that there are presently two taking place. I think they could last a long time, because the people who live in this area want to be a part of the entire world and they certainly are mostly – in the main – wealthy, they like travelling a great deal, they want the best of everything and I just think they always will be wanting to have, as they have here, to try and demonstrate that they can make the best Grand Prix in the world happen and there will be enthusiasm to do that for many years to come.

Q: Frank, what kind of plans do you have for the future of Valtteri Bottas?

FW: Depends how quick he is. I don't know enough about him. He looks very good, he does look very good, but beyond saying that, I don't know him. We have to keep testing him, I guess.

Q: John, to eventually start 2012 with a rookie would mean that once again you would start from zero, so in which way do you see that it could improve the team, knowing that normally stability is a good platform to improve?

JB: First of all, the stability we have in Timo, a guy with massive experience and committed to the team's long term future, so we have stability there already. I know the question you're referring to but as I said before, we'll assess where we are with the drivers after the young driver test and they will look to make a decision after Brazil.

Q: We've got a young driver test coming up next week with some teams treating it as a quick payday and then we have McLaren running a driver who it's difficult to call a young driver as such. Do you think the concept of the young driver test should be revisited?

MW: I think Gary still thinks he's young and as far as I know, all of us still think he's young. I think he's still young enough to be in Formula 1. Incidentally, he's a very talented driver. He's someone who deserved and still does deserve an opportunity in Formula 1 so I think we are very proud to be able to showcase him. He has been driving for Mercedes and McLaren for a number of years. I'm sure if one of the teams below or elsewhere want to sign him, I suspect we would be releasing him.

JB: I think the format for the qualification for a novice driver or a rookie driver works pretty well. I don't see any reason to revisit it.

Q: Gentlemen, from a business point of view, the fastest way to improve your revenues is to get hold of the revenues of the sport. Can each of you tell us if it's possible that you can get together and buy the commercial rights and divide up the money between you, and borrow the money from a bank, because that's what CVC did, and if not, why not? Martin?

MW: Well, it depends on who you talk to whether Formula 1's for sale or not at the moment. I think anything's possible, but I think making public pronouncements really doesn't generally help create the environment to do the right thing. What we need is co-operation between the teams, the FIA and whoever owns the sport. We can't rule out the teams being equity participants at some stage in the future. I think it would be healthy, I think it would be good but I think we've got to make sure that there are the right economic conditions to provide that.

SD: On my side, you know that we have certain obligations not to speak about sensitive subjects, any kind of declaration we may make can be used and – let me put it this way – manipulated for the wrong reasons, so I would say that I cannot comment on that.

RB: I think that what's involved is a kind of natural order of things, in terms of the teams being focused on their racing, and the commercial rights holder being focused on the races and the promotion of those races, and the governing body being responsible for making sure that the sport is run properly and fairly. Of course, the issue is the division of the income for Formula 1. If we can find a good solution, a compromise in the future for that division, then I think that role and function of the various parties works very well. I think the problem will come if that division isn't fair, then things may change, but fundamentally we're happy with the way things are but like all teams we want to see how we can improve the income for the teams.

FW: I would like to compliment Ross on being extremely perceptive and accurate on what he said. He is absolutely right.

JB: I think the only comment I would make is that it may be worthwhile looking at how other major sports in other countries are run to see if we can learn any lessons from those. It might be interesting to see those results.

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## F1 Abu Dhabi Blog – FP3 at Yas Marina

So McLaren have made a clean sweep of Abu Dhabi practice, and Lewis Hamilton finished FP3 half a second clear of Sebastian Vettel. But everyone expects another pole for the Red Bull driver – why break the habit of a season?

All in all, the final practice session at Yas Marina was a pretty chilled out affair. Well, as chilled as anything can be under the desert sun, anyway.

But there were no serious offs, no damaged cars, and nothing for the mechanics to worry about over lunch. Well, kind of.

While there was no drama on-track, there was drama off it. Around twenty minutes into the session, Mike Gascoyne announced that Jarno Trulli's afternoon was over thanks to a gearbox failure. The Italian driver had completed a single installation lap, and had been unable to set a time.

Rubens Barrichello was the next man to fall, thanks to an oil leak that saw the Brazilian sidelined after five laps. But in those five laps the Williams driver was able to set a benchmark time that kept him comfortably ahead of all of the drivers from the 'new' teams barring Heikki Kovalainen. Not great, but it could have been a lot worse. Just ask Jarno...

While FP3 is only an hour long, much of the session was spent waiting for the track to cool in the closing stages.

The temperatures here change dramatically as soon as the sun starts to slip over the horizon, and both air and circuit will be much cooler during Q3 than they were this afternoon. As a result, the most useful data for the front-running teams was that gleaned towards the end of FP3, as it's more representative – although nowhere near ideal.

The timesheets offered few surprises, with McLaren, Red Bull, Ferrari, and Mercedes all fast. The HRTs and Virgins are very off the pace here, with Team Lotus' Kovalainen setting a best time nearly two seconds clear of his rivals at the back of the pack. The 107 percent rule might just come into play this evening, although based on past experience it will probably be waived.

FP3 times (unofficial)

1. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.38.976s [17 laps]
2. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.39.403s [18 laps]
3. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.39.427s [18 laps]
4. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.39.429s [16 laps]
5. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.39.661s [16 laps]
6. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.40.135s [19 laps]
7. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.40.183s [18 laps]
8. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.40.429s [21 laps]
9. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.40.511s [19 laps]
10. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.40.938s [18 laps]
11. Bruno Senna (Renault) 1.41.509s [21 laps]
12. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.41.527s [21 laps]
13. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.41.566s [20 laps]
14. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.41.594s [18 laps]
15. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.41.622s [18 laps]
16. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.41.855s [18 laps]
17. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.42.025s [19 laps]
18. Heikki Kovalainen (Team Lotus) 1.43.409s [22 laps]
19. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.43.861s [5 laps]
20. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.45.262s [23 laps]
21. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT) 1.45.302s [20 laps]
22. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin) 1.45.509s [22 laps]
23. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT) 1.45.732 [20 laps]
24. Jarno Trulli (Team Lotus) NO TIME SET [1 lap]

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## FP1 Abu Dhabi Blog – Q1 at Yas Marina

As the teams prepared for the start of qualifying in Abu Dhabi, the media centre was treated to a surprise visit from Bernie Ecclestone and the Crown Prince of Bahrain.

But while many assumed that Ecclestone was there to discuss his Munich court appearance, there was only one topic of conversation on the agenda – the 2012 Bahrain Grand Prix, which all and sundry insist is on the calendar and will stay on the calendar.

Asked whether there was a chance that the race might move from its current April slot, both Ecclestone and the Crown Prince were adamant that Bahrain had moved on from its recent political turbulence, and that the grand prix was an important symbol of national unity.

But the important thing this weekend is the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, not the neighbouring race. With qualifying about to start, the track is 32 degrees, with an air temperature of 26 degrees. The sun is beginning to fall, and shadows are lengthening. By the time Q2 reaches its mid point, it will be dusk.

Bruno Senna was the first man out of the pits in Q1: his first timed lap saw the Brazilian cross the line in 1.47.457s. The Toro Rosso pair crossed the line moments later, with Jaime Alguersuari taking the top slot with a 1.43.895s.

Mark Webber is the first of the front runners to cross the line: the Australian shaves two seconds of Alguersuari's effort with a 1.41.816s.

Rubens Barrichello has yet to leave the pits: the Brazilian was sidelined by an oil leak early in FP3 and there's a chance the Williams mechanics haven't been able to get the car fixed over lunch.

Michael Schumacher's first timed lap is a frankly shocking 1.55.091s. Something went very wrong there. Teammate Nico Rosberg is the next slowest man on the timesheets with a 1.49.853s.

As the session begins to approach the mid point, Sebastian Vettel, Lewis Hamilton, Fernando Alonso, Mark Webber, and Jenson Button are competing for the top spot. The five men are the only drivers to have set a time in the 1.41s so far.

Webber goes fastest with a 1.40.936s. Hamilton then takes the top slot with a 1.40.661s and stays out on track to improve his time.

Barrichello will not be going out in this session.

Button shaves four-tenths off his teammate's time, crossing the line in 1.40.227s. All of the frontrunners are still out on track. Webber bests Button with a 1.40.167s, but the glory lasts for a nanosecond as Hamilton takes the top slot with a 1.39.782s.

At the back of the pack, the dropout zone is comprised of the six drivers from 2010's new teams, plus the sidelined Barrichello. There's one second between Heikki Kovalainen in P18 and Pastor Maldonado in P17, so unless the Lotus driver can find serious extra pace, it's unlikely that we'll see much of a change.

Pastor Maldonado arrived in Abu Dhabi with a 10-place grid penalty hanging over his head: the Venezuelan is likely to line up at or very near the back of tomorrow's grid.

With five minutes remaining, the front runners are all in the pits. As usual, the battle for survival is at the back of the pack, with Daniel Ricciardo an

impressive 0.1s down on Kovalainen in P18. The two are on different tyres, but it was a good lap from the Australian nonetheless.

Kovalainen jumps up to P16 with a run on softs that sees the Finn cross the line in 1.42.979s. But it's a temporary victory, and the Team Lotus driver is now back down in P18, three-tenths shy of knocking Schumacher out in Q1.

The chequered flag has fallen, but all of those in the dropout zone barring Barrichello are still out on track. Schumacher is also out there, defending his place in Q2. And he does it – out in Q1 are the six usual suspects plus Rubens.

#### Dropout zone

18. Heikki Kovalainen (Team Lotus)
19. Jarno Trulli (Team Lotus)
20. Timo Glock (Virgin)
21. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT)
22. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin)
23. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT)
24. Rubens Barrichello (Williams)

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## F1 Abu Dhabi Blog – Q2 at Yas Marina

So we've waved goodbye to Rubens Barrichello and the six usual suspects. What mysteries will Q2 have in store?

A near certainty this weekend is a back row start for both Williams drivers. Barrichello was unable to run in Q1, while Pastor Maldonado will need to qualify in P12 or above to avoid the back row, thanks to a ten-place grid penalty.

The early times indicate that pole is going to be a straight fight between Sebastian Vettel and Lewis Hamilton. The Red Bull driver was the first man to break into the 1.38s, but Hamilton crossed the line moments later and one-tenth faster, temporarily claiming the top spot with a 1.38.434s.

Felipe Massa needs to learn to stop playing with the kerbs; the Ferrari driver has just brought out the red flags by running into a bollard and scattering it across the track.

Nico Rosberg is the worst hit – the Mercedes driver had yet to set a time, and had just completed the first sector of his first flying lap in Q2. That's one set of tyres for the bin.

Pastor Maldonado, Adrian Sutil, and Paul di Resta are the remaining drivers yet to have set times this session, but the three were still in the pits when the red flags came out.

As the pitlane reopens for business, we're treated to the sight of Vettel's front wing quivering like a nervous virgin. Of the yet to have sex kind, not the car.

Massa is told by Rob Smedley that he needs to stop making mistakes and pull together a lap in the mid 1.39s. The Ferrari driver manages it, crossing the line in 1.39.623s.

With less than five minutes remaining of Q2, the dropout zone is comprised of Vitaly Petrov, Kamui Kobayashi, Bruno Senna, Jaime Alguersuari, Sutil, di Resta, and Maldonado. The latter three men have yet to set times, but all three are finally on timed laps. Is the one-run effort leaking into Q2?

The Force India pair cross the line in P8 and P9, with Sutil ahead of his teammate by half a tenth. Maldonado's first effort sees the Venezuelan pop up in P17 with a 1.47.711s, that would have seen him out at the back of the pack in Q1. There is enough time remaining for one final timed lap from the Williams driver.

Senna crosses the line after the chequered flag falls with a 1.41.079s that's only good enough for P13. That's one man out for Renault. Petrov's out in P12, with Perez in P11. For now – there are still two cars out on track.

And that's that. We wave goodbye to both drivers from Sauber, Renault, and Toro Rosso, plus Pastor Maldonado. The Venezuelan will be lining up on the back row tomorrow, joining teammate Rubens Barrichello in Williams' worst grid start.

#### Dropout zone

11. Sergio Perez (Sauber)
12. Vitaly Petrov (Renault)
13. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso)
14. Bruno Senna (Renault)
15. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso)
16. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
17. Pastor Maldonado (Williams)\*

\* Pastor Maldonado is carrying a 10-place grid penalty into the weekend; the Williams driver is on his ninth engine of the season.

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## F1 Abu Dhabi Blog – Q3 at Yas Marina

McLaren are eager for a good result this weekend; Jenson Button is the first man to leave the pitlane for Q3, with teammate Lewis Hamilton hot on his heels.

We're down to five teams for Q3, with both drivers from McLaren, Red Bull, Ferrari, Mercedes, and Force India making it through into the final qualifying session at the Yas Marina Circuit.

The tyre choice of the moment is the option, as has been traditional in the final qualifying session all season. Nico Rosberg is trying something different for Mercedes; the German driver has left the pits on primes.

But that something different looks certain to be an aborted lap – enough to see him ahead of those who choose not to run (we're looking at you, Force India), but little enough that he'll still have a free tyre choice for the race tomorrow. Ah, tactics.

Hamilton is top of the timesheets with a 1.38.704s as the session reaches its mid point; Sebastian Vettel has yet to set a timed lap, and Mark Webber is in provisional P2 with a 1.38.858s.

And Vettel snatches P2 from his teammate with a 1.38.746s, 0.042s slower than Hamilton's provisional pole.

Three minutes remaining, and the pits are emptying for the final flyers before the chequered flag falls. All ten runners are out on track, but how many of those laps will be aborted for convenience's sake? We wait with bated breath...

Button takes provisional pole with a 1.38.631s, but milliseconds later Hamilton grabs it with a 1.38.622s. Vettel has yet to cross the line.

And the German does it, equalling Nigel Mansell's record of 14 poles with a 1.38.481s. Did anyone expect anything less?

The big surprise of the session? Nine out of ten drivers set times. Megal!

### Provisional grid

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull)
2. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren)
3. Jenson Button (McLaren)
4. Mark Webber (Red Bull)
5. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari)
6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari)
7. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes)
8. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes)
9. Adrian Sutil (Force India)
10. Paul di Resta (Force India)
11. Sergio Perez (Sauber)
12. Vitaly Petrov (Renault)
13. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso)
14. Bruno Senna (Renault)
15. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso)
16. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
17. Heikki Kovalainen (Team Lotus)
18. Jarno Trulli (Team Lotus)
19. Timo Glock (Virgin)
20. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT)
21. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin)
22. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT)
23. Pastor Maldonado (Williams)\*
24. Rubens Barrichello (Williams)

\* Pastor Maldonado is carrying a 10-place grid penalty into the weekend; the Williams driver is on his ninth engine of the season. The Venezuelan driver qualified in P17; I am assuming he will start ahead of his teammate who didn't run at all, but that has yet to be confirmed.

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## F1 Abu Dhabi Blog – Saturday press conference at Yas Marina

Dark had fallen over Yas Marina Circuit before the drivers lined up for the post-qualifying press conference, where they talked about Nigel Mansell, Vettel's seemingly endless run of poles, and the challenge of changing track conditions.

Present were pole sitter Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull), Lewis Hamilton (McLaren), and Jenson Button (McLaren).

Q: Sebastian, you equalled Nigel Mansell's record of 14 poles in a season today, congratulations, but you had to dig pretty deep to get this one?

Sebastian VETTEL: Oh yes, especially after yesterday where to be honest I wasn't very happy with the car and we weren't happy in general as we thought there is more in the car, the performance is there, but we couldn't really get to it. Today, this afternoon, it was already quite a bit better but

this place is tricky in many ways. You have the practice on the one hand in day conditions, the sun is up, the track is a little bit hotter, and then in the evening you qualify and you race and the circuit is quite a bit different. The car behaves differently. The tyres come in differently. It is not easy to get that right all the time. Then in qualifying I had a much better feeling especially moving onto the soft tyres. Already in Q2 we looked much better than before. Then the other difficulty around here is to get everything into one lap. It is a long lap. There are a lot of corners, especially the last sector. Once you start to turn into Turn 11 after the second straight it is basically left-right-left-right. Plenty of opportunity to gain time, but also if you take a lot of risk it is very easy to do a little mistake. It is very easy to lose straight away a lot of time. We are not speaking one, two, three hundredths. It is immediately a tenth, tenth-and-a-half. I was not so happy with my first run in Q3, but the second run much happier especially the first two sectors and with that I was buying myself a little bit of a cushion in the last sector which was a bit trickier towards the end of the evening. But all in all just enough to jump ahead of Lewis who has looked very strong all weekend. It is good that in that session, where it matters on Saturday, we were able to be just that little bit quicker than him.

Q: Lewis, as Sebastian said you have really been in control all weekend. Did you think you had done enough there?

Lewis HAMILTON: No, no. It was a good session for me. I think it has been quite a good couple of days to be honest, quite a big improvement for me, I feel, from the last race at least. Yeah, we were quick, the car has been feeling good, but just at the end there that was as fast as I was really able to get out of my lap. It wasn't particularly a great lap, the one in Q2 was much better but that's the way it is and well done to Sebastian, he did a great lap. As always, he is very, very quick but the race is tomorrow, that's the most important day.

Q: Jenson, you put it all together there on your final run. Is this a result a surprise for you and the team today?

Jenson BUTTON: I don't think a surprise, as we know the pace in the car and it was finding the right balance. I have not felt 100 per cent comfortable this weekend in terms of the balance of the car but we have improved it, we've tried a few different things, and was finally getting there through qualifying. But Q3 was very strange as there was less grip as the circuit was a lot cooler and with the break from Q2 to Q3 the car was acting differently but in some ways it was a good thing for me as I couldn't get enough front end into the car. All weekend I have been struggling with a nervous rear. Finally, when we get into qualifying, I have got massive amounts of understeer so more in the direction I like but in the tight section towards the end of the lap you need a reasonably pointy car but I didn't have that. Not a bad lap, but still, as Lewis said, the car is working well around here. It is not perfect, Seb did a good job and put it on pole, so we will have challenge from behind tomorrow.

Q: Sebastian, clearly you are in a very fierce battle here with the two McLarens. What are you expecting from tomorrow?

SV: Well I think it is going to be a long race, a fun race. As we have seen all weekend McLaren, both Lewis and Jenson, looked very competitive. Very quick on the long runs as well. That's what we expect. They will be very quick in the race. I think we need to see from some people behind, but we have to focus on ourselves first of all, try to get a good start, but then it will be a long fight. A long fight to the chequered flag. Looking forward to the race. I think the car is good, especially with the steps we were able to make after yesterday's practice. So confident and ready I would say.

Q: Sebastian, you seem to come up with the goods every single time. Just where does it come from?

SV: I don't know. There is no box in the car that I open and get it from. To be honest I wouldn't say a surprise. We expected that if we get everything right to be closer than in practice, much closer. McLaren looked very competitive straight away yesterday in particular when I wasn't happy with the car and I wasn't happy with myself. I went off, did a mistake, and it cost us probably a proper long run. But the balance of the car wasn't as good as it could be. I felt there was more in the car and we just had to get to it, so overnight we tried to find out where the problem is. I think this afternoon it was already quite a bit better but then, I think, this is a tricky place as I mentioned with the different conditions. Conditions changing with the sun being up in FP3 this afternoon, the sun going down during qualifying. The circuit changes and the car changes and the behaviour changes. Ideally you would like to change the car, but once qualifying starts you have made your choice and then only thing you can change is yourself. You have to play around and fortunately I felt much better this afternoon and it was only getting better until later on in qualifying. In particular then, in Q2, we were quite close in reach of Lewis and I thought in Q3 if we got everything together, we would have a chance. Surprisingly the circuit did change after the little bit of downtime between Q2 and Q3 and it wasn't getting quicker. It didn't seem at least, particularly the last sector. It is such a long lap, plenty of opportunity but also once you are really pushing to the limit quite possible, quite easy, to maybe ask for a little bit too much and go off slightly. My first run in Q3 I pushed a bit too hard and the second run I was much happier and able to have a very good start into the lap, first two sectors, and with the difficult sector three I was able to have a little bit of a cushion. When I crossed the line I was looking up towards the monitor. I can't read the lap time but I can see if it is yellow or green and green is good and yellow is maybe not so good so that's a good sign but I didn't know if there were people coming behind me. Then I got the call on the radio and I was very pleased.

Q: You have won this race twice before. You have clinched the World Championship here. You have been on pole twice here now as well, it must be one of your favourites mustn't it?

SV: Today yes, yesterday no. As I said it is a tricky place. It is an amazing place. I have a lot of good memories, in particular last year, but the standard here if you look at the facilities, the place itself, it's incredible. It's a bit like wonderland if we come here with a fantastic circuit, tricky as I said, especially the last sector, so many corners, it is so long and it easy to do a mistake. But once you get into the rhythm around here it is really good fun and you are one unit with the car. The car is doing what you want and you are doing what the car wants, then it is very enjoyable.

Q: Lewis, second on the grid. Must be nice to be on the front row as you've been on the front row both time before. Is there one side better than the other to start from?

LH: Yeah, I was just thinking about that. I am not really quite sure. I think a lot of us once we hit the apex, the exit kerb, we come back across. I am sure the pole side is a little bit cleaner than the left side, but I don't think it will be too big a difference. I am happy with today. To be on the front row and not have any penalties is a blessing for me so I can look forward to tomorrow.

Q: You are pretty close. It is not as though Sebastian has got a massive margin over you in spite of the fact that you felt that was probably all you could get out of the car.

LH: Yeah, I think, as I said, it wasn't a particularly spectacular lap. Neither of them in Q3 were. In the first two qualifying sessions the car was looking really good and then we got to Q2 then I started to feel the car was understeering a little bit and that's really the limitation of the car. Then in the final runs I was pushing as hard as I could, but just wasn't able to improve on my last lap. I think there were bits of time there. As Sebastian said, sometimes you were up, sometimes you were down and there were a couple of small bits of time all over the place but unfortunately I wasn't able to extract that. Nevertheless, I am still happy with the job I did.

Q: Jenson, you were within nine thousandths of a second of...

JB: I've heard that one before! Sorry, I was getting all excited. I said I've heard that one before. Carry on.



Q: Given the hard luck stories and the balance of the car, that must be pleasing to be as close as you are.

JB: Yeah. All weekend I've been reasonably happy with the balance but I still feel that there's more to get from the car but it's just trying to find it, trying to help the rear of the car. I've been struggling with, as I always say, a nervous rear end, and I don't like that. Tried a few things before qualifying and at the start of qualifying, felt a little bit better but during qualifying, I suddenly found myself with massive amounts of understeer, so a completely different car balance than I felt all weekend, so then we had to work on trying to put front end into the car and ran out of all the options, really, in the end. It was pretty good. I'm quite happy with the lap and happy with the improvements we've made. In qualifying there's not so much you can change so we played with everything we could. It was a pretty good lap.

Q: After yesterday, you said that you didn't think DRS was going to help overtaking that much, or it was still going to be very difficult. Is that still your opinion?

JB: Yup. I think it's going to be tough to overtake with DRS. Hopefully, we will have a different story tomorrow in the race. I don't want to finish third. So we will have to see but it does feel short still. Yesterday, I was DRS-ing out of turn seven all the way down to turn eight and I still couldn't overtake anyone. We will see how it goes, but yeah, hopefully there will be possibilities. It's a long, long race. There are a couple of pit stops, which will be important to get right. We really don't know what's going to happen with the tyres but we know more than Seb, obviously.

Q: (Dan Knutson – National Speed Sport News) Jenson, with the balance problems you have, are they better or worse on the prime or the option or are they the same on both tyres?

JB: For a long run, it's definitely better on the option tyre, I think. It felt pretty good in terms of grip level for a high-fuel long run, so hopefully we will see that tomorrow.

Q: (Joris Fioriti – Agence France Presse) Jenson and Lewis, congratulations on your outfit, which is very nice. Did you have any thoughts at the beginning of the weekend that you were actually going to be faster than Red Bull, knowing that you were fastest in F1, FP2 and FP3?

JB: I think we've seen it before. We've been very quick in practice, but basically we're just doing our own thing. We're working through our programme and it's not about being the quickest during the day, it's just the way it seems to happen. We obviously run a different programme to Red Bull. We've seen this before and we expected the Red Bulls to be quick, so yeah, it's always a challenge to beat them and to beat Seb with the consistency they've had this year in qualifying. The race, also, is very difficult, but I feel that we are more competitive and we can challenge more in the race than we can do in qualifying.

Q: (Frederic Ferret – L'Equipe) Question to the two McLaren drivers: what is your plan to prevent Sebastian winning tomorrow? Is there something special you can do?

LH: I think it's about getting a good start, from my side at least. I can't remember if it was last year when we... was it last year when I started second and you [Vettel] started on pole again last year, didn't you? Yeah. And I remember into turn one, I braked early and let him go. I don't plan to do that tomorrow.

JB: Any plans? Yeah, a good start's important but it's more difficult from third than it is from second, so I don't know, we will see. As I said, we've got a pretty good race car, I think. We will see tomorrow if that is true or not but it feels that it's pretty good. It's not all about the start, I don't think.

Q: (Kate Walker – Girl Racer) For those of us who haven't had time behind the wheel in an F1 car, could you talk us through the way the track changes as the night falls and everything gets cooler and the way that affects the handling of the car?

SV: It's a difficult question. We all, surely, feel something... as I said earlier, we would like to change the car in the session, it's not possible, we haven't got the time and we're not allowed to. And then you can be surprised either way so as Jenson described, I think he said he had quite an understeery balance and then finally he found the grip so yeah, the circuit did pick up some grip for the fronts but then I think it's not the same for all the cars. It wasn't really in my case, there wasn't a clear trend, it was just coming together or going away from you. In particular, you can feel when there's a lot of cars running it gets cooler, it seems to get quicker. We saw that from Q1 to Q2, then a little bit of a break, not too many cars running, only ten – I don't know if the last cars did a timed lap – but it does make a difference and the little break, not many cars, again the circuit seems to get a little bit slower and the cars are moving a bit more. It's difficult to highlight a trend, to say OK, the front picks up, the rear picks up. That's the difficulty, it's a bit of everything.

Q: (Michael Schmidt – Auto, Motor und Sport) Sebastian, you couldn't do a long run in Suzuka in Friday practice due to a crash: yesterday you said you missed out a little bit. In Suzuka you were surprised about the behaviour of the tyre in the race; is something similar possible tomorrow?

SV: No, I think I did a long run in Suzuka. I crashed in the first practice didn't I? I crashed on Friday for sure. It seems to be a habit. No, I don't think so, to be honest. Yesterday, as I said, I wasn't happy with the car, I'm much happier today. You see that across the fuel loads, not only on low fuel but also on high fuel, so for the race I think we are in good shape, we have enough experience from previous races, I think. The problem in Suzuka was different. We shouldn't run into the same problem here, I think we were able to learn from that straightway for Korea so we will see. Also, I think the tyres lasted pretty well yesterday. Obviously I didn't have a go on the soft tyre with higher fuel but all the others did and no one seemed to have a real problem. It's interesting to see how many stops we will have tomorrow. I expect something between one and three; everything is possible but the tyres seem to last fairly well.

Q: (Joris Fioriti – Agence France Presse) Sebastien Loeb just won his eighth title in rallying yesterday; what are your thoughts about that and do you think that someone in Formula One could reach that score?

SV: Look at Michael. I think he's an exception and then you look at rallying. Sebastien is another exception, for sure.

LH: He's the best by far.

SV: Yeah. The consistency? You don't need to talk about it. The most important thing is that he's a very nice guy. He's very down to earth and a great, great person. You could probably talk forever about his skills. What the guys do is pretty amazing. Generally, I'm a big fan of rallying. I think we would be overwhelmed by the adrenaline and those guys... for them it obviously becomes normal after a while, but what they do is pretty special. To always then make sure that you are that little bit quicker than the rest, or sometimes much quicker than the rest and for many years be that consistent, very little and very few mistakes says it all.

Q: (Gary Meenaghan – The National) Seb, we heard you being addressed on the team radio as Mr Mansell; is that something that's been discussed within the team this week?

SV: Not really. Discussed by you, discussed by the press but not within the team. I was very happy to get pole because it was difficult. We weren't sure about it or... I was positively surprised when we crossed the line, I think, and the same on the pit wall. Because everyone – not us – talks about it, you are aware of it. He (Mansell) obviously took two races less to achieve the same but still, it's something very special. It's a great feeling, for sure.

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## The Abu Dhabi Grand Prix as it happened

As the paddock gears up for the penultimate race of the 2011 Formula 1 season, the biggest piece of news doing the rounds is confirmation that the FIA have extended the first DRS zone by 75 metres.

The Abu Dhabi Grand Prix will feature two DRS zones; the first was to be 470 metres after Turn 7, but it will now run to 545 metres after that corner. The hope is that the increased length will open up more overtaking opportunities on a track that has become known for its parades.

As the cars peeled out for their formation lap, the track was 30 degrees, with air temperature at 26 degrees. Air temperatures have been falling steadily all afternoon, and as dusk falls the cooling conditions will affect handling throughout the grid.

And they're off!

Vettel made a good start, but spun off on the second corner, destroying his right rear in the process. Hamilton now leads from Button, with Alonso on the pounce. And Alonso gets past, up into P2 during the first lap.

This race could get interesting.

Massa and Webber nearly collided going into Turn 1, while the two Mercedes drivers looked close to connecting on more than one occasion. Vettel is now at the back of the pack and limping slowly to the pits.

Lap 2, and Hamilton has a 2.5s lead over Alonso in P2. Vettel makes it to the pits and looks close to retirement – the wheel is destroyed.

Lap 3, and DRS is enabled.

On replay, it's obvious that Vettel's suffered from hub failure, and not driver error. At least the best time to have your first retirement of the season is after you've won the championship, right?

Hamilton still leads from Alonso and Button, with Webber in P4. But the Red Bull driver passes Button with relative ease, prompting talk that the McLaren driver is struggling with the balance of his car.

Alonso goes purple, but is still 2.6s behind Hamilton and out of DRS reach.

Kovalainen made a great start, and is currently running in P14. Just behind him is Barrichello, who has worked his way up to P15 from a grid slot of P23.

Perez, Kobayashi, and Senna have all pitted; based on pace the latter two appeared to be suffering car trouble before heading to the pits. Perez is almost certainly on a one-stop strategy.

Alonso is currently two-tenths faster than Hamilton in the first sector, but the McLaren driver has the edges in sectors two and three.

Button – who managed to get back ahead of Webber – has just posted the fastest lap of the race and is beginning to close in on Alonso. But the McLaren driver is 6s down on his teammate, which isn't far off one second a lap off the current pace.

Lap 9, and Buemi and di Resta are jostling for position. Buemi crept ahead, but di Resta managed to hold his position despite being on the harder tyre. The battle was brought to you – in part – by the extended DRS zone.

With the race one-fifth run, the top ten is: Hamilton, Alonso, Button, Webber, Massa, Rosberg, Schumacher, Sutil, di Resta, Buemi.

The two HRTs are tangling with each other, both drivers jostling for position at the back of the grid.

Di Resta radios that he is beginning to lose traction; Buemi might be able to pounce in the next lap.

At the front, the gap between Hamilton and Alonso is holding steady around 2.6s. Button is six seconds further back, with Webber 1.4s behind.

Rosberg is pulling out a lead on teammate Schumacher; the two cars have been running together since they nearly collided on the first lap but the younger driver is now 5.6s ahead of his compatriot.

Lap 13 and Alonso goes purple. The gap to Hamilton has been reduced to 2.3s.

Button radios complaining of car trouble; the McLaren driver is losing a second a lap and is now within Webber's DRS range.

Buemi and di Resta are still playing pass and repass; the Scottish driver is delivering a commendable performance given his traction issues at a circuit where traction is vital.

Lap 15, and Webber makes his move on Button. Webber overshoots the corner and Button reclaims his place. The McLaren driver has KERS failure.

The gap between Hamilton and Alonso is down to 1.9s, as Ferrari call Massa into the pits. The Brazilian drops from P5 to P8 on exit, and ushers in the first major pit stop phase of the race.

Hamilton and Alonso pit together from P1 and P2, while Button enters the McLaren box as soon as his teammate leaves it. Sutil, Schumacher, Alguersuari, and Kovalainen have now all pitted this lap.

Webber now leads the race, with Hamilton in P2 and Alonso in P3. And on the next lap, Webber pits from the lead and emerges in P5. Hamilton is back in the lead, and 2.6s ahead of Alonso.

Webber had a very slow stop, over nine seconds thanks to a stuck wheel.

Hamilton goes purple on his fresh rubber, extending the gap to Alonso to 3.3s. Button is 15.9s behind his teammate, and has Massa 1.4s behind.

D'Ambrosio has retired following what felt like a ninety minute pit stop, thanks to what the team confirm is a brake problem.

Lap 21, and we're treated to a battle for 12th between Renault teammates Senna and Petrov. But Senna pits, and the promise of action comes to nothing.

Buemi has retired.

Lap 22, and with three retirements under our belts the top ten: Hamilton, Alonso, Button, Massa, Webber, Rosberg, Sutil, Schumacher, di Resta, Maldonado. Di Resta and Maldonado have yet to pit.

The gap between Alonso and Hamilton is shrinking, thanks to time lost lapping backmarkers. On lap 23, it was holding steady at 3s, but by lap 24 Hamilton has pulled out an extra 0.3s on the Ferrari.

Further down the grid, Kovalainen is keeping Barrichello solidly in his wing mirrors; the Lotus driver is in P14 with the Williams man 2.3s further back down the track.

Lap 25, and Barrichello passes Kovalainen for P14.

Maldonado pits and crashes into the tunnel wall on exit. This is the pinnacle of motorsport, don't you know? The Williams driver recovered and continued to the track.

Lap 28, and di Resta pits for what will presumably be his only stop of the race. Perez pits for a second time – I was wrong to assume he was one-stopping.

At the front of the pack, Hamilton is slowly extending his lead on Alonso. The two men are now split by 4.1s.

Lap 29, and Maldonado is under investigation for ignoring blue flags. And almost immediately, the stewards announce a drive-through for the Venezuelan, who is currently running in P14.

Lap 30, and Webber and Massa are getting close. Webber passes Massa on the straight, and the two make brief contact. Massa then uses his DRS to repass the Red Bull. This is a battle certain to run and run.

Lap 32, and Maldonado serves his drive-through. Can he leave the pits without driving into the tunnel wall?

Hamilton is pulling away from Alonso at the front of the pack; the gap between the two is up to 5.6s. Button is 15.8s further back in P3, with the Massa-Webber battle four seconds behind him.

Alguersuari and Maldonado are causing traffic problems for Webber and Massa, who are attempting to lap them. The grid has now been lapped up to Kovalainen in P13.

Alonso sets the fastest lap the race so far (we're on lap 34), and chips away at the gap to Hamilton by half a second. Traffic is a serious problem for the frontrunners, especially where Maldonado is concerned.

Lap 35, and Hamilton has lost 0.7s passing backmarkers.

Maldonado and Alguersuari are being investigated for ignoring waved blues. That'll be a stop-go penalty for Maldonado, while Alguersuari should get a drive-through.

Webber pitted from P5 on lap 36, and returned to the track in P6. One lap later, Button pits from P3 and comes back out in P5.

Senna is under investigation for ignoring waved blues, and is immediately issued with a drive-through.

Lap 37, and Senna pits for his penalty.

Lap 38, and the order in the points is: Hamilton, Alonso, Massa, Rosberg, Button, Webber, Schumacher, Sutil, di Resta, Petrov. Di Resta and Petrov are one lap down on the race leaders.

Webber goes purple on his fresh soft tyres.

At the head of the pack, the gap between Hamilton and Alonso is down to 3.1s. Hamilton will need to pit for new rubber shortly; the question is will Alonso stay out with a view to jumping the McLaren driver, or will the pair race in the stops?

Lap 40, and Hamilton pits from the lead. Alonso stays out, and the McLaren driver emerges in P2.

Massa pits from P3, and is joined by Kovalainen. The Lotus driver overtakes the Ferrari heading into the pit exit tunnel.

The stewards announce the Alguersuari-Maldonado incident will be investigated after the race.

Webber passes Button for fourth, the two men make contact and the McLaren driver wobbles across the track but recovers. It looks as though the Red Bull tapped the rear and the front in the course of the pass, but it was racing contact and not anything to worry about.

Alonso has yet to pit, but is currently sitting on a 20s lead over Hamilton in P2. Ferrari will need to best McLaren's 3.6s stop time to stay ahead, and Hamilton is setting fast sector times on his fresh tyres.

And Alonso pits on lap 43, slowed down by Ricciardo who is also pitting.

The Ferrari stop wasn't quick enough – Hamilton has the lead on Alonso, and both cars will now run till the end of the race.

Lap 44, and the leading pair are split by 4.4s.

Massa has just driven over a bit of what appears to be Barrichello's front wing, possibly damaging his car in the process.

Lap 45, and Webber passes Rosberg for P3. The Australian isn't vulnerable to a DRS-powered repass, as he's just powered off into the distance. What was that about the unbeatable Mercedes engine?

Lap 47 and the provisional points go to: Hamilton, Alonso, Webber, Rosberg, Button, Massa, Schumacher, di Resta, Kobayashi.

Hamilton is currently 5.7s ahead of Alonso in P2. Button is now 1s down on Rosberg, and might be able to use his DRS to pass, although defending will be tough without KERS.

Pit me baby one more time. Britney (aka Rosberg) pits for the last time on lap 49.

Massa isn't having a great day – the Brazilian driver has just slid sideways across the runoff area, but returned to the track unscathed.

With five laps remaining, the gaps have stabilised at the front of the pack. Hamilton has six seconds on Alonso, who is eleven seconds ahead of Webber. Button is just shy of 10 seconds behind the solitary Red Bull.

Closing laps drama from Ricciardo, who plants his car sideways into the barriers at Turn 16. The Australian is out, but will be a classified finisher.

It's the penultimate lap, and there're no changes in the points.

Hamilton crosses the line to begin the last lap of the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, and Webber pits for the last time. The Australian slips off the podium, handing P3 to Button.

And Lewis Hamilton wins the 2011 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. Looks like that happy bubble might be back.

Abu Dhabi Grand Prix results

1. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren)
2. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari)
3. Jenson Button (McLaren)
4. Mark Webber (Red Bull)
5. Felipe Massa (Ferrari)
6. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes)
7. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes)
8. Adrian Sutil (Force India)
9. Paul di Resta (Force India)
10. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
11. Sergio Perez (Sauber)
12. Rubens Barrichello (Williams)
13. Vitaly Petrov (Renault)
14. Pastor Maldonado (Williams)
15. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso)
16. Bruno Senna (Renault)
17. Heikki Kovalainen (Team Lotus)
18. Jarno Trulli (Team Lotus)
19. Timo Glock (Virgin)
20. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT)

Daniel Ricciardo (HRT) RET

## F1 Abu Dhabi Blog – Sunday press conference at Yas Marina

For the first time this season, we had a post-race press conference without a Red Bull driver sitting among the top three race finishers.

Present were race winner Lewis Hamilton (McLaren), Fernando Alonso (Ferrari), and Jenson Button (McLaren).

Q: Lewis, describe your feelings after this win. It is one for you mum, hey?

Lewis HAMILTON: Yeah, absolutely. It's my mum's birthday this weekend and it is great to be able to win while she's here. I feel fantastic. I think it was one of my best races. I said that to myself as I slowed down, just being able to hold off one of the best drivers in the world throughout the race is something that is very, very tough to do. Just looking after the tyres, just managing the gap. Obviously the team did a fantastic job in the pit-stops, but I'm ecstatic. Really very happy to be back up here. This is great. I can get on my flight tonight and smile.

Q: Fernando, there is a lot of respect between you two at the moment. You had a great start today, fifth up to second, and you almost got close enough to Lewis at the second round of stops.

Fernando ALONSO: Yeah, it was a fantastic race for me as well with a very good start and then a good first lap fighting with Jenson. Obviously with the problem with Sebastian (Vettel) we found ourselves second and then we fight all through the race more or less in a distance of three to five seconds with Lewis. Then the last pit-stop we stayed two laps longer than the McLaren and we were close I think. But we had some traffic in the pit entry, behind one HRT, and I think we lost a little bit of ground. But, anyway, with the last stint I think they had a little bit more pace so even if we were able to overtake in the stop it was difficult to win the race so extremely happy with second and enjoy this weekend.

Q: Jenson, a lot of battles with Mark Webber for you but it looked a bit uncomfortable and did you radio in that you had some KERS problems.

Jenson BUTTON: Yeah, I did. I am not sure if my pace was entirely there on the soft tyres anyway. I think it was about lap 13 or 14. I didn't have any KERS basically. I had to fend off Webber and also (Felipe) Massa which is also quite interesting without KERS. Then in the next stint I was told what I could do to try and get KERS back, and at least we got it back, but it lasted for like two laps at a time and I had to keep resetting it. The problem is it is not just when you accelerate, it is when you brake. When you have KERS you have a lot of engine braking from the KERS and when you don't have it you don't have any braking performance. Every time I arrived at a corner I didn't know what I was going to get, either engine braking or not, so it was pretty tricky. But coming home and finishing third I am relatively happy.

Q: Lewis, by your own admission it has been a tough few months. Does this win put you well and truly back on track do you think?

LH: I don't know. It is early days yet but this is definitely the start of something hopefully very good. We've got another great race ahead of us in Brazil and I have just got to put my focus on that and try to keep the momentum, but you know how it goes. Anything can happen. I have just got to keep my mind on the game.

Q: Lewis, what were your thoughts when you saw Sebastian go off?

LH: I didn't know which way it was going to go, so I was just trying to avoid that. I saw immediately that something had happened to his tyre, and that's why he was going sideways. I was just making sure that I didn't collect him as he potentially [could come] across the track. After that, I just saw that I had two very quick drivers behind me and I was just trying to keep the gap. It didn't really enter my mind at all, throughout the race.

Q: As you say you tried to keep the gap: that gap remained incredibly constant up to the first stint, and then a different gap again remained stable up to the second stop.

LH: Yeah, I think it's very rare for us and for me to get the opportunity to be able to maintain a gap, to be able to control the race but today I had the pace, I was able to put in the laps when Fernando went quicker, and whenever he closed the gap, generally was able to keep it the same or pull out a little bit more. There was a point – I can't remember which stint it was – but he was closing the gap. It seemed like he would start a bit slower than me in a stint and then get faster towards the end, so his tyres would last longer but nonetheless, I'm very happy with how it went.

Q: There were one or two penalties for backmarkers: was there a problem with backmarkers more here today than elsewhere?

LH: Just to point out that backmarkers have a tough job, because firstly they're just looking ahead, they're competing for whatever position they're competing for and sometimes you just don't look in your mirrors and sometimes you're probably just not expecting to be lapped or when that's going to happen. I've been in that position before and I think some of them just didn't see because they were fighting the guys in front, but some of them were on their own and just stayed in front. I lost seconds behind certain different people, and I think Rubens overtook me with the DRS: there was nothing I could do about that. I came up back alongside him thinking 'dude, I'm in the lead, we're not racing'. He came and congratulated me afterwards so that's fine.

Q: Fernando, tell us about that fantastic start.

FA: I don't think it was so good. At the start, I think we lost a little bit of ground with Jenson, who was right in front of us in third, and we were fifth. Then we braked and we risked, on the outside of turn one, to overtake Mark, so we gained one position there. We gained one position with Sebastian's accident and then one position with the slipstream with Jenson. I think we've had better starts than today, the start itself.

Q: Again, just to ask you about the gap to Lewis each time; I guess you were pushing as hard as you could.

FA: Yeah, definitely. I think it was a time trial race, like an individual race, not against the time. I was doing like qualifying laps every lap, trying to close the gap, but one tenth up, one tenth down for the whole stint, as you said. I think we were dominated by people who were catching slower cars. When he [Hamilton] had some problems, I would maybe close the gap by like two seconds; when I had a problem, the gap increased by two seconds. We were dominated by how easy [it was to pass] or in which part of the track you caught a slow car.

Q: What are your thoughts about the next race in Brazil?

FA: I'm looking forward to it; it's the last race. To be honest, I already want to have the last the race and to think about 2012 as soon as possible, not to forget this year, because I think the year in general has been quite good for the team and in general, with some good improvements from last year, but obviously we were not able to fight for the championship. We had only one victory this year so definitely next year is a big challenge for us, and a big motivation to do better than 2011. So looking at Brazil, I think the race there will be interesting. The weather is normally a little bit unpredictable, so anything can happen there and hopefully with a possibility to fight on the podium again.

Q: Jenson, a good third place but were your worst fears about DRS confirmed or was it just compounded by the lack of KERS?

JB: Yeah. DRS was actually quite good round here, which was a pity for me. I had a couple of good battles out there during the race but it was a lot more difficult by not having KERS for a lot of the race. We found a way of getting the KERS working again but the problem was it would only last for a couple of laps and then it would stop working and there was no warning to tell me it had stopped working so I would just lose all engine braking. It was pretty tricky, so to get to the end and be on the podium, I am pretty happy with that.

Q: Were you surprised at Mark Webber's tactics?

JB: Yes, very surprised. I don't know if they thought that I had the KERS problem for the rest of the race because when I had the KERS problem I was obviously a lot slower and he was pushing me around for 15 laps. As soon as I sorted the problem out, I would go half a second quicker. I don't know. It was a strange decision to make but they also made a mistake on the first pit stop, I think, which lost them a lot of ground. I think that really hurt him and he wasn't able to really challenge after that.

Q: Lewis, how do you rate this victory after such a bad time?

LH: I don't know. I've had some interesting victories, some better than others. When I was doing the lap on the way in, I was thinking that this was definitely one of my best, just in terms of my own performance, not making mistakes. I don't feel I've made a single mistake in the race and with the things that have gone, with the pressure that I've been under and with the doubt that has surrounded me, I felt just massively proud to have put that kind of performance together and to have come out on top. I think my fans have been incredibly supportive and so have my family, particularly more so in the recent weeks and so that's made a big difference. And it's my Mum's birthday, so it makes it even better.

Q: Fernando, after such a disappointing race here last year, does the performance make it anything special for you?

FA: Well, not really. I don't think that we were thinking about last year when we came here. It doesn't change the feeling of last year when we lost the championship at the last moment to be on the podium today. As I said on Thursday, what makes this podium special is that I think I have 73 podiums now, so 73 trophies in Formula One. I have them from all the circuits that I have raced on in Formula One, so Magny-Cours, Indianapolis – circuits which we are not racing on now and I missed only one at home, and that was Abu Dhabi, because in the three years, I have never been on the podium. So now I have completed all the circuits. So, happy.

Q: Lewis, it seemed like that whole of Abu Dhabi was rooting for this win for you. Could you feel the energy and vibe in the crowd?

LH: Definitely, definitely. When we were doing the parade lap before the race, I could see that there were a lot of fans, particularly from the UK but also from here in Abu Dhabi. I was really surprised to see so much support, but it's great. It's a great spectacle, a great circuit to come to and a great country. Hopefully, it was a good race to watch. Obviously for me it was probably not too exciting to watch me go round, but I don't mind having those races every now and then.

Q: Lewis, would it have made the victory any more special if you had beaten Sebastian on track rather than him retiring?

LH: I don't know really. I will tell you when it happens. I think we were clearly very quick and it would have been very close. Sebastian got a great start – again – and was off. From turn one he got quite a good exit from turn one so he had a pretty good gap already. Every now and then, we need a bit of bad luck to notice the good times, I guess, and I don't remember the last time he had a bit of bad luck.

Q: Lewis, I just wondered if you felt that this was the first race weekend in a while when you felt like you've been able to get on top of your emotions and for them not to affect you when you've been in the car? Is that what has made the difference today?

LH: I don't know. I definitely think that this weekend I've been clearer in my mind and I've had less weighing on me, less thoughts and issues or whatever problems that I've got. I was just able to drive clearly. I think my qualifying has always been generally good and my practice has always been pretty good but obviously in the last race I had that mistake which was... I was just not thinking straight and this weekend I was able to think straight. I don't know if that's because I had some great support here or what, but it's been a positive feeling all weekend. I felt like I was on it all weekend so I just feel very fortunate to have come out and finish and had the car last and not get into any trouble.

Q: Lewis, how much could you see of Sebastian's accident. Is it possible that he was maybe too high on the kerb with a full fuel load, which maybe damaged the tyre?

LH: I could see he went through turn two and it looked like his rear tyre failed for whatever reason. He wasn't on the kerb as far as I could see. I only saw it happen after the kerb, so after the apex, but I just saw that his tyre was deflated and the right rear was squashed up on the inside of the floor and everything, so I assumed it was just a tyre failure.

Q: Fernando, could you please tell us what was going through your head in the second pit stop when you followed the HRT into the pits? Did you see possible victory slipping from your sights?

FA: We knew that maybe we could overtake the McLaren at the second stop, because when we saw Lewis pitting, we had the tyres in more or less good condition to push for another two or three laps, so we did some good timed laps, so the team was informing me that we should be OK maybe to exit in front of him or maybe on the limit, very close. But even with that, I knew that with 15 laps remaining, with the medium tyres, it was really difficult to stay in front of Lewis. Definitely, with the traffic on the pit entry, maybe we lost the opportunity to be close at the exit of the pits but I don't think that we lost the victory there. It was extremely difficult to beat the McLaren today.

Q: Jenson, you're visiting Ireland next summer for the Dublin F1 street demo on June 3. Are you looking forward to the trip and have you any sightseeing planned? A few pints of Guinness perhaps?

JB: Wow, I normally don't plan that far ahead. I'm glad. I actually did know I was going. Yeah, I'm looking forward to it. It's a fun city, I've been there a few times before and always had a good time. Yeah, looking forward to the experience, and hopefully [I'll] have a lot of support there. Looking at all the Tweets that I've had about it, there's a lot of interest so I'm looking forward to it.



LH: Are you going to keep your moustache for that?

JB: I'm not sure actually. My missus likes it so I might just carry it. I've got to shave it off tomorrow or else I might stick it to something so I can put it back on. It takes me a while to grow it.

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## Analysing the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix

Lewis Hamilton has got his mojo back. And with his mojo came his mother, who flew out to Abu Dhabi to celebrate her birthday and was rewarded with a grand prix win for her efforts.

Despite – or perhaps due to – being one of the grid's most talented drivers, Hamilton has spent the 2011 Formula 1 season facing seemingly endless criticism from the media, fans, the stewards, and his fellow drivers (most notably Felipe Massa).

The combination of raw talent and pure racing spirit found in the boy from Stevenage is something that doesn't come along very often.

Long-time racing rival Fernando Alonso can be passionate and hot-headed on track, but the Ferrari driver can also be more calculating when the occasion demands, lifting off and gathering points.

Current world champion Sebastian Vettel puts a lot of hard work into his performances, gathering data, taking notes, and analysing every aspect of his car and the circuit before going out and claiming yet another pole. It is a cool and analytical approach that reaps dividends.

Hamilton, on the other hand, is an all-or-nothing racer in the mould of Gilles Villeneuve. The McLaren driver attacks every circuit with fire in his belly. As a result, he can wrestle a dog of car to race wins, or he can crash out from P3 because a podium finish simply isn't good enough.

When he's good, he's very, very good. But when the fire goes out, when the flames are quelled by the tides of disappointment, Hamilton is a very different man. And it is the latter man we have seen for much of this season.

The combination of difficulties in his personal life, widespread media criticism, and on-track performances that haven't lived up to his high expectations have seen a loss of focus from the McLaren driver. And in over-compensating for that loss of focus, in attempting to make up positions both on track and in the championship, Hamilton has delivered a number of erratic performances that often result in a trip to the stewards' office.

The British driver admitted as much this weekend, telling reporters that he needed to create a positive bubble of friends and family around him in the paddock, giving him the headspace needed to go out and deliver on track. Was it coincidence, then, that mother Carmen was there to oversee her son's transformation?

Having tasted victory at Yas Marina after delivering what the McLaren driver called one of the best drives of his career, Lewis Hamilton was a changed man. Far from the gloomy and taciturn soul that has graced press conferences for much of this season, ever wary of his word choices in front of the waiting press, the 2008 world champion revelled in his return to form.

"I feel fantastic," Hamilton said in the post-race press conference. "I think it was one of my best races. I said that to myself as I slowed down: just being able to hold off one of the best drivers in the world throughout the race is something that is very, very tough to do.

"When I was doing the lap on the way in, I was thinking that this was definitely one of best, just in terms of my own performance – not making mistakes. I don't feel I've made a single mistake in the race, and with the things that have gone on, with the pressure that I've been under and with the doubt that has surrounded me, I felt just massively proud to have pout that kind of performance together and to have come out on top."

While there were 24 men on the grid when the lights went out at 5pm on Sunday evening, there was only one man who counted when the chequered flag fell 1h37m later. Hamilton may not have delivered a lights to flag win, but the McLaren driver dominated the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix from the moment pole sitter Sebastian Vettel retired on the second corner.

At the time of writing, the exact cause of Vettel's retirement had yet to be confirmed, although it was obvious to all and sundry that the right rear was to blame. Did the RB7 suffer hub failure, or was it a puncture that led to a sudden loss of control that saw the Red Bull driver spinning off track? By the time the German driver had limped his car back to the pits, the wheel was so damaged it was impossible to identify which element had failed first.

"To be honest, at the exit of the first corner everything seemed fine," Vettel explained to reporters in the paddock.

"As soon as I started turning in for the second corner I could feel something was odd on the rear right, and then I had to catch the car surprisingly. The second time I had to catch it I couldn't do it anymore; I'd lost too much air already on the rear right and had a puncture and spun off. On the way back I damaged the suspension so badly that we couldn't carry on."

It was the Red Bull driver's first retirement of the season, and it could hardly have been better timed. If bad luck is going to strike at any point, there's no better time to have it happen than after both world championships have been sewn up.

But back to the analysis.

While the 2011 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix offered a number of DRS-powered overtakes, thanks to the double DRS zones on offer at Yas Marina on Sunday, the endless rounds of pass and re-pass made a mockery of the concept.

Rather than offering drivers the chance to break free of the aerodynamic turbulence caused by the cars ahead, we saw an endless series of do-si-doing around corners as pairs of cars traded position for lap after lap until one man finally made a mistake. Interesting it might have been, but breathtaking it wasn't.

The Abu Dhabi Grand Prix was filled with pass and re-pass battles that must have been thrilling to take part in, but were somewhat less dramatic to watch. Paul di Resta and Sebastien Buemi started the trend, then Mark Webber made the most of it, battling with Felipe Massa and Jenson Button at various points of the race.

While on-track action is no bad thing, it starts to wear a little thin when you realise that these endless overtaking manoeuvres are going precisely nowhere. It's like eating a massive tub of buttered popcorn in lieu of dinner. Sure, the calories are there, but the nutrition and sense of being full? Not a chance.

The drama that we did see on Sunday evening largely took place in the pits. And I'm not referring to Pastor Maldonado's brief flirtation with the wall at the pit exit.

The Hamilton-Alonso battle at the front couldn't play out on track – the McLaren driver commanded the race, and managed to maintain a steady margin to the Ferrari in every stint. As a consequence, it was only in the pits – or in the pit stop strategy – that Alonso had the opportunity to get to the front of the pack.

The leading pair pitted together in the first round of stops, but Hamilton managed to hold onto his position at the front. Then, when the British driver stopped for a second time, the Spaniard stayed out on track with a view to building up enough of a margin that he would be in with a chance of returning to the track ahead of the McLaren in his own final stop.

It would have been a close-run thing whatever happened, but thanks to Daniel Ricciardo – who entered the pitlane moments before Alonso – the tiny window of opportunity slammed shut. From that point onwards, the race was Hamilton's to lose.

Webber lost out on the chance of a podium thanks in no small part to a fluffed pitstop that saw Red Bull struggle with a stuck rear wheel. The nine second delay meant the difference between P3 and P4, and meant that for the first time all season, there was no Red Bull driver on the podium.

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