

Sunday press conference

Despite having gifted those watching with one of the most thrilling grands prix in recent memory, the drivers in the post-race press conference were focused on the errors they had made on Sunday evening.

Present were Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes), Nico Rosberg (Mercedes), and Sergio Perez (Force India).

Q: What a race! Lewis, what's it like to win the 900th Formula One grand prix?

Lewis HAMILTON: It's great to see that we have such a great crowd. It's the first time we've had a night race here. I'm so grateful to the team for working so hard to get us up here. It's my first time winning here in Bahrain, it's taken me a long, long time, so I'm really proud.

Q: But what a race, probably one of the most exciting Formula One races for a long time, would you agree?

LH: Yeah, it was exciting. Nico drove fantastically well throughout the race; very fair and it was very, very hard to keep him behind, particularly at the end. I had built a gap, that was OK, but he was very fast on the option time so I was on the knife edge the whole time and a real relief when I got across the line.

Q: Congratulations, mate, fantastic race. Nico, you got the fastest lap and you helped to make it one of the most exciting grands prix I've seen for a couple of seasons, would you agree?

Nico ROSBERG: I strongly dislike coming second to Lewis, that's really not something I enjoy doing but on the other hand it was definitely the most exciting race I've ever done in my whole career. I hope we were able to give all of you fantastic racing in front of the TV. Today was a day for the sport. We put on a massive show as team Silver Arrows so I hope you had a lot of fun in front of the TV and I'll be back next race to take the win.

Q: Sergio, what was it like following these two guys and what's it like being back on the podium again? You're enjoying this aren't you?

Sergio PÉREZ: Yeah, I mean, it's been a while since my last podium. This podium is very special for me guys, I told you already on the radio. This is only my third race for the team and it was a really, really good one. The strategy was really close for us. It was looking a lot easier until the safety car came because when the safety car came in we were going on two stops so the people behind, the Red Bulls, they were on there stops but we managed to keep it just to the end: one more lap I couldn't manage to keep him back.

Q: Lewis a great battle with Nico, no other way to describe it. Just tell us how tough it is to race with a team-mate that hard and not go off and what it means to you to win it?

LH: Well, this weekend started off well and then I seemed to lose pace while Nico picked up his pace. Today, I knew I needed to get a good start and things generally went my way, except when the pace car came out. I've never won here. I won I think in Formula 3 back in 2004, so it's been a long, long time coming. The safety car came out, we had different tyres. It was one of the most difficult races... I think the last time I had a race like that would probably be Indianapolis, 2007. So, a long, long time. Nico drove fantastically well. When you're with your team-mate it's very, very hard to make the right decisions of where to put your car, where to brake, all these different things, but yeah, it was great.

Q: And Nico? Your side of the story. Obviously at the start, the outside at Turn Four and then later on you attacked him around Lap 18 and 19, again wheel to wheel for a couple of laps. At the end you had a go at it. Is it going to be like this all year?

NR: Yeah. I didn't have the best of starts. It was still good but Lewis had a little of a better one and that's the way it went. And then, yeah, I was quicker today, which I was pleased about and gave it a run. Tried to overtake at the end of the first stint, couldn't make it stick. And then we tried to invert the strategies, just to give me a shot at the end, again to overtake. That was the plan before the race so that worked out well and I tried to keep a good pace on the Prime, knowing that I'll have a shot again at the end with the Option. It was a good battle again but unfortunately couldn't make it happen today. Lewis did a good job defending but, y'know, it was a massive fight out there and that's what I'm here for. For racing like that. I think it was a good day for the sport, which is important, because of recent little bits of criticism. I think they're all going to be rather quiet tomorrow - which is a very good thing. It's good that us as Silver Arrows, we made it happen - but of course I am very unhappy with second.

Q: Sergio, it's been, let's face it, quite a tough period for you since the last time you were at the podium towards the end of 2012. What does this mean to you today?

SP: It means a lot. It's a very special podium for myself. As you say, I had a really tough time, my time in McLaren where I was basically quite far... I never have a chance to fight for a podium in all my year. Really, coming into Force India and being able to, only in my third race, to be able to qualify fourth and then straight away being able to fight for the podium was a great feeling. An amazing podium. The Safety Car makes things really hard for me. It was looking quite comfortable before the Safety Car came in and once it came it was really difficult also to switch the Prime tyre on. It was extremely hard as we had a Safety Car for a long period. So I arrive into Turn One after the restart with my team-mate... just couldn't stop the car, locked the front wheels. Tried my best to keep the position and we managed and then we had the Red Bull coming really quick at the end. Fortunately we managed to keep the podium.

Q: (Ralf Bach - Sport Bild) Nico, who took the decision that you stay out two laps longer in the first stint - and when?

NR: The team makes the decision for strategies. We did exactly the plan we discussed before the race. Everything went exactly to plan in order to give me the best opportunity to have a shot at overtaking him at the end of the race. So, it was absolutely... the team played it as fair as they possibly could today, let us race flat out. I don't think you need more evidence than you saw that we're here to race this year and there's no team orders. We want to put on an amazing show for you guys out there, and you at home, and today we managed. Of course that's the small positive, but as I said I really don't like coming second.

Q: (Paolo Ianieri - La Gazzetta dello Sport) Lewis, how difficult was it to defend with the Medium tyre against the Soft tyres of Nico?

LH: It was incredibly tough. As I said, it was one of the toughest situations I've been in for a long time. The Option tyre, for us, we believe it is worth six-and-a-half tenths. To hold that behind, to keep him out of my gap, out of my slipstream and the DRS was very, very hard. To be pushing flat out for ten laps... it was an exceptional race, I think, to be able to have that. Me and Nico haven't had a race like that since back in our karting days. I did think today, I was just saying to him today, there was a race we did years ago in... I don't know what year it was, in karting, our first race together. He

was leading the whole way and in the last lap I overtook him and won the race. I thought today for sure he's going to do the same to me, and get me back. That's what was going through my head.

Q: (Vincent Marre – Sports Zeitung) Nico, if you could have changed the strategy during the race, that was set before the race, would you or could you have done it?

NR: As I said, the strategy was exactly as planned and it was also what I wanted. I asked for that on the radio, you can listen to it in the race. I said 'make sure to put me on prime tyres for the second stint because that's the best way for me to have a shot at Lewis at the end of the race.' So in hindsight, I would do exactly the same again and it was the perfect strategy for that race. It is a slower strategy in terms of race time, yeah, but it is the one that gives me a shot at the end of the race if I have the speed.

Q: (Michael Schmidt – Auto, Motor und Sport) To both Mercedes drivers: just at the end of the safety car period, Paddy Lowe came on the radio and said to you 'bring the cars home'. For us, it sounded like 'don't attack each other,' you obviously didn't do so and then Nico, in the last two or three laps, you didn't attack any more. Did something happen there?

NR: I was well aware that the whole world was thinking 'huh, here we go, Silver Arrows team orders, finally they're there.' That was clear to me but it wasn't that at all, it was just 'guys, make sure that you get these cars to the finish. Don't break them, don't crash.' The message was clear anyway, not really necessary to give such a message because we know that, we drive very hard but in the end with the necessary respect but we're free to race all the way and in the end, I just got a bit more overheating on the tyres in the last three laps because I was pushing so hard in the slipstream, you know, with less grip, sliding a lot and so the tyres just overheated in the last three laps and I couldn't get close enough any more. And also with the hybrid, at times you have more than you have less. It's coming and going and it's difficult to be there in the right moment when you do have it. It's not that easy, so there was then a period when I didn't have enough boost power either.

LH: I don't really have much more to say but luckily my tyres didn't go off in those last two or three laps so he seemed to lose a little more than me, so just able to stay ahead.

Q: (Kate Walker – crash.net) Question to both Lewis and Nico: Nico, you were saying that being able to race hard with Lewis is the respect that you have for each other as drivers but you were able to race very very hard and very close. Do you think that having been teammates in karting gave you more of a sense of where each other was going to put their car?

NR: No. I was just pushing to the limit, going for it and just making sure we don't crash, but all the way, as hard as possible and it worked out, and at no time did I think 'we're going to...'. At no time were we at risk of taking both cars out. There was always the necessary margin, might not have looked like it on TV but there was. It was good racing.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – Universo On Line) To Nico and Lewis: that was wonderful but mainly fair. It would be nice if you could describe to us some moments... for instance, you Nico, said to yourself 'now I've got him, I've overtaken' and you Lewis 'no, he didn't get me.' Can you describe to us more details from inside the battle?

NR: I thought I'd got him about nine times but they didn't work. He always got the run back on me and he did a good job, that's it. Lewis is obviously a great driver and made it work and next time I need to do better.

(Inaudible question)

NR: Out of turn one and then he chose to go on the outside for once. Because it's difficult to see, you don't see him. I don't see where he is at times, I really don't know because there's a big dead angle in the car and so when it's so close, so many times I didn't know where he was and that's where I thought 'OK, now I've got him' and then all of sudden he reappeared again. That's it.

LH: Yeah, it was the same for me. A lot of times he was in my blind spot and I had no idea if he was there or not, so I tried to leave space. You don't know whether he's attacking or braking later into the next corner because you don't even know where he is. That was very difficult. But for me it feels like a long time that I've been able to have a real racer's race and really use whatever skills that I've acquired over the years as a youngster in karting. Being able to apply them in Formula One is a lot harder but to be able to pull them out of the bag and use them again... The time that I went round the outside or got back, just timing it right – you know, it's a fantastic feeling to be able to do that. It's one of the greatest feelings when you obviously come out on top.

Q: (Paolo Ianieri – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Lewis, do you think this could be one of the best victories of your career so far?

LH: I have to watch it back but it's difficult to really... every one is very special but of course, this one today, I think ultimately of course winning the race is the greatest thing, so I'm going to go away tonight very happy of course, but deep down inside, I didn't have the pace today and that's always still in the back of my mind and I've got to really go and work hard to try and find out what that is, because that wasn't the case in the last race. A lot of the advantages that I had in the last race Nico found them as we came here and applied them and did even better, so I've got to go now and find out what he did better than me and see if I can improve for the next race.

Q: (Cristobal Rosaleny – Car and Driver) Checo, last year was maybe your more difficult year in Formula One with McLaren. This year you have alongside you a big name like Nico Hulkenberg. Could you describe how important it is for you to be in front and taking the podium you never got at McLaren?

SP: It was very important. Obviously, when I joined McLaren, I joined a really fast team, the fastest team there of all my options back then, so when the McLaren option came to me, I didn't think twice. So I went into McLaren and I found out that we had a really tough time, a very difficult time and basically I had to... I frustrated myself very much because you come as a young driver, hoping to fight for the title, to win races and when you join a big team it's the first thing that you think of and it was not that way so I had a really tough time, more than people think, because of the fact that I had a competitive car that was able to fight for a podium. So being able to do it is a great feeling. Obviously the race, the way it paid... Yesterday qualifying was good but we were at a big disadvantage with the people behind, for example Nico Hulkenberg, my teammate, he had newer tyres than I did and at the end of the day, when we were on two stops, it makes a massive difference. He was able to stop a lap earlier and not make a difference... he jumped me, I had to jump him back and overtake the Williams. So a bit like Lewis was saying, it was a really enjoyable race, a bit like karting days when you're fighting in and out. But when you are sliding all the time and you have degradation, it was not so enjoyable towards the end of the race, but still, once you've crossed the finish line it was a great feeling for me.

Race report

Some races are destined to enter the realm of F1 myth as soon as the chequered flag falls. The thrilling 2014 Bahrain Grand Prix, won by the slimmest of margins by Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton, is one such race.

The Sakhir International Circuit played host to the desert kingdom's first night race on Sunday, and the race organisers could not have hoped for a better grand prix with which to usher in the new era of Formula One in Bahrain. The cars sparkled under the floodlights as teammate battled teammate in what can only be described as an automotive ballet.

Hamilton had built up a comfortable lead in the first half of the race, but a Safety Car brought out when Pastor Maldonado left the pits and ploughed into the side of Esteban Gutierrez, flipping the Sauber a full 360-degrees in the process, negated any advantage. In the closing stages of the race Nico Rosberg was breathing down the Briton's neck, although it is testament to the supremacy of the W05 that the pair were able to pull out a 23-second lead over the chasing cars in the final 19 laps of Sunday night's race.

At the head of the pack when racing resumed danced Hamilton and teammate Rosberg, the two men spending lap after lap racing wheel-to-wheel, each man taking and ceding advantage from corner to corner, their cars so closely positioned that a millimetre in error would have spelled disaster. But there were no errors in Bahrain on Sunday night, with both men demonstrating admirable restraint and maturity in their battle for supremacy. Hamilton held on but only just, crossing the line a breath-taking second ahead of Rosberg.

Joining the Mercedes pair on the podium – but 23 seconds behind on track – was Sergio Perez, bringing Force India only the second podium finish of the team's career. Perez' third-place came following a bullish drive from the young Mexican, who showed no remorse at barging past teammate Nico Hulkenberg and barely leaving the German enough room to stay in the race. With both men and machines unscathed, Perez charged on to the podium, while Hulkenberg was left chasing down the Red Bull of Daniel Ricciardo.

It was Ricciardo's most aggressive performance since his promotion to Red Bull, with the Australian clearly more comfortable in the RB10 than his teammate. The late-race fight for the podium with Perez was preceded by a neat overtake on the man in the other Red Bull, with Ricciardo making the most of his DRS to slip past Sebastian Vettel when racing resumed after the Safety Car. Several corners later and he made similarly short work of Hulkenberg for fourth.

Vettel crossed the line in sixth place, hot on Hulkenberg's heels. Behind the German racers were the battling Williams pair of Felipe Massa and Valtteri Bottas, delivering yet another classic example of a good intra-team fight. Prior to the Safety Car, Williams looked to be on course for a podium finish for one of their drivers, but both men were forced into an extra stop thanks to suffering high levels of tyre degradation while the track was being cleared after the Maldonado-Gutierrez collision.

Both Ferrari drivers finished in the points by the skins of their respective teeth, having spent the duration of Sunday's 57 laps defending position and not challenging their rivals. The Bahrain circuit was a particularly cruel one for the team, highlighting the Ferrari power unit's relative lack of power when compared with the class-leading Mercedes.

Further down the field it was a miserable weekend for McLaren, who saw both drivers fail to complete the race. Jenson Button was a classified finisher two laps down on the race leader, and at the back of the numbered pack in P17, while Kevin Magnussen was retired by the team as a precaution on lap 40.

Bahrain Grand Prix race result

1. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1h39m42.743s
2. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) + 1.085s
3. Sergio Perez (Force India) + 24.067s
4. Daniel Ricciardo (Red Bull) + 24.489s
5. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) + 28.654s
6. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) + 29.879s
7. Felipe Massa (Williams) + 31.265s
8. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) + 31.876s
9. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) + 32.595s
10. Kimi Raikkonen (Ferrari) + 33.462s
11. Daniil Kvyat (Toro Rosso) + 41.342s
12. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) + 43.143s
13. Max Chilton (Marussia) + 59.909s
14. Pastor Maldonado (Lotus) + 1m02.803s
15. Kamui Kobayashi (Caterham) + 1m27.900s
16. Jules Bianchi (Marussia) + 1 lap

Jenson Button (McLaren) RET
Kevin Magnussen (McLaren) RET
Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) RET
Marcus Ericsson (Caterham) RET
Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) RET
Adrian Sutil (Sauber) RET

Saturday press conference

It was three familiar faces who lined up in the post-qualifying press conference at Bahrain's Sakhir Circuit.

Present were Nico Rosberg (Mercedes), Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes), and Daniel Ricciardo (Red Bull).

Q: Nico, Lewis was ahead of you going into the crucial parts of qualifying but you managed to turn it around. How did you do it?

Nico ROSBERG: Yeah just worked well through the weekend, just planning my way and progressing, getting around some issues, understanding what set-up to go for and things like that. The challenge this weekend you know is that the free practice sessions were in such hot conditions mainly, also the one before qualifying and it's just very difficult and you have to guess sort of what the set-up is and what the car is going to be like in the colder conditions in the evening. It worked out well, I was feeling comfortable, I got my laps together. I'm very happy and it's great to start from pole.

Q: And for the second year in a row in this place. What is it about this track and you?

NR: I have very good memories from this track – in GP2 here, the championship, and also my first race in F1. I've always liked it, I enjoy coming here and again today, yeah it suited me.

Q: Lewis, a little disappointed perhaps? At the end there what happened?

Lewis HAMILTON: No to be honest I'm not. You can't always get it right. Congratulations to Nico. He's done a great job this weekend and he's been improving and picking up his pace and he had a really good at the end there for us. Obviously I made a mistake on my last lap, locked up and went straight on but generally I'm happy. I'm really proud of the team for us to continue to keep moving forward and progressing as we are.

Q: Obviously it's going to be difficult for everyone on fuel consumption tomorrow. Can you talk a little bit about the management of that through the race?

LH: Yeah it's no worse than it's ever been in the past I don't think really. There's a lot of emphasis put on it but I think it should be fine tomorrow.

Q: Thanks for that. Come to you Daniel, up in the top three again but this time you've got to move back 10 places. Your feelings on the performance and on that penalty?

Daniel RICCIARDO: Yeah really pleased with the performance. At the moment it's the best anyone else can do besides the two guys alongside me. We've still got some ground to make on them tonight. As Nico touched on it's been really tricky. You know, the temperature drops a lot for these evening sessions and as you probably saw in P3 we were a long way off the pace but it turned around this evening and it was nice to close to gap. As I say there's still more. Tomorrow, yeah, unfortunately I don't stay at the front here but it'll give me a bit of a work to do and I'll move forward from there.

Q: Talk about the race situation tomorrow. Is there much you can do on strategy to get yourself back on terms?

DR: I hope so. We've got some good guys in the office back there and I'm sure they'll do what they can to get me as far up the front as possible. I think at the moment it's pretty close between two and three stop and maybe there's a bit of room for us to try something there.

Q: Back to you Nico. The race tomorrow between you and Lewis.. The pendulum keeps swinging between you, which way will go tomorrow?

NR: Well, starting from pole is obviously a great thing but it's a whole different story, a whole different challenge awaiting us in the race, with tyre degradation the main problem, the main difficulty. But I'm confident. I had some good runs yesterday on the high fuel, so I'm confident that I can stay ahead tomorrow in the race.

Q: Nico, in Q1 neither of you needed to use a set of Softs to get through. Just talk a little bit about that margin there that you've got and the psychological advantage of having that in your pocket.

NR: Yeah, it's definitely an advantage because we're quick at the moment, especially on this track because it just suits the engine power that we have, y'know? That makes it a bit more easy to get through qualifying – but still, even the Red Bulls, even on a track like here, they've really picked up the pace and we need to keep pushing, definitely, because they're pushing fast.

Q: Lewis, Nico just mentioned the power is definitely part of it – but it's not just that is it? The advantage that Mercedes have on this circuit? It seems to really suit your car.

LH: Yeah, I think the guys have done a fantastic job with setup simulation this weekend. The car has done a lot of testing here, obviously and so it's as good as we can get the car here.

Q: Daniel, I wonder whether driving under lights for the first time in a place like this... obviously it's not the first time in Formula One or for you, but is it a bit like re-learning a circuit? Seeing it in a different complexion?

DR: It's probably not that extreme but it's nice, it's something different. I've always enjoyed driving around under the lights, even when I was young, racing go-karts in the summer back home, we had a lot of night races. It's even cool following some cars, seeing the sparks come off. It creates a little bit more excitement. I think they've done a really job here with the lighting. There's plenty of it. And, yeah, it's going to be a good race.

Q: (Paolo Ianieri – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Daniel, the other day you said 'I have to qualify first to start eleventh' so you were close, considering the two of them. What do you think you can do in the race? You have the pace to come back and perhaps think of a podium or are you too far behind?

DR: I would love to charge through and have a podium after the 57 or so laps. I think realistically we just have to get some points to start with. My season has been going well but I don't have any points to show for it so far, so I think that's the first target. But in saying that, I don't think we need to be conservative. We need to push, we are obviously out of position, starting 13th, so I will do what I can and obviously if there's an opportunity to move forward then I will take it and hopefully walk away tomorrow with some points on the board.

Q: (Vincent Marre – Sport Zeitung) To the two Mercedes drivers: how would you rate Daniel Ricciardo today, and Sebastian Vettel? Would you rate Ricciardo in front of Vettel?

NR: I don't really want to rate them. Sebastian is clearly a fantastic driver, one of the best out there and Daniel is doing a great job and definitely deserves the seat that he's got at Red Bull. It will be an interesting battle between the two.

LH: Same.

Q: (Paolo Ianieri – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Lewis, are you disappointed that you didn't grab pole after being dominant in the first free sessions and Nico, are you surprised that you got pole?

LH: Not particularly. The weekend's gone pretty well. Generally it didn't really go the right way in my car, I think. I wasn't really too comfortable at the end, much more comfortable through practice but Nico did a great job today. Naturally I'm happy that my teammate's there and no one else.

NR: For me, Lewis is tough to beat always. In qualifying, everything needs to go right to be ahead and today it worked out but my mind is on pole when I go into qualifying so that's what I'm going for. So not surprised.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – O Estado de Sao Paulo) Question to Nico and Lewis: it's clear both of you have the fastest car on the grid. Is there any agreement between you and Lewis, is there any orientation from the team concerning the start of the race?

NR: For sure, we as Mercedes AMG Petronas, the Silver Arrows in F1, we're here to race, we're here to put on a great show and so I think you could see some action tomorrow between us, hopefully not. It's very possible and we owe that to the fans, to everybody, to put on a fantastic show and that's what we will do.

LH: Yeah, as he said.

Saturday report

As qualifying got underway at the floodlit Sakhir Circuit, it looked like another shoe-in for Mercedes, who have dominated every session thus far. And while the Silver Arrows pair did not end Q1 on top of the timesheets, Nico Rosberg and Lewis Hamilton were the only drivers to make it through to Q2 on the harder compound.

The time difference on the softer compound was so great that teams were forced into making a mid-session compound switch in order to save their skins, with the likes of Esteban Gutierrez jumping straight into a comfortable top-ten position on his first timed run on softs.

At the end of the session it was the Caterham and Marussia driver pairings plus Pastor Maldonado and Adrian Sutil who failed to make the cut, although Sutil's big moment of drama took place on track, not in the dropout zone. The Sauber driver twice impeded the Lotus of Grosjean in the dying stages of the session, in an incident currently being investigated by the stewards.

The first few minutes of Q2 saw a lack of action on track before Kimi Raikkonen took an early lead. Breaking with the form set in Q1, the Williams driver pairing were some of the earliest out of the pits, but any hopes either man had of using their Mercedes power to get to the top of the timesheets were dashed when first Hamilton and then Rosberg went to the top of the timesheets.

Daniel Ricciardo popped up in P3, what would have been a strong position for the Australian had it been the final round of qualifying – following the Red Bull driver's unsafe release in Sepang he arrived in Bahrain with a ten-place grid penalty hanging over him.

In contrast, Vettel hung back in the garage for much of Q2, finally emerging with less than five minutes remaining. Also late to the party was Grosjean, the Frenchman seeking to emulate the last-minute flyer that saved his bacon in Q1.

The final moments saw all barring the Mercedes pair out on track, with Felipe Massa, Sergio Perez, Valtteri Bottas, Jean-Eric Vergne, and Gutierrez fighting for survival as Grosjean was still putting his first timed lap on the board. The Williams pair saved themselves, knocking Vettel into the danger zone with time for one more lap. But the Red Bull driver returned to the pits and was out in Q2.

Bottas was the first man to set a timed lap in the final round, but Mercedes were comfortably fastest, with Rosberg nearly one second faster than Bottas in P3, and three-tenths faster than teammate Hamilton. With seven of the cars in the top ten powered by Mercedes engines, there is no denying the Brixworth advantage in Bahrain.

The last two minutes saw all ten runners out on track, but little change to the earlier order. Rosberg claimed Mercedes' third consecutive pole, while Ricciardo will once again be joining the Silver Arrows pair in the top three.

Provisional grid

1. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1m33.185s
2. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1m33.464s
3. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1m34.247s
4. Sergio Perez (Force India) 1m34.346s
5. Kimi Raikkonen (Ferrari) 1m34.368s
6. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1m34.387s
7. Felipe Massa (Williams) 1m34.511s
8. Kevin Magnussen (McLaren) 1m34.712s
9. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1m34.992s
10. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1m34.985s

11. Nico Hulkenberg (Sauber) 1m35.116s
12. Daniil Kvyat (Toro Rosso) 1m35.145s
13. Daniel Ricciardo (Red Bull) 1m34.051s *
14. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1m35.286s
15. Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) 1m35.891s
16. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1m35.908s

17. Pastor Maldonado (Lotus) 1m36.663s
18. Adrian Sutil (Sauber) 1m36.840s
19. Kamui Kobayashi (Caterham) 1m37.085s
20. Jules Bianchi (Marussia) 1m37.310s
21. Marcus Ericsson (Caterham) 1m37.875s
22. Max Chilton (Marussia) 1m37.913s

* Daniel Ricciardo qualified in P3 but will start in P13 thanks to a 10-place grid penalty for an unsafe release at the Malaysian Grand Prix.

Friday press conference

Despite the best efforts of the bulk of those present to focus on the positives of the new season, Friday night's technical press conference in Bahrain was derailed by one team's ongoing attempt to highlight the worst of the new era of Formula One.

Present were Bob Fearnley (Force India), Luigi Fraboni (Ferrari), Paddy Lowe (Mercedes), Adrian Newey (Red Bull), Pat Symonds (Williams), and Remi Taffin (RenaultSportF1).

Q: Bob, could I start with you. It looks like you're in the battle again here this weekend behind the Mercedes. It's been a pretty decent start to the season on the whole. Two battles with the fastest Ferrari at the first two races. What do you put it down to and how do you feel about the start you've made?

Robert FERNLEY: I think it has to be testament to the team really. We were in this position really last year and unfortunately the steam was taken out of us a little bit when the tyre change came in and we had to recover from that and really play catch-up from then on. But I think this year, Otnar [Szafnauer] and Andy Green and the whole team have done a fantastic job of putting together a very competitive chassis and of course it's not an accident that we've also got the Mercedes engine, which is very helpful.

Q: For a team like yours in a the position you're currently in, how confident do you feel that you can develop along with the others and stay more or less where you are now throughout this year?

RF: I think it's always harder for a team like Force India to be able to completely keep the resources that are necessary for development. But I think we should be OK. I think we'll be alright. I think Red Bull have got a lot more to come yet and that's going to be a threat going forward. Other teams are doing a great job as well. It's only a matter of time before we're in the throes of an aero war.

Q: Coming to you now Pat. It looked very strong today, especially the long runs. But you didn't go out until quite late one. Generally though it's been a reasonably strong start to the season, you've scored 10 points twice. A very different picture from last year. Do you feel you've taken full advantage of this early competitiveness so far?

Pat SYMONDS: No, I don't think anyone in Formula One is ever satisfied with what they've done until they totally dominate and while 20 points from the first two races is a huge improvement on where we were last year, I still feel that we have the potential to do a little bit more than that. I think we've underperformed a little bit and I hope that the next couple of races will allow us to improve on where we are.

Q: There's been a lot of talk about the last race in Malaysia – the Massa and Bottas instructions. Now that you've done the analysis on that, what more can you say about that episode and possible outcomes?

PS: I think, as we've said, it's not a big deal. We could have maybe handled it better. We've learned from it and we've moved on. The drivers are happy so let's just continue with the rest of the season now.

Q: Thank you for that, Pat. Coming to Luigi Fraboni – welcome. [Luigi is] head of track engineering for Ferrari on the engine side.

Talk to us about the achievement of getting these very complex machines – the power units – operational and racing to the point we are now, particularly from where we were in testing here in Bahrain only a few weeks ago.

Luigi FRABONI: Of course for us and for all the other manufacturers of engines it was a very hard job. Honestly, looking at what we have now and what we were in the end of January, for me it is close to being a miracle. Of course the result we have achieved is due to the job of everyone in Ferrari, everyone at home and everyone here at the track. It's something that we are still developing and there are a lot of things to learn. Basically with every run you learn something and every run you try to put something in the power units for the following one. I think that for us there are still a lot of things to do but there are a lot of jobs we have already done and we are very happy about this.

Q: Talk about the strengths and weaknesses of the Ferrari power unit as you see it at the moment.

LF: Well, of course, I think it's quite early to say but in the first two races having four Ferrari engines on our side that saw the chequered flag I think is a very good result, as you said thinking about where we are in the end of January. And then so we also start to see the real reliability of the power unit because this is basically the third race for some one and they start to be above 2,000km by the end of this weekend and for sure I hope this is one of our strengths. In terms of mapping and in terms of fuel consumption I think we are in quite a good shape. Of course in terms of absolute power this is something... you can see there lap time between the car, there is a difference of speed between the cars but the difference of speed is not only the power unit. So we have some ideas. We know we have to improve on our side on the power unit but this is also car related so we'll have to do the best on this.

Q: Coming to you Remi. Same questions I asked Luigi a moment ago really: about the challenge, the achievement of going to this point. How do you evaluate from a Renault point of view?

Remi TAFFIN: I think we've made a big step from where we were one month ago. Obviously we had difficulties to get out – simply like this. I think now we can at least make our teams go out and do their programme, which is an achievement from that point of view. Obviously we keep on developing our engines and I think it's working well. Obviously it's not where would like to be but we can we have made some progress and there is still a lot to come.

Q: To get eight cars to the finish in the first two races – how do you evaluate that side?

RT: I think it's just to put on the fact that the job being done at the factory is massive. We've seen where we were at the tests – very difficult to get cars on track. So yes it's a good first thing. We always say we need reliability to make some progress and work on the power of it. So I think we've got there in terms of reliability and now we just need to develop as quick as we can. We are a bit behind schedule but we are doing as much as we can and we will see for the next two or three races how we can get up to speed.

Q: Thank you. Coming to you now Paddy. A big margin again today. Two grands prix, two poles, two wins. There's not an awful lot more you could have done up to this points, but is it more or less difficult this season do you think, with this technology, to maintain that?

Paddy LOWE: To maintain through the season, do you mean?

Q: Yes.

PL: I think we're going to see far steeper gradients in terms of performance development through this season than we've seen in the past few years because there's so much new on the cars, particularly around the power unit, a great deal more optimization that can be done on that. I see performance development being far more rapid this season. It already has been that. We've seen some great steps made by all the teams since we were last here testing. I think that will continue through the season and I think there's potential for a lot more excitement as we develop during the year.

Q: There's been a lot of talk about the new style of Formula One. What's your take on it? You've been around for a while, how do you evaluate it?

PL: I think it's very exciting. Some things have caused discussion. Always when things are different there are some people that appreciate them in different ways. I just find it exciting. I love the technology. One of the great things about Formula One as a sport is that it's not just about the athlete – the driver – it's also about the car and the technology and that. Our fans like that richness in the sport. So I hope they also appreciate what's been done on the cars and it's sort of relevance to the future in the automotive industry generally. It's very exciting. What we've seen in the past two races is that it, for me, hasn't affected the racing and the demands made on the driver. That to me seems very normal.

Q: Adrian, coming to you. At the test here things looked quite bleak for Red Bull Racing but you arrive here off the back of a podium. Can you tell us a little bit about the turnaround and how far away you think you are from victory?

Adrian NEWBY: Yeah, certainly we had a very difficult pre-season. That was down to a whole number of reasons. We didn't manage to get as much running done on the dyno as we would have liked, which is where a lot of the problems that afflicted us, you would normally sort out, from a chassis side and from an engine side. We came unprepared in many ways. We had a problem with a component overheating and with the lead time involved in some of those components it takes time to sort that out. So while we kind of figured out what we needed to do, it still takes time to do that and when tests are coming thick and fast you don't have time to come up with proper solutions between those. So I think all the guys back at Milton Keynes on our side did a fantastic job of coming up with solutions to that and Renault on their side. From a performance point of view we're clearly giving a lot away on the straights still. But there's a lot of development to be had.

Q: You've obviously worked under a lot of different types of technical regulations in your years in Formula One. How do you rank these rules among others that you've designed cars to?

AN: Ah well, that's a very complicated question is the truthful answer to that. I guess the other obvious answer to that is probably whether you have a Mercedes engine, a Ferrari engine or a Renault engine will cloud your answer to it, in truth. Such is the nature of Formula One. My opinion of it is that from a technical aspect first of all you have to question whether... the whole thing behind. When you get into things like batteries then an electric car is only green if it gets its power from a green source. If it gets its power from a coal-fired power station then clearly it's not green at all. A hybrid car, which is effectively what the Formula One regulations are then a lot of energy goes into manufacturing those batteries and into the cars which is why they're so expensive. And whether that then gives you a negative or a positive carbon footprint or not depends on the duty cycle of the car – how many miles does it do, is it cruising along the motorway at constant speed or stop-starting in a city. So this concept that a hybrid car is automatically green is a gross simplification. On top of that there are other ways, if you're going to put that cost into a car, to make it fuel efficient. You can make it lighter, you can make it more aerodynamic, both of which are things that Formula One is good at. For instance the cars are 10 per cent heavier this year, a result, directly, of the hybrid content. So I think technically, to be perfectly honest, it's slightly questionable. From a sporting point of view, to me, efficiency, strategy etc, economy of driving, is very well placed for sportscars, which is a slightly different way of going racing. Formula One should be about excitement. It should be about man and machine performing at its maximum every single lap.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) I'd like to pick up on what Paddy said and also what Adrian said. So for Bob and Pat Symonds in particular: how do you see the show? There has been a lot of talk about taxi cab driving and economy run racing and there are calls for a summit this weekend and people have said it's a fiasco. How do you two gentlemen feel about it?

RF: I'm not aligned with Adrian or Luca [di Montezemolo] actually on this one – obviously Adrian just now and Luca previously. For me what we're representing today in Formula One is the peak of technology available in automotive and I think it's a very exciting concept. I think the fans are very much more sophisticated today than they ever have been and whilst noise is one element of it, I don't believe that's the be all and end all. I think there's a lot more to it and I think we're going to find that the fans are going to embrace this as we go on in the years to come. So I'm very pro the technology and the challenges that it's given the teams. I think all teams have done an amazing job and the manufacturers to bring this in in the time that they have. So from my side it's a good thing and I think that it's great that we're seeing cars that are difficult to drive, that are on the limit, that are

breaking away at the rear end, which is something that we've not done for a long, long time, so I think the show is good. Also one thing that is important is that Honda are coming in next year and it's the first time we've had another major motor manufacturer coming back into Formula One for a long, long time, so that's a tick in the box that says that actually Formula One has got it right.

Q: Pat?

PS: I think as a business we ought to focus on the positives and I think that the technology that we're employing in Formula One now is impressive. The road car industry – rightly or wrongly – has to hit CO₂ per kilometre targets and those are very difficult targets to meet. And they will have to employ technologies such as we are using in Formula One. So we are moving things forward, we are more relevant than we used to be and I think that's very important. I think there was a great danger – and I mentioned this in one of these press conferences last year – that we would become irrelevant. We would become the focus of gas-guzzling and not having social responsibility. And I think it was really important that we did move away from that. And you've got to remember that the seeds of this were sown many, many years ago, before the world economic recession hit which of course has had a bearing on things. And now we're in a good place and I think as a business we should focus on the positives. I think many people from the UK will remember a guy called Ratner who basically killed his business by negative comments on it. I think we should be positive. We've done something good and we should tell the world about it.

Q: (Abhishek Takle – Midday) Question to all six of you. Formula One at the moment seems to be an engine-based formula where engines are acting as a performance differentiator. As the season goes along do you expect those performance gaps to disappear to the extent that the sport will once again be an aero-based formula?

LF: It's part of the thing that we were saying before. Now, for sure, this year there is the new power unit so the difference is bigger than in the past due to the fact that the project is at the beginning. I'm sure that during the season things are going to close up because there is a lot of learning. And what you are doing is improving every race. I am sure that every engine manufacturer will do the maximum to get the maximum performance from what they have. Of course the engine is frozen, I mean we know the power unit is frozen so you can have just modification for the reliability but I think there is still a margin. The other thing, as you said, the aerodynamics is free, so that you do a lot of things with this so about this Ferrari and the other teams will be working very strongly because there are a lot of things that you can gain on this point.

RT: I think if we look at the timing sheet we've got, for example today or the first two races you can clearly see that you have got the three engine manufacturers which are putting engines in cars that are in the top ten, so I think we already have this championship going on, and we've got the engine championship too. Whether we're going to have a champion, I don't think so because there is no championship for engines but as my colleagues say, there will be a lot more development through the year. I think we still have a lot to come so obviously we will get with some parameters I think will be leveling I think to the top. And that's always the same story. We will just be trying to do as much as we can and we will see what we get later in the season.

BF: I disagree. I think if it was an engine formula you would have all four Mercedes teams at the top and they're not. Ferrari-engined cars and Renault-engined cars are competing very strongly in the top end of the grid and already you've got differentials coming in with aerodynamics, so I think it's a mix of performance that delivers.

PL: Yeah, I agree with Bob. I mean, I think that already the evidence is that we are seeing differences in engine and aerodynamics and the rest of the chassis playing out. I think the nice thing about this season is that we have added the new element of competition among the power units. Because the differences between power units in the last few years has been very, very marginal. So I think it's good to see Formula One providing a more rounded competition in terms of the car as a whole – including the power unit.

AN: I think when we talk about the power unit we talk about it by manufacturer. We should also include the fuel company of course. I think you'll find within an engine, depending on what fuel it uses there can be very significant differences. That can also create differences. We certainly can see that in our own GPS analysis between our rivals that some appear to have significantly more power than others, even though they have the same engine. At the moment I think it is an engine formula that has tended to reshape the grid more than anything else, compared to last year. How that develops as we move forward is unclear.

PS: I think the power unit is probably more significant at the moment than they were last year – but I think within the rules the idea of having a maximum fuel flow is driving everyone to efficiency rather than just how much air can you get into an engine. So I think, to answer your question, I think they will tend to equalise – but you know Formula One is always going to be an aerodynamic formula and I don't think that will change significantly in the years to come.

Q: (Edd Straw – Autosport) Adrian, you touched on the engine regs. Hypothetically, if you had a clean sheet of paper, and in broad terms, what sort of engine regulations do you like? Would you like something quite prescriptive like last year's engine regs? Would you like something wider so that teams and engine manufacturers can explore different energy-efficient technologies that might perhaps drive road car technology even further than the current technology?

AN: I think it's a very difficult question to answer. Don't get me wrong, I'm not suggesting we should go back to gas-guzzlers as Pat called them – although actually the V8s were extraordinarily efficient. But, it seems to me that what we have done is create a set of regulations which, whilst technically interesting, I still question whether it gets all the compromises right. Ultimately, then there is a relationship between cost, weight, aerodynamics... all sorts of factors if you're going to go into road relevance. How you weigh that, how you proportion it is impossible for an open-wheeled single-seater. It's a very different beast. So no easy answer. We've got for a package which is very complicated, very expensive. The cost of the power unit has at least doubled compared to last year, which is difficult for some of the smaller teams, so it's a very complicated balance I think is the honest truth, outside this Friday Five meeting.

Q: (Luc Domenjoz – Le Matin) It seems that some cars have trouble meeting the minimum weight requirements so the question to the technical directors is: did you set specific weight requirements to your drivers, and what do you think of the fact that some drivers do not drink any liquid during the race just to save an extra kilo?

PS: Yeah, one of our drivers is on the heavy side, Valtteri, and we did over the winter ask him to, certainly maintain weight and in fact perhaps lose a kilo or two but I'm happy to say that we don't have a weight problem on our car so the drivers are allowed to have a drink bottle in there. We do carry ballast on the car, we're pretty happy with things.

AN: We're certainly right on the edge of the weight limit with both drivers and our drivers are on the lighter end. I think the power units have come out heavier than expected and that's putting a lot of pressure on the teams. It's another hidden factor that drives the cost up because saving weight tends to be a very expensive business.

PL: The job of a driver getting to his optimum weight has always been there and the thing is you always want the driver at the lowest weight possible while maintaining his health and fitness because he needs to drive properly through the whole race. That's a training task so our drivers have pursued that over the winter just as normal to make sure they're at that optimum. There's no issue that I'm aware of in terms of drinking during the race. You need to drink to stay healthy.

Q: (Michael Schmidt – Auto Motor und Sport) Remi, you introduced on two of your teams today a second generation of engine. Does this apply for all six components or was only part of the components new?

RT: I think you will have the answer quite soon from the FIA papers that you will receive maybe tomorrow. It is of course a brand new V6 we introduce but I will not go into details at that moment. You will know tomorrow.

Q: (Vincent Marre – Sports Zeitung) We have seen now the differences between the engine. My question is, let's assume – just assume – that at the end of the season you will achieve 100 per cent of the potential of your engine. What per cent are you today in the round, in terms of performance of this engine?

LF: If I look at what we have done in these two months, I think that we are already at 70-80 per cent of the potential. I hope we will get the rest in the

next two months. I am confident of this.

RT: I think it's a very, very difficult question. Whether to know what is the potential we've got in the engine at the right time here, we know.

Whether we will be at that potential tomorrow, I hope we will be much further than that, so it's very difficult to answer. Let's put it this way: we know we have quite a lot of potential and we can't get the most out of it. Maybe it's 20 or 30 per cent, we don't know. But of course I think we will have, I hope, another 20, 30 per cent more by the end of the year. It's all the difficulties to know where we're going to get to by the end of the year – and that's the work with this new power unit. We just keep on developing and sometimes you will find out something completely different and you get the lap time out of it. It's part of the game.

PL: It's something very difficult to quantify. Obviously there's a lot to learn in this early stage so we will make improvement through the year – but I couldn't put a number on that.

PS: It depends what you mean by potential. If by potential you mean power, I don't think we're going to see a huge difference in the ability to produce power in a qualifying lap. I think we will see some improvements in average power through a race where the fuel limit comes in as well. Cooling balance, I think we'll see improvements there. Driveability, we'll see improvements there. Potential is a very wide subject. I think your question is: if we said the end of the season is 100 per cent, where do we think we are now? Well, I don't know how to put a number on something that is so broad but I certainly hope we will see improvements in every area during the season. This is a very immature technology so one would expect the learning curve to be quite steep.

AN: No, everybody has already said it.

BF: No, it's an engine technical process, that.

Q: (Chris Lyons – AP) Question for Bob. There's certain teams agitating behind the scenes for a review of the regulations, a review of the rules. There are expected to be meetings this weekend about that. How worried are you about the chances of those teams being successful and agitating for a change. And also those meetings will probably address a spending cap as well. How optimistic are you that we can get a spending cap introduced in time for next season.

BF: I'm hopeful that the FIA are going to drive forward from the meetings that we had Geneva at the beginning of the year where all the teams were present and all teams agreed to progress to cost control. And the FIA have got clear direction on that and how they hopefully can achieve it. Whether that is derailed or not, it's not something that Force India will have anything to do with. We're one of the six disenfranchised teams. We don't have a say in Formula One and I think it's totally unacceptable.

Q: (Daniel Johnson – The Telegraph) Why do you think the narrative around these new rules has been such a negative one, and if there are going to be changes that could be made or that people want made, what changes would you like to be made, and do you think any are possible during this season?

PL: Yes, well it's interesting you say that and I was very interested in Pat's Ratner comment because we've seen a little bit of that going on and I don't understand it because I think there are so many positives around this formula. For an engine to deliver similar power to last year, with more than 30 percent less fuel consumption I think is just an incredible achievement and it's something we should celebrate. If at the same time, from our perspective, the racing is just as it was, I don't understand either the stories about economy drives etc. Formula One has always been a formula in which you had to manage your fuel through the race. For us, that's not different, so there are good stories around fuel saving whilst maintain the spectacle and I think we should be talking more about that.

AN: It's a big subject and I guess ultimately the spectators and the television viewers are going to vote with their feet. What we waste words saying in here won't make much difference in truth. The old classic Coke completely turning Coke around compared to Pepsi in the States so you can always skin these things various ways. I think obviously all the talk is about the engines, as mentioned earlier, it's not just about creating a formula which looks at how many litres of fuel you use per kilometre with everything else fixed, because everything else isn't fixed in reality. If you go into the real world, cost isn't fixed, the cost has gone up hugely to create this. As I said before, if you put that cost into weight saving, you might be better off in many cases so to automatically say that this is some huge benefit for mankind I think is taking a bit of a big leap myself.

PS: As I said earlier, I have found it disappointing that there are so many negative comments about the new formula. We've had two races, that's not much of a sample. I think the racing could improve but I don't think that's to do with power units and things like that. I think there are lots of other things. The tyres have changed very significantly this year but I think the thing that Formula One really needs to face up to is costs, it is costs that is going to kill Formula One and that should be the most important thing on our agenda right now.

LF: Well, my point of view even if there is a rule that now you could have good races, if you have a nice fight between drivers, the cars more or less arrive at the same point, and the other thing I have to say, is that we all know that we have been fuel saving for years so we don't have to be surprised that we are fuel saving now. We raised this point years ago. For sure, depending on the point view, technically speaking it is a big challenge for us and working on this I am very pleased because it is a very high level of technology and high level that we need to reach. The point I want to say is that you can have good races with these rules, I guess.

RT: I will make it short. I would not change anything from now. We've had so many changes that we need to focus on these ones and it's enough work for us.

BF: I think the whole thing just started with the noise really to a certain degree and it's probably escalated with some of the challenges that everybody faced through the testing process. I think everybody's just done an amazing job. I genuinely believe that the fans will embrace it going forward. I think it's an exciting new world and something that Formula One can be very proud of.

Q: (Michael Schmidt – Auto, Motor und Sport) The lap times are between two and four seconds slower than last year: how much is in the new power units, how much in the reduced aero and how much in the harder tyres?

PL: So you want a breakdown of that reduction you mean? It's probably pretty split on all those three, if you're saying it's two to four seconds.

Probably equal across all of those three, but it's a new formula and we will develop... you know, by the end of this season, we may well be back to where we were in lap times.

PS: I think I agree. I haven't sat down and split that out because it's academic but of course, you've got to remember the tyres are very significantly different. We're seeing a big difference in lap times between the compounds, particularly here, which accounts for an awful lot of that difference, but yes, it won't be far off equal, I'm sure.

AN: Ditto really. I guess from a tyre point of view, Pirelli are probably best placed to give their estimate of that. On the aero side, yes of course we have lost some, because this isn't a maximum wing level circuit, then it's a relatively small difference because the aerodynamic efficiency of the cars hasn't dropped a lot. What has dropped is the load they can give at maximum downforce, maximum wing level and of course, I'm assuming – because I haven't looked for myself – that you're referring to a low fuel, qualifying-type scenario. Race difference will be much more than that. The cars are going a lot slower and that should be factored in when we talk about the whole... OK, they're using 50 kilos less fuel but they're going a lot slower to achieve that.

Q: (Kate Walker – crash.net) To all of you: in recent days we've seen some speculation about a consortium involving teams taking partial ownership of the sport. To what extent do you think that teams having a financial stake in the sport would secure its long term future and if given the opportunity, would you recommend that your teams invested?

BF: I think the answer's yes. I've always been a believer that Formula One should have some form of ownership from the teams. It locks the teams in, it makes decision-making from a commercial point of view... it serves the commercial rights holder better, longer term and therefore yes, Force India would be in favour of participation of ownership.

PL: I agree. In an ideal world the sport would be owned in part at least, by the teams: whether it's realistic to jump to that scenario from where we are at the moment I don't know.

AN: Yes, I think the fact is that for many of the teams on the grid, the financial position is extremely difficult for them and one has to believe that there is, within the sport, the money to support those teams. It would be good to find a way to achieve that.

PS: The teams are significant stakeholders in the business and that should be reflected, I think.

LF: My point of view... don't have a realistic view on this. I can say for sure that what we say here, the ??? is a lot of money. So for Ferrari it is different than for many teams. This is a fact.

Q (Edd Straw – Autosport) Adrian, how satisfied are you with the stat that you've seen with the Renault engine this weekend and when, realistically, do you think you will have a power unit package which will allow you to really take the fight to Mercedes on relatively level terms rather than just trying to hang on to the back of them?

AN: Well, I don't think we've actually got anything particularly different this weekend but in reality, I think you should be asking the person sitting behind me.

RT: I think the short answer is as quick as we can but obviously it's not as easy as that. We've obviously had a bad start through winter testing but we're recovering and obviously we've got a plan, we think that when we come to back to Europe we will be in better shape and then we will just try to keep on it. It's not as easy as that, because obviously we've got the frozen rules, we can change parts of the engine for reliability but it's fair to say that we think that our engine has got the potential and we'll still need to get the most out of it so the more we get out of it, obviously the more Adrian will be happy and it's fair to say that we're trying to do our maximum, we're working with Red Bull and the other teams and we hope by quite soon we will be there.

Q (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) To the front row and Bob if you'd like to comment as well. Earlier on, Paul Hembery was saying that next week they'll be developing for the 2015 tyres and that one of the aspects was the ban on tyre warmers. Are you people in favour of it and what sort of difficulties do you foresee because he said one of the things that may have to happen is low profile tyres to reduce the amount of air in the tyres?

PS: I think that there are two aspects to the ban on tyre blankets. I think it started as a sort of cost-saving thing which is perhaps questionable. Yes, the blankets cost some money, shipping them around the world costs some money but using a Formula One car to heat up tyres costs an awful lot more. That said, I rather like the idea of having to manage the tyres in a different way. I think it would be good if a car comes out of the pits and it doesn't automatically keep the position that it's got, that it has to fight for it. We see that in GP2 and I think it does improve the spectacle. I do think that the biggest problem is that we're going to see probably a nine psi increase in tyre pressures between the minimum that we have to go out on and with the – let's face it – rather old fashioned high profiles that we use, that's quite significant. If we had a lower profile tyre with a stiffer side wall and a lower volume of air cavity, it would certainly be much easier to manage.

AN: I think Pat's summed it up very well there. I don't think I have much to add.

PL: It's been an idea discussed over many many years actually, in TWG, and the real challenge is about the pressure increase that you have with the temperature and what that causes is a real problem, is the cold pressure, having a safe cold pressure that is then properly policed, given that the hot pressure will be well above the optimum for the tyre. That's the real problem you've got to deal with. We actually tested the tyre without blankets in February when we were here at the Bahrain test and we were quite surprised how quickly it came in, actually. There had been a belief it would take two or three laps or so, but you could get a lap going first timed lap, so that was a pleasant surprise but it doesn't take away the problem of the pressure that I mentioned, so that would have to be solved.

PS: We did the same test and I agree, it did come in quicker than we might have imagined, but it wasn't there leaving the pits, it was during that first lap that it came. We are tyre testing next Wednesday for Pirelli and we are running some more tests with tyres that haven't been in blankets so I think next week we will know a lot more.

PL: I'm thinking about the low profile, and introducing that is a very non-trivial task in terms of engineering and cost so not an easy one.

BF: I think it's been put very well by the guys in front. I'm quite excited about the spectacle of drivers on the limit for a lap while they get the tyres in so I think it adds to the show.

Friday report

Mercedes continued their run of strong form at Bahrain's Sakhir Circuit on Friday afternoon, with Lewis Hamilton topping the timesheets, closely followed by teammate Nico Rosberg. It was the Mercedes-powered teams who had the advantage, with four of the top five using Brixworth engines, and six of the top ten.

It was a fairly incident-free FPI, with the only real moment of note coming courtesy of Ferrari, who sent Fernando Alonso out of the garage with three mediums and one soft tyre. But the team noticed their mistake in good time, wheeling their driver back into the pits for a quick fix before he started his outlap.

Three reserve drivers had their first outing of the season in Bahrain, with Felipe Nasr showing well for Williams, only half a second down on teammate Felipe Massa by the end of the 90 minute session. Giedo van der Garde also did a decent job for Sauber, down at the lower end of the timesheets but only 0.3s slower than Adrian Sutil. And at the back of the pack it was the highly-rated Robin Frijns who schooled Marcus Ericsson, the reserve lapping 0.3s faster than the race driver.

When the pitlane opened for FP2, night had fallen over the desert track. For the first time on the F1 TV feed, the floodlit Sakhir Circuit was visible to the public.

Mercedes continued to dominate on Friday evening, with pace-setter Hamilton one second clear of Fernando Alonso in third place. FP2 was more action-packed than the opening practice session of the Bahrain Grand Prix weekend, featuring retirements, mechanical troubles, and a couple of near misses on track.

Lotus managed to bank a decent amount of running, but did not find the pace that has been sorely lacking this season. Romain Grosjean complained of misfires from his Renault engine, while Pastor Maldonado went airborne in a Turn 4 incident that left car and driver unharmed.

Caterham, Marussia, and Sauber all had struggles to contend with – Max Chilton span out of the session after losing drive, while Adrian Sutil and Marcus Ericsson both saw their evenings come to a premature end as the result of as yet unspecified technical problems.

The sense in the paddock is that there's still more to come from Mercedes, who are likely to repeat their recent run of poles during Saturday's qualifying.

FPI times (unofficial)

1. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1m37.502s [14 laps]
2. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1m37.733s [13 laps]
3. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1m37.953s [17 laps]
4. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1m38.122s [10 laps]
5. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1m38.636s [16 laps]
6. Kimi Raikkonen (Ferrari) 1m38.783s [12 laps]

7. Kevin Magnussen (McLaren) 1m38.949s [15 laps]
8. Daniil Kvyat (Toro Rosso) 1m39.056s [24 laps]
9. Sergio Perez (Force India) 1m39.102s [21 laps]
10. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1m39.389s [16 laps]
11. Felipe Massa (Williams) 1m39.533s [11 laps]
12. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1m39.862s [26 laps]
13. Felipe Nasr (Williams) 1m40.078s [14 laps]
14. Daniel Ricciardo (Red Bull) 1m40.406s [19 laps]
15. Adrian Sutil (Sauber) 1m40.652s [20 laps]
16. Pastor Maldonado (Lotus) 1m40.793s [31 laps]
17. Jules Bianchi (Marussia) 1m40.889s [20 laps]
18. Giedo van der Garde (Sauber) 1m40.913s [20 laps]
19. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1m41.036s [24 laps]
20. Max Chilton (Marussia) 1m41.794s [20 laps]
21. Robin Frijns (Caterham) 1m42.417s [35 laps]
22. Marcus Ericsson (Caterham) 1m42.711s [21 laps]

FP2 times (unofficial)

1. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1m34.325s [28 laps]
2. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1m34.690s [31 laps]
3. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1m35.360s [28 laps]
4. Daniel Ricciardo (Red Bull) 1m35.433s [28 laps]
5. Felipe Massa (Williams) 1m35.442s [13 laps]
6. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1m35.528s [21 laps]
7. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1m35.606s [29 laps]
8. Daniil Kvyat (Toro Rosso) 1m35.640s [31 laps]
9. Kevin Magnussen (McLaren) 1m35.662s [22 laps]
10. Sergio Perez (Force India) 1m35.802s [40 laps]
11. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1m35.920s [9 laps]
12. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1m35.972s [32 laps]
13. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1m35.998s [18 laps]
14. Kimi Raikkonen (Ferrari) 1m36.366s [32 laps]
15. Adrian Sutil (Sauber) 1m36.962s [13 laps]
16. Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) 1m36.975s [35 laps]
17. Pastor Maldonado (Lotus) 1m37.259s [24 laps]
18. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1m37.599s [23 laps]
19. Jules Bianchi (Marussia) 1m37.800s [15 laps]
20. Max Chilton (Marussia) 1m38.247s [10 laps]
21. Kamui Kobayashi Caterham) 1m38.257s [33 laps]
22. Marcus Ericsson Caterham) 1m39.136s [30 laps]

Thursday press conference

It was a short and sweet Thursday press conference in Bahrain, with the drivers looking backwards, not ahead to the season to come.

Present were Jules Bianchi (Marussia), Jenson Button (McLaren), Marcus Ericsson (Caterham), Romain Grosjean (Lotus), Nico Hulkenberg (Force India), and Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso).

Q: Jenson, if we could start with you. Obviously you'll reach 250 grand prix this weekend - congratulations on that. Later this year I guess you'll become the third most experienced grand prix driver of all time. Maybe your thoughts on that what lessons you've learned along the way.

Jenson BUTTON: I've learned a lot along the way, as you can imagine, racing for 14 years in Formula One. The thing that surprises me is how quickly it goes by. Fifty races ago I was in Hungary, celebrating my 200th grand prix, which I won by the way! So, it's amazing how time flies. You really do have to enjoy every moment of it as much as you can. For me, being 14 years in the sport, I still feel like I have more to learn. I'm definitely not the perfect driver yet, and I never will be, but there is always still more to learn. That's something, for me, that's exciting about the sport. New regulations obviously are changing the sport quite a lot, especially with these new regulations, and again, you always have more to learn. For me that's what keeps the sport exciting and that's what has kept me on my toes for the last 14 years and hopefully for many more.

Judging from the first two races and also from some of the messages from the team, it seems that McLaren is a bit better perhaps in the cooler conditions than it was in the heat of Malaysia. What are you expecting this weekend - we're in a warm place but it's a night race?

JB: Well, we have a good engine, which helps us here. There isn't as much high speed as Malaysia and Malaysia was also hot. So hot and high-speed corners are tricky for us. It's an area we know we've got to work on, high-speed downforce. So, here it should be quite a bit better. Fuel consumption is pretty tricky here though, I think for everyone, some more than others for some reason. There's a lot of work needed before the race to get the right balance for a night race - our first night race here, which should be pretty interesting.

Q: Coming to you Marcus. Obviously your first Formula One finish, in Malaysia - congratulations on 14th place? Can you describe your feelings and the progress at Caterham?

Marcus ERICSSON: Yeah, it was a good feeling to finish my first F1 race. I think we have done good progress. It's been a tough, a difficult year so far, with the problems we had in pre-season and then Australia was obviously a very difficult weekend for the whole team. But we've been working really hard and making progress all the time, which is the key for us. To have both cars finishing in Malaysia in our home race was a great effort from everyone. Hopefully now in Bahrain we can continue to work forward and first of all a trouble-free Friday, so we can start setting up the car and then see what we can get from the set-up.

Q: I wonder if being a rookie in a year with such new and complex machinery proved harder or easier than you expected?

ME: It's been quite hard because especially in pre-season there were quite a lot of issues. So it was difficult to get ready for it before you arrive in Australia, with very limited running. So I wouldn't say it's easier but it's been alright.

Q: Jules, coming to you, obviously a very frustrating first couple of grands prix for you in Australia and Malaysia, with very few

race laps. But the car seems to have run OK the rest of the time. I wonder what your feelings are at this point?

Jules BIANCHI: Yeah, obviously the feeling is not the best. We are trying very hard to improve everything. For sure the car is running well at the moment. We had a small issue in Australia before the start but now it's fine all that. Another issue on the first lap in Malaysia but actually we don't have big problems on the car, so this is the positive thing and now we have to have everything going well for the next races.

Q: As Jenson was saying it's the first time we have a night race here in Bahrain. I wonder what your thoughts are on that and how it will add to the challenge of racing here?

JB: Well, obviously the lights will be good, as it's always good on night races in Formula One, so I don't expect that to be a big challenger. But it will be good to have a night race in Bahrain. I think it will be a nice one for us.

Q: Nico, obviously the last two grand prix, two fantastic battles with Fernando Alonso and Ferrari. Give us some insight into those two battles and what it's been like from your cockpit.

Nico HULKENBERG: Well, I think Australia was not quite a battle. I was just driving in front of him and he overtook me by strategy. And in Malaysia there was not much I could offer in the end. I was struggling on my tyres: he was on a fresh set of softs. Still I was trying to make him work a little bit for the move. But it was always clear that he, coming two second a lap at me, that I don't have to offer so much. But I think a really positive start to the season for us at Force India. Eighteen points for me already, which is good. I feel we have a good foundation but we need to keep pushing and I need to keep the momentum up because it's a good opportunity to collect good points this early in the season.

Q: This race last year was obviously one of the strongest for Force India last season. Is there much optimism within the team going into this weekend's race?

NH: Absolutely. The whole team is very positive, everybody is working in the right direction. We had two strong races, we're basically trying to keep the races and keep plugging away at good results. I think here this weekend here is a little trickier. In Malaysia, we had surprisingly good performance on Sunday maybe stronger than we expected. We were quite clear on McLaren and Williams, which was a little bit of a surprise, but I think here things might be a bit more tricky and a bit more tight.

Q: Jean-Eric, double points finish for Toro Rosso in Australia, Daniil Kvyat in the points in Malaysia: is it fair to say Toro Rosso has started this season on the front foot, feeling competitive?

Jean-Eric VERGNE: Yeah, I think Toro Rosso has done a massively good job during the winter and even before that, produced a good car and I believe there is still a lot more to come from this team. Many things have changed in a good way and you can definitely feel it inside the team and I'm really happy, they've showed some really good results. I think if I didn't have a problem, I think we could have finished again in the points, a double points finish in Malaysia as well, and that's what we're going to try and do here in Bahrain. But overall, I think it's a good start but the good thing is that I'm sure there is a lot more to come.

Q: Speaking of changes, can you talk a little about the changes that you've made, in that some of the people you're working with, the way you're going racing this year?

JEV: I've changed many things, I would say. I will not go into much detail but I needed to change my approach a little bit and I think the changes that I've made have been in the right direction. I feel better as a human being and as a racing driver as well, and enjoying more of what I do: I can see that already inside the team, outside the track and on the track. As for the team, I think I still have a lot more to give, so it's all positive so far.

Q: Romain, obviously 11th in Malaysia, close to the points but not quite there. It's been a real up and down couple of Grands Prix for you. I wonder if you could describe your emotions and how they've evolved over the last couple of races.

Romain GROSJEAN: Yeah, I won't say exactly everything I could say inside my helmet sometimes. I think it was good for all the guys that we could finish the Malaysian Grand Prix. Of course it was not the way you would like to see when you start a Grand Prix but at the moment that's where we are plus we were not that far from the points. I think without a small issue at the end of the race, we could probably have got closer and maybe fight for points but it was good and as I said, the guys had three nights in Melbourne when they didn't sleep, all that for not a big reward. And then we went to Malaysia and again, they worked very hard and we all know it's humid and hot there so conditions were tough but we managed to get to the end of the race. I think we learned more about our car and we wish from now on that we get troublefree weekends as was the case on Saturday and Sunday and then from there we can learn, improve and get closer to where we would like to be.

Q: Do you feel that the team is on a path back to where it was: how long is it going to take?

RG: Yeah, I don't know, to be honest. I know that we still have in our genes the winning spirit and we can still fight back. Of course, when you start the season with everything in the right direction it's easier to move forward but at the moment we've had some issues, we've solved most of them, hopefully no more coming, then we can go from there. Of course, Renault is well aware that the power unit needs to improve a little bit compared to certain other manufacturers, but I think it's going to be good and we can work on our car.

Q: (Vincent Marre – Sports Zeitung) Jenson, in all the seasons that you've been racing now, which car has been the most memorable for you? Not the year or the season but the specific car. There must be one.

JB: There have been quite a few, for different reasons. 2009 obviously was good, it was the year I won the World Championship so an enjoyable car to drive. I liked the big front tyres that we use to have as well. 2011 was good fun. It was quite difficult because we had the blown diffuser that everyone had but it was quite unusual to drive, but when you got used to it, there was so much downforce, it was pretty awesome. But then if you look back, 2004 was also a great year: V10 engines, 900 horsepower, revving to 20,000rpm. Obviously there was a tyre war then as well. Most of the lap times that were achieved then, the fastest laps, have not been beaten in ten years. That was a pretty special car to drive as well. All very different eras in the sport, if you like. It's great to have been around through the V10, V8 and now the V6 periods. I think it's been some exciting times that I've had in my career.

Q: (Luis Fernando Ramos – Racing Magazine) To all drivers: in less than one month, motor sport will pay tribute to Ayrton Senna on the 20th anniversary of his passing. I would like you to recall what impact that Sunday at Imola had on your lives and the ones who were too young to remember, maybe how Ayrton Senna relates to you as a driver?

NH: What that Sunday had, the impact of that Sunday? Not many memories, it was just my first contacts with motor racing and therefore I can't really remember so much of it but obviously having heard a lot of stories and have seen a documentary, obviously he was a very passionate guy about the sport, about racing and was always pushing the limit very hard.

JB: Obviously I was four years old when this happened, so I don't remember many things but let's say I remember just the fact that all the people were loving him so this is what I remember the most.

JEV: Same as Jules. I was four years old so I have absolutely no memory of this but obviously it took me a few years to realise who he was and what he has done for the sport. I think everybody has a massive respect for this guy. Obviously I love all the sportsmen that changed the philosophy of world sport, like Michael Jordan in basketball: I believe he is part of the really big sportsmen of any kind of sport, Ayrton Senna, and I think that's why everybody loved him.

ME: Yes, the same, I was four years old so I don't remember anything but obviously he was a great driver and a great person from the look of it. When you watch the documentaries and stuff like that, you can see how great he was both on and off the track.

RG: Yeah, I think it was the first or second year that I was starting to watch Formula One and of course it was Prost and Senna when I started watching in '94. I remembered that Sunday, I was watching the race with my Dad and I didn't understand what exactly was going on and why the race was stopped and it was so long. And then, well, I found out a little bit later and of course, Ayrton has been part of the sport... Again, I started watching Formula One when he was fighting with Alain, I think it was a great era and they were fantastic drivers.

JB: I wasn't four years old, I was fourteen years old, still very young obviously but I was racing in Italy that weekend, karting, I had just started racing there so it was a massive shock. Basically the kart meeting was over as soon as we heard the news from Imola. A horrific day for everyone but as the guys said, sometimes it takes something like that – a terrible tragedy – to really change the sport for the better and in terms of safety for us guys, it's had a very big impact.
