

F1 Abu Dhabi Blog - Sunday press conference

Far from resting on his laurels after securing his fourth straight title, Sebastian Vettel drove like a man possessed on Sunday evening in Abu Dhabi, so keen was he to attend another post-race press conference.

Present were Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull), Mark Webber (Red Bull), and Nico Rosberg (Mercedes).

Q: Sebastian, seven in a row, 11 so far this season. They're going to charge you rent on this top step soon.

Sebastian VETTEL: Yeah, I don't mind. I also did some donuts so...

Q: You are a naughty boy, that's going to cost somebody some money ...

SV: No, I don't think so because this time I bought the car back so it's fine. As you can see it's in parc ferme. No, it's incredible. Thanks to all the fans, the atmosphere today. Twice, we have this complex around Five, Six and Seven and then around Eight and Nine, along the straight to Turn 11. So many people, so many German flags, so nice to see and to get so much support. More and more for Red Bull so I hope that kicks up more in the next years. The car was absolutely brilliant. Absolutely brilliant. Not much more to say. I was flying at some stages. At least it felt like it. Massive gaps, big surprise. Thanks to the team, thanks to Renault as well. A lot of our success is also down to them. They're doing a very, very good job and I hope that next year we'll have an engine that's as powerful and as reliable as this year's.

Q: Talking of support, your Mum and Dad are down there somewhere. How much does it mean to win yet again in front of them?

SV: Yeah, it means a lot. Obviously spend most of my time racing in front of them when I was a small kid and obviously now there's a little bit bigger toys, more people watching but it's very special to me that they were here this weekend. I love them very much and want to dedicate the win today to them. I think I learned a lot of good things from them and one day if I had kids I want to pass exactly these things on.

Q: Mark, well you tried your best, you gave it plenty but the start hurt you a little bit out there.

Mark WEBBER: Yeah. The start wasn't great. Nico got an unbelievable start, Seb's was a bit better than mine. I think we were lucky we're not at Malaysia or Monza because it would have been even more painful. Anyway, I think in the first stint just not strong enough and on the soft tyres Seb got a very good gap. I had to reposition on the primes. So anyway, after that the race started pretty well for me but then Seb... he was gone. He was on another category out in front and I had to have a little battle with Nico for second. Guys did a great job on the car all week here. Nice and reliable. Fans have been great: plenty of Aussie flags here as well, so thanks guys coming from Australia. And... yeah, on to Austin and few more to go. Thank you.

Q: This guy. You've ended up in an era where you're unfortunately his team-mate. That's tough, isn't it?

MW: Yeah. I think he's in a sweet spot, for sure. Obviously I've got a few grey hairs now, I'm doing my best but yeah, he's driving well. In the end I did my best today. It's a circuit which... it's my equal PB around here so would have liked to have got the win but that was Seb's today. Thank You.

Q: Great drive Nico, you must be thoroughly satisfied to be up here.

Nico ROSBERG: Yeah, I happy of course. Third place is good. The aim for the weekend was to be best of the rest behind the Red Bulls and that's worked out - even though second place would have been possible in a perfect world today. Mark just got me with Di Resta. Little bit disappointing on that one but otherwise of course very happy.

Q: And you take a lot more points off Ferrari again for the team. Lewis had a little difficult afternoon but that's looking good as well for second in the world championship for the team.

NR: Yes, for sure. I was very happy to hear that we took some more points off them again and that we're edging away from them. That's the most important thing for us at the moment - just to finish second in the Constructors'. It's just much more money for next year but also motivation for everybody. If everybody in the factory can see that we built the second-best car this year, that's just a massive boost.

Q: One final word from Sebastian. You're so gentle with these tyres. What's the secret champ?

SV: I don't know if there's a secret. I've got traction control - at least that's what they said three or four races ago. No. These tyres are difficult to drive. Extremely sensitive. Obviously it helps when you are in free air. Not so much in traffic. But somehow we got the hang of it. More and more so towards the end of the year. And looking after them, really listening to them and being able to extract maybe a little bit more performance than the other guys. But I don't think there's any secret genetically. So... yeah, I'll take it though.

Q: Sebastian, seven wins in a row, equalling the record. I guess in Austin you can go for the record. Are these numbers important to you?

SV: It doesn't make me jump into the car but it's a shock when you mention these [Schumacher and Ascari]. I knew that any kind of record you talk about, Michael is involved for sure, so... yeah... I don't know what to say. The thing is that people see seven races. People don't see the challenge it takes every single race to nail it. It's been exceptional. The fact that we got everything right: smooth pitstops; reliability. All these things need to come together. To answer your question, the numbers are not that important to me but equally they make me very, very proud. If you equal something or you're close to something then... the guys you talk about are the most special drivers in the world in Formula One. So, yeah, I don't think I'm old enough to realise. Probably.

Q: What does seem to be important to you is doing donuts at the end of grands prix. You did it again today. Are you not worried about getting into trouble again?

SV: Not really because technically I didn't do anything wrong. I brought the car back. I think I stick to the rules. I hope that we can provide a fuel sample because obviously it burns some extra fuel. But... yeah... obviously I spoke to the Stewards after India. I'm not sure I remember everything they said but... yeah... I was just happy. It's a sort of stadium there. It's really nice, people all around you. I think they loved it.

Q: Mark, the start was decisive for you today. It got away from you there at that point but you were able to get Nico back. Perhaps you could talk a little bit about that move and also, is there a sense of disappointment, given that you did start from pole. You seemed to be smiling on the podium. How are your emotions at this point?

MW: Yeah, alright. I don't think the start was decisive. I don't think what happened off the line... Sebastian was in another category today. So probably this was the maximum result, even if we got away in front. He was quick and very, very strong. It was then obviously a recovery job against Nico who got a better start than both of us. Obviously it's a short run to Turn One so... if it was a longer run he would probably have got both of us. But, Seb and myself, the last few races... we know starts is not exactly my strong point, especially on these little babies. On the little Pirellis. So, anyway, we got away and then got into the race from there. The softs, I had a reasonably feeling for them when they were fresh but I had no real feeling for those tyres when they're scrubbed. So, I was very slow in the first stint. Very, very poor feeling with the rear, and then that makes it even worse. You have more and more slip and temperature control problems and all of those type of things. Anyway, it was regrouping at the stops after that and I think my pace wasn't too bad after that but Seb was well and truly gone. Incredibly quick pace from him. As you said, the fight with Nico was good. I managed to get that right. Obviously I didn't use too many KERS. I think I understood a little bit of German with Nico. He said he used all his KERS on Paul in the first attempt, which was close. It's always tricky to know how to deploy your KERS on those two straights but in the end I left some for the next attempt and managed to get him. It was good, fair racing which you'd expect from someone of Nico's quality and in the end we probably are sitting here with the results that we all deserve.

Q: Nico, your side of that story. You got up into second at the start but obviously you got into that incident with Mark, and you were saying Paul di Resta involved in it as well. Perhaps you could give it from your perspective - and did you think second place was achievable any other way once that had got away from you?

NR: The main thing was that I got my balance wrong in the car for that second stint and that's why I just wasn't as quick as I was hoping. And I was just struggling a bit to get past the Toro Rosso and then Paul di Resta. I gave it a shot down into Turn Eight, used all my KERS up and I wasn't able to do it and Mark got me on the next one. So, definitely that was unfortunate but that's the way it is. Anyway, third place is still a very good result. Lots of points.

Q: Sebastian. Lots of success this year but I get the impression today's quite an emotional day for you. Would that be right?

SV: Yeah. Obviously winning is very special. As I said, obviously seven races in a row... yeah, every single race is tough. It's a lot of work that goes into it, from Thursday, even before that at the simulator, and then the whole weekend. Please stop mentioning these kind of things because, yeah, it makes you realise a little bit what it means. I remember when I was a small kid watching Formula One and Michael was with Ferrari and dominating Formula One. They had a very strong car, very strong team spirit for many years and... yeah... if you look back you feel like he won every second race but to equal some of the stuff that they managed to achieve is very, very special. For me - but also I think for the whole team. Definitely after 2011, a special year, we said it would be very difficult to repeat a season like that and maybe it comes across once in a lifetime. Now, we can probably say it came across twice at least. So... yeah.

Q: (Paolo Ianieri - La Gazzetta dello Sport) Sebastian, in Singapore, everybody thought you were dominating that race very easily. Today, to me it was even more impressive. In the early laps you were going almost two seconds faster and Rocky must have been very worried on the radio, from what we were hearing.

SV: Yeah, I realised that we were pulling away from Nico and also from Mark. Obviously you make use of it because you don't know what's coming later on in the race. We had a very very strong pace on the option. We could even have stayed out a little bit longer. I was busy, for sure, I was pushing because I felt that I can take lap time, I can take a couple of seconds out of the guys behind so I was pushing but I was also trying to look after them to be flexible on strategy and help the guys on the pit wall to make the call. Also, I could then afford to take it a little bit easier in the pit lane which I think is one of the trickiest all year with a slippery entry and a very narrow exit. I think it just all came together, I think it was a perfect day for us.

Q: (Dan Knutson - Auto Action and National Speedsport News) Mark, early in the race you were on the radio talking to the team about the KERS; was there a problem? And later in the race, given the number of gremlins that have struck your car, were you hearing funny noises and worrying about that?

MW: No, there was no issue with the KERS, it just got a bit warm at one point so we had to give it a chance to recover so that was fine, just a lap or so where we were a little bit out of sync with a better management so we recovered that. And at the end, not really. I can't do much more than obviously keep pushing the car and obviously I had to... couldn't relax completely. Nico was going reasonably well but obviously we were just maintaining... did a few laps at the end just to let him know that I had a bit in hand, but he was probably doing the same so in the end we were getting the car home, mate. It's always a surprise when the car stops on track obviously. Normally the ratio is that you finish so I was still confident that we could do that.

Q: (Joy Chakraverty - Sport 360) Seb, in an interview just a few days ago, Adrian Newey said that two of your best races that he remembers actually came in Abu Dhabi and one of them was last year when, despite the problems with qualification, you came back and finished on the podium. But do you think that this is much better than every other race that you have had in Abu Dhabi?

SV: It's very difficult. Obviously I can remember all the races that I've had here, it's been a very very good track for me, especially come Sundays, especially looking back to 2010 and obviously with five or four drivers going into the last race, being able to win the championship, yeah, it was a special day, special emotions when you look back. Also the race last year, a very crucial point in the championship to be forced to start last or indeed from the pit lane, was tough but we came back and managed to finish on the podium. So this year, for sure, stands out in a way that we had control over the race, very very strong pace and could match the cars behind whenever we had to and were able to pull out a very very big gap, so in a way, similar to - if you look at the time and the gaps - a little bit similar to the race in Singapore. It's a bit similar, if you look at the track layout, quite technical, quite challenging, obviously mostly low speed corners but important to get the balance right in the car and to look after the tyres which I think we did very well.

Q: (Khodr Rawi - Autosport Middle East) My first question is for Sebastian: will you keep on doing your doughnuts celebration if you win the next two Grands Prix, even if you'll get a penalty today?

SV: Well, it depends on what kind of penalty I get. If I get excluded from the next race then probably I won't be able to do them. Again, it was spontaneous. Obviously I had the experience last week but entering the sort of stadium, I thought it was a very very good spot, I made sure there was

nobody around and I was far away from the lines. I think if we are in a position to think about that then obviously it's very special because it means we had a very very good result in the race. So I think there's a lot of work before we get to decide whether we can do it again or not.

Q: (Khodr Rawi – Autosport Middle East) The second question is to Mark: you have won at least one race a year with Red Bull since 2009; would it make a difference if don't win a race in your last season?

MW: Well, it would be nice. I've challenged for a few victories here and there this year but not strong enough when it counted, but in the end, Seb was too strong today for the win. I've got a couple more races to go, all I can do is do my best. It's not going to be a huge huge difference but it would be nice to get it as any Grand Prix victory is always special to get them. Yeah, we'll keep pushing mate and see how we go in the next two races.

Q: (Paolo Ianieri – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Nico, I know that next year the regulations are changing completely so we're going to have pretty new cars but is it not worrying for you to see that Red Bull has such a big advantage and that two seconds are not so easy to catch up, even with the new rules?

NR: Well, I don't think it's two seconds at the moment, I think it's less than that. OK, maybe at times today but anyway, I'm not worried, no, because it's a great opportunity because it puts everybody back to zero, so on the contrary, it's actually better this way. Everybody starts from zero. We have such a strong team now, it's been built up over the last four years, they already did a fantastic job last winter from 1.5s a lap slower. At the beginning of this season we were sometimes the quickest car without a regulation change, so they did an amazing job last winter and I'm confident that they can do it again, for sure. And again this year, OK, we had some weaknesses which we've learned from and are trying to continue improving and then I'm very sure we can have a good season.

Q: (Michael Schmidt – Auto, Motor und Sport) Mark, you said that you struggled with the scrubbed tyres in the first stint. Has that been a general feature this year for you? Why are they so unpredictable? Was it just particularly here on this circuit?

MW: When we go to this type of range of tyre it is probably a little bit more high maintenance for me to feel whether the tyre is in the race. It's a little bit frustrating but that's the way it is. If you want to go quick, you've got to go... obviously it's such a fine, delicate balance, obviously and then you can feed the tyre a lot if you treat it in a different way but to get into that window is sometimes not obvious. I think that we've seen – like Korea, China, a few other races where we are probably a bit more on the front tyre. Of course I'm very fast, I'm quick but when we're on the rears it's a bit harder for me to be as competitive at certain times. That's the way it is. The primes weren't too bad, I didn't think we were going too badly on those in terms of feeling, anyway, but that's the way it's been the last... since 2011. I'm not going to learn now, mate. Old dog, new tricks, it's over.

FI Abu Dhabi Blog – Race report

When Mark Webber secured pole on Saturday night in Abu Dhabi, few expected the Australian to hold on to the lead into the first corner. Lining up next to teammate Sebastian Vettel the assumption was that the younger driver would charge off into the sunset as soon as the lights were out.

The assumption proved to be correct, with both Vettel and Nico Rosberg getting ahead of Webber in the run to Turn One. Another man to make a slow start on Sunday evening was Lewis Hamilton, who lost a place before the pack had reached the first corner of the Yas Marina Circuit.

But whatever struggles Webber and Hamilton suffered in the opening stage of the race it was nothing compared to Kimi Raikkonen's short-lived and miserable race. The winner of the 2012 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix lined up at the back of the pack after being excluded from the results of qualifying, and was parked up at the side of the track before the first lap was complete, following contact with Giedo van der Garde that broke the Lotus' steering.

At the head of the pack Vettel was up to his usual tricks, opening up a 1.9s lead over Rosberg by the end of the first lap, and extending that lead with every tour of the circuit. After an early run of pit stops the Red Bull driver had a 26.3s lead over the yet-to-pit Ferrari of Felipe Massa in P2, and Vettel was able to make his first stop at the end of lap 13 and emerge still in total control of the race. By the beginning of lap 15, Vettel was 6.6s ahead of Massa, and the grand prix was effectively over.

After his own scrappy start Hamilton found himself staring at the rear wing of a Sauber for much of Sunday evening, the second such occurrence in two short weeks. It was another difficult race for the Briton, who was once again out-paced and out-performed by his underrated Mercedes teammate.

Hamilton struggled to find a way to make the car work for him, and despite a few spirited attempts at keeping up with the Joneses the Briton spent most of the evening alternating between being overtaken by slower cars with better grip and destroying his rubber in face-saving attempts to DRS his way back past those who had overtaken him. In the closing stages of the grand prix Hamilton struggled to pass the Toro Rosso of Jean-Eric Vergne, despite lapping nearly a second faster than the Frenchman.

In the end, a seventh-place finish was the best Hamilton could hope for, finishing the race fifty seconds behind his teammate.

While Vettel extended his lead with every passing lap – at one point emerging from the pits with a comfortable 15s in hand despite the 25 seconds lost in the pitlane – there were some small moments of excitement in the chasing pack, with the drivers continuing to fight despite the inevitability of the outcome.

Having out-qualified teammate Fernando Alonso yet again, Massa delivered a spirited performance under the desert skies, scrapping with Alonso, Hamilton, and Sutil before losing position to the Spaniard after the second round of stops, when problems fitting the front left rear saw the Brazilian lose a precious second in the pits.

But Alonso was on a characteristic charge, unwilling to give ground to any of his rivals. Emerging from the pits ahead of Massa after his final stop, the Spanish racer was involved in a near-miss with Vergne that saw the Ferrari exceed the track limits in dramatic fashion, an incident the stewards decided to investigate after the race. After much deliberation, the stewards elected to take no further action, and Alonso's work in overtaking Hamilton and Paul di Resta for fifth place was not for naught.

2013 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix results

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1h38m06.106s
2. Mark Webber (Red Bull) + 30.829s
3. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) + 33.650s
4. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) + 34.802s
5. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) + 1m07.181s
6. Paul di Resta (Force India) + 1m18.174s
7. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) + 1m19.267s
8. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) + 1m22.886s
9. Sergio Perez (McLaren) + 1m31.198s
10. Adrian Sutil (Force India) + 1m33.257s
11. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) + 1m35.989s
12. Jenson Button (McLaren) + 1m43.767s
13. Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) + 1m44.295s
14. Nico Hulkenberg (Sauber) + 1 lap
15. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) + 1 lap
16. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) + 1 lap
17. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) + 1 lap
18. Giedo van der Garde (Caterham) + 1 lap
19. Charles Pic (Caterham) + 1 lap
20. Jules Bianchi (Marussia) + 2 laps
21. Max Chilton (Marussia) + 2 laps

Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) RET

F1 Abu Dhabi Blog - Saturday press conference

The post-qualifying press conference for the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix will go down in the record books as the shortest

Present were Mark Webber (Red Bull), Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull), and Nico Rosberg (Mercedes).

Q: Mark, your second pole in three races now. Describe your feelings, particularly on a track where your team-mate has always been so strong.

Mark WEBBER: Yeah, I think this weekend so far has gone pretty smoothly for us. It's not the easiest venue because of the temperatures, when the sessions are: obviously in the afternoon and then the night session. You've got to be on top of that as a driver and also from an engineering perspective. So, we did what we could do. Not the smoothest part, I would say, to the start of Q2. Also Q1, we were not, I would say, electric but then getting into the groove we changed the car quite a bit, with the front wing level and things like that, as the session went on. And I got more and more comfortable. So, I knew I had to work on certain sections of the track. Sebastian had already been doing a good job there already so I had to try to match him there and keep the areas where I was still doing a pretty good job. Overall happy with the pole. It was a good lap obviously on a track which in the past hasn't been super-invigorating for me in terms of layout, let's say, but we certainly enjoyed the quali today and really looking forward to the race tomorrow because we've got a good car for the race in these conditions.

Q: Sebastian, obviously a slightly unusual session from your point of view, didn't top the times in any of the three parts of the session. What were the tactics today and where did it get away from you?

Sebastian VETTEL: Well, I wouldn't call it unusual. I think we were still pretty competitive, that's probably the difference from you guys and us inside the garage. There is no guarantee. I think it's a great result for the team, first of all. Start of qualifying I think Mercedes looked very, very strong. Both Nico and Lewis, especially in Q2. I think Mark and myself weren't hanging about in Q2 but they were very, very strong. But we seemed to be able to find a little bit of extra time in Q3. I think I did a very good lap so congratulations to him. I think I should have done a little bit better but I don't know if it had been enough. As a fact he deserved to be on pole today. He did a good job, no mistakes. As I said, on top of that, a great result for the team. We should have a strong race tomorrow.

Q: Nico, previous visits here, two times ninth, two times seventh. So a big step forward for you. And again, for you, your team-mate has always been very strong here and you've beaten him.

Nico ROSBERG: In general I'm pleased with the result for sure: third place, best of the rest, which is our target for the weekend. It was nice to annoy Red Bull a little bit from time to time there in qualifying but in the end they were just too quick again. But anyway, third place is good, I'm pleased with that. And again [we're] just looking at the Constructors' [Championship]. That's what counts for us, third and fourth, blocking out the second row of the grid. Lotus for sure are some way back but especially Ferrari, who are our direct competition, they're well back, so that's a very good result for us today in qualifying.

Q: Coming back to you now Mark. You didn't manage the win from pole in Japan. Just a few races to go before the end of your Formula One career and a great chance tomorrow to sign off with a win.

MW: Yeah, look as Seb touched on, there are no guarantees. We have a good car in the race I believe. As we've shown in the last few events we've always been certainly there or thereabouts and leading some race in the last few events and challenging for some very good results. Like you say in quali it's been pretty strong. Korea in the race, yeah, coming back from the 10-place penalty and bits and bobs. So, in general the form has been very strong, carry that over tomorrow night, keep my head down and look for a very good result, there's no question about that.

Q: Mark, why is it that this year has been so different from previous years. What is it about you that's just hooked it up here?

MW: Well, I was pretty competitive last year here in qualifying. I think it's probably no super secret that I like the more flowing circuits but you have to put your heads down and get on with these types of circuits like Singapore and Abu Dhabi and do the absolute maximum and do the best. When you start in Formula One, there is not a huge amount of circuit around like this but there are more and more now and that's part of our job. With that,

I get more exposure at these type of circuits and I think you learn more and unfortunately, or fortunately, I have a guy in the other car who is pretty handy on these type of tracks and you can also do some learning in that respect. I think it's a strong type of layout for Seb, as he's proved in Singapore and those type of tracks. In the end, more experience. You can never stop learning, mate, even at this age, so it was a good day and puts us in a good position tomorrow.

Q: Sebastian, we heard you on the radio at the end, just apologising to the team that you didn't make the most of sector one in particular. You haven't made that many mistakes so far in 2013, I guess the heat is off now, you've already done what you needed to do but is that what led to the mistake?

SV: I was pushing hard, that's the reason behind it. Surely, I think, as a driver, you always argue that there is a little bit here, a little bit there but the bottom line is that if you look at it from the outside as well, if you push yourself to the maximum trying to get everything out then you do mistakes as well. I'm not very proud of that but I did what I could today and it wasn't enough to be on pole and that's why I said it before and I'll say it again - Mark deserved to be on pole, no doubt. So, I think the car was good. That's why I apologised, I said, 'sorry guys, I messed up a bit at turn one'. It's a tricky corner. If you get it right, it feels great. If you mess it up, it doesn't and then you have a long lap trying to make up for it. But obviously there is a limit. Overall, as I said, I was happy but didn't manage to get everything perfect. Whether it would have been enough, I don't know, Mark did a very good laps, so we'll see tomorrow.

Q: Nico, before qualifying you could say that you hadn't perhaps hooked up the final sector maybe as well as the other two but you put it all together when it really mattered at the end. Maybe you could talk a little bit about your preparation for qualifying.
NR: I progressed really well through the weekend. Set-up progression was massive, it changed so much from the beginning to the end and it's just very difficult because the first session of each day is so hot that you can't really learn much and you just have to take an estimated guess where to go for the evening sessions with the set up and so that made it very, very difficult. And in the end... yeah, got there in the end in qualifying. Felt comfortable and there you are. P3. It's good.

FI Abu Dhabi Blog - Saturday report

It was Sebastian Vettel who topped the timesheets ahead of Mark Webber during the final practice session of the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix weekend, setting the scene for yet another Red Bull-dominated qualifying session on Saturday evening.

Barring a dramatic high speed spin and crash by Jules Bianchi at Turn 1, an incident that saw the Frenchman clip the barriers hard enough to damage his gearbox, earning a penalty in the process, it was a largely incident-free session that was more of the same old, same old.

When qualifying got underway beneath the dusky desert skies, all bets were on another pole for newly-crowned quadruple champion Vettel. Despite having sewn up the drivers' title last week in India, Red Bull have not eased up on their tyre preservation strategy, keeping both Vettel and Webber in the garage for the first half of Q1 so as to save as much rubber as possible for Sunday's race.

On his first Q1 run, set on the soft compound, Vettel set a 1m41.683s lap which put the Red Bull driver at the top of the timesheets. Webber, meanwhile, set a 1m41.568s lap - also on options - and dethroned his teammate in the process. The Red Bull pair unseated the Mercedes drivers, whose own pace-setting efforts had been set on medium tyres.

The softs quickly became the compound of choice in the closing stages of Q1, with Kimi Raikkonen and Romain Grosjean shuffling Vettel and Webber down the order with two minutes remaining. Adrift in the dropout zone were Felipe Massa and Adrian Sutil, two men who had been struggling for much of the weekend. But it was a very close pack, with the top 17 men covered by less than a second in the dying minutes.

As the chequered flag fell, Massa burst to the top of the timesheets with a 1m41.254s lap that saw Lewis Hamilton at risk of dropping out before the Briton's own flyer put him half a second ahead of the Brazilian. At the end of Q1 it was Sutil and Esteban Gutierrez who joined the usual suspects in the dropout zone.

Unusually, Vettel and Webber were early out of the pits in Q2, a session that saw all 16 contenders out on track in the first five minutes. Shod in options yet again, Webber managed P2 before being pushed down the order as times popped up on the board.

Following a timesheet topping run of 1m40.473s, Nico Rosberg was called to the weighing station, limiting his track time. But both Rosberg and Hamilton had three-tenths in hand over Vettel in P3; the only other driver to break the 1m40s barrier was Raikkonen.

In the dropout zone as the session ended were a ragged-looking Fernando Alonso and Jenson Button, both of whom were bested by their less-fancied teammates, Paul di Resta, Jean-Eric Vergne, and the Williams pair. It was another close-fought qualifying, with one second covering the full spread from first to 16th.

As had been the case all evening, the soft tyre was the compound of choice in Q3. Degradation levels seen earlier in the weekend make the medium compound the preferred tyre for Sunday's race, and the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix is not expected to see much of a mix of tyre strategies.

As is his wont, Vettel pulled an extra three-tenths out of the bag in Q3, with it killing the prospect of a real fight for pole in the dying seconds of qualifying. Those tenths were lost to Webber, who was 0.7s slower than his teammate on his first timed lap.

Vettel's sudden burst of pace meant that what had been a close pack spread out - instead of the top 16 being covered by a second, there was a gap of 1.2s between Vettel in provisional P1 and Nico Hulkenberg in P7. But as the flag fell the order changed dramatically, with Webber gaining two-tenths on his teammate and clinching pole position. Near simultaneously, Hamilton stopped on the circuit, brakes smoking, in what was a provisional P4.

After the session, Raikkonen's floor failed to pass the deflection tests imposed by the scrutineers. As a result, the Finn was excluded from qualifying and started the race from the back of the grid.

Provisional grid

1. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1m39.957s
2. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1m40.075s
3. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1m40.419s
4. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1m40.501s
5. Nico Hulkenberg (Sauber) 1m40.576s
6. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1m40.997s
7. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1m41.015s
8. Sergio Perez (McLaren) 1m41.068s
9. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1m41.111s
10. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1m41.093s

11. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1m41.133s
12. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1m41.200s
13. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1m41.279s
14. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1m41.395s
15. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1m41.447s
16. Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) 1m41.999s

17. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1m42.051s
18. Giedo van der Garde (Caterham) 1m43.252s
19. Charles Pic (Caterham) 1m43.528s
20. Max Chilton (Marussia) 1m44.198s
21. Jules Bianchi (Marussia) 1m43.398s*
22. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1m40.542s**

* Jules Bianchi will start the race in P21 following a five-place grid penalty for an unscheduled gearbox change. The Marussia driver qualified in P20.

** Kimi Raikkonen was excluded from qualifying when his floor failed to pass scrutineering on Saturday evening. The Lotus driver qualified in P5.

F1 Abu Dhabi Blog - Friday press conference

For the second week running, team representatives faced a grilling on the F1 Strategy Group, and the inequality it threatens to create.

Present were Cyril Abiteboul (Caterham), Paul Hembery (Pirelli), Graeme Lowdon (Marussia), Franz Tost (Toro Rosso), Martin Whitmarsh (McLaren), and Claire Williams (Williams).

Q: Franz, can we start with you? Obviously, Daniil Kvyat coming in next year. What lies ahead in the next few weeks and months in terms of getting up to speed for his Super Licence, practicing, testing? And what expectations do you have for him?

Franz TOST: We will have a test with him next week to get the Super Licence. Afterwards, he will go out on Friday in American and in Sao Paulo and of course we will have winter time, where he has to do a lot of work with physical training, mental training, then working on the simulator to prepare him as good as possible for the next season. I'm convinced he will do a good job because he is a very high-skilled driver. He has done, this year so far, a very good job in GP3 where he still can win the championship. He has 131 points, seven points behind the leader, and I'm quite sure that he will show a very good race tomorrow, and on Sunday. Apart from this he showed a very good performance in Formula 3 - in the FIA Formula 3 European Championship - where he won the last race in Zandvoort, starting from the pole position. If I remember correctly, his first race, in Hockenheim, he was also in pole position and finished the race in third. For us, for Red Bull and for Toro Rosso, he is a very high-skilled driver and I think that he will have a successful future.

Q: Does this a little but like a home race for you, because obviously IPIC is getting more and more influential in your set-up. Most of your sponsors seem to come from their group, so is it beginning to feel like a home race for you?

FT: Yes, the grand prix here in Abu Dhabi is one of the highlights for Scuderia Toro Rosso because we have a very close business relationship with IPIC, which is a company based here in Abu Dhabi and our main sponsors, Cepsa, Nova Chemicals and Falcon Private Bank belong to this company and therefore we are every year very much looking forward to coming here and I just hope that we will improve our performance, which was not so good today, to show a good race on Sunday.

Q: Moving to Graeme, you've already secured Jules Bianchi for 2014. What's the right kind of driver to put alongside him for next year? Which direction are you looking?

Graeme LOWDON: It sounds simple to say a quick one but that's what everybody wants - a quick driver. I think something special about next year are the new regulations for the power unit. That's going to create really quite a few new challenges for everybody up and down the grid. I think there's a very strong argument to say keeping the same line-up we currently have would be a good thing. That said, typically at this stage of the year, in previous years we wouldn't have finalised our driver line-up and it's the same this time. I think we'll just have to evaluate where we stand, what's the best solution for the team moving forward and then announce in due course. I have to say both drivers this year have done an exceptional job. I think a lot of people have forgotten that we started this year with a rookie line-up and that's quite unusual and I think both guys have done a very, very good job, sometimes under some difficult and challenging circumstances. So, we'll see how we move into next year but I think there is a strong argument to say that trying to keep the same line-up would be a very positive thing for the team.

Q: You've secured your commercial arrangement with the commercial rights holder. What does that allow you to do now and what difference does it make to you?

GL: I think in all honesty the biggest difference is how we're perceived in the outside world. It was a very strange situation when most of the teams in Formula One - in fact, all of the teams in Formula One - had an agreement with the commercial rights holder, apart from our team. It quite clearly

would lead to questions when we're looking at potential partners and sponsors for the future. Probably the biggest thing is that external perception in a way. We're perceived to be on the same grid, in the same pit lane as every other team now and it's just removed some of that uncertainty and allows us to focus on what we should be focusing on, which is going racing.

Q: Cyril, coming to you. Obviously you're in a race with Marussia for that important 10th place in the Constructors Championship. This time they're ahead, a position that hinges on their 13th place in round two. Do you believe you can get that 10th place back off them again before the end of the season?

Cyril ABITEBOUL: It's tough. It's going to be a challenge, in particular because we don't have all the answers in our hands. Obviously, we need to do the best we can, make sure that we go for them in turn one in particular, but also to finish the races, that we are reliable. Even if we do all of that and if we achieve a good result, we need more, we need a little bit of external help. Maybe a bit of retirements would assist. So, hopefully that's something we will secure. We secured that last year in the last minute of the last race, so why not again this year? But I'm not against having that a bit earlier than last year to be honest.

Q: What's the state of play with your drivers for next year? What are the important criteria for you and when do you hope to have that concluded?

CA: We would like to have that done fairly quickly, I would say. In particular sooner than last year – because we were late in confirming our line-up – because there is an awful lot of work to be done between the teams and the drivers. A lot of teams are changing, including for the drivers, and the sooner we can integrate and work together, the better it will be for next year. Having said that, in terms of what we want, there is a lot of options. Consistency is a good thing, so one of the options is that we continue with the two drivers that we have, building on the relationship that we have started. But everything is changing anyway, so I think one thing we want is someone who is reliable in his feedback because we will have to develop the car during the season. We didn't develop much the car this season. Next season will be a totally different ball game – in particular the start of the season when everything will be new. We will have to adapt ourselves, the drivers will have to adapt themselves, so experience might be something that is interesting but more than anything I think someone who's capable of being almost transparent and providing the most accurate feedback as possible to the engineers who're trying to understand how the car is working, is something that will be important for us.

Q: Claire, do you feel you're putting in place or making progress towards putting in place your ideal line-up for 2014?

Claire WILLIAMS: We're making progress. I think we'd ideally like to be able to make our driver announcement soon. Historically we've probably left it until the end of the season. I couldn't give you a date now as to when we're going to make the announcement but we're definitely making progress, yes.

Q: Obviously we find ourselves in the Middle East. You and your father have done a lot of work in Qatar. Is there any chance of getting any closer to them getting involved in the race team?

CW: We've been in Qatar for three years now. We've had a business out there that's developing flywheel technology and also working on road safety campaigns. It's not an easy marketplace, it's Frank's project – I think he came out earlier this week or last saying he'd really like to get the deal done and he's working really hard to do that. He's coming out tomorrow and will be spending some time down in Qatar next week – but we'll have to wait and see.

Q: Paul, can you give us an update on what the situation was with Paul di Resta's tyre during that session.

Paul HEMBERY: From what we've understood there was something to do with the brakes. Not sure what but that's the only info we've had so far.

Q: Where does Pirelli stand in terms of tyre supply contract for 2014?

PH: It's done really. There's one last piece to be done with the FIA. The lawyers are dealing with that – when you get lawyers involved with anything it tends to add time to whatever you're doing. So, it's just rumbling along.

Q: What are the next steps you're taking in terms of preparation of the tyres for 2014?

PH: There's a couple of things that are happening quite quickly. We've got a 1000km test with McLaren coming up in Vallelunga. We will be bringing to the Brazil race for P1, a couple of sets of tyres of the prototype for next season. We're hopeful to do a couple of tests in December and January with an old-generation car and there's been some good ideas going forward as to what we could do during the pre-season itself. It's clearly a big step forward, if we're looking at it selfishly from our point of view, to be in Bahrain for pre-season testing, the temperatures will be right, aggressive track and that will be very, very useful for us to understand the real impact of the new cars.

Q: Martin, obviously you're on a big recruitment drive at the moment, Peter Prodromou amongst others that you've been pulling in. Can you share with us your vision for the team and where you want to take it the next few years.

Martin WHITMARSH: Well, I think it's the same vision we've always had. We're here to win and this year's fallen short of that. So, when those things happen you reappraise your organisation, the resources, and you try harder. So, we've been going through that process and that's meant we've been out recruiting and we're pleased with some of the recruiting that we've done. But in the meanwhile we've still got to produce a quick car next year – so we're working hard to do that.

Q: You've got Kevin Magnussen and Stoffel Vandoorne to bring through into Formula One. Are you making any progress towards getting them a race drive for next year – or any kind of drive?

MW: Yes, we are. I think both will be racing next year. We didn't set out to have perhaps the two hottest prospects at the same time but I think that's in effect what we have with both of them. They both deserve to be at the highest level and we're working hard. I'm fairly confident that we'll have both of them racing next year.

Q: In Formula One?

MW: No, both of them racing next year.

Q: Either of them in Formula One?

MW: Possibly one of them.

Q: (Luke Smith – NBC Sports) Franz, I want to talk about Jean-Eric Vergne because he obviously missed out on the Red Bull seat. Where does his future lie within the Red Bull set-up? Is he purely a stop-gap before you feel that either Antonio Felix da Costa or

Carlos Sainz Jr are ready for a seat at Toro Rosso?

FT: I don't see this. He will race for us next year. Jean-Eric Vergne is a high skilled driver. He has shown a couple of very good races and if the team provides him with a good competitive car, he is always - and at every race track - able to show a very good performance. I see a good future for him.

Q: (Mark Bryans - PA) Claire, I just wanted to ask, in terms of driver line-ups, is it more important now more than ever to get that nailed down sooner rather than later because of all the regulations coming in and the changes that are happening throughout the sport next year? Will it be better to have those people in place going forward sooner than you would normally?

CW: Yeah, I think clearly you want your driver line-up confirmed as soon as possible, so that they can start working with your engineers in order to support the development programme that you have in place, but most drivers have contracts that run up until certainly the last race of the season, and if not, the end of December so they can't necessarily come in and help you when you want them to anyway. But yeah, inevitably, you want them to come in as soon as possible and just to get the whole announcement made as well and out there in the public domain and everyone can move on and everyone knows everyone else's future.

Q: (Dieter Rencken - RacingLines) We've got five team principals and a very interesting split because you've got the two in the front who are members of the Formula One strategy group and then we've got Franz who's... although Toro Rosso isn't the associate team is, and then at the back we've got two who aren't. I'd like to ask all five team principals' opinion which side of the fence you're on, how you justify or don't the strategy group and particularly the two at the back, because what we have is a situation where a majority is actually dominated by a minority, a privileged minority and that, where I come from - South Africa - used to be called apartheid?

Q: Let's start with one of the non-members, Graeme.

GL: Thanks James. I think it's disappointing not to be included, that's one thing for sure. If we're looking at sports' governance then sport is fundamentally built upon the ethics of fair play and everything that goes with it. And so, when you're looking at a body that is making really the strategic direction then it would certainly be nice to have some inclusion. You would look for some form of democracy, some transparency and some accountability. From our point of view, we're not too sure how it's all meant to work or is going to work because we're not part of it, so it's really quite difficult to even say whether this new body is going to be able to make the correct strategic decisions, but inherently, you have to think, when you're outside of a group, you have to think 'how can that group be making a decision that could be beneficial for everyone involved, including us?' So it's quite an enormous leap of faith, I think, that the teams who are excluded from it are being asked to make, that the structure will work. Obviously only time will tell and the group has an incredibly onerous role to play, because it has the future of the sport that so many of us depend upon and our employees and the wider supplier base. So it has a very very important task and you would intuitively think that in particular an element of democracy would be good but I guess time will tell.

CW: I think that from the outset we would like to say that Williams as a team, we're pleased that we are on it. Clearly it's important that we are and the reason being is that we're an historic team in the sport, we've been racing for 36 years. But Graeme talking about the democratic process around it, I don't necessarily want to comment on that but I think from our perspective, certainly, we will be going in there, clearly representing Williams but also, I hope, representing the other teams and the greater good of our sport as well.

CA: First, I think an F1 strategy group is a good thing. I believe it's something that was missing generally in the landscape of Formula One; that's - to a degree - running the risk of upsetting some people. Maybe it's a bit too technocratic. Having said that, I think we need to preserve the working group that will properly execute and follow up any decision that is made by the F1 strategy group. So I think generally that to have a group that is also thinking of the marketing side of things, the commercial side of things, ensuring the final consequences of the decisions that are made by technical sporting people, is the right thing to do. And maybe we will not come up with some situations in which we are... for instance, the engine which is quite expensive - so that, in itself, is a good thing looking ahead. Having said that, I think that regarding inclusion, I would totally share Graeme's view and more than anything, I just simply don't understand why all teams are not represented. I think we would not want a situation whereby one team can block a process and we need to make sure that we are progressive and that's one of the things in any democracy but that, in itself, does not justify the fact that half of the grid is not represented.

Q: Franz, you're in a unique position in that your sister team is very much represented.

FT: Exactly, I have a good relationship with Christian Horner from Red Bull Racing and therefore we are a little bit involved, but nevertheless, the strategy group does not approve new rules because this comes from the Formula One Commission and in the Formula One Commission all the teams are involved and there's a working process; there I don't see any problem.

Q: Final word from Martin; is there a FOTA dynamic to this, in terms of the fact you're part of that, you represent their interests as well as your own?

MW: I think that we're in an evolving process at the moment. The full governance of the sport hasn't been defined in the new Concorde. I agree with many... there's as much inclusion as you can have in the sport is a good thing and I think we've been consistent in that. I think McLaren endeavours to be a good citizen within the sport. But I also agree with some of the things that Cyril said, that Formula One... we haven't done enough contemplation of the strategy or the strategic development of our sport. I think we can do a better job together in that regard. Let's see what happens. I think it's going to evolve over the next few months and hopefully it will evolve to a shape and a form where everyone feels comfortable.

Q: (Christian Nimmervoll - Motor Sport total. Com) At the beginning of the engine cycle, one manufacturer was allowed to make some changes. Obviously next year a new engine format is coming in - the turbo engine. I wonder if any process is in place, if any discussions are going on with regard to homologation and what happens when the engines are spread quite a lot at the beginning of the season? Is there any process in place to address that?

CA: Yeah. I think the first thing is that no one really knows what's going to happen at the first race, so it's very difficult, because we are talking about a framework or some re-tuning that will be allowed according to something that we don't really know for the time being and there won't be a magic KPI (Key Performance Indicator) or performance indicator that would summarise the whole performance of the package. So I think there must be an element of good faith in this process, see where we are, making sure that we get something that is sensible, such that any manufacturer who is short of performance is capable of doing something, also someone who is really too strong is capable of doing something else. Honestly I think it's a bit terra incognita, I think we have to wait and see, unfortunately.

MW: Well, in answer to the question, actually there is no process at the moment to do so. Clearly it isn't as straightforward as just understanding peak power which is the traditional metric. As Cyril pointed out there are lots of metrics that will affect the performance of the car, the efficiency of the cooling system, fuel efficiency etc etc. So it's a much more complex process but inevitably, if there's a big mis-match, then the sport would be wise to deal with it. We can't and shouldn't afford to lose automotive manufacturers from the sport. They are the biggest investors in our sport and it's

important that we find a situation where the sport is perceived to be level, it's got a good competition and there's an active interest from as many automotive manufacturers as possible. But at the moment there's no process.

Q: (Gary Meenaghan - The National) To Cyril and Graeme: could you please put a value on securing tenth place, not only in terms of finances - basic financial value - but also in terms of how it will affect the future development of the team going forwards?

GL: Sadly, we can't put a value on it because the terms of our commercial agreements are confidential and quite rightly so. But we're all here to race, everyone in the team is a racer so... I get on very well with Cyril but I want to beat him and that's the essence of our sport and that goes for every single person in the team. As you know, it takes a few hundred people to design and build a car and to race it and every single one of them is highly competitive and you can see when you go back to the factory there's a... the factory's a great barometer of what's happening competitively at the race track. Tenth sounds a lot better than eleventh, ninth sounds better than tenth and so it goes on.

CA: Exactly the same. We believe that we deserve this tenth place and we are going to fight to obtain it, as I said at the beginning, but one thing I should make clear is that it does not jeopardise the team's future - maybe my future but not the team's future.

F1 Abu Dhabi Blog - Friday report

It was a low-key start to the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix weekend when F1 got underway at the Yas Marina circuit on Friday afternoon. The session took place under typically sunny Middle Eastern skies, with air temperatures in the high thirties and a track temperature nearing 40 degrees centigrade.

Thanks to the earlier efforts of the GP2 and GP3 grids, the desert circuit had been rubbered in before the Formula One pack headed out onto the track. As a result, the grippier circuit provided fewer problems for the 22 drivers, with even the bevy of reserve pilots making their way around the track - and its characteristic wide run-off areas - with comparative ease.

While Sebastian Vettel topped the timesheets early on, as is his wont, when the mid-session flurry of faster times took place it was Lewis Hamilton who was the fastest man on track, a position he would have held until the end were it not for a late flyer from Romain Grosjean, who ended F1 as the fastest man by a two-tenths margin.

Of the reserve racers taking their turn on the track in F1 it was James Calado who was the most impressive; the Briton ended the session nine-tenths behind Paul di Resta thanks in part to his earlier GP2 running that gave him experience of the vagaries of the circuit. Rather less impressive was Rodolfo Gonzalez, whose best effort for Marussia put the Venezuelan nearly two seconds behind Jules Bianchi and more than five seconds behind Grosjean.

The evening's running was rather more dramatic than the morning session, and not because of the setting desert sun. The natural order of things was restored, with Vettel back at the top of the timesheets when the chequered flag fell, while F1 pace-setter Grosjean sat out half the session thanks to brake issues.

Further down the pack it was brakes that led to one of the more bizarre moments of FP2, when the brake duct from Max Chilton's Marussia was seen sitting by the side of the track as its owner completed his lap. The other moments of minor drama came about via punctures for Paul di Resta and Jenson Button, although both drivers were able to continue the session without problems once reshod.

McLaren's recent upturn in form was evident again in Abu Dhabi, with the team looking stronger on their heavy fuel long runs than they were over a single quick lap, making the Woking racers a potential threat in Sunday's race. McLaren's long-run pace was on a par with that displayed by both Mercedes and Lotus, while Ferrari - who are still fighting for second in the constructors' championship - were visibly slower than they had been in India, on both long- and short-run pace.

McLaren's improvement now promises to be a threat to Ferrari's chances in the constructors' fight, with their increased speed making it a strong possibility that Button and teammate Sergio Perez will prevent the Scuderia from scoring valuable points on Sunday.

F1 times (unofficial)

1. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1m44.241s [21 laps]
2. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1m44.433s [22 laps]
3. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1m44.499s [18 laps]
4. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1m44.712s [19 laps]
5. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1m44.741s [23 laps]
6. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1m44.929s [22 laps]
7. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1m45.040s [20 laps]
8. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1m45.099s [20 laps]
9. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1m45.150s [24 laps]
10. Sergio Perez (McLaren) 1m45.331s [20 laps]
11. Nico Hulkenberg (Sauber) 1m45.378s [23 laps]
12. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1m45m440s [18 laps]
13. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1m45.823s [22 laps]
14. James Calado (Force India) 1m45.924s [20 laps]
15. Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) 1m46.068s [18 laps]
16. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1m46.114s [22 laps]
17. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1m46.124s [18 laps]
18. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1m46.126s [21 laps]
19. Charles Pic (Caterham) 1m47.600s [22 laps]
20. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1m47.670s [22 laps]
21. Jules Bianchi (Marussia) 1m47.723s [23 laps]

22. Rodolfo Gonzalez (Marussia) 1m49.565 [22 laps]

FP2 times (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1m41.335s [35 laps]
2. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1m41.490s [32 laps]
3. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1m41.690s [37 laps]
4. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1m41.726s [42 laps]
5. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1m41.758s [41 laps]
6. Sergio Perez (McLaren) 1m42.006s [36 laps]
7. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1m42.010s [31 laps]
8. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1m42.171s [31 laps]
9. Nico Hulkenberg (Sauber) 1m42.324s [41 laps]
10. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1m42.440s [36 laps]
11. Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) 1m42.509s [39 laps]
12. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1m42.607s [18 laps]
13. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1m42.806s [27 laps]
14. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1m42.952s [36 laps]
15. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1m42.998s [27 laps]
16. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1m43.152s [29 laps]
17. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1m43.271s [36 laps]
18. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1m43.565s [36 laps]
19. Giedo van der Garde (Caterham) 1m44.138s [35 laps]
20. Jules Bianchi (Marussia) 1m44.459s [35 laps]
21. Charles Pic (Caterham) 1m44.525s [38 laps]
22. Max Chilton (Marussia) 1m45.565s [27 laps]

F1 Abu Dhabi Blog - Thursday press conference

It was a short and sweet press conference that took place at Yas Marina Circuit on Thursday afternoon, with little left to talk about after the end of the championship bar queries about 2014 race drives still under discussion.

Present were Fernando Alonso (Ferrari), Valtteri Bottas (Williams), Romain Grosjean (Lotus), Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes), Adrian Sutil (Force India), and Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull).

Q: Sebastian, your fourth world title of course. Tell us about the last four days. What have you been doing, how have you celebrated and what has the reaction been like?

Sebastian VETTEL: Well, the reaction has been very positive. Obviously great relief when I crossed the line on Sunday, a great feeling. Sunday night, obviously the whole team still had to do the pack-up, but we had a little bit of fun in the hotel bar – quite spontaneous. Obviously, there's not a lot of time between the race in India and the race here, so the team is very busy. So we couldn't go completely mad, but I had a time on Sunday night and then I had two days at home before coming here, again fairly quiet, not very spectacular. I just enjoyed the peace at home. I had some time for myself, back with my girlfriend as well. So, fairly quiet.

Q: Probably history will remember this achievement as you in a strong team with a strong beating a very strong field of drivers – looking at the gentlemen sitting around you here. Is that how you see it?

SV: I think that's the way it always has been. When Lewis won his title in 2008 he was with a strong team facing strong drivers, same for Fernando in 2005 and 2006, so yeah, even 20 or 30 years ago it has always been the name of the game. That's how people remember the past and one day will remember what we are doing now.

Fernando, runner-up again. So hard to hit the sweet spot in Formula One isn't it? How far off championship level do you feel your group is?

Fernando ALONSO: I think we need to be realistic, knowing that we didn't have the chance this year to fight for the championship. In the beginning of the year we were a little bit closer but then we were not quick enough and we are fighting now for other targets, which is the Constructors' Championship and second place in the Drivers' [Championship] as well, which was not the main priority when we started the season but still a good target to achieve and a good thing for the team, to help them. We'll see, I think we need to keep very focused in the remaining races and try to do our best and obviously with half of our mind thinking of 2014 because we are competitive people, we want to win. This year it was not possible but next year we start from zero.

Q: How has your relationship with the team evolved over the course of the year, particularly in terms of steering a course for the future?

FA: It's fantastic. Obviously, every weekend I repeat the same thing. So I guess in Austin on Thursday the first question in the press conference will be how is my relationship with the team...

Q: The question was how has it evolved?

FA: It was perfect, it's perfect and it will be perfect.

Q: Lewis, coming to you. You didn't perhaps expect to challenge for the title this year but can you talk about the level of the challenge coming from Sebastian and Red Bull and how you take the fight to them from here?

Lewis HAMILTON: They've done an incredible job for some time now, so you know, they've raised the bar and everyone just needs to work harder.

Us, as a team, we're working as hard as we can to really put the energy into next year and hope that we can compete with them. That's ultimately what I'd love to do and ultimately what the team desires too. That's what the dream is. There's a long steep curve for us to climb or hill for us to climb for next year but it's more of a level starting ground for everyone and you can either get it right or wrong. Hopefully we're on the right side.

Q: Racing drivers always move on very quickly and I wonder if mentally you're already in 2014.

LH: No, no. I'm still trying to... this year hasn't been perfect for me and I'm always trying to learn and improve. There are lots of areas that can always be improved on, from myself and from the team, and we're just working on those because we don't want to carry the negatives of anything we have into next year.

Q: Romain, really strong run of form at the moment. Was India your best performance yet in Formula One, do you think? How much more is there to come from you?

Romain GROSJEAN: Hopefully two more places! It was certainly one of our best races. We misjudged our level of performance on the Saturday and we took the right decision about the strategy, how to go for the race. It was clearly not an easy one as I really had to first make the option tyre last and then try to make the prime tyre last for 47 laps. There were some quick cars around me, especially behind me, and yeah, just try to take care as much as we can of our tyres and do good driving. But I think Japan was a pretty good race. We had certainly a fantastic start and led the race from there, which was somehow easy to control in the first part. I think Red Bull was just a little bit too quick behind but when you watch the gap with Fernando who was P4, it was quite big, so I think those last four races have been pretty good: trying to improve myself every time, car is getting there and clearly the blue cars are still a little bit quicker than we are – but we try to push them as much as we can.

Q: Let's cut to the chase: you're a completely different racing driver from 12 months ago. What's the key to the turnaround do you think?

RG: I don't think there is any particular key to be honest. We like to put some things are changes but to me the work started a year ago and I'm improving myself day after day – or I'm trying to. The start of the season was poor. It's a bit of a shame when we look at what we are capable to do right now but then since we put back the car in place it has been getting better and better. I was a bit unlucky before Germany and then Germany things turn out to be well together and from there we had very, very good races and the car is doing well. Hopefully it's going to be the case until the end of the season.

Q: Adrian, strong drive in India, bold strategy. How important was it to stem the recent tide of Sauber getting closer and closer to you? And how much confidence has that given the team going forward now for the rest of the year?

Adrian SUTIL: Well it was an important race for us, of course. It was our home grand prix and we wanted to show that we're still able to be in the top ten. The last couple of races were a bit more difficult to score the points but we recovered and we did what we could to make a good result. We risked a little bit with the strategy – where we had both cars on a different strategy. I was on a one-stop – more risky – but almost the same outcome. Eighth and ninth position was almost the maximum we could achieve. Six points as a team, now 23 points ahead of Sauber, which is quite a good gap. It's not over yet, we have to push on, but I think quite comfortable. It's very important for us to save this sixth position in the championship, looking to next year of course, as a team. But I think, yeah, nice to have recovered a bit. Now we focus on what we have and try to optimise the package and do similar results in the next couple of races.

Q: Looking from the outside it seems that the tyre change mid-season didn't really help your team particularly. What do you feel about that?

AS: Yes, it's true. It's one reason. We were a bit slower after that change but also we decided to stop the development very early in the season, so we had no parts on the car for the last six months or so. It's quite a long time. I think it just hit us: from the tyre; from the development. Also the strategies in the race were more equal for everyone. Normally we were able to save one pitstop just because our tyre life was much better to others. After the tyre change that was different. But also we messed up a little bit the setup in the last races. We tried to somehow go back where we were but with a package where we just couldn't make it. We tried different setups and it almost just slowed us down even more. We got problems, we made mistakes as the driver because the car was so difficult to drive. So, in India was said "we stop it, we take what we've got," and that was the key for the points.

Q: Valtteri, been obviously a difficult, challenging year for you. What sort of shape are Williams in going forward?

Valtteri BOTTAS: Yeah, it's been a challenging year. We've been learning a lot the whole year as a team. It's been very tough. So we're definitely I think going in a good direction, we're now very focussed for next year. What I've seen at the factory, the working at the factory is changing. We've got some new people and I've already seen some good things. I really think the future of Williams will be much better than what we've seen this year.

Q: Not too many rumours about you, does that indicate that you're staying put for next year?

VB: I think Claire Williams is tomorrow in the press conference so maybe you can ask her.

Q: (Joy Chakravarty – Sport 360) Seb, considering that the big prize is already yours, how will you motivate yourself to win over the next three races, and if you win on Sunday, will it be one of your greatest challenges, when you win with just about nothing to gain from the season, at least?

SV: Well, I don't think we approach the weekend as if there's nothing to gain. I think we – as a fact – we love what we're doing. We enjoy the challenge and that's why there's no question as to why we are here and what we have to do. We want to race, race the others as hard as possible. If we have a chance, we want to win. As I said, I had some quiet days at home which was good, to sober up after India and get ready for here.

Q: (Khodr Rawi – Autosport Middle East) Sebastian, after winning so many races and four consecutive championships, do you think it will be harder again for you to lose?

SV: To be honest, I'm not getting in the car and thinking that there's a guarantee that we will do well. Maybe that's a little bit the impression that you get from the outside: obviously since the summer break we've won all the races but we come here and there's absolutely no guarantee that we will do well, so we have to give it everything we have. Yes, we have a strong package so I think we have reason to be confident. I need the team, I think the team needs Mark and myself to push the car to the limit and to get some good results. There's no guarantee for what we've been doing the last couple of races to make it last.

Q: (Heikki Kulta – Turun Sanomat) Valtteri, last four qualifying you have managed to beat your teammate. Have you found something new in your one lap performance?

VB: The whole season I've been learning a lot and there are little things you're picking up all the time. In qualifying, it's been very tight this year – it's

always like that – and every hundredth counts. I think after the August break, for sure I've also improved in qualifying. I think I can now maybe get a bit more out of the car more consistently than before. I feel more confident all the time, so maybe we can see that in the results.

Q: (Paolo Ianieri – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Lewis, we heard yesterday some declaration from Dieter Mateschitz saying that Red Bull has been working hard on the development for this season but also trying many new parts that they will use in 2014; about 50 percent of that will be on next year's car. How is the situation at Mercedes? Have you been trying the same path or also working on trying to fight with Ferrari for second place in the Constructors' series?

LH: Probably not being doing as much as it sounds as they have been doing, in terms of developing for next year, but I think that a lot of the stuff that you do develop on this year's car, upgrades that we do bring to this year's hopefully will have an effect on next year's car. It's kinda of similar but some teams obviously can turn their focus a little bit earlier and some a little bit later, but hopefully, ultimately, we'll still be competitive next year with these guys.

Q: (Frederic Ferret – L'Equipe) To Romain, Sebastian and Fernando: what do you think of Kimi as a man and as a driver?

RG: As a man, I would say yeah, Kimi basically I don't know him. He is with me as he is with you. As a driver, he's a very good driver and he has been, until recently, a very good teammate. He's a quicker driver, he's a consistent driver and to me, having him to learn (from) and to improve myself has been pretty good. But yeah, I don't see him in different clothes to the ones we're wearing right now.

SV: Well, I think I have huge respect for the fact that he loves what he's doing, he loves motor racing, any form of it. Obviously, I think Formula One gives him a lot of satisfaction to drive a Formula One car. He doesn't like the rest of it so much. On a personal level, he does talk to me. I don't know what I do differently. He's one of the most straightforward guys I've met so far and I respect a lot that he has always been very honest. Since I came into Formula One, he was ready to help, even gave me a lift a couple of times early on. I get along with him.

FA: Personally, I cannot say anything because I do not know him enough to speak about him personally. As a driver, he's a great champion, great talent, very very fast. He likes what he's doing. That's the best thing.
