

Fl Australia Blog – Sunday press conference

With one race down and eighteen to go, the 2013 Formula One season is officially underway. And what a start to the season – weather chaos, an unpredictable race, and impressive performances the length of the grid.

Present at the post-race press conference were Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus), Fernando Alonso (Ferrari), and Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull).

Q: (Question inaudible)

Kimi RAIKKONEN: It's the first race, so you don't really know how it's going to go, how the tyres are going to be. I didn't really do any long runs in the winter. I knew that I had a good car, so I had a feeling that it was going to be a good race but you have to get through the first laps and then go from there.

Q: And you did a 1:29.2, the fastest lap of the grand prix just before the end. Just having a bit of fun?

KR: No, I mean Fernando was catching me at some point, when I was taking it a bit more easy and there was some traffic, so I just wanted to make sure that if the rain comes or something happens we have a bit more gap. I was still taking it pretty easy. Like I said, the car has been very good all weekend and it was a pretty nice race, not so difficult.

Q: Fernando, second place. How are you feeling about that?

Fernando ALONSO: Fantastic. Obviously it was fantastic race, with fighting all through the race. Big thanks to the fans all weekend. We felt sad yesterday when we postponed the qualifying until today, because they were in the grandstands with the rain, the windy conditions and at the end we didn't run. So today we had to put on a good show for everybody and I think we did it, because the race was action every lap. I personally enjoyed it. Obviously at the end it was a little bit sad not to be able to win the race, but Kimi was fantastic today, the Lotus car as well. We need to congratulate them for a fantastic race.

Q: You made some pretty bold moves when you came out of the pits after your stops. You really had to push, with Adrian Sutil and generally you had to push hard for that.

FA: Yeah, it was not an easy race. At the beginning traffic with Sebastian and Felipe and then traffic with Sutil, some tricky moments. But at the end, as I said, extremely happy. We had a very difficult start to the season two years ago and last year as well and this year is very different. We feel much more optimistic. The car is responding well, we are competitive so we have a very interesting season ahead of us.

Q: But isn't it very worrying that they could do two stops? I'm assuming you couldn't do a two-stop race.

FA: It is a worry, yes. Obviously Lotus did a very good job. Kimi was driving fantastically all through the race and he managed two stops, so we need to analyse what we can do for the next race. We have only four days to work on the car to prepare for the next race and I think he will again be a tough opponent.

Q: Sebastian, only third today but the crowd are obviously very appreciative of what you did. But what happened to the Red Bull pace we were expecting?

Sebastian VETTEL: Well, I think first of all we can be happy with today. Obviously we wanted more. Clearly when you start from pole you want to win. I think we could see after a very good start, and a good first two or three laps, that the tyres were falling apart and we couldn't go as long as other people. So congratulations to Lotus and especially to Kimi, I think they did the best job today. An little bit of a surprise when I saw on the pitwall that I was lacking one position to count because I knew Fernando passed us at the stop but I didn't know where the other car was coming from but I think they had incredible pace. Same goes for Ferrari. I think we were third-quickest today and very happy to get third place.

Q: Do you think it was just the conditions, the track temperatures or are you seriously worried about the pace of Lotus and Ferrari?

SV: No, I'm not worried. I have to admit sometimes that other people are faster. I think we can be very happy today. We had a great qualifying session this morning and this afternoon unfortunately didn't quite work the way we would have liked but it's a long season, a long way ahead of us, so good points to start. Surely we wanted a little bit more but there's no reason to be disappointed.

Q: You didn't win the first race of 2010 or 2012 but you went on to win those championships, so I guess it's not the end of the world?

SV: Yeah, I think there are always statistics that can work for you or work against you but at this stage... it was very good fun today, tricky to manage the tyres, but I'm very happy to be on the podium here, it's always a nice grand prix so looking forward to next week.

Q: One quick word with our winner Kimi Raikkonen: Kimi, you lead the world championship. You had two years away rallying, you came back and won a race last year did a great job but here you are leading the championship again. How does that feel?

KR: It feels good but it's only after one race. It doesn't really change our aim and our work for this year. Definitely we are happy with the win but there is an awful lot to still do to try to win the championship. We seemed to have a good car here and hopefully it works well in the next races also.

Q: Kimi, did you believe from that seventh position the win was there for you today?

KR: I was pretty disappointed this morning after the qualifying. Obviously there was only one lap really on the dries and I took it a bit too easy and got a bit of a small mistake in one corner. It was more timing and getting it right than really the maximum speed from all the cars, so not the ideal

starting place but it was still ten places better than last year, so not a disaster in that way. I knew that my car is quite good. It's been feeling good all weekend and when we did the longer run it felt good. We only destroy the front tyres so we knew if we get the front tyres lasting it should be fine. In a way I was pretty confident – but of course you have to get through the start and the first lap and it's the first race so you never know what's going to happen with the conditions and the circuit after the rain and with tyres, so there's a lot of question marks. I felt I had a good car and it turned out to be pretty good.

Q: Alan Permane said to you, on the subject of tyres in parc ferme, “we got it absolutely right today.” Was that just one of the ingredients where everything seemed to fall into place for you?

KR: Yeah, I mean our plan was to do two-stop and it's always difficult, especially the first races, to really know when to stop, and not doing it too early and not too late. We got it, like he said, exactly right. The team worked very well and we had a good plan, and we follow the plan and it work out perfectly for us. I could save the tyres and I could go fast if I needed and I could really drive very easily. One of the easiest races I've done to win the race. Hopefully we can have many more of this kind of races.

Q: Fernando, turning to you, you had to stop one more time, was there ever a chance that the Ferrari could run longer? Was it the way that the car wore out the tyres that cost you victory today?

FA: I think it's difficult to know if we could do two stops today. You need to commit, more or less, to one strategy before the start of the race because you race differently. Obviously we were attacking, we tried to pass Sebastian in the first part of the race, Felipe and me. We could not do it in the stint. In the second stint we were again also behind Sutil at that stage of the race. I think we felt all these things against... maybe you can go a little bit longer in the stints but we have to stop, try to overtake these people that we felt they were slower than us in the race and if you commit to that, obviously there is not a way to find a two-stop so, I don't know, the race without traffic... could be.

Q: Your team-mate Felipe Massa got the better start, how surprised were you to see him get off the line so quickly and how much of an effect did that have on the early part of your race?

FA: No, well, I had a much better start than Felipe and a much better start than Hamilton especially but they close each other in the middle and I have to lift off. If not, with a longer straight I think I could arrive second easily in the first corner but it was a little bit problem there and then Nico also was very aggressive on the first corner, so it was not easy start and obviously in the first race no-one wants to take an extra risk. But yeah, that was not a help in the first part of the race and then some traffic all through the race. First with Sebastian and Felipe and then with Sutil, Hamilton, Rosberg, Sutil again and two people, I think one Caterham and one Williams that, obviously it is a first race for them but it seems they were not very concentrated today.

Q: Sebastian, Adrian Sutil's name has been mentioned a couple of times. How big a thorn in your side was the sight of that Force India out in front?

SV: Well I think in the end you have enough laps in the race to even things out. Surely it didn't help at that stage but, y'know, it's pretty simple: if we had the pace we should have passed him. We didn't. I was quite a bit quicker when I arrived at the back of him but then couldn't pass him. I think running in traffic it has quite a negative effect on tyres. The same for the people behind me so I wasn't that afraid there was a lot of pressure from behind because I knew that they will be in the same problem that I was with the car in front and, yeah, at some stage even he pulled a little bit away. So, as I said, I don't think, considering all the laps in the race, it made a massively difference. We jumped him after the stop. Yeah, it was quite a good overtaking into turn three, I think. And it was important, I think, to get past. Obviously Fernando, I think, stopped a lap earlier and was on the fresh tyres so he could use the momentum to get past the group, which worked well for him. After that though, we could see that he was a little bit too quick for us today and in the last two stints he was pulling away. I have to admit I was quite surprised when I was still missing one position in my calculations because all the cars that I saw made sense but I never saw Kimi in the race but he ended up way ahead of us and then I saw him on TV, and then saw that Fernando was then second and Kimi was leading. Overall, as I said before, very happy with third place. I think surely when you start from pole, you want to win but I think we can be happy with the pace all weekend. The car left a very good impression. The whole team seemed to operate very calmly and considering it was the first race of the season we seemed to just continue where we stopped last year. So yeah, I think it was a good day for us. Obviously there's a bit of homework to do, regarding the tyres. I think two-stop was out of our range today, so we'll see where we are next week.

Q: But did it surprise you that starting from pole the pace wasn't there to go on and win the race?

SV: Well I think the pace was there. The naked pace. Qualifying was pretty good for us. I think we had quite a good run, and then also the first two laps of the race were pretty good and also the first two laps on each set of tyres felt pretty good – but yeah, obviously after that we couldn't keep it up and surely the times set in the front, from Fernando but Kimi especially, were quite impressive considering the amount of laps on the tyres. So, we couldn't do that and that's why, I think we lost out a little bit today. But, as I said, it's a very tough, very long grand prix and very nice to be on the podium at the end. We have quite a good record here so I'm happy that we had another podium finish today.

Q: (Leonid Novozhilov - FLife) Kimi, do you give a chance to your opponents in Malaysia?

KR: It's a difference place, it's going to be much hotter there so it's very difficult to say how the cars will feel, who will be fastest after having just one race. I think we have to do two or three races before we really know who is where and what's going to happen. It's probably going to rain again in Malaysia at some point but it will be a different circuit, different conditions. Our car worked well here at least and usually – at least last year – in hot conditions it's been good for us so hopefully it will turn out to be a good weekend next week.

Q: (Heikki Kulta – Turun Sanomat) Kimi, I know how much you love winning. When it comes easily like this, in the first race, does it mean even more to you?

KR: A win's a win, it doesn't really matter how you get it. Of course I'm happy that we didn't really have to go full speed all the time so it's kind of a good sign, a good race for us, but as I said, it might be a completely different story in the next race, so there's nothing to jump up and be so extra happy about, because it's a long season and in the end we want to be on the top for all the races and it's going to be a hard season for that. As I said, everything worked well, we had no issues with the car all weekend, the car's been good, the team has been working well. After the winter test, when I probably did the least laps of everybody in the winter, we didn't have a very special winter. As I said before, we didn't have a very special winter the previous year and not this winter, but the car has always been good in the race so so far so good and hopefully it goes like this.

Q: (Manuel Franco – Diario AS) Fernando, what's been the biggest surprise for you today, Red Bull, Ferrari or Lotus?

FA: I think none of them, to be honest. At Ferrari, we had a good winter and the car is more or less as we expected. Arriving here and fighting for the podium was the aim of the team and the goal of this winter, to reduce the gap and to arrive at the start of the season with a competitive package. I

think the goal was achieved. In the winter the car felt good and the understanding of the car was good so being on the podium here is some kind of job done, let's say. Lotus, we saw in winter they were very quick and we saw this weekend they were very quick and very consistent, so they had a fantastic weekend, they deserved victory, and then Red Bull is the quickest car at the moment, first and second in qualifying, first and second in practice, nearly, and then in the race they saw a little bit of degradation but that doesn't mean that they are not the fastest.

Q: (Christopher Joseph - The Vancouver Sun) Fernando, what did you learn about the car today in the race that you didn't know after testing?

FA: You always learn some things for sure but I will talk with the engineers now in the debrief about the competition. When you run close to other cars in the first race, you always discover some weak points of the car and some strong points and today was a lot of fights, a lot of traffic, a lot of action, let's say, in the race and it was pretty clear for us some of the strong points of the car and some of the weak points that obviously we will keep between us.

Q: (Don Kennedy - Hawkes Bay Today) Kimi, that seemed to be a very popular win judging by the crowd reaction out there. Can we perhaps expect a re-release of the 'I know what I'm doing' t-shirts? They're pretty popular, I gather. They only had a hundred released and they sold out. Can we have a few more?

KR: No. That was last year and nothing to do with this year or this win. It was just people asked for them and we made them but now it's not going to happen, not from me at least, maybe somebody else. There's nothing planned. It's happened before many times, as I said, but this time it came on TV so I'm sure some odd things will come through even this year. Maybe it gets on TV, maybe not.

Q: (Trent Price - Richland Fl) Sebastian, on the first lap you were able to establish quite a margin at the start; do you think that strategies like Adrian's will actually affect your own strategies mid-race or do you really have to concentrate on your own, what you've already planned out before the race?

SV: Well, you mentioned two things. On the first stint I was very happy initially to get a good start, defend the lead, then I think I was able to pull away but after two laps, I felt that I could be in trouble. The tyres started to go away from me and as we could see, Ferrari, Felipe and Fernando were catching up and then in the stint after that, we were running into the back of Adrian, but as I said before, surely it didn't help, especially losing the position to Fernando, but then I think you should look at the whole race. They left a strong impression but I think it should have been very difficult to keep him behind all the race. For sure, in that moment, it was that one particular lap where he decided to pit a lap earlier and jumped the group. So you can argue that for sure, at that time, the traffic didn't help, especially because as I mentioned earlier, in traffic, you start to slide around even more and then lose more of the tyres, so we struggled with that today but again, I'm not blaming anything or anyone because there's plenty of laps in the race where you can make it up again. P3 I think was the best we could get today.

Q: (Livio Oricchio - O Estado de Sao Paulo) Sebastian, did you have any indication during the winter tests, or even Friday here, that you could face this kind of problem with your tyres during the race?

SV: Well, I think in winter testing everybody had trouble to make the tyres last. It seemed to be very inconsistent in Barcelona, very dependent on the day you were running, depending on the conditions. I think we ended up today with similar conditions but it's a completely different track. I think the amount of laps covered today were not even out of sight, they were out of thought I think in Barcelona for everyone. I think there has been a certain trend: if you look at Lotus last year, looking after the tyres, if you remember, a couple of key races such as Montreal, where they seemed to be the only team to make a one stop possible, whereas I think Fernando and myself struggled and had to pit again. It was quite a messy race at the end but I think you always learn along the way. We had a plan today before the race which I think was different to Kimi's and probably very similar to Fernando's or Ferrari's. Adding up with our tyre wear, I think that's where we finished today.

Q: (Kate Walker - Girl Racer) Another tyre question for you, Sebastian: over the last few years your car has been known for its downforce, it's been a really good advantage for you. Do you think that might actually be an Achilles heel this year, that you're wearing out your tyres more quickly than the competition?

SV: Well, it depends, I think. At the end of the day, surely there were times when we had plenty of downforce compared to other people, but I think these times are over, not just this year but way before that. I think we sometimes have the ability to compare a little bit to other people and the magic days when we were covering a lot more speed in high speed corners, I don't think they are happening any more. I think we are still very competitive but I think there's a lot more to it than just the raw downforce level. You could argue that with more downforce you go faster, you're asking more of the tyres, all of those things, but I think overall there's a certain trend where some cars seem to work pretty well in some conditions. As Kimi touched on today, he was struggling with front tyres; I think for us it was more evened out. We had both axles running away from us. I'm not sure about the Ferraris but looking at their tyres during running, it looked pretty similar to us, so especially at the end of the stints. Then again, every day can be a bit different. I think you need to be very careful to find a real trend but I think there have been a lot of races where we have been looking after the tyres pretty well and they will come again. For sure, today we were a little bit behind but next week is another race and completely different conditions, as Kimi said, so we will see what happens there.

Q: (Flavio Vanetti - Corriere della Sera) Kimi, can you compare the feeling that you have now with the one you had in 2007 when you won with Ferrari?

KR: For sure a win is always a win so in that way we have a good feeling, the best start that you can have in the first race of the season, but of course many things have happened since then. Still, I won here and it's nice to be winning the first race again. But we started in seventh place and had to fight through the positions to win in the first place and I led more or less all the race. Different years but a similar feeling because obviously we won the first race and leading the points.

Q: (Michael Schmidt - Auto, Motor und Sport) Fernando, the question was already asked to Sebastian but I think it was a little bit inconclusive. We saw this weekend two completely disciplines: in practice Red Bull was dominating with a big pace difference, then all of a sudden, in the race, we have to say that the Lotus and the Ferrari were faster, whether in traffic or on an open track. How do you explain that?

FA: I don't have an explanation to be honest. It's not new. We saw in the last three years that Red Bull are untouchable in qualifying and in the race everything is much closer. And we saw McLaren sometimes winning the race and sometimes us. Lotus, I remember last year, in Hungary I think, in Bahrain, they finished on the podium and in qualifying they were not as quick as the Red Bulls so we need to find some extra pace in qualifying because if not, they will always start on the front row.

Q: (Erkki Mustakari - Finnish News Agency) Kimi, through the years we have seen that whoever can develop the car best through

the season has the best fun towards the end of the year. Do you think Lotus has enough resources to keep up the work because there are not many ways you can go from here because you started by winning?

KR: Yeah there was a big question mark last year in our team whether we can keep up with the bigger teams. Of course it's not going to be easy for us. I'm sure we have the people, all the tools to make it. The money is a big part of the thing. For sure we don't have the same budget as Ferrari or Red Bull or Mercedes but we could show last year that... we did pretty well on the money and the things we have. I have no doubt we have the people and the tools but of course if we get more money it will help and it will give us a better chance and more fair play against the bigger teams. Like I said, we have good plans, and if we can follow it up it might be good, it might not. It's a long season. If you do things right it will go nicely but one thing can change the whole year. You do a few things a little bit wrong it can turn around and go downhill after that. So we just have to do our normal things, like we did last year and put the good effort into new parts and if we're happy we keep them and if not we have to look more closely. But like I said, so far it has been good, so there is no reason why we can't keep it up.

Q: (Heikki Kulta – Turun Sanomat) Fernando, the same three guys were on the podium in Abu Dhabi in the same order. From your point of view were there any similarities in your fight against Kimi in this race compared to Abu Dhabi.

FA: I don't remember too well but I don't think so. It was a very different race. I think we were closer to victory in Abu Dhabi or closer than what we were here today. We didn't have the pace to fight with Kimi today. He was too fast for us and he did a fantastic job. I think in Abu Dhabi it was different with the safety car. I think with 15 or 20 laps to the end of the race we really had the opportunity there to fight for victory and today they were too fast.

Q: (Cristobal Rosaleny – Car and Driver) A question for Fernando. Could you please describe the decision process about the second stop because it was the main point of your race and Felipe is not so happy with that. It was two or three laps later.

FA: There is always the flexibility to anticipate the stop, delay the stop. There are some kind of laps that you programme before the race to do the stops as you predict more or less with the simulations etc. But there is always a margin of three or four laps shorter or longer depending on how the race goes. How the race goes is the tyre degradation that you are facing through that particular race or the traffic you are facing through that race. In my case we felt we were a lot faster than the cars in front. We stopped in lap 20 or 21. We felt we had more pace for 18 or 19 laps so it was the right time to start. It was too early then maybe that compromised the full potential of the three stops. For that we could not maybe fight with Kimi because it was too early also for three stops, I think lap 21. It was enough to jump three place though, Sebastian, Felipe and Sutil. So it was a very good decision at the time but what we didn't know at the time was the pace of the Lotus. So they did a better job than us and maybe we did a better job than the others in the front.

Q: (Phil Branagan – Motorsport News Australia) A question for Sebastian, a question about tyres. I don't know if you've seen the weather forecast for Malaysia next weekend but it's rain Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Given the tyre wear of your car in the dry this weekend. Are you thinking of a conservative game plan for this weekend or is it business as usual?

SV: Let me answer with a question back. Have you ever been to Malaysia? It rains every day! It doesn't really make sense to look at the forecast. It's one of those places where there's always rain at some point in the day. Yeah, I think it's a completely different place. I think last year we cannot take as a reference because we had different issues with the car. I think starting with the season this year the car seems much more balance and I'm much happier, in a much happier place. So, looking forward to next week. It will a lot hotter, naturally there is a risk of rain, thunderstorms. We've got rain tyres and intermediates, so we should be fine but in terms of approach there's not too much difference. I don't think you can take this race as a reference because the circuit is too different and as I said, the conditions will be different plus the tyres we use are different again.

Australian Grand Prix race report

Cool, calm, and consistent were the watchwords in Albert Park this evening as the world gathered to watch the opening round of the 2013 Formula One season.

For the twenty-one men lining up on track for the start of the Australian Grand Prix (Sauber's Nico Hulkenberg failed to start the race thanks to a fuel pick-up issue), it had been a tumultuous weekend determined by the weather. After two weeks of cold winter testing in Barcelona, teams were looking to Melbourne to teach them about their cars and the high-degradation Pirelli rubber.

But the weather gods had other plans in mind, and a long heat wave broke on Friday morning, when the paddock awoke to cold temperatures not dissimilar to those on offer at the Circuit de Catalunya in February. The worst was yet to come, however.

Saturday's predicted rain showers turned into a mini monsoon shortly before qualifying, with the result that for the first time in F1 history, a qualifying session was split over two days, with the rain-delayed Q2 and Q3 taking place on Sunday morning. With more light showers predicted for not long after the race start, there was an aura of uncertainty on the grid, a sense that – despite the Red Bull front row lock-out – anything could happen.

And it did.

While Sebastian Vettel pulled off his usual trick of tearing off the line and into the distance by the end of the first lap, the race was far from being a repeat of the 2011 season. The signs were there by the time the cars had reached the first corner, with a resurgent Felipe Massa powering his way up through the pack and into second place, with teammate Fernando Alonso visible in his wing mirrors.

By the end of the first lap, the Ferraris had made it past Lewis Hamilton and the prancing horses were on the hunt for a lone Red Bull. The RB9's race pace was not as strong as it has been in previous seasons, while the Mercedes appeared to be suffering from 2012's problem of being reasonable in qualifying and rather less so in the race itself.

McLaren were nowhere and sliding backwards fast, the Lotus of Kimi Raikkonen was working its way forward, and far in the background was F1 returnee Adrian Sutil, barely making an impact. Or so it appeared at the time.

Pirelli's high degradation supersoft compound began to fray early on, and many drivers' first stint ended between laps 5 and 10, as teams elected to

bring their drivers in early and take their chances on the far more durable – but slightly slower – medium tyre. It was these early stops that would come to define the outcome of the race.

With the unnatural order of runners shuffling as men made their way in and out of the pits – including race leader Vettel, who made his first stop on lap 7 – Hamilton briefly led the grand prix with Sutil giving chase in P3. When the Mercedes driver stopped for his own tyre change on lap 13, all that Sutil needed to do to grab the race lead was pass countryman Nico Rosberg.

And pass him he did. For the second race running, a Force India was leading the pack. Sutil's run at the front lasted until the German driver's own pit stop seven laps later, handing the clear air over to Massa, who pitted two laps later.

The rest of the race saw the lead shared between Raikkonen, Alonso, and Sutil, with each man ceding position as he pulled into the pits until the final stint, at which point it was an all-out battle between man, machine, and rubber.

The 2013 Australian Grand Prix became a war of the tyre strategies, with the two-stopping Raikkonen and Sutil battling it out with the three-stopping Vettel and Alonso. Was the time lost in the pits worth having the fresher rubber with which to do battle in the closing stages? While the general assumption was yes, the race result showed that it was not the case.

What Alonso and Vettel gained on their fresh rubber was lost in the face of the grim determination of Raikkonen. Blessed with a car known to be more gentle on its rubber than most, the Finn's typically cool and calm demeanour equipped Raikkonen with the ability to focus on the task at hand – opening up enough of a lead while his rivals played around in the pits that he was able to pit for his second and final stop without affecting his chances of the win.

The closing stint of the race saw Raikkonen chase down and pass Sutil before holding on to a comfortable advantage over Alonso until the Lotus took the chequered flag with twelve seconds in hand. Completing the podium was pole-sitter Vettel, repeating Hamilton's 2012 feat of going from P1 to P3.

Further down the pack, it was an embarrassing day for McLaren. Jenson Button barely scraped into the points after starting P10 on the grid, while Sergio Perez crossed the line in P11. McLaren's troubles were so widespread that the team is now talking of reverting to their 2012-spec car. But however bad it was for McLaren, at least both cars finished the race.

In addition to non-starter Hulkenberg, Toro Rosso's Daniel Ricciardo, Mercedes' Nico Rosberg, and Williams' Pastor Maldonado failed to make the chequered flag. Ricciardo was sidelined with a broken exhaust, Rosberg suffered electric failure, and Maldonado was the victim of his own not infrequent tendency to ricochet off track at high speed.

Australian Grand Prix results

- 1 Kimi Räikkönen (Lotus) 1h30m03.225s
- 2 Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) + 12.451s
- 3 Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) + 22.346s
- 4 Felipe Massa (Ferrari) + 33.577s
- 5 Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) + 45.561s
- 6 Mark Webber (Red Bull) + 46.800s
- 7 Adrian Sutil (Force India) + 1m05.068s
- 8 Paul di Resta (Force India) + 1m08.449s
- 9 Jenson Button (McLaren) + 1m21.630s
- 10 Romain Grosjean (Lotus) + 1m22.759s
- 11 Sergio Pérez (McLaren) + 1m23.367s
- 12 Jean-Éric Vergne (Toro Rosso) + 1m23.857s
- 13 Esteban Gutiérrez (Sauber) + 1 lap
- 14 Valtteri Bottas (Williams) + 1 lap
- 15 Jules Bianchi (Marussia) + 1 lap
- 16 Charles Pic (Caterham) + 2 laps
- 17 Max Chilton (Marussia) + 2 laps
- 18 Giedo van der Garde (Caterham) + 2 laps

Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) RET
Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) RET
Pastor Maldonado (Williams) RET

Nico Hülkenberg (Sauber) DNS

F1 Australia Blog – Saturday press conference

After a slight delay to Saturday's qualifying session – which eventually took place on Sunday morning – the Saturday post-qualifying press conference took place at a time when many people are tucking into roast meat of some form.

Present were Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull), Mark Webber (Red Bull), and Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes).

Q: Sebastian, surely that was the best way possible to start the season?

Sebastian VETTEL: Yes, obviously it's been a very good weekend so far for us, I have to say. Obviously, we came out of winter testing and didn't know what to expect, but since Friday we got into the groove, I had a good feeling with the car, so I think we confirmed that in all conditions.

Obviously a bit tricky yesterday and I think it was the right decision to call off qualifying and continue today but the main task is coming this afternoon.

Q: And the team seemed to run it absolutely right. I think you probably had another lap to go if necessary right at the end?

SV: Yeah, but then obviously with these conditions there is the fact of always getting quicker just because the circuit dries up and you get more confidence, you know, the exits of the corner when you turn in. You can adjust the amount of risk you take but obviously there is always the tyres. The supersoft used by the majority of people, or everyone, is very good for one lap but you can definitely feel the step down in grip, so we'll see what happens this afternoon. But for now a perfect result for us as a team. Mark in second, so I think it's a great way to start the race but it will be a long race. Weather-wise I'm not sure what is going to happen, probably a little bit better than it was so far but we'll see.

Q: And surprisingly, perhaps, this is fairly similar to Barcelona testing in terms of temperatures.

SV: Yeah, so that's what we are going to find out – whether it's similar in terms of tyre wear this afternoon. Could be quite funny. I think it will be all about watching after the tyres. We've had a lot of practice in winter testing, the temperatures were very different; the circuit was very different. I think that's the main difference, even though now it seems a bit cooler than the last couple of days.

Q: Mark, you're equal best ever grid position here. What are your hopes for this afternoon?

Mark WEBBER: Yeah, first of all I think it was a great job from the team. Very, very tricky in those conditions and also very easy to make errors on any side – driver, procedurally, planning, all sorts of stuff. We survived the small bullets yesterday and then also got through today's session with not far off the maximum we could get. In the end it was very chaotic, very difficult to get all the planning right. I think all the drivers are probably quite frustrated that they didn't put slick a little bit earlier because it was just the third sector that was a little bit wet and you're not quite sure how the slick will take – the intermediate was well out of bed, you're not sure how the slick will go. In the end it was a good quali and as you say this afternoon we're now in a position to have a good afternoon. Five per cent of the job's done. We know that the big stuff's this afternoon, looking forward to the race. Unusually we finish quali and talk to you guys and we've got to get ready for the race now. Certainly we're ready for it. I'm ready. The team's ready, so looking forward to it.

Q: What can you do about that chap [Sebastian] beside you?

MW: Well, yeah, there's got to be some calls made today on tyres and strategy and see how the balance of the cars are, and yeah, so it's going to be a tight grand prix, potentially. But also if you're not in the window with the tyres or having the balance where you need to be... it's so early in the Championship for all of us on these tyres and working out how we're going to execute a long grand prix, so things can blow open as well. I think we've done as much as we can in Europe. As you say, temperatures are very similar to Barcelona today – if not the same. 13 [°C] track or something like that. Quite uncanny really – but that's just the way it is. Seb's always a strong competitor and he's one of many out there that can go OK – but I'm confident I can have a good race.

Q: Lewis, looking back at yesterday afternoon, I guess it's quite a relief to be sitting there.

Lewis HAMILTON: Definitely, definitely, the guys did a fantastic job to get us out on time. It was very tricky out there but I'm very happy I got the job done. Obviously these guys [Sebastian and Mark] were incredibly quick but I'm really happy with the job we've done. And to be this far up coming into this season – I said yesterday that it was a blessing they moved it to today and it really was.

Q: Presumably you were able to put on a new rear-wing because it was damaged – even though the cars were in parc ferme?

LH: Well, it was during the session, so yeah.

Q: Third-fastest with a new team as well, that must be a great satisfaction.

LH: It is: it's incredible. What an incredible job the team have done. To come from last year where they were struggling quite a lot to now. I really feel we have a car that we can really work on. It's a great foundation to build upon throughout the year – so keep up the good work guys.

Q: (Oleg Karpov – Klaxon) Lewis, Jenson is more than two seconds behind. What are your thoughts about that? Is it a little confirmation for you that you did the right choice in the winter?

LH: I don't look at it like that. I think our position and how the car's behaving and how I feel in the team just confirms to me that I feel like a made a good choice. I never looked back once I made the choice and I didn't have any regrets about it. I don't know what difficulties they're having but they had a fantastic car last year so I have no doubts that they'll pick it up. Sometimes in the team, when I was there, we had rough starts but the team are very strong in putting it back together.

Q: (Jacob Polychronis - Flplus.com) Mark, I think out of the three drivers you look the most pleased and happy. However, it obviously wasn't ideal with the preparations for qualifying, considering it's on Sunday morning. I wonder if you would explain how you readjust and how much of an inconvenience it is really?

MW: We've been in this situation a few times, not many, but I think we had Suzuka in '04, Suzuka again in 2010, so we've had a few events where we've had the horrible situation for everybody – fans, you guys, us, teams – to have that big delay, tomorrow trying to get that gap in the weather. Yesterday, they also had to manage the problems with the lights so all in all, you've just got to take the moments as they are and deal with what's thrown at you at that period in terms of yesterday afternoon and then last night you re-group, let's say, very very quickly. But then knowing you've got a big day today and coming here a lot earlier than normal for a race weekend, things have to be shuffled around a lot in terms of procedure in the garage, also driver preparation. It's really just like a Friday really, but it counts, so a short run in the morning then long runs in the afternoon but it really really counts. It's the race, you've got to put everything together for. I think the experience helps as well. I think we saw yesterday with the young guys getting their head round that sort of stuff is quite overwhelming to start with probably on a very tricky circuit as well; it caught out a lot of us out so in the end experience also counts in those conditions and this scenario.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – O Estado de Sao Paulo) We saw in Barcelona, in similar conditions, after some laps there was a lot of graining in the tyres. What do you realistically expect from the beginning of this race, first pit stop on the fifth or sixth lap and then plus ten or 12 laps another pit stop? What can you realistically expect?

SV: I think it's unknown at this stage. What we can say is that it's surprisingly cool here today, probably cooler than we all expected but also we have to see that it's a different circuit so we have seen that all of us were struggling a lot to make the tyres last more than a lap or two in Barcelona but this is not Barcelona. It's much easier on the tyres but then again, it's still pretty tricky to make our way round so we will see. We saw a little bit on Friday when the temperatures were very different and I think tyres weren't holding up too badly but it could be all different this afternoon. I don't know

what's realistic: it could be a couple of laps or it could be a couple of laps more. I think we need to go with what we have.

MW: I think that it's a product which is very very challenging for us, no question about it. There are periods where the tyre isn't strong enough to handle the lap times a Formula One car can do, the same as in Barcelona we saw the tyres really really under incredible load, and as Seb touched on, it struggles to finish four laps in Barcelona so it's really us understanding how we can get the most out of short runs and then long runs. It's no surprise that some of the races towards the end of last year – Korea for example – that they were quite conservative on strategy and these ones are probably not going to be like that today, so we will learn more today and we will then pass the information on to Pirelli and maybe they can learn a bit more as well.

Q: (Ian Parkes – PA) Sorry Seb, we didn't have any sound in the media centre at the start of your questions. We've got the sound back now, so would you just give us the run-through of your pole, it looked quite easy?

SV: Well then you should do it next time and I will take the day off. Definitely not easy in these conditions. I had a surprising feeling when I went out for Q3 because the circuit already looked very dry but obviously once we committed to the time schedule, there was no way back and I had two good runs, one on the inters and one on the dries, and on the dries I think I got into the groove and the car felt pretty much in balance similar to what I had on Friday, so I was happy and ready to push on the lap. Obviously it's always tricky to find the limit in these conditions, especially around the fast bit: turns 11 and 12 were still a bit wet so there was one dry line but overall pretty happy with the lap and as soon as I got confirmation that it was enough I pulled in to save the tyres.

F1 Australia Blog – Sunday qualifying report

After an overnight delay, qualifying for the Australian Grand Prix finally got underway on Sunday morning. The skies over Albert Park were heavy and grey, and the morning was subjected to a constant stream of drizzle.

With heavier rain predicted, the beginning of Q2 saw the pitlane empty as all and sundry went out with a view to setting an early banker on inters lest they get scuppered by worsening conditions.

Saturday timesheet topper Nico Rosberg continued his good form on Sunday morning, setting a benchmark time of 1m40.423s. The Toro Rossos showed more of their wet-weather pace, but as track conditions improved it became clear that the mid-field team was not yet ready to duke it out at the front.

By the time the sixteen remaining drivers had all put at least one lap on the board, the Albert Park circuit had dried out dramatically, with the front-running teams shedding around two seconds apiece between their first lap and their second.

Sergio Perez made the brave decision to go out on supersofts while the rest of the pack were still on inters; the McLaren driver skittered around the track in P14 and failed to improve. It was a desperate move designed to give the Mexican racer a chance to break through into Q3, but it didn't work – Perez ran wide and trashed his rubber on the grass.

At the end of Q2 Perez was out in P15; with him in the dropout zone were Nico Hulkenberg, Adrian Sutil, Jean-Eric Vergne, Daniel Ricciardo, and Valtteri Bottas. Making it into the final round of qualifying were the driver pairings from four of the big five teams – Red Bull, Mercedes, Ferrari, and Lotus – plus Jenson Button and Paul di Resta.

Despite the drying track, Q3 saw the bulk of the remaining drivers elect to stick with inters. Mercedes once again set the pace, with both drivers setting laps in the 1m33.6s mark. Hamilton was ahead by a margin before Sebastian Vettel snatched P1 by a full second with a lap that saw the Red Bull driver running wide into the grass.

With five minutes remaining, the pitlane was full of traffic as the drivers switched to supersofts for their final attempts at a flyer. As the first man to make the switch, Button grabbed provisional pole before being unseated by Hamilton, who bested his former teammate's time by three seconds. Vettel then shaved another two seconds off Hamilton's time – this is a shoot-out and a half.

The times kept falling, but it was Vettel's pole to lose. And the Red Bull driver ain't one for losing – are we looking at 2011 all over again?

Provisional grid

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1m27.407s
2. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1m27.827s
3. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1m28.087s
4. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1m28.490s
5. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1m28.493s
6. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1m28.523s
7. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1m28.738s
8. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1m29.013s
9. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1m29.305s
10. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1m30.357s

11. Nico Hulkenberg (Sauber) 1m38.067s
12. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1m38.134s
13. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1m38.778s
14. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1m39.042s
15. Sergio Perez (McLaren) 1m39.900s
16. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1m40.290s

17. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1m47.614s
 18. Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) 1m47.776s
 19. Jules Bianchi (Marussia) 1m48.147s
 20. Max Chilton (Marussia) 1m48.909s
 21. Giedo van der Garde (Caterham) 1m49.519s
 22. Charles Pic (Caterham) 1m50.626s
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F1 Australia Blog – Saturday report

A rain-soaked final practice was followed by an afternoon of torrential rain that saw qualifying for the Australian Grand Prix delayed by half an hour. Once Race Control issued the all-clear, it was the Mercedes pairing of Lewis Hamilton and Nico Rosberg who were first out of the pits.

First casualty of the session was Giedo van der Garde's front wing; the Dutchman spent a lap dragging it around the circuit under his car after a bump into the wall – not ideal for aero. But it fell to Hamilton to slide along the track in the style of a Tokyo drifter before clipping the back end of his car on the wall at Turn 1.

The slippery track conditions saw a number of offs over the course of qualifying, with Adrian Sutil running off in Q1 shortly before Felipe Massa span his Ferrari like a top, losing his front wing in the process. Next off was Mark Webber, who also took a trip across the mud. Both Sergio Perez and Esteban Gutierrez had wet weather moments of their own – the track conditions caught out the bulk of the grid over the three sessions.

Despite rear wing damage Hamilton stayed out on track and improved his lap time, although he was 1.1s slower than teammate Rosberg, who topped the timesheets for the first half of Q1. Jean-Eric Vergne had a brief spell at the top before being dethroned by the ever-reliable Sebastian Vettel.

In the final five minutes of Q1, the track had dried out enough for a widespread switch to inters, despite the seemingly constant run of off-roading from all and sundry. Both Jenson Button and Massa were able to dethrone Vettel on their changed rubber, before session survival became a matter of timing – being the last man out in a semi-decent car was all that was needed to make it through.

Q1 drew to a close under yellow flags, after both Charles Pic and Gutierrez hit the wall in separate parts of the track, with Gutierrez stopped out on track and unable to move. Pic's best time saw the Caterham driver finish outside the 107 percent time of 1m50.616s.

Between Q1 and Q2, the rains grew heavier and heavier, and the start of Q2 was pushed back in ten- and twenty-minute intervals before being delayed until 11am (Melbourne time) on Sunday morning.

Provisional grid

17. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1m47.614s
 18. Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) 1m47.776s
 19. Jules Bianchi (Marussia) 1m48.147s
 20. Max Chilton (Marussia) 1m48.909s
 21. Giedo van der Garde (Caterham) 1m49.519s
 22. Charles Pic (Caterham) 1m50.626s
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F1 Australia Blog - Friday press conference

When it comes to the serious (non-racing) business of Formula One, the Friday senior team personnel press conference simply can't be beat. The Australian edition was all about the money.

Present were Eric Boullier (Lotus), Paul Hembery (Pirelli), Jean-Michel Jalinier (Renault Sport F1), Martin Whitmarsh (McLaren), and Toto Wolff (Mercedes).

Q: Jean-Michel, after three very successful years in your partnership with Red Bull as the engine supplier, what are your objectives for this 2013 season? Another double world championship?

Jean-Michel JALINIER: Obviously to renew the success of the past year and win a new title or two new titles with our partner Red Bull.

Q: Could it be quite a difficult season for you as an engine manufacturer? Whilst you're keen to develop and progress the 2013 engine it is the last year we'll be using that engine and you have a very big programme for 2014 ahead. How do you manage that balancing act?

J-MJ: Well, it's correct that there is a challenge because we have to provide the right level of service and performance with the current engine and at the same time develop the new engine. And during the current year the staff of Renault Sport F1 are going to be allocated from V8 to the new engine progressively.

Q: Paul, an awful lot of data to go through after the first two practice sessions of the season. How happy are you with the way the tyres stood up to the demands of the Albert Park circuit today?

Paul HEMBERY: I'm really pleased, to be honest. After the winter testing, which was obviously not particularly good from a tyre perspective. To finally get running in the normal running conditions, we are pleased. We found that the medium tyre is lasting 22-24 laps which is what we needed. And the supersoft – very much a qualifying tyre here. You've got to your time in and probably do a short stint at the start and then you'll be looking at a two, possibly three-stop strategy. From our point of view that's in line.

Q: Do you feel the drivers might have to change the way they warm the tyres up, especially for qualifying with the supersoft, the changes to the compound and the construction? Do they need to be a little more gentle before they go for a flying lap?

PH: Well, we haven't had the debriefing yet, that's going to happen this evening to try and understand how it felt when they were doing quick runs and also when they were on the full fuel loads at the end, to do the start-of-race simulation. But at the end of the day the supersoft really is just intended as the tyre to do a time with and the main race will be held on the medium tyre. So we don't see any particular issues.

Q: Toto, rather dramatic end to the second practice session. Explain to us what happened with Lewis Hamilton and subsequently Nico Rosberg as well.

Toto WOLFF: We got some good mileage on the car today but at the end we had some minor issues. We had a gearbox issue and a problem with the bib. So it's not a big drama.

Q: On both cars, gearbox issues?

TW: No, on one car.

Q: And what happened to Lewis, driver-error?

TW: No, we had a slight problem on the bib, not a driver error, it caused some understeer and he went off.

Q: Off-track it's been quite a busy winter at the team, changes to the management structure. Explain to us now who's in place and who does what and who has responsibility for what.

TW: It's pretty clear now isn't it? We tried to keep you busy over the winter! The structure's actually pretty simple. Niki [Lauda] has been the chairman of the board since a couple of months in a non-operational function. And I have been recruited, basically, to step in for Norbert [Haug] as the motorsports director, and equally in an executive function in Brackley for MGP. So I'm having two heads on, actually.

Q: And beneath you Ross [Brawn], as team principal, still has the same responsibilities as before?

TW: He's not beneath me, it's a different position and he's team principal, he stays the team principal and he's responsible for the racing. It didn't change to last year.

Q: Eric, Lotus, how do you fare from today's two practice sessions? How pleased or otherwise are you with your performance?

Eric BOULLIER: I'm pleased because obviously we had to fulfill our testing schedule for today, so no issue and we could go through everything we wanted to test and obviously understand. Performance is not so bad, I have to say, so happy and pleased with where we are. Obviously there's still a lot to learn from tyres and obviously the rest of the weekend, maybe the wet forecast is obviously another challenge coming.

Q: Talking of challenges, if we have a development race this season, how well-equipped are Lotus? Do you have the budget you think you need to win a development race?

EB: Definitely. We have the budget in place. We have already anticipated the split from the resources we have to put on the 2013 car and obviously the 2014 challenge, so now everything is in place.

Q: How was the view from pit wall at McLaren today? From the outside we might detect you were struggling a touch.

Martin WHITMARSH: Thank you, that's a very kind understatement. It was one of the hardest days I can recall. I don't think we've got time here to summarise the day but I think we were lacking overall grip, consistency, we had understeer, poor ride. So a very difficult day, one where we didn't go forward during the day, so that's a bit of concern. But we have a lot of data and the team will, I'm sure, be working long and hard tonight and clearly it should be a base we can improve upon and hopefully we can do so tomorrow. But I think it was a disappointing and a tough day for the team.

Q: Are you getting sleepless nights at the moment? McLaren has been a team that has developed well in the past but starting from a low base is not what you or the team would have wanted?

MW: No it isn't, but it's a long season. We knew consciously we made quite a lot of changes to the car running into this season and at the moment we don't fully understand how to get the best out of this car at the moment. So that's a choice you make. It's a season that lasts between now and the end of November and we will be able race throughout that period of time, developing the car. That's what we set out to do. Of course it's much more comfortable to start this season competitively and then fight from that. We've done both in our time. This feels pretty tough at the moment but we're a strong team and we'll have to find a way through.

Q: (Dieter Rencken - The Citizen) Gentlemen, your companies are in Formula One basically to use performance as a marketing pedestal or platform to be seen by a worldwide audience. Yet with the recent move to pay-per-view television audiences are dropping off. People are talking about 19% cumulative drops in the UK, 70% possibly in France, Jean-Michel. How do you people feel about this and how can you reverse this trend?

J-MJ: Yes, it's true that in France we're going to pay-per-view but it's a worldwide exposure and this is France and only France, so it's not a worldwide big issue. We're counting on quality because we have today a commitment from Canal Plus to deliver real quality in the job they're going to do to cover Formula One. We hope quality is going to be the master word.

PH: Well, I agree that there's some quality broadcasters going into the sport and there's no doubt that the level is being raised all over. Having said that, when you do your calculations to monitor your investment in the sport, or any sport, viewing figures are also vital. There's probably a bigger picture involved in terms of what's happening with the television world overall. It's not just about motorsport in reality. Broadcasting is something that can't rely on national broadcasters anymore. Pay TV is probably going to be future. It might not be today. At the moment we might lose some viewers in the short term but long-term that's probably where we're all going to end up. So, it's a hard one to call. You have to be slightly worried about it, but equally [about] what's happening in the television world generally. It's not just about Formula One, it's the television business model as it currently stands.

TW: I would agree with Paul. We're seeing a switch in the model. I'm not so worried because what we see is that in the US it's functioning very well. All the big sports platforms are transmitting on pay-per-view or pay TV. Probably it's a difficult transition, it's going to be painful at the beginning but it looks the way forward.

MW: We've got to accept that the world is changing and media is changing, so clearly pay-per-view in the first instance has reduced the classic audience size and that's got to be a concern. All we can do in Formula One is put on the best show and make the most entertaining show we possibly can. Also I think we have to work hard on all the other platforms because less people are watching television in the traditional sense. They are watching it in deferred modes, so they're watching it through mobile devices, laptops, tablets etc. So we have to look at the complete picture of how

people view their entertainment, how they use entertainment. The idea that the audience is always going to sit down at one or two o'clock on a Sunday afternoon and watch us is clearly going to change and we've got to accept that we have to make the best show we can and Bernie and his team have got to go out and market it and exploit it and get us as big an audience as we can possibly get.

EB: I think most has been told by my colleagues but if I may add something, going pay TV obviously it's a changed audience. It's clear that with live TV viewers you have different figures but I think the cumulative audience will be also stronger. I think if you take the example of some urban markets going to pay TV, I mean we always look at the global audience and actually America is going to be free-to-air so I'm sure the audience numbers will largely cover the difference in Europe

Q: (Alex Popov – RTR) The question is for Toto and Eric. What about the new passive DRS on your car, will you use it here, or if not, will you use it in Malaysia. And also for Toto, can you confirm that Daniel Juncadella is the reserve driver or not because it's not clear.

EB: We have not used the passive DRS on our car and we don't know yet when we are putting it on the car.

TW: Same for us. As for Daniel, he is part of the DTM line-up. It's something we want to have a close look, that starting from F3 where we have engines into DTM we want to build that platform and really have a ladder for young drivers in the system to grow up into Formula One and obviously putting them in the simulator and educating them properly is something we want to do in the future and Daniel is going to be part of that group of young drivers.

Q: (Ed Krause – Australian Motorsport News) The question goes back to the first question. Given the broadcast model is changing does that mean your revenue models need to change? You sell sponsorship based on bulk viewing essentially through free-to-air. Will you expect that the uptake in revenues from pay-per-view will offset any potential losses or reductions in your actual sponsorship?

MW: I think clearly you would hope that there would be an uplift in revenue from pay-per-view but I think all Formula One teams now have a more complex business model than purely selling the live television audience. We have for some time had to work harder and harder. Advertising has become a more challenging worldwide marketplace. Of course we hope we get some more revenue from pay-per-view. But I think Formula One is a mass audience sport and I think we inevitably have to maintain that. As we just said, we're going through a transition period and people can point to Formula One as maybe making some decisions that are wrong, but actually I think if you take the case of the UK, Formula One really didn't have a choice. The BBC was reducing its sporting budget, Bernie really had to move when he did and I think Sky are doing an excellent job. We've got to work with them, we've got to enhance our show, we've got to look at all the other media platforms outside of television that are increasingly being used and we've all got to work together to do so.

EB: Yes, as you said, obviously as you said the business model today of a Formula One is much more complex maybe than the past, than just selling TV viewerships. If we could get more money from pay TV it would be welcome. It's more complex in looking at the future. I mean football went to pay TV and got huge revenue from pay TV, but I think Formula One, because first its global and this is the only global sport in the world it needs to be something more complex and it's going to take time.

TW: I think it's much tougher today with big sponsors and sponsors leaving the sport is not good for any of us. But we shouldn't talk it down. As Eric said it's the largest global motorsport – sport platform actually – and I think we are just in a terrible environment. It's a long cycle. Big corporations pull out and in a couple of years we will look back and say that was pretty tough. But if you look at the revenue we are having from TV and Bernie's marketing that revenue is going up. So maybe that model is changing and we are going to go more regional. We have seen it in the past where teams are doing regional sponsorship through various channels, through the Internet and classical sponsorship, so the whole model is in a transition but I think it's in a transition to a different maybe better model. It's going to increase the potential revenue streams and as I said before it's just a very tough market at the moment.

Q: For Paul and Jean-Michel at the back. Obviously you're not teams but partners and suppliers for Formula One, so how does this affect you as engine and tyre suppliers?

J-MJ: The only way it can affect us is through the budget of the teams. If the team has got less budget it will be more difficult to find a way to get enough revenue for Formula One to live with engine suppliers, but we have no direct impact.

PH: For ourselves on one level there is an impact because it's a major investment for us to be in the sport and the viewing figures do have a big impact on how we calculate the value of our involvement. Having said that, the other aspect is that it is a unique global platform. As Martin mentioned there is no other sport that has the global cohesion. F1's gone away from a European-based sport to a truly global sport and if we do finally go to Russia, we have another race in the US and there's always talk of something else in Latin America, it is a unique proposition for many people like ourselves, particularly in the automotive world. So it has some value. There are also different channels that we don't really evaluate today. We talk about gaming for example. I've yet to see anyone calculate what's the value of having a brand exposed in gaming. I'm sure that will come soon but there are areas that we will evolve into as a sporting platform that will give us more value than just the classical television audience. Martin's right – most people under the age of 20 don't watch television on a television anymore. That is the way the world is changing. Formula One has an opportunity to be at the forefront of that technology, particularly as it's such a technological sport. We have to look at it from two points of view.

Q: (Ian Parkes – PA) Martin, given that at the end of last season McLaren finished that season with the fastest car, a winning car, what was the thinking with the team over the winter to decide to make so many changes? And secondly, given the team also lost Paddy Lowe over the winter, has that played any part in the team starting the season on the back foot?

MW: Well, answering the last piece first, obviously Paddy was with us through to the launch of the car, so I don't think the Paddy Lowe decision had an impact. I think the primary decision is you make a judgement during the course of last year. We made good development of the car. If you look at our year, in fact we were very strong here in Australia. We didn't make as much progress for a while, and then towards the end we came strong again. We took the view that there is a natural asymptotic profile to development and we felt that if we wanted to have the ability to develop the car between now and the end of the season we needed to make some season. Inevitably when you do that there is some risk involved and that was the judgement we made. We still believe that we've got a platform we can develop. It's a platform we don't know as well as the one we have left. Undoubtedly, if we took last year's car and just concentrated on that, would we be quicker today? I think, yes we would, today. But would it have the development potential during the year? It was our judgement, we'll see later whether we're right or wrong, but it was our judgement that we needed to make some changes which is what we did.

Q: (Jacob Polychronis – Flplus.com) Martin from a managerial perspective is it easier now at McLaren considering that you no longer have two world champions with the team or was that considered a situation you'd prefer to have?

MW: I think any team wants the strongest driver line-up. We've had various stages in the life and history of McLaren where we've had two world champions and those have usually been interesting and good phases because you have two good drivers. It wasn't managerially a real challenge.

Occasionally you have a situation where drivers are near the front and they're competing with one another, if you're in the middle of the pit wall you know if it goes wrong the heat comes on you. You have some uncomfortable moments but overall it's not a bad place to be.

Q: (Kate Walker – Girl Racer) Question for the three of you in the front row: going back to the issue of sponsorship, but away from the broadcasting and TV rights, to what extent has the financial crisis affected your ability to pull in sponsors? We've seen Burn come in, Glaxo Smith Kline, Blackberry but there have also been a few high profile losses. Toto, I'm particularly interested in your response because you've seen this through both Williams and Mercedes. Is there a difference at the front end of the grid to the back?

TW: I think it's – as I said before – a tough environment. I'm in a totally different place than I was last year and it helps to kind of give me a good perspective as to how important it is for us all to push for the sport and not just go flat out in an opportunistic way for ourselves. So yes, the financial crisis and the economic environment has a big impact. If big corporations have to scale down their investment, marketing or sponsorship is probably the first thing that you're looking at, but I guess the sport is in good form and good health. It's cyclical, it's going to come back, maybe in a different way, in a different form, maybe different kind of partners and as you said, we have seen Coca Cola coming into the sport; Blackberry, obviously, with us, has been a very important milestone for the team so I don't feel so depressed for the sponsorship market but we have to be very careful and look at the situation and we can't, as I said before, we can't just look after ourselves, we have to look after all the teams and try to keep the sport healthy.

EB: I think that for me it's a little bit more complex. The world economic situation doesn't help because every company still looks at their budget and obviously how it is spent. The funny thing about the situation is that Formula One is attractive today to a lot of companies and we actually have on our shirts signs of a couple of new sponsors including Coca Cola and Microsoft and Unilever which are big companies and looking at new strategy, and I'm telling you, the global strategy of Formula One – and I'm repeating myself – but it is the only global sport in the world. I think, in our case anyway, the most difficult challenge is to... we have a lot of discussions with sponsors and it's mostly the heritage from the last decade, where you have car manufacturers selling cars and obviously today we are selling Formula One which is a bit different. It's all an educational process which you have to do and go through and go to the new companies which were interested in Formula One and, as you say Toto, the sport is healthy in this way but it's definitely the challenge and we have to be cautious but it will take time to rebuild all the portfolio.

MW: I think our view is that there is still a lot of companies which find Formula One a very attractive sport to invest in but inevitably, if they're going through a tough time, then they're hesitant to come in at this moment. I think we all come across a lot of businesses that would like to come in, they would like to come in at perhaps a rate card that some of the top teams wouldn't support. I think we've got to be very conscious of that but as we said earlier, we've got to make sure we build the show, make sure we work hard at it. The world economy certainly hasn't made it any easier, there's no doubt about that. But I think there's some positive signs in the market at the moment, that people are seeing that Formula One is stabilising, there have been some great World Championships over the last few years. I sense that perhaps we were the last into this recession, we will be the last out of it but I think teams are starting to see better interest in the commodity of Formula One than perhaps we have in the last two or three years where people didn't have confidence because people need to have confidence, need to believe that they're going to be around and survive and be healthy before they invest in Formula One.

Q: (Matt Coch – pitpass.com) To the team principals: we're talking about money almost exclusively here, isn't that a sign that Formula One's excesses have got a little bit excessive? You've got teams at the back spending a million dollars a week where teams at the front are spending four million dollars. Doesn't the whole underlying problem here stem back to the fact that Formula One spends too much money?

MW: Inevitably, if you say we're going to put two cars on the grid 19 times this year and look at the budget, then I think that by most people's... certainly by most people's domestic economics it seems very excessive indeed. But it's driven by the value of success in Formula One because, as we've mentioned already, it's a world sport, it has this great coverage and none of the investors today in Formula One are there for any altruistic motivation, they're there because it makes sense, they get a return on that investment and if they're not, they're not around for long. It's one of those situations. I think Formula One has not been the best environment in which to try and control costs because we're naturally competitive people and you're always trying to find a way forward, find performance, find a way to spend more money. But I do think there is much more discussion about money in Formula One than there needs to be; I don't know how much it interests the audience incidentally, perhaps we talk about it too much. But I think it's clear that if you look at the limitation on the number of engines, the limitations on the number of gearboxes, wind tunnel, CFD restrictions, testing restrictions; all of those things go against the natural inclination of the large teams in Formula One – because they like doing all those things, they like to do them frequently. The fact that we have restricted ourselves quite successfully in those areas, is a demonstration that there is an understanding that the sport has been too excessive in the past and we've got to try and control it, but it's difficult, because you control one space and the sport is very creative and they will find somewhere else to spend the money. It's going to be constant process.

EB: For me I think your question is a bit strange; do we spend too much? It depends on the level of expenditure, obviously, and it's a global sport, successful I think, so obviously success is driving costs. If there are a lot of followers and TV viewers and a lot of people watching across the world it is because they like this sport. I think the real question is how to make sure this sport can last and be sustainable for the long term, rather than do we spend too much or not enough.

TW: If you look at the media value of some of our races, it's huge. I remember I read a figure about Mercedes winning in Shanghai last year and it had a media value of about 60 million for our brand, so the question is that you have to put that in relation: how much do we spend and how much value do we generate for our partners? I think that ratio is still healthy.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – The Citizen) Question predominantly for Martin, only because you've been in Formula One 21 years or so so I think you've operated under virtually all the Concorde except the first one. If we have a look at the 2008/2009 season, there was no proper Concorde in place. All the parties had agreed to operate under the previous one, so in real terms there was proper procedure, governance, whatever. At the moment there is absolutely nothing, so Sunday's race is the first race for about thirty years running outside of a Concorde Agreement; is that sustainable at all?

MW: Well, I think it's sustainable but it isn't desirable. I think now it's clear that the FIA and FOM are working hard together. I think people are operating largely as though the governance of Concorde is in place. Clearly there are some questions about how some rule changes have happened: is there correct governance? I think at the moment people are resisting the desire to get terribly pedantic so I think in the best interest in the sport, rather than arguing about the detail of a particularly rule change, it's better that we all concentrate on converging upon a Concorde which is clear governance, it gives a clear framework, it gives confidence to investors, it makes the teams know how they are going to operate. Is it sustainable for a few more months? Yes. Is it healthy and the right thing for years to come in the sport? No. But I think there are signs that people are working quite hard now to get to a new Concorde.

F1 Australia Blog – Friday practice report

After months of anticipation, the beginning of F1 at Albert Park was a moment of magic. The air was torn asunder with the sound of a revving F1 engine, Daniel Ricciardo took to the track, and that was about it for what felt like decades.

It was frustration made flesh, a quick F1 teaser that only served to remind us that free practice tends to be less than scintillating. No one wants to be the man to clean up the track for all their rivals, wasting precious rubber and achieving little of value.

But after several ice ages had been and gone, the teams decided they'd had enough of their Mexican stand-off and finally left the pits en masse. What did we learn from the morning session?

First and foremost, the only problem Red Bull had during winter testing was finding a sandbag big enough to disguise their pace. Quelle surprise. Red Bull do that Every. Single. Winter., but the press falls for it on an annual basis.

Otherwise, the relative pace demonstrated by the teams was pretty much as expected. McLaren had a nightmare of a day, with both Jenson Button and Sergio Perez struggling during the morning and the afternoon. But the so-called Big Five all filled the top ten slots in F1, barring a decent show of pace by F1 returnee Adrian Sutil, who cut a fine figure behind the wheel of the Force India.

Caterham were dramatically slower than the newly KERS-equipped Marussia, but a private conversation with a senior team figure earlier this week revealed that the team expect to be off the pace until Barcelona, as the last of Mike Gascoyne's designs are worked out of the car, to be replaced in Spain by John Iley's innovations and iterations.

The afternoon session saw more of the same, with Sebastian Vettel once again setting the pace for Red Bull. But where F1 was largely free of drama (despite Paul di Resta's best efforts to drift his Force India through the gravel traps at the close of play), FP2 was a bit more of an incident-riddled affair.

Both Mercedes drivers found themselves out of the running with problems shortly before the chequered flag fell – Nico Rosberg was told to pull over when the team detected a gearbox problem, while a broken splitter saw Hamilton career off track and into the gravel. Before the issues, however, both cars were demonstrating reasonable pace.

Mark Webber was the first man to actively demonstrate the high degradation levels of the new Pirelli rubber, losing all grip and sliding backwards out of Turn 13. The Australian's car was undamaged, and he went on to end the session in P2 on the timesheets.

Webber wasn't the only spinner on Friday afternoon – Jean-Eric Vergne had a brown trouser moment in his Toro Rosso, while Giedo van der Garde lost it in the kitty litter after eleven laps and found himself with little to do for the rest of FP2 but twiddle his thumbs.

Formula One is back! But can we pretend it's not till qualies get underway?

F1 times (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1m27.211s [16 laps]
2. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1m27.289s [17 laps]
3. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1m27.547s [16 laps]
4. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1m27.552s [18 laps]
5. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1m27.668s [18 laps]
6. Kimi Räikkönen (Lotus) 1m27.877s [17 laps]
7. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1m28.013s [17 laps]
8. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1m28.426s [19 laps]
9. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1m28.440s [19 laps]
10. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1m28.520s [15 laps]
11. Sergio Perez (McLaren) 1m28.597s [19 laps]
12. Nico Hulkenberg (Sauber) 1m28.786s [19 laps]
13. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1m28.910s [18 laps]
14. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1m29.443s [20 laps]
15. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1m29.928s [19 laps]
16. Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) 1m30.203s [17 laps]
17. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1m30.729s [17 laps]
18. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1m30.969s [19 laps]
19. Jules Bianchi (Marussia) 1m31.263s [24 laps]
20. Max Chilton (Marussia) 1m32.176s [23 laps]
21. Charles Pic (Caterham) 1m32.274s [21 laps]
22. Giedo van der Garde (Caterham) 1m32.388s [18 laps]

FP2 times (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1m25.908s [33 laps]
2. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1m26.172s [31 laps]
3. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1m26.322s [26 laps]
4. Kimi Räikkönen (Lotus) 1m26.361s [38 laps]
5. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1m26.680s [32 laps]
6. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1m26.748s [35 laps]
7. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1m26.772s [28 laps]

8. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1m26.855s [32 laps]
 9. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1m27.435s [35 laps]
 10. Nico Hulkenberg (Sauber) 1m28.187s [34 laps]
 11. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1m28.294s [30 laps]
 12. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1m28.311s [37 laps]
 13. Sergio Perez (McLaren) 1m28.566s [33 laps]
 14. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1m28.627s [31 laps]
 15. Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) 1m28.772s [33 laps]
 16. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1m28.852s [36 laps]
 17. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1m28.968s [36 laps]
 18. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1m29.386s [39 laps]
 19. Jules Bianchi (Marussia) 1m29.696s [32 laps]
 20. Charles Pic (Caterham) 1m30.165s [37 laps]
 21. Max Chilton (Marussia) 1m30.600s [36 laps]
 22. Giedo van der Garde (Caterham) 1m32.450s [11 laps]
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F1 Australia Blog – Thursday press conference

It's the first day of a new season, and with it comes a new press conference format. A new approach, some fresh questions, and six familiar faces getting grilled by the media.

Present were Fernando Alonso (Ferrari), Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes), Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus), Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso), Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull), and Mark Webber (Red Bull).

Gentlemen, welcome. Let's start with you Mark. There have been a couple of retirements from the sport, so you're the oldest man on the grid this year – don't worry, you don't look it just yet.

Q: Home race to start the season. Pretty much everyone here apart from Kimi has a home race. Is it good to get one out of the way first of all, all the pressure and extra attention that goes with it?

Mark WEBBER: I think it's just great to come to Australia at any stage let alone for a race, so we're all looking forward to finally getting racing. There's a lot of testing that goes on in Spain and we can all get down to what we all enjoy doing and that's racing the cars. So, yeah, all the teams, drivers come here with a little bit more anxiety let's say just because it's the first grand prix of the year, whether it's pit stops or whatever department you're in, it's a fresh challenge for the new year. For sure around round six, round seven everyone is more comfortable with their jobs but it's the same for everyone. It's a great event and looking forward to getting into the car.

Q: Daniel, I'm sure you're looking forward to getting into the car as well for what is your home grand prix. It's your second full season at Toro Rosso – extra pressure that goes with that? You against Jean-Eric Vergne. Is it a shootout between the pair of you? How do you see your season coming?

Daniel RICCIARDO: Just hanging out for it to start, actually. Obviously I'll try and take the experience I learned from last year and bring it into this season: a bit of extra confidence and whatnot and then just try to get some better results and start to creep up the order a bit. That's really the plan. You always want to try to beat the team-mate. That's always there, but I'm definitely focused on myself and just do than usual, not doing any dramatic changes.

Q: I'm not sure there's anything that's pretty much usual for you Lewis. New team. Melbourne might be familiar but Mercedes still not quite the familiar team that McLaren would be. How much different is your life at the moment with your new outfit?

Lewis HAMILTON: It's not that much different. It's put me in a better place. Just settling into the team pretty well. It's still a Formula One team and they still exist to win. The guys are doing a fantastic job and I'm really excited about the season and excited to get back in the car.

Q: More excited after Barcelona? It went well that final weekend for you and for Nico.

LH: Not particularly any more excited I think. You can't really take too much from the tests.

Q: With that in mind Kimi, let's reflect on yours and Lotus' chances for this season. A slight touch of unreliability in the tests but a lot of people are saying you, the team are genuine contenders for the title this year. Is that accurate?

Kimi RAIKKONEN: It's difficult to say but we will see after maybe two or three races where we are. We had a few small issues and unfortunately the issues just took a long time to fix. That happens. I think we should be OK. There are always things that can go wrong but I think we are more or less, speedwise, similar to where we were last year when we started and like I said it's difficult to say exactly where we will be. We'll see a bit tomorrow.

Q: Do you believe, going into your second full season since your comeback, that you're a better driver this year – that the rustiness you had maybe at the start of last year is gone?

KR: I don't think it's going to really change. I know the team so it should be a bit easier to start the year but there is no promise that this will give you better results. It's another year and we'll try to do as well as we can.

Q: For you Fernando, another year but a much better car than this time last year – 200 times better I think you said, the Ferrari in 2013. Is this your best chance to become a world champion at Ferrari?

Fernando ALONSO: We'll see. I think it was not difficult to start better than last year because it was difficult to start any worse. We were a little bit too far behind and the winter has been much better than the last year, understanding the car and working with the car and getting the results we more or less expect. That will give us much more confidence and optimism to start the season, but who knows. I think it will be a very interesting championship, very challenging first part of the championship with Australia, Malaysia. Difficult circuits, difficult weather as well – changeable. So we need to start on the right foot and hopefully scoring some good points for the championship.

Q: And Sebastian, three consecutive titles. How much difficult is a fourth title in a row now that you've got those three in the bag or does it make no difference whatsoever?

Sebastian VETTEL: I don't think it makes a difference. I think every year we start again from zero. I think everyone has the same chance. As we said, testing obviously this year was probably not as conclusive as previous years, so we arrive here not knowing what is going to happen. But I think it is very exciting so as every year, excited to start.

Q: Not knowing what's going to happen, does that make it even better for you – that the challenge could be tougher ahead?

SV: I think it's going to be a long year. Obviously we're looking forward to this weekend and this is the first of many. But I think we've seen in the last couple of years, last year in particular, that it's a long season and every race is very important. So this is the place we start but then there are many other places coming.

Nineteen races ahead and lots of questions to answer. Bob, I'm sure we've got a few hands raised among our media delegates here with some questions for the drivers.

Q: (Livio Oricchio - O Estado de Sao Paulo) To all drivers: during the winter tests tyre temperatures didn't go over 60 maximum Celsius and the temperatures here approach the temperatures indicated by Pirelli. Are you afraid that the handling of the car can be completely different to what you got in the winter tests?

SV: I think in winter testing we all suffered the same problem: the tyres didn't last. It was extremely difficult for us to do a lot of laps on the same set of tyres, to test certain things. We hope it gets better here. Otherwise it could be quite funny.

FA: Nothing to add. Let's hope it's different than the tests, with the temperature.

Q: The guys at the front, Daniel, probably have a touch more downforce on their car than the Toro Rosso. Do you feel the effect of the tyres that much extra in the midfield?

DR: I don't know. We're probably not afraid of what the weekend is going to be. We're probably more excited. It was a little bit frustrating at times, so I think we're excited about what it's going to bring here, so I'm sure it's going to be better. Looking forward to it more than anything else. There are still some answers that need to be found. We're all in the same boat, so I think that's going to make it exciting.

Q: (Gabriel Polychronis - Flplus.com) This one is for you Mark. Do you feel that the recent criticism from Helmut Marko on your performances acts as a motivator for you to prove yourself throughout the season.

MW: I've answered this question a few times in the last six weeks and as I said, he has his agenda and I'm not part of it, so that's fine. Everyone can have their opinions. I'm always pretty good for motivations.

Q: It doesn't make your motivation any less though?

MW: Of course not.

Q: (Ian Parkes - PA) Sebastian, after winning three titles in a row now, coming into this season, how do you approach it? Is your motivation any different to the past three seasons when you've gone on to win the title? And if it isn't, how do you build yourself up, keep yourself going, keep yourself focussed.

SV: Well if there is a secret I think it's not to think about what happened the last three years. I think the first title was very, very special. After that I don't think you have that pressure any more. You've proved to yourself more than to anyone else that you can do so. After that obviously we had two fantastic years again. Very different to each other. But as I said, you probably don't think about what happened last year or the last three years. We are here, we have zero points on our side at the moment, the same as everyone else. So everyone has the same opportunities. The cars didn't really change. Last year we saw it was very close so I don't expect it to be any different that last year. If anything maybe a little bit tighter. So it will be crucial to make the most out of every single race – but in terms of motivation... it was a long flight but I'm happy to be here now and very pleased to start again.

Q: (Trent Price - Richland F1) Question for Lewis. Obviously we can't take a lot from testing but obviously Mercedes did quite well towards the end of the times. Are you pushing quite hard to get time out of the car or are you feeling comfortable with it? Are you feeling quite snug?

LH: I feel comfortable in the car. I feel we've definitely made some really good steps forward. We've still got a lot of work to do. Obviously, normally when you go to a new team it takes a while to get settled in but I'm still working as hard as I can to make sure that feels as comfortable as possible. I think it just takes time and as time goes on I think I'll get even more and more comfortable in the team.

Q: What's been the one thing that you've appreciated more than anything since you've moved to Mercedes? What have the team done or allowed you to do that's made you feel more comfortable?

LH: Just a little bit more time at home. Training and to spend with family and friends. It's been good.

Q: (Manuel Franco - Diario AS) Question for Fernando. Ferrari can win this race?

FA: I think difficult to know. No-one knows who can win this race at this moment. We have to wait and see for answers to some questions that winter testing doesn't answer. I think there are top teams with a little bit of advantage. Maybe it's not the same as last year where we saw seven different winners in the seven first races. It was a little bit mixed on the grid. I think this year with the consistency in the rules I expect the five top teams to have a little advantage and not to have many, many surprises in the first races. But from these five top teams I think it's very difficult to see really after winter testing who has this extra two- or three-tenths that can make you win. At the moment I think it's very close and very difficult to choose one favourite.

Q: So, would you say ten drivers go into this race with a realistic chance of winning on Sunday?

FA: I think so. I think Mercedes, McLaren, Lotus, Ferrari and Red Bull show up some potential in different days in testing and different parts of races last year. I think difficult to choose.

Q: (Carlos Miguel Gomez - La Gaceta) Question for Fernando. After Barcelona, we see in Barcelona you have the best time in the last sector. With these conditions could this track be very good for the Ferrari?

FA: I don't know. I think winter test, as we've said many times, very difficult and dangerous to make any conclusions. I think in terms of sector times

and things like that, a lot of different tyres for every team, a lot of different fuel loads etcetera and different moments of the race. We are happy with the job we have done in the winter. We more or less did the programme that we planned – even though we had some weather changeable on some days – and we arrived here with our hundred per cent of the potential at the moment in the car. We don't really miss anything, that was a problem before. So, hopefully it's enough to be competitive and this circuit in particular I like a lot. I have been always very comfortable here and with good performance, the same in Malaysia, these first two races can be a good opportunity for us to score some good points. But I don't know how quick we can be.

Q: (Richard Fowler – motorsportretro.com) Mark, it's the 60th anniversary of the race here at Albert Park. What would it mean for you to win at home and join the likes of Jack Brabham and Alan Jones as a winner of the Australian Grand Prix?

MW: Any grand prix victory is special. I'm lucky to have had that feeling a few times now, which is great: Monaco, the British Grand Prix, those are very prestigious races. This is for sure up there in the top three of events a driver wants to win: your home grand prix is for sure very special. It would be a sensation feeling to be able to do it. But as you say, all that, anniversaries and the nice, fuzzy stuff, is not really going to make it easier for me. I realise I've got to put together a clean weekend and pull it all together and make all of the right decisions. We're capable of it but we're also mindful that it's a very tricky weekend to execute – especially with it being the first event and things like that. But looking forward to it.

Q: (Kate Walker – Girl Racer) Question to any of you who want to answer it. We've heard a lot about the new tyre compounds that Pirelli have provided but the new tyres also have different weights, which has affected the front-rear balance of the car. To what extent has that affected your handling on track, downforce, things like that please?

KR: I think everybody has similar issues with the tyres. All winter, conditions, they wore out very quickly but I thought they had better grip on one lap than last year but then they go off more quickly. But it's difficult to say with the conditions we've been running over the winter testing, so it might be a completely different story here. Balance-wise they are quite similar to last year.

Q: Lewis?

LH: I don't really have much more to say about it. The tyres are a little bit different, it's not a big drama, everyone's in the same boat so it'll be interesting to see how long the supersoft tyre lasts, if there's a little more graining than there was last year. But again, everyone's got the same tyre. I haven't seen any discrepancies between each tyre.

Q: On the subject of supersofts, do you enjoy the challenge Seb, of having to go with a tyre that has never been used here before?

SV: We didn't use it in winter testing either; we haven't used that tyre. I think generally, as Kimi said, it will be interesting to see whether the temperatures make a difference or not at all. We are keen to find out and then we'll know a little bit more.

Q: (Ian Parkes – PA) Fernando, you've agonisingly missed out on the title twice in the last three years. Do you carry the pain of those near-misses into this season? Does it serve as motivation for you to drive you on this season?

FA: Well, I think I feel privileged to fight for the world championship two times in the last three years. Not many people have the opportunity to be on the podium and to enjoy the podium ceremony in Formula One and even less people have the opportunity to win races and very few people have the opportunity to fight for a world championship. So I feel lucky and privileged to have those opportunities. Sure, we lost two times in the last three years, in the last race and we want to have again the possibility once again to fight for the world championship, hopefully this year and hopefully this year change the final result. But this is just a normal thing for the sport and this is maybe some extra motivation for me and from the team, to really have one happy result at the end.

Q: (Michael Wittershagen – Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung) Question to Sebastian and Fernando: could you please tell us what you think of each other as a person and as a driver?

FA: Well, I think as a driver, really not much to say: three times World Champion beating all the records in terms of wins and fastest laps and pole positions etc. 2011 was nearly a record championship and this is not only about the car or about the package. You need to perform, even when you have the car that is available. Seb has won everything perfectly in the past years and for that he is World Champion and he's a tough rival and contender for the next couple of years. As a person, we obviously don't spend much time together. We are of a different generation. We didn't race together in go-karts or anything like that. He's a normal – or looks like a normal guy – and nothing more so all good.

SV: Thank you very much. I think, as a driver, I don't have to introduce Fernando. I think he's one of the most respected and most accepted drivers in the world. I think in all circumstances he has the ability to be on the limit. I think he's a very intelligent driver and I think that's the reason why he was always fighting for the championship until the end, in many years of his career. Fortunately we had the upper hand in the last couple of years but surely he's trying his best to give everyone a hard time again this year, and as a person, as he said, we don't spend that much time together, hardly with any of the drivers. It's probably what people think or expect from the outside but there's obviously not a lot of time during the weekend but in private – I don't drink coffee so I'm not inviting you for a coffee but I can invite you for a Red Bull if you want to talk.

At least you're on one each other's Christmas card list now for the future.

Q: (Alex Popov – Russian TV) There is strong opinion about the new qualifying, in Q2 especially, because there are fewer cars and the tyres are very soft, so maybe it's better to preserve the tyres than get into Q3? Do you agree?

MW: In Barcelona we were still qualifying all together. Just start the race. The tyres at the back of the grid... don't worry about Q3, we don't worry about Q1 or Q2 either. You need the tyres to finish the race.

Q: Can any of you see an advantage there in missing out on Q3, potentially in the first few races?

SV: I don't think so. I think you always want to start from the front. There's the odd example here or there where people maybe had a bit of a benefit putting on that extra set at the end of the race but on average I think if you can choose, you go for the front (of the grid).

Q: Same for you Daniel?

DR: Yeah, I'd like to! I'd like to. Obviously if I was in the position to do that as well I would definitely go for starting at the front. Starting in the mid-pack and taking that risk to save tyres is obviously putting yourself in a bit more of a tight situation potentially on the first lap with more cars around. The thing is, if you're able to fight for the front row you go for it, that's the logical one for me.

Q: (Gary Meenaghan – The National) Is there such a thing as an ideal size of field; we've lost a team, obviously, over the break? Are we now the ideal size, should it be higher, less?

MW: I think that's a nice number: twenty is probably getting a bit low so between 26 and 20 is a nice little number. More than 26 is probably too much on some tracks – Monte Carlo, whatever – in qualifying. I think that's a good number, certainly in a nice window but that level of numbers – I think what's important is the level of the teams, that's the thing we've got to keep an eye on, keep the level of the teams at a high level in Formula One, not to have cars on the grid that are properly not at the level, so we just need to keep an eye on that in the future.

Q: (Livio Oricchio - O Estado de Sao Paulo) Start with me, finish with me: Sebastian and Mark, the new test for the front wing and forbidden to use DRS on many parts of the circuit; how do these changes affect your team particularly?

MW: Look, we've had a lot of different front wing regulations in the last few years. It's normal in Formula One that we have to adjust technically around new rule changes, sometimes within the season itself, not just at the start of the season: January, February. We obviously make the car fit within those regulations and we will have to adjust the car around the findings of how that front wing will form in those new regulations, so that's fine. In terms of the DRS, it's not a big thing for us. I think that we have been OK in qualifying in the past, also quite strong in races so the effect of the DRS, the delta of the DRS, all those type of things which is not something that we're having a huge eye on, we're not disappointed that the DRS is less in qualifying. For example, Sebastian and I are very happy; we pushed quite hard to have DRS dropped down in terms of volume on Saturday afternoon so we're quite relaxed with that one.

SV: I think most of the changes to the front wing came in trying to stop us so something that we maybe did better or that the others couldn't do and then there's just one more thing, so it's not a new situation.
