

F1 Brazilian Grand Prix – Thursday press conference

For the last time in 2012, six drivers were called up to face the demands of the attendant media. For at least one driver present, it will have been his last Thursday FIA press conference.

Present were Fernando Alonso (Ferrari), Lewis Hamilton (McLaren), Felipe Massa (Ferrari), Michael Schumacher (Mercedes), Bruno Senna (Williams), and Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull).

A very important weekend for everybody, the final weekend of the championship and lots of pressure all round, apart, perhaps, from Michael Schumacher. You've been here before Michael, you have an extraordinary record at this race and you're finally ending your championship bid after many, many years, after many seasons. What are your feelings coming into this weekend?
Michael SCHUMACHER: I guess I have some experience and that's why, probably, I'm rather relaxed about the happenings. On top [of that] we are not in any championship fight compared to last time that happened to me, obviously. Well, I'll just take the best out of it and enjoy it as much as I can.

Is there a certain sadness?

MS: Probably not, no.

Quite happy to leave it.

MS: Yeah, I have tried that mission to end successful. It didn't work this time but I'm quite happy to finish from here and go for a different life again.

Felipe, if we can come to you. You've won here twice before, what can you do to help Fernando win the championship.

Felipe MASSA: Well, first of all I'll try to win a third time. That's always the right direction to think about racing – always thinking about victory. Here is a very special place for me and I'm going to try to win and hopefully Fernando can finish second without any problems to win the championship.

Just give us a bit of a summary of your season so far. What are your thoughts on the season?

FM: I think it was a very difficult season until August. So, struggling... in some of the races I was not struggling but I could not put together the result. Always happened something in the race that I couldn't finish in the right position. I would say after August everything was better and we were able to put together the right... almost the right result at every race. It was a very good second part of the season and very good preparation for next year.

Lewis, we saw what you can do in this championship last weekend, a fantastic race, and of course you won the championship here; you know what it's all about this final race of the series. For you, you've been with McLaren for many years, it's your final race for McLaren. How do you approach this weekend?

Lewis HAMILTON: Good morning everyone. It's quite a unique experience for me. I've obviously never been in the situation I'm in this weekend, where it's my last race for the team I grew up in. It's going to be a tough one. Nonetheless, we're going to push as hard as we can, as we did in the last race, and try to win. I've never won here before. So I'm going to have to try and beat Felipe, as he wants to win it. It's such a beautiful race here so hopefully the weather will hold up for us.

After so many years with McLaren what are your feelings leaving the team?

LH: I only have good memories. I leave with just the greatest memories, the best experiences and hopefully a lot of good friends I will continue to be friends with throughout the future. I was just saying to them that even though I'll be with Mercedes, I'll probably keep coming back to have lunch and dinner back at the hospitality because the food's great there. So, I hope Mercedes' hospitality lives up to the one we have.

Bruno, a summary of your season so far.

Bruno SENNA: It's been a very challenging season, lots of learning. We got some very good results and some tough races as well. Considering it was my first full year in Formula One, and with the small handicap of not doing free practice on Fridays, I think it's been a pretty good year. In the end most of my races have been very strong. Just starting from a different position from where I should be starting has made me score less points than I could have had. In the end of the day it's learning and you normally do much better on the second attempt at the same thing, so for sure there will be a lot of improvement to be done for next year.

Are you confident there will be a next year? The future seems to be undecided at the moment.

BS: Yeah it's undecided and I think we will have to wait until after the season to see what's going to happen. Let's hope it comes in a good way and we can be in a competitive car for next season.

Sebastian to some extent we look at an unpredictable weekend, in that the weather seems to be unpredictable and there's a little bit of a question mark over the reliability. To what extent are you nervous about this weekend?

Sebastian VETTEL: In terms of general preparation we do what we can. Weather-wise, it's Sao Paulo. It's the same as if you go to Spa, you know, things can happen quickly and the weather can change a lot here, so... yeah, I spoke to some locals and I think there was a big rain two days ago which wasn't expected. Probably for Saturday, Sunday there's some rain on the way, but then again you don't know how much and when so I think I asked Pirelli yesterday if they have all the containers here with the rain tyres, and that's the case, so I don't think we have to be concerned.

At the same time you can be confident: 13-point lead in the championship, you've had excellent results here, Red Bull have had

excellent results here.

SV: Yeah, I think the circuit seemed to suit our car in previous years. I think we need to confirm it. So all eyes on Friday, to start the weekend, to get into the groove, but I think we can be as confident as we could in this stage. Obviously we know there is a lot ahead but we are in a great position.

Michael, we'll come back to you again. It's been 20 years of grand prix racing. How can you sum it up?

MS: Well, I don't think we have long enough here to sum it up, but let's put it that way: It was mostly 20 good years and lots of fun and lots of excitement.

You'd recommend it to Sebastian would you?

MS: Well, I just remember when I was in the early days, I said if you're going to do this four or five years that's going to be probably most of it, and then I will be tired and I can't see myself longer than this. Obviously it became almost 21 years. I'm pretty sure it's difficult for those guys to imagine that longer time ahead, but let's see.

Fernando, it's quite difficult for you from where you are, 13 points behind in the championship. What are the chances this weekend?

FA: Well, I think we need to try to do a normal weekend, try to score as many points as we can, obvious it will be good to be in the podium and score a minimum 15 points and then when we cross the line we see where Sebastian is and we try to do some numbers after that. The first priority for us is to be in the podium, let's say, which give us the possible to score more than 13 points and then we need to wait obviously for the results from Red Bull because we have not... it is not in our hands, we have not much to lose, we have only the possibility to win something and we will try to do our best.

Regardless of what happens this weekend, what do Ferrari need to do to be in a better position for next year?

FA: Well, we are working hard, it was a tough season for us, the first couple of months were not as we expected. When we put the car on the circuit the first time in Jerez we were two seconds off the pace and we didn't understand how was the car working so we changed many things. There was a lot of work going on in the wind tunnel in Maranello, in the car itself and after some understanding of the car we were a little bit more in the pace and we were able to fight for podiums more or less constantly all the season and that gave the possibility to be right now fighting for the World Championship. But we are not totally happy with the performance of the car all through the season and many changes will be for next year and hopefully we can recover a little bit of the gap we have now. In winter we will have to do an extra job compared to the other teams to recover this gap.

Seb, despite your enviable record in this sport, quite often people say... or they may not give you the credit that you might feel you deserve because you've always had such a strong car. How does it feel for you hearing people say 'oh, I'd like to see him in a different car, I'd like to see him in a worse car'? Does that demotivate you or motivate you to just prove everybody wrong?

SV: Well I think if you look back, I don't know how far, but as far as I can look back, I think there was never people, y'know, really, really successful in a really bad car. I think you always... I think it's a natural thing to happen that one day you have strong drivers in a strong team so you end up with a strong combination and then obviously that is difficult to beat. I think it's natural to start in a weaker car, I think we have all been in that situation.

Michael started in a Jordan which wasn't competitive but he set some highlights, Fernando I think started in a Minardi, set some highlights. Obviously in my case I started with the BMW, replacing Robert for one race, which was a great chance and then afterwards I got the seat in Toro Rosso, which at the time was not a very competitive car but I think we did a very good job and even won a race. Obviously with the circumstances allowing us to close the gap back then but... yeah, nevertheless I think we had a great season, finishing in the points a couple of times and obviously after that to step up to Red Bull Racing and 2009 was a great and fantastic season for myself, for the team, for the first time to be competitive, finishing on the podiums, win races, so I think it was a fairly normal way that I went.

Another one for Seb, would you like to have a team-mate like Felipe Massa? And you were very cool about the situation last weekend: will you be just as cool about the situation last weekend if you're not World Champion on Sunday?

SV: Well what they do is not in our hands. I didn't follow up if Felipe had a real trouble with the gearbox or not but as I said it's not our job to focus on these things. After seeing Felipe on Sunday night in Austin I'm not sure whether he would be a good team-mate! No, I'm joking, I think obviously it is a different approach compared to my team but that's how life is. I think everyone handles certain situations in a different way.

Michael, you know both of the contenders for a long time, what kind of memory will you give us for Seb and for Fernando? And question for Seb and Fernando, what kind of memory will you keep from Michael?

MS: Well, I mean obviously with Fernando I have had quite a few more years together competing and fighting championships. Obviously that is slightly different in this respect, it was tough moments. I mean, he was unfortunately in quite a few moments looking very strong and doing too good a job honestly - should have taken it easy and looked after the old man! But on Seb's side, we've been friends for a long time and I sort of follow his career into Formula One and seeing him doing so well, obviously makes me proud. We've both grown up on my home track in Kerpen and to see from where he started to end up and kind of being dominant for quite a while recently, that's quite an achievement.

And you two on Michael.

FA: I think we will always remember the privilege to race and compete with someone like Michael that will be record in history of Formula One, maybe for a very long time and we've been there, we've been in the grid close to him. As Michael said, some good fights and great respect on the circuit and always constantly learning with someone that changed a little bit this sport.

SV: I think it's a little bit different for Fernando than it is for me because obviously I had the privilege to meet Michael when I was a small kid. He was my childhood hero. Maybe he can close his ears or shut his ears now, but he was a true inspiration back then, for me and for many other kids, as he mentioned, in Kerpen. He was our hero. Obviously we had the honour to meet him. He was taking care of the championship held in Kerpen and came to the last race, gave all the trophies to everyone, every child, more than 100 at the time, so he was very patient and now, obviously, we understand that the busy schedule that he had, taking that extra time for the fans but especially for us, for the kids who were racing, was something very special, a very special memory. When I met him the first time, obviously I didn't know what to say because I didn't want to ask something stupid but for sure, I remember these moments and then later on. Today I think it's a little bit different because you are more grown up, you have a normal relationship so when I talk to him now, it doesn't feel like talking to my childhood hero, it feels like talking to Michael so I see the person rather than what he has achieved but obviously, if you remind yourself of that and the fact that I was racing against him for the last couple of years, unfortunately not as close as he probably shared with Fernando, but still that thought or that image was very very far away when I was a small kid, because obviously he was already in Formula One but for me it was a dream so very far away but very special for the last couple of years, very special the relationship we share and I think he will always be an inspiration for myself.

Sebastian, Bernie Ecclestone said to the German Bild Zeitung that despite you already having won two titles and maybe now a third, you miss out on charisma, compared to former drivers such as Hunt, Senna, Lauda. And he also said that not only you but all the drivers of your generation are more or less in the same situation, because, he said, teams pampered you too much and the FIA put muscle to you, so you are not free to explain yourselves. What do you think about that? Maybe this is also a general question; if somebody else would like to answer, I would appreciate it.

SV: Well, I think it's a difficult question. I don't know exactly what he said but maybe he was just taking the piss out of... sorry, maybe he was just taking the mickey out of the newspaper which is very possible with Bernie, but given what he said what you just said, I think generally it's difficult. Hopefully I have a little bit left in the sport so I can make up a little bit but also I think these days are very different to the previous days in terms of the freedom that we have. To give you an example, imagine that you find all of us, sitting here on Saturday night having a beer, even if it's just one beer, it would be a massive scene on Sunday. Yeah, unfortunately it's not that easy as maybe it used to be in the past. Last race we were in Austin, in Texas. The last winner in Texas was Keke Rosberg in 1984, I think, and he was having a smoke on the podium. I'm not sure whether people would be too happy with that when they already get excited when sometimes the language is not appropriate after just getting out of the car.

Fernando, if you win the championship, people will recall some great driving from you, but do you think your achievement will be damaged by the memory of what Ferrari did to your teammate's gearbox in the last race in Texas?

FA: Funny. I think we've seen so many scenes coming from the teams, not only this year but in the past in Formula One: we don't need to go too far this year with some of the races that we had some doubts - even Saturday night - of which teams and from which position they will start, depending on some decisions or some limits that they were finding in the regulations which we saw this year from many teams. I'm proud of my team, it was a strategic decision, to start on the clean side with both cars, also fighting for the Constructors championship that is one of the targets that we have, beating McLaren and it worked quite well. Because it worked quite well, maybe the people were not very happy but I'm proud of my team, more than anything it's because they said the truth when we changed the gearbox. Not many teams are able to say the truth when they make a strategic decision.

Fernando, Lewis is moving teams next year. You've been his teammate, what can Nico expect? What's it like having Lewis as a teammate?

FA: I think it will be fine for him, it will be a good challenge at Mercedes, and as a teammate, I think he will be very strong, so Nico will have some extra work to do. After three years with Michael, I think Nico keeps learning many things and another tough challenge with Lewis will arrive. I think they will be very strong. I think Nico and Lewis together, with the Mercedes, they can be serious contenders for next year. In the future, who knows, but I have a lot of respect for Lewis. I always said that he's probably the best or one of the best here. I shared a year with him, it didn't work too well because maybe we were not sharing the same philosophy but without McLaren, why not?

Fernando and Sebastian: two years ago in Abu Dhabi, Fernando you had a 15 point lead over Sebastian going into the very last race. Sebastian went and won the title. Does what happened then - although the track and circumstances are a bit different - does that give you belief as to what can be achieved? And Sebastian, does that make you fearful as to what could happen?

FA: I think these are different circumstances from Abu Dhabi. Now we have DRS, KERS so it (was) a little bit more difficult to pass (then) and maybe the rule was also introduced because of that race. I think even if you find yourself at the back of the grid, you're still able to recover positions as we saw in Abu Dhabi this year. Even if Seb started last, he finished on the podium, so we will see what we have in mind, that this is Formula One. This is a sport and anything can happen until the chequered flag so we will try to do the best race we can and, as I said, cross the line on the podium which gives us more than 13 points and see where Sebastian crosses the line. If we win, we will be very happy but we know that we need some strange combination of results: if we don't win, we will congratulate him and we will try next year. Nothing really surprising.

SV: I think we're very happy in the position that we are in. I think two years back we would have loved to have been in Fernando's position. If you could choose, I think it's clear but as Fernando said, in sport anything can happen so we need look after ourselves. The weekend starts tomorrow morning and not on Sunday, so really we have to go step by step, trying to do everything to ensure that we get the maximum result. Historically we've been very quick here, historically we know also it's quite a place where a lot of things can happen so we need to be sharp in the moment and see what we can get.

Lewis, what memories will you be taking away from McLaren? I presume here, four years ago, will be your greatest one.

LH: I think I'll take away only the positive memories of our journey together. Obviously winning the World Championship, winning my first Grand Prix, starting out together and I guess this weekend.

Sebastian, is there extra pressure that a lot of people think that you must win this championship?

SV: Yeah, I think it's obviously normal if you're in that position. I think we fight all year, some ups, some downs. I think everyone had the same to be in that position so now there's no reason to complain or not to be happy. Obviously there's one thing that the people expect, but another thing what we expect. All year we've been trying to push very hard and trying to put ourselves in a very strong position, to fight for the championship, ideally until the last race and be in the best possible place. Now we arrive in the last race, we are in a strong position so I think we can be happy with that but nevertheless, there's one more race to go, and as I said, we have to make sure that we focus on every single step to get the job done here.

Fernando, is there less pressure in that you have nothing to lose?

FA: Well, I think in Formula One there's always pressure but definitely we have less than on some other occasions and maybe less than probably if we were leading the championship, because as you said, we have nothing really to lose. We are arriving in second position, we are arriving after two qualifying dominated by Red Bull - well not two qualifying, five or six - and then we were around positions seventh, eighth in the last couple of Grands Prix so recovered 13 points, it looks like a very difficult achievement and I think, as I said, if everything goes normally, we should finish second. If something happens, maybe we will win the championship so, because it's probably not in our hands, the pressure is much less.

Fernando, do you think you will have another possibility in future, if not this year?

FA: I hope so. I think I'm 31 and I still feel that I will have some more possibilities. I'm at Ferrari for the next four or five years, minimum, so I think that will always give you the possibility to fight for World Championships. In three years at Ferrari, I arrive two times already fighting for the championship at the last race: 2010 in Abu Dhabi and now in Brazil, even with so many difficulties and chaotic years, let's say, for us, in terms of performance, in terms of problems and we were not dominant in any part of those championships, so even with those problems we are fighting for two or three years at Ferrari, so I have no doubts that in the next four or five years there will be more fights and more championships, but let's concentrate on this one.

Fernando, you said about the qualifying position, as you said in Austin, you said you would start in sixth, seventh. Do you think it will be the same, the gap will remain in Brazil?

SV: Yeah, I think so. I think there's no magic part that you can put on the car in five days. We were seventh in Abu Dhabi, we were ninth in Austin so I think around those positions should be the normal for here but hopefully we can do a better job.

Sebastian, in 2010 you needed to attack to win the championship and last year it was so easy, perhaps one can say. This year, you have an advantage to defend. Does it change your mental approach to the race, or will you take it as any other?

SV: I think the secret is to take it as any other. If you look in the calendar, Brazil is a race like every other one. You get the same amount of points and I think we are here to attack. Obviously we know that we are in a good position. Obviously, as I said, it's something we know but still we have to be - as I said before - sharp and ready to attack.

Fernando and Seb, if you finally win this title, will it be the most simple for you?

FA: Not really. I think winning the championship is always winning the championship. They all feel different, they all can feel special but I don't think there is one that becomes more important for you, or more special so I think it will be nice but nothing bigger than the other two.

SV: I think the man to ask sits in the middle. He has won more than two times. For us, for Fernando and me, it's the same with two championships and maybe a third, so we will see after this weekend but I don't think it makes sense to talk about it now and therefore, as I said, maybe Michael is the one to ask. He can choose from a variation of titles.

MS: I think the question was slightly different: whether this is the important one? Whichever one you win the latest one is the most sweet one.

One question for Sebastian and Fernando: at this point of the championship, looking at the whole season, do you feel that you had good luck or bad luck to arrive in this situation, with a gap of ten points?

SV: Well I think we have so many races this year, 20 races, some of them you might have a bit of luck; others you might have bad luck but I think it's the same probably for all of us, if you look over the course of 20 races. Sometimes it might feel this way or that way, but I think it evens out until the end.

FA: Yeah, it's up and down for everyone. We have more or less two or three retirements for each of us, fighting for the championship until the end and those retirements were sometimes for mechanical problems, sometimes for accidents, sometimes they were bad luck but at the end of the day this is normal and we see what happens here.

F1 Brazilian Grand Prix – F1 report

It all comes down to the next three days of track action in Interlagos, with the 2012 world drivers' title to be decided during Sunday's Brazilian Grand Prix.

Sebastian Vettel has a thirteen-point lead over rival Fernando Alonso, but Ferrari are throwing all that they can at their star driver's title bid – the Scuderia's aerodynamic upgrades were not limited to those tried in Austin. Friday morning in Brazil saw Alonso testing a new-spec front wing, and the gap between Red Bull and Ferrari appeared to have narrowed.

But there is little sense in reading too much into the times set during free practice, which is a time that Red Bull have – on occasion – used to disguise their pace with a view to lulling the other teams into a false sense of security.

Vettel was 0.009s slower than timesheet-topper Lewis Hamilton this morning, who set a 1:14.131s lap, with Mark Webber 0.058s further back. Alonso only managed a 1:14.392s fastest lap, which on a circuit as short as Interlagos is a bigger margin than the Scuderia will have hoped to see.

Also on display on Friday morning was a new Pirelli tyre, decked out in orange markings. The Italian tyre manufacturer brought along a trial version of 2013's new hard compound rubber for the teams to test, and used the orange branding to differentiate it from the official compounds that will be used for the duration of the weekend.

Pace-setter Lewis Hamilton set his fastest time of the morning on the development compound, while Vettel's best time was set using current rubber. The indications are strong that Pirelli will be spicing up the racing even further in 2013, giving drivers added grip for yet more cornering speed.

This morning's driver announcements have made it clear that Michael Schumacher is not the only driver taking part in his final F1 Friday practice session. Kamui Kobayashi does not have a drive for next year, and Heikki Kovalainen's chances of retaining his seat are growing ever slimmer.

F1 times (unofficial)

1. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1:14.131 [33 laps]
2. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1:14.140s [35 laps]
3. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1:14.198s [34 laps]
4. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1:14.217s [31 laps]
5. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1:14.392s [28 laps]
6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1:14.716s [29 laps]
7. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1:14.719s [33 laps]
8. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1:14.738s [34 laps]
9. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1:15.015s [37 laps]
10. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1:15.050s [32 laps]
11. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1:15.114s [36 laps]
12. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1:15.255s [31 laps]
13. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1:15.396s [32 laps]
14. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1:15.413s [23 laps]
15. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1:15.587s [35 laps]

16. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1.15.701s [16 laps]
 17. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.16.048s [35 laps]
 18. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.16.315s [36 laps]
 19. Giedo van der Garde (Caterham) 1.16.460s [32 laps]
 20. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.16.506s [31 laps]
 21. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.16.617s [30 laps]
 22. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.17.234s [26 laps]
 23. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.17.678s [15 laps]
 24. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.17.895s [13 laps]
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F1 Brazilian Grand Prix – FP2 report

For the second time today, Lewis Hamilton topped the timesheets for McLaren, setting a fastest lap of 1m14.026s in dry conditions at Interlagos.

As was the case in the morning, FP2 passed largely without incident – the only event of note was Charles Pic drawing his car to a halt on track as the result of what the team believe to have been an alternator failure. At the time of writing, the cause of the stoppage had yet to be confirmed.

It was interesting to note that Jean-Eric Vergne set exactly the same fastest times in both FP1 and FP2, demonstrating impressive consistency over the course of the day.

Hometown hero Felipe Massa outpaced teammate Fernando Alonso for the second weekend running. When the Paulista demonstrated more pace than the championship contender in Austin, the Scuderia were forced to help the Spanish driver's championship campaign by demoting Massa five places on the grid with a gearbox penalty. It would surprise no one if similar measures are taken this weekend, should they prove to be necessary after qualifying.

As tends to be the case on a Friday afternoon, the latter part of the session was given over to longer runs on heavy fuel as the teams began to identify the ideal setups for Sunday's race.

But the big gamble is on wet or dry, with 35mm of rain predicted – but by no means guaranteed, as this is Sao Paulo – for the Brazilian Grand Prix. The McLarens looked strong on heavy fuel with a dry setup, while Ferrari's high downforce setup implied that the Scuderia are putting their eggs in the wet basket.

Should heavy rain fall on Sunday as predicted, it will shake up the season finale. While both Sebastian Vettel and Alonso are dab hands in wet conditions, the Ferrari has shown itself to be stronger in the wet than it has in the dry.

Add to that the fact that the Magneti Marelli alternators like neither hot temperatures nor soggy conditions and the Brazilian Grand Prix should be less of a walkover for Vettel than many have predicted.

FP2 times (unofficial)

1. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.14.026 [35 laps]
 2. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.14.300s [40 laps]
 3. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.14.523s [37 laps]
 4. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.14.553s [37 laps]
 5. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.14.592s [37 laps]
 6. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.14.654s [36 laps]
 7. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.14.669s [40 laps]
 8. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.14.863s [40 laps]
 9. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1.14.994s [37 laps]
 10. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.15.129s [39 laps]
 11. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.15.131s [40 laps]
 12. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1.15.371s [39 laps]
 13. Bruno Senna (Williams) 1.15.432s [45 laps]
 14. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.15.542s [35 laps]
 15. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.15.839s [43 laps]
 16. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.15.902s [39 laps]
 17. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.15.953s [47 laps]
 18. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.16.048s [40 laps]
 19. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.16.126s [39 laps]
 20. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1.16.655s [42 laps]
 21. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.17.244s [15 laps]
 22. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.17.675s [42 laps]
 23. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.18.127s [31 laps]
 24. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.18.139s [15 laps]
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F1 Brazilian Grand Prix – Friday press conference

For the final Friday press conference of the 2012 season it was up to the team principals from the top six teams in the constructors' championship to

face the demands of the waiting journalists.

Present were Eric Boullier (Lotus), Ross Brawn (Mercedes), Stefano Domenicali (Ferrari), Christian Horner (Red Bull), Monisha Kaltenborn (Sauber), and Martin Whitmarsh (McLaren).

Eric, first of all great news from you yesterday on the Burn sponsorship. Can you tell us a little more about it? Is it a title sponsorship? How big is it?

Eric BOULLIER: I'm not going to release any more information; we have a marketing and communication plan about the endorsement and so you will know later a little bit more detail about this deal.

Is it big enough to make a big difference to your budget for next year? Does that mean you can spend more on development? You know what it takes now.

EB: Whatever it is, it's always welcome. It's obviously more budget for next year and the next years, and it's going to be good to have this brand on the car, obviously, and all the activations that go on around; also promotion for the team and Formula One.

Can you be a top contender for next year then?

EB: Ah, I don't know yet to be honest. There is some stability in the regulations so it's going to be up to every team to deliver a good car for next year. I cannot see any reason why we would lose some ground, I just hope that yes, we will be better. I know Kimi will be on top form from race one, so that will be a big change for us as well.

Monisha, today you announced Esteban Gutiérrez as your... number two driver I guess. How important was it to maintain the Mexican connection?

Monisha KALTENBORN: Well, it's always good if you have stability but I think you have to also see clearly that these are two different issues. Just because Esteban is from Mexico it's not the same situation as we had with Sergio because unlike Sergio, Esteban is not a member of the Escudería Telmex. Of course there's a natural connection there because Telmex has this bigger vision of establishing motor sport in Mexico and Latin America, but it's a different situation. But it's important for the team's stability to continue with the partners.

Both your drivers are very popular but sadly it seemed that worked against Kamui, is that the case?

MK: I won't say it worked against him. To take up a new driver is always a strategic decision where many factors play a role. Kamui has been with us for the last three years. He's a very good driver, he is an excellent team player and actually a very fine human being so it's tough to take such a decision. I think if a driver deserves to be in Formula One he's definitely one of them and I hope he can get support from Japanese companies - because Japan is an important market for Formula One - and stay in the sport.

Ross, obviously we're losing double DRS next year. Is that going to be a big change for you for next year's car?

Ross BRAWN: Not a huge change. Obviously as a facility it's only of benefit when the DRS is being used and next year there's also a move to DRS only being used in small areas during practice and qualifying, so there's a general move away from it anyway. It's always helpful, it would be foolish to say it's not been an advantage, but we've got other solutions in place for next year.

Change in the financial structure in that Mercedes have brought back a shareholding from Aabar. How much is that changing for you? How much does that mean things change for you?

RB: No change for the team, quite frankly. I think it's part of a bigger disinvestment Aabar are making in the Daimler group and it wasn't logical for the Formula One team to stand out separately. So part of an overall strategy from Aabar. I think it demonstrates the commitment of Daimler to Formula One. So for our team it makes very little difference, but it gives us reassurance and confirmation of Daimler's commitment to Formula One.

For Stefano and Christian, basically similar questions. Stefano, first of all, preparations so far: has everything gone according to plan? I'm sure you had a strategy worked out, a plan worked out for this weekend

Stefano DOMENICALI: First of all, last weekend was the birthday of Christian and this weekend is the birthday of Ross, so happy birthday Ross. We have to keep the tradition of that. We have done the job we were supposed to do today. We know that this weekend for us is a challenging weekend. We have to do the maximum on our side and that will not be enough if we want to win the Drivers' Championship. We need to go in the race, as I said, trying to be perfect on our side and then seeing what's going to happen. But that's the only thing we can do and we will do.

What's the mood like within the team?

SD: The mood is that we have nothing to lose, because we are already behind. We need to go there with a rational approach, as I said, to try to be there, if some situation will arise, we need to be prepared to take them. This is really the spirit that is around the team at the moment.

And the weather forecast doesn't look very good. Does that work for you or against you?

SD: I'll tell you later. Before, it's always difficult. It can be good in terms of mixing the cars but it depends on how intense the rain is, when it will come. It is another thing on the table that has to be used in the best way we can.

Christian, similar for you: preparations so far, how have they gone.

Christian HORNER: It's been a pretty normal Friday really. Track temperature has been very high today, so I'm sure that's been a challenge to some degree to each of the teams, but it's been a sensible Friday. We've worked through our programme with both cars and plenty of information to look at tonight. How relevant that will be, as Stefano has alluded to, with the rest of the weekend, we'll only see when we get up in the morning and particularly on Sunday morning. It's been very much a normal Friday for us.

And the mood within the team?

CH: Fantastic. I mean, obviously, just having sealed a third consecutive Constructors' World Championship the mood in the team has never been as high. It's extremely focused; we're approaching this race just as we have the other 19 and you know for us it's a question of trying to extract the most out of ourselves, out of the cars, out of the drivers this weekend and we'll see where we are at the end of it. But certainly our approach to this race isn't any different to any of the previous 19.

And is the rain, is it a variable you could do without?

CH: At the end of the day it's the same for everybody so whoever wins this championship is going to have to have mastered different conditions, different circuits, different challenges and we could well get another factor on Sunday. We take absolutely nothing for granted despite the fact we're coming here with a 13-point advantage. We know from our own experience how quickly that can change. We saw that in 2010 in Abu Dhabi when I think we were actually more than 13 points behind going into the race. So our focus is very much, as I say, going into this race to try and get the most out of it we can and when the chequered flag falls we'll know where we are.

Martin, a great race last weekend for Lewis Hamilton. A great win for Jenson Button at the start of the season. You had the fastest car at the start and the end, but is it a source of frustration that you're not involved in the title battle.

Martin WHITMARSH: Of course. I think we've had six great wins this year and we haven't done a good enough job for the rest of the season one way and another and that's a little bit frustrating, but at the moment we're in a position where with one race to go we're going to focus. These guys have got some pressures on their shoulders and we're going to try and win the race. In one sense it makes it simple for us this weekend.

How much does that affect your preparations for next year, knowing what you've had from this?

MW: I think there's no secrets: to be consistently winning you've got to have a quick car, you've got to have reliability. We've often had a quickish car this season, we've had a number of errors, a number of issues, which are disappointing, but we know we've got to work on that and we'll aim to come out next year with a quick car and hopefully be reliable and be there at the last race.

For Stefano and Christian: the championship has come down to your two drivers. Please evaluate the strengths and qualities of your driver over the season and how do you evaluate your opponent?

CH: I'll start with my driver. I think that Sebastian has driven incredibly well this year. It's all too easy to say he's had the fastest car because on numerous occasions this year he hasn't. McLaren have had a very strong car throughout this year but Sebastian has never given up, he's kept fighting. He came back from the summer break almost 40 points behind the championship lead. He focused hard, he worked hard at it and he maximised his chances. I think he's driven superbly well this year. He is up against a formidable opponent, who is very much at the top of his game and I think you're witnessing two great talents and hopefully it will be an exciting race on Sunday, but I can't speak highly enough of certainly the job Sebastian has done this year against some formidable opponents.

SD: For my side, Fernando, in my view, up to now, did one of the best seasons of his career. We knew that at the beginning of the season our car was not really the quickest. Well, I would say it was on the second half of the grid rather than the other side. He was able to extract from that the maximum out of it. He was able to get great victories in a moment where the car has improved, he drove really well in wet conditions when he was in that situation. He was always at the maximum. Always he was working with the team knowing that it was a very delicate situation for all of us in that moment. So on top of his ability on the track he was able to keep the team together in a difficult moment. So I agree, who will win will deserve it. And of course, on his side the only remark we have to say is that he was not able to do all the races because he was unfortunately kicked out two times. Not his fault, but of course in this situation where the championship is so tight they're very heavy points. But as I said, don't look back, look ahead. I'm sure Fernando will do the maximum of his capability to make sure... to do the best with the car that he has with a team that is working hard under a lot of pressure. I'm happy for that, because the team was able to do sometimes incredible work. As I said the spirit together I think was the most important thing... was the most significant thing, sorry, that I would like to remark on that respect.

What about Sebastian?

SD: I'm exactly of the same opinion as Christian, I speak about my driver.

Stefano, we're coming to the last race of the year again, and again, Ferrari are capable of winning the last race of the championship. Can you just compare how you are feeling, compared to how you felt in 2008 and 2010?

SD: Well, also 2007 we were near. Different feelings, of course. In 2007, I think that if you remember well, Martin, we were in a situation where honestly we had the same approach as at this race: try to do the best job that we can, we could, but knowing that the opponent was very strong and the race evolved in a situation where we were able, as a team, to work extremely well. Then in 2008 we were able to win the Constructors' title, to have Felipe as World Champion of Drivers for 20 seconds, but after Hamilton won the race, in a championship where I would say we lost, if I remember well, mainly because the car was not reliable enough, because we had some races where unfortunately we had severe DNF that caused us to lose that championship. And I believe that season, Felipe did an incredible job and we were very disappointed for him, because I think we deserved it, but at the end of the day Lewis did (win). Then 2010 was the most frustrating because we knew that we had a couple of situations to handle and it was our fault that we were not able to do it, for a mistake that we made; we didn't help Fernando. I think that season we didn't have the best car. I believe that we were able to always be there winning a lot of races but because of unfortunate situations that Red Bull had and we lost that championship. This is, I would say, the heaviest of my thoughts on the past. On Sunday, I think that, as I said, we are in a different spirit. We cannot look back; we need to see whatever will be the outcome we need to accept it. So therefore I would say our mindset is closer to what we had in 2007 at the moment.

Christian, when do you think was the turning point of the main factors for Red Bull to develop from a medium team to a team that may now win its third title in a row?

CH: It's a good question. Red Bull came into Formula One at the beginning of 2005. Dietrich Mateschitz had a vision. He'd been a sponsor, he'd been a shareholder and for the first time, after acquiring the Jaguar team became a team owner and his vision was very much to compete at the front in Formula One. Certainly the perception, perhaps, in the early days was that Red Bull turned up, played their music loud and were perceived as a party team, perhaps just happy to be in Formula One but underlying that was a determination to work our way to the front and slowly and steadily we gathered the right people into the team during the course of 2006 and at the beginning of 2007. We started to build, we started to work as a unit, to work as a team and then by the time the new regulations came along, a clean sheet of paper in 2009, it allowed all of the departments to demonstrate their abilities to work together as one group. In 2009, we started winning. We challenged for the championship; we fell short that year, but then we have kept that momentum. We went on to win both titles in 2010, both titles again 2011 and again a third Constructors' championship this year. And that is purely down to the hard work, the dedication, the application of every single member of the team. We've got some great leadership in the team: Adrian Newey does a stunning job of leading the technical team but it requires all of the departments to do their bit. I'm extremely proud to say that they've absolutely done that and the testimony to that is the 34 races that we've won, the 80 podiums that we've had in only eight seasons. It's all down to the people and of course to talented drivers: Sebastian and Mark Webber have been a very successful pairing and what Sebastian has achieved in only 100 races again is quite remarkable.

Question for Mr Whitmarsh and Mr Domenicali: 2013 might be a very special year because you have to be prepared for the rule changes coming up for 2014, but at the same time you want to be successful. Maybe you can give us a general view on what you

expect for 2013?

SD: I think that 2013, as you quite rightly said, in terms of regulations, will be a stability, so I'm expecting to see the situation that we are facing now in terms of performance of the team. What I believe will happen during the season, depending on how the season will go, is that some teams will start to dedicate more and more resources to the 2014 project because it's a project that will be totally, totally different and at least on our side, we already have, at the moment, a small group of people that is working on this project, and of course, on our side, we also have the duty - being a constructor - to work on the new powertrain. For us it's a massive job next year. This is maybe the most difficult in that respect because there are so many new things that we have to do at the same moment where we need to make sure that we are fighting for another season and championship. So for me, the 2014 season could be a year where we can see once again a split between the group of the cars in terms of pure performance. If you remember, at the beginning of this year, we had so many cars that were very very close. I'm expecting a different scenario for 2014 because all these changes which will come into place very very soon.

MW: Well, not much to add to that. I think, as Stefano alluded, I think it will be quite interesting. It will probably be two or three of the teams sat before you today who are underperforming at the half way stage of next year's championship and the decision that they might take to then give up on the '13 championship and apply all of their resources to '14 makes it quite an intriguing process. It's a difficult one. If you're competitive as we all aim to be next year, you'll want to win the races, you'll want to win the championship next year but knowing that in doing so and in applying the resources to do so, you're actually robbing 2014. I think it's an interesting second half of the year and as Stefano said, undoubtedly a very interesting start of 2014.

As you may be aware, Honda has shown some interest in the new engine technology coming up in 2014. I would like to know whether a possible comeback by them fits the frame of the new regulations. If so, how much will you welcome Honda back in Formula One?

MW: As we just said, 2014 we've got, as far as I know, only three manufacturers committed to the sport. I imagine there will be a greater level of technical diversity than we currently have in powertrains just as there will be in the aerodynamic solutions that run with it. Normally, when you have a new regulation that encourages a certain amount of creativity, and then over a period of years you get a convergence onto very similar technology and very similar approach.

RB: I think this is the sort of challenge they relish, they quite like. I know from my time with them they like to have fresh technical challenges. They very much look upon Formula One as a research and development exercise and I think the new regulations appeal to them. But there's no concrete signs they're doing anything at the moment. I gather, as a company, they're improving after some difficult years and I think there are lots of engineers there who would love to get involved. Whether there will be a strategic decision high up to do it, there's no signs of that yet. But we would welcome Honda in as well. I think the more manufacturers, the more engines we have in Formula One the better.

Christian, how do you see the possibility of maybe having another drink company joining Formula One as a title sponsor? Would it be bad for Red Bull? Is it a difficult or easy business model to follow? What are your thoughts?

CH: I don't think it will be bad. I don't think it would be bad for Formula One. I think that Red Bull welcomes competition and that's the way it is in the market place. Red Bull's positioning is quite unique, not only what it's achieved as an energy drink but in terms of what it's done and the way it carries itself in Formula One. There would certainly be no concerns from our side. I think it would be welcomed within Formula One. I have no idea what their business model is. The Red Bull one works OK.

Ross, happy birthday; for next year, obviously you have Lewis Hamilton signed up to drive with you. Now Lewis is something of a free spirit and the Daimler brand is not associated with free spiritedness. I was wondering if you have any plans to try and curtail Lewis's free spirit, or if you're just going to let him be Lewis?

RB: I think that's going to be taken on a race-by-race, day-by-day, week-by-week basis. I think it's impossible to predict those sort of things. I know Lewis. Obviously I've had a lot of conversations with him. He's an intelligent guy, he understands Formula One, he understand the exposure Formula One gets. He understands the positioning of Daimler and an understanding of all those things, I think, will avoid any issues in the future. But I think Formula One needs characters. I think Formula One needs individuals, so we're not going to suppress is too much. I don't anticipate any major issues.

A quick one to all of you: you're all from quite different backgrounds: a lawyer, engineers, an ex-racing driver. Just a quick word on what makes a good team boss and whether you only look like a good team boss when you're winning?

MW: A thick skin!

EB: When you start to win races. The proof is not only one profile, it's just the capacity of managing the right people, to bring the right people at home, to build up the right business for your team, and obviously to seek the best drivers and make all the group of people work well together in a very competitive environment and having also a little bit of some politics around this which makes the whole package a success. I think this is a simple definition but this is the way I think it should work.

MK: I don't think there are any hard and fast rules about that. I think we are all measured at the end of the day by performance and if you are good, if you are performing well then you must be a good team boss.

RB: I agree. I think you're measured on your results. One of the things that is very demonstrable in Formula One is the results in the team and there's no hiding place. But I think all of us in Formula One probably demonstrate our strengths mostly when we are failing rather than succeeding. I think the reaction to failure and how you deal with it, how you continue to motivate the team, how you continue to put all of the pieces in place is the most critical quality that all of us round here, this group needs. All of us have faced failure many times, that's the nature of Formula One, there is only one team that can win and the rest of us are failing. How we react to that, what we do and how we try and improve our situation is, I think, the measure of being the boss of a team and trying to make it work.

SD: I agree with what they said, so really nothing to add to that

CH: I don't think there's any hard and fast rules. I guess the role of team principal in different teams represents different things even, and I think that fundamentally it's a people business and it's a question, a matter of what your background is, what your education is. It's a matter of getting the best out of people, encouraging people and removing obstacles where necessary and sharing one vision, one goal, one objective and that needs to flow through an organisation from the top to the bottom, throughout an entire team, because Formula One is the biggest team sport in the world, and it is still a sport. You can argue that from Monday to Friday it's a business, but at the end of the day it's a sport where you are competing, department for department against your rivals and if you work collectively as a group, you can go on to achieve great things. There are no guarantees, nobody is owed success, but it's a type of sport that what you put in you get out.

MW: Not much to add, really. I think a lot has been said about the team, and I think all of the Formula One teams are really great teams of people that work incredibly hard, whichever end of the grid you're at, everyone's working very hard. I think to be a good team member, to recognise it, just one part of the team's important but everything else has been said already.

F1 Brazilian Grand Prix – FP3 report

The final practice session of the 2012 Formula One season took place in the dry at Interlagos, but with the air heavy with the promise of incoming rain, courtesy of a group of ominous-looking clouds on the horizon. All bets are on for a rain-soaked qualifying session this afternoon.

With the testing of next year's rubber now done and dusted, FP3 took on its usual form of seeing teams try out a variety of set-up changes for both wet and dry, with a view to hedging their bets for what is predicted to be a very wet race on Sunday.

By and large the session passed without incident, although there were two moments of drama on track.

The first saw Kimi Raikkonen stop his car out on track – for the first time this season – when his engine called it quits. The Lotus driver will now reuse a different one of his eight race engines in the Brazilian Grand Prix, and will not incur a penalty for using a ninth unit.

The second incident featured Bruno Senna, who spun on track, narrowly missing being hit by Michael Schumacher before the Mercedes driver took evasive action. Senna spent rather a long time pointing in the wrong direction before he was able to right himself and continue with the practice session unaffected.

The last ten minutes of the session saw a mass pitlane exodus, as cars ventured out en masse to complete short runs on the medium compound rubber in preparation for the opening phase of qualifying this afternoon.

In the closing stages the timesheets changed with every passing lap, although Button was able to hold onto the top slot with the 1m13.192s lap he had set earlier; the Briton was unable to better his own time in his subsequent efforts until the final minute, when he shaved an additional 0.004s off his best time.

FP3 times (unofficial)

1. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.13.188s [22 laps]
2. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.13.245s [21 laps]
3. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.13.385s [25 laps]
4. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.13.389s [17 laps]
5. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1.13.420s [24 laps]
6. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.13.486s [21 laps]
7. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.13.602s [22 laps]
8. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.13.691s [15 laps]
9. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.13.700s [20 laps]
10. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.13.712s [17 laps]
11. Bruno Senna (Williams) 1.13.948s [20 laps]
12. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.14.126s [25 laps]
13. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.14.190s [26 laps]
14. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.14.192s [21 laps]
15. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.14.347s [24 laps]
16. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.14.687s [21 laps]
17. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.14.972s [19 laps]
18. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.15.159s [22 laps]
19. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1.15.707s [21 laps]
20. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.15.763s [24 laps]
21. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.16.059s [21 laps]
22. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.16.198s [15 laps]
23. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.16.793s [18 laps]
24. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) NO TIME SET [3 laps]

F1 Brazilian Grand Prix – Q1 report

It was a busy beginning to qualifying at Interlagos thanks to a powerful rain shower that fell towards the end of the lunch break. With more rain expected shortly, all and sundry need to get a banker lap in early to prevent dropping out thanks to bad timing.

Cars started pouring out of the pitlane as soon as it opened, with the timed laps beginning in the first two minutes of the session.

But the anticipated front-runners from Red Bull, McLaren, Ferrari, Lotus, and Mercedes all elected to stay in the pits for the early part of the session, running the risk of repeating the indignities of Malaysia 2010, which saw McLaren and Ferrari knocked out in Q1 after misjudging the approaching torrential storms.

It was immediately obvious that track conditions were slippery; Narain Karthikeyan ran wide on his out lap but was saved by Interlagos' extensive new tarmacked runoff areas.

Heikki Kovalainen and Timo Glock had a near miss at the end of their first timed laps, with the two cars narrowly avoiding collision before spending the first sector of the next lap running side by side.

The wet track conditions meant that the early laps on the board were not representative of Interlagos lap times – drivers were crossing the line in

1m20s (or more), not the 1m13s and 1m14s we are accustomed to seeing on this short and twisty circuit.

As the session approached its midpoint, the first of the big guns left the pits, in the form of Mark Webber. The Red Bull driver's first timed lap was a 1m20.076s. One minute later, the Australian was joined on track by teammate Sebastian Vettel, who crossed the line in 1m21.038s.

Lewis Hamilton's first timed effort saw the McLaren driver at the top of the timesheets with a 1m17.772s lap, marginally faster than Bruno Senna in P2.

Fernando Alonso headed out of the pits with the information that Ferrari had given him time to complete seven timed laps before the end of Q1, more than enough attempts to secure a place in Q2. The Spanish driver's first effort saw him in the middle of the pack, but his second timed lap was a pace-setting 1m17.385s before Hamilton reclaimed the top spot with a 1m17.374s lap.

In the dropout zone with six minutes remaining were Vitaly Petrov, Narain Karthikeyan, Sergio Perez, Timo Glock, Charles Pic, and Michael Schumacher, with the latter driver yet to set a timed lap.

When Schumacher did cross the line he did so in 1m17.365s, good enough for a temporary P3. Perez was next out of the dropout zone with a 1m16.941s – with every passing lap the track is drying more and more, and lap times are plummeting as a result.

With four minutes remaining the dropout zone was comprised of Daniel Ricciardo, Glock, Petrov, Vettel, Pic, de la Rosa, and Karthikeyan, but Vettel quickly saved himself and knocked Heikki Kovalainen back in.

Ricciardo saved his skin and pushed Pastor Maldonado into the danger zone, with the Lotus pairing of Kimi Raikkonen and Romain Grosjean hovering on the edge.

De la Rosa knocked into Grosjean near the pit entry, costing the Lotus driver his front wing and potentially ruining the Frenchman's chances of making it into Q2 – there was only just enough time remaining for Grosjean to complete and outlap and start a flyer before the chequered flag fluttered down.

With one minute to go, the dropout zone was comprised of the six usual suspects plus Maldonado, with Grosjean and Schumacher hovering on the edge. Maldonado saved himself at the eleventh hour, and it was the turn of Grosjean to join the six usual suspects knocked out at the end of Q1.

Dropout zone

18. Romain Grosjean (Lotus)
19. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham)
20. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham)
21. Timo Glock (Marussia)
22. Charles Pic (Marussia)
23. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT)
24. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT)

F1 Brazilian Grand Prix – Q2 report

With Romain Grosjean knocked out in Q1 thanks in no small part to an incident with Pedro de la Rosa, expect to see Lotus lodge a protest with the stewards in an attempt to penalise HRT.

The beginning of Q2 was rather more sedate than the opening round of qualifying in Sao Paulo, with less of a pit lane exodus than had taken place 25 minutes earlier.

Jean-Eric Vergne was the first man to begin a timed lap: the Toro Rosso driver crossed the line in 1m16.348s. Of the title contenders, that honour belonged to Fernando Alonso, who managed a 1m14.631s lap on Pirelli's prime compound.

Five minutes in to the session and there were times on the board from eleven of the seventeen contenders. Alonso continued to be the pace-setter, but Sebastian Vettel, Mark Webber, Lewis Hamilton, and Jenson Button all remained in the pits.

Without those four drivers on track and setting times, any dropout zone would not be representative of the predicted Q2 eliminations – while anything can happen at Interlagos, the pace demonstrated by Red Bull and McLaren over the course of the weekend thus far indicates that all four cars should be high up in the top ten come the end of qualifying.

Kamui Kobayashi almost certainly secured himself a place in the dropout zone with a serious lock-up that flat-spotted his tyre and led to significant vibrations. Around the twisty and hilly Interlagos, that presents more of a disadvantage in handling than it would do at a simpler track. There was still time for Sauber to reshoe their driver and send him back out, but Kobayashi returned to the pits for a brief break.

Hamilton and Webber left the pits around the six-and-a-half minute mark, shortly joined by Vettel. The three men had the track to themselves for their outlaps, and were at no risk of running into traffic that could impact their runs.

With five minutes to go, Button remained in the pits. His fellow drivers, many of whom were on their third and fourth attempts at a timed lap, poured out en masse for a few final runs. At the four-and-a-half minute mark, Button joined them at last.

Hamilton headed straight to the top of the timesheets with his first timed effort, while Webber crossed the line in P2. Vettel soon took the top slot, and all seventeen drivers were out on track fighting for their place in the final top ten shoot-out of the year.

With three minutes remaining, the dropout zone was comprised of Michael Schumacher, Kobayashi, Sergio Perez, Paul di Resta, Jean-Eric Vergne, Pastor Maldonado, and Button, who had yet to set a time.

On his first effort Button managed a provisional P3, knocking Felipe Massa into the dropout zone where he joined Bruno Senna, Schumacher, Perez, Ricciardo, Kobayashi, and Vergne. With one minute remaining, the dropout zone was unchanged.

Massa saved himself with a last-ditch effort, narrowly squeezing in to P10.

Dropout zone

11. Paul di Resta (Force India)
12. Bruno Senna (Williams)
13. Sergio Perez (Sauber)
14. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes)
15. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
16. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso)
17. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso)

F1 Brazilian Grand Prix – Q3 report

With ten minutes and ten drivers remaining in the final round of qualifying for the 2012 Formula One season it was a nail-biting atmosphere in Interlagos as the track continued to dry under the hot Brazilian sun.

Sebastian Vettel was the fastest man in Q2, by a margin of 0.189s to Lewis Hamilton. Not insurmountable, but certainly a challenge for Fernando Alonso, who was six-tenths slower than his title rival on a track that doesn't leave much room for improvement.

The honour of completing the first timed lap in Q3 fell to Nico Rosberg, who crossed the line in 1m22.398s, a very poor effort on what has become a dry track.

By the time three minutes had disappeared on the clock, all barring Kimi Raikkonen and Nico Hulkenberg were out on track giving it their all, with Lewis Hamilton crossing the line 10 seconds faster than his future teammate with a 1m12.850s lap. Fernando Alonso took provisional P2 with a 1m13.463s lap before being dethroned by his teammate.

But all eyes were on Sebastian Vettel, the fastest man in Q2. The Red Bull driver's first effort saw him cross the line in 1m13m903s, good enough for a temporary P6.

At the head of the pack Hamilton is followed by Jenson Button, Mark Webber, Felipe Massa, and Alonso. At the rear, Pastor Maldonado, Raikkonen, and Hulkenberg have yet to set timed laps with just over three minutes remaining of the session.

The track went largely silent, with Vettel out in an attempt to improve on his earlier effort before aborting the lap, while Raikkonen headed out to set his first timed lap of the session. The Finnish driver eventually crossed the line in 1m13.298s, good enough for provisional P6. Hulkenberg's first timed effort saw the Force India driver in provisional P4.

With 100 seconds remaining, all ten men were out on track fighting for position.

Webber's first sector was faster than that set on Hamilton's provisional pole lap, as was his second. The Australian was on a flyer and crossed the line in 1m12.581s, leading to grumpy faces on the McLaren pit wall.

But Hamilton responded in kind, beating Webber's sector one time on his final effort, and crossing the line in 1m12.458s, reclaiming provisional pole. Button then bested Webber, leading to an all-McLaren front row.

Vettel was unable to string together the ideal lap, and will start the Brazilian Grand Prix from P4. Alonso, meanwhile, is down in P8, with teammate Massa up in P5. Expect another gearbox penalty for the Paulista as Ferrari attempt to squeeze every advantage they can out of another bad qualifying session for their title contender.

Provisional grid

1. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren)
2. Jenson Button (McLaren)
3. Mark Webber (Red Bull)
4. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull)
5. Felipe Massa (Ferrari)
6. Pastor Maldonado (Williams)
7. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India)
8. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari)
9. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus)
10. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes)
11. Paul di Resta (Force India)
12. Bruno Senna (Williams)

13. Sergio Perez (Sauber)
 14. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes)
 15. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
 16. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso)
 17. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso)
 18. Romain Grosjean (Lotus)
 19. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham)
 20. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham)
 21. Timo Glock (Marussia)
 22. Charles Pic (Marussia)
 23. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT)
 24. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT)
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F1 Brazilian Grand Prix – Saturday press conference

For the first time in anyone's memory, there were no questions from the floor during the post-qualifying press conference for the Brazilian Grand Prix.

Present were Lewis Hamilton (McLaren), Jenson Button (McLaren), and Mark Webber (Red Bull).

Lewis, a fantastic pole position, it must give you great satisfaction, particularly in your final Grand Prix with McLaren.

Lewis HAMILTON: Yeah, absolutely. It's been a good weekend so far. Grateful to be able to put the car on the front row and to have the last one-two in qualifying with Jenson in the same team. Just a fantastic job by the team - so grateful for all the opportunities they've given me. I hope that we can turn it into something really positive tomorrow.

Jenson, you've obviously been very quick all weekend and starting on the front row of the grid, now. Well done.

Jenson BUTTON: Thank you, yeah, it was a pretty good lap. I'm not going to point at areas where you lose or gain time. It was a good time but Lewis's was half a tenth quicker. Very happy to be on the front row as the last couple of races have been a bit tricky in qualifying. So yeah, good, as Lewis said, it's great to both be on the front row for his last Grand Prix for the team. The team's in great shape at the moment and it's a pity things have got to change, but things do change.

Mark, third on the grid, obviously you have your teammate and championship contender Sebastian Vettel alongside you; question is how can you/will you help for the championship tomorrow?

Mark WEBBER: Well, I think we focus on ourselves tomorrow, do the cleanest race I can. We know there may be some tricky weather tomorrow. It's a long Grand Prix and I'll be focused 100 percent on my efforts in my cockpit and get to the finish line as quick as possible.

Back to Lewis; obviously you won the last Grand Prix last weekend, fantastic pace last weekend, what are the chances tomorrow?

LH: Well, I think the weather is going to be tricky tomorrow so it's definitely going to make it more of a lottery but I think, as Jenson said, we've put ourselves in a really good position and we are just going to do the best job we can from there and work together as a team, the best we have been for quite some time, so we will make sure we will do absolutely everything to get the top result.

Lewis, first time on pole here. You mentioned the weather just now. Have you made any allowances for that? Is there anything in the set-up for that? Or is it too much of a gamble to go for a wet set-up with high downforce?

LH: Generally nowadays you don't even really have much of a wet set-up. It's not like in karting when you soften everything off. The set-up in the dry and the wet is very, very similar - apart from ride heights maybe. We've just set the car to attack the qualifying and we don't know what the hell... what's going to happen tomorrow. We just have to wait and see, make sure we get our tyre pressures right, make sure we get the tyre temperatures right and the brake temperatures and try to steer clear of any big puddles.

Starting in front is obviously the best thing if it is wet. Do you want it to be wet?

LH: I don't mind. I love driving in the rain. Here in Brazil it's quite a special race for the rain... [it's special] even in the dry. But I'm massively happy to be... every year I've generally qualified fourth since 2007, I think one year I was 18th, so I'm really happy not to be on that fourth spot. Who's there? I don't know, I guess Sebastian will be there, so he'll experience what I've experienced in the past.

Jenson, your best grid position here as well in 12 grands prix so that must be good for you. What sort of race is it tomorrow for you? Is it try and beat Lewis, is it a team race, what do you think?

JB: We're there to win the grand prix as I think every driver is, unless it's team-mates fighting for the world championship. So, we both want to win the race tomorrow, that's the aim for both of us. So we'll see what we can do. The car seems to be working very well in the dry, our long-run pace is pretty good, but as you said, there's a massive chance of rain tomorrow and that just throws it up in the air for us, it's quite exciting for two people, their stress levels are going to be through the roof. But for us starting near the front it's hopefully going to be a very exciting race. We just have to hope that the rain level is OK for us to actually race. That's always the worry here in Interlagos.

Mark, what are you looking forward to in terms of conditions?

MW: Well, we know Interlagos can be very hit and miss, the little showers can just generate from anywhere and surprise you pretty quickly, the guys on the pit wall. We could have a little bit of both tomorrow, we could even run all three sets of tyres, in terms of wets, inters and slicks at some stage. So, obviously I think it will be pretty humid tomorrow as well. I think the ambient is going to be quite cool but the humidity will help dry the circuit out in some cases. We need to keep our eyes open tomorrow and be ready for everything because that's what can happen around here. So looking forward to whatever it is. It's going to be a good final grand prix of the year, looking forward to getting a really good result.

F1 Brazilian Grand Prix – Race report

As season finales go, the 2012 Brazilian Grand Prix certainly deserves the mantle of a nail-biting epic.

Before the first lap was complete there had been drama aplenty, with great leaps forward, flying bodywork, and a title contender facing oncoming traffic at Turn 4 after he had been set spinning by a midfield colleague.

And over the course of the next seventy laps of the twisty and undulating Interlagos circuit the drama continued apace, as nails were bitten down to the quick along the length of the pitlane.

At the head of the pack was Nico Hulkenberg, leading a grand prix for the first time in his career, while further down the grid Marussia and Caterham were slugging it out for that all-important tenth place in the constructors' championship.

And in the middle of it all? In the middle was an all-out battle for the drivers' title, with Fernando Alonso and Sebastian Vettel driving their hearts out to secure what would have been either man's third championship.

As the cars left the grid for the formation lap, the light drizzle that had been falling over Sao Paulo since lunchtime grew heavier. By the time the lights went out to signify the start of the last round of the 2012 Formula One World Championship, the track was better suited to inters than the slick tyres the cars had been shod in.

Pole-sitter Lewis Hamilton found decent traction, and kept the lead going into the first corner. Hometown hero Felipe Massa made a great start, jumping up to keep pace with the McLarens. But further down the pack there was trouble aplenty.

With drivers running wide at Turn 1 and rejoining, the pack was squeezed through the early corners. The racing line was an object of fantasy, not reality, and new apexes were being carved out between the press of racing machinery. For those who had no place to go, the only answer was to plant themselves – unwillingly – into their rivals' cars, as happened to Sebastian Vettel.

Turn 4 saw the Red Bull driver suffer significant damage to his left sidepod as he was spun around like a top by the Williams of Bruno Senna when the latter man had nowhere to go in traffic. For a lesser driver, the fat lady would have completed her warm-up exercises and picked up her sheet music.

But for Sebastian Vettel, who found himself facing oncoming traffic before righting his RB8 and chasing 23 cars around the Autódromo José Carlos Pace, that early setback was merely another opportunity to prove that he deserved that third title, no matter how hard he would be forced to fight for it.

The incident did not merely affect Vettel – Sergio Perez, Bruno Senna, and Pastor Maldonado were all out of the Brazilian Grand Prix on the first lap, collateral damage in the chaos of a race start in highly changeable track conditions on barely suitable rubber.

By lap 4, Vettel was in P18 and fighting his way up through the grid with sidepod damage the team were unable to fix. The German was not the only title contender to struggle in the opening phase of Sunday's race. Fernando Alonso was much higher up the pack, having worked his way up to P3 and looking good for the title, but the Ferrari driver was being chased down by Nico Hulkenberg, who had rediscovered his 2010 Interlagos form.

On lap 5, Alonso ran wide at Turn 1, handing the advantage – and third place – to the Force India driver. It was the sign many on the pit wall were waiting for, and teams began to call their drivers in to box for inters. There may not be many universal truths in Formula One, but if Fernando Alonso is struggling, track conditions are not easy.

Lotus called Kimi Raikkonen in first, but the Enstone racers found themselves rueing that decision when the less experienced Romain Grosjean lost control on the following lap, slamming into the tyre barriers at Turn 11 (and out of the race as a consequence). One lap later and Mark Webber also ran wide, losing track position but staying in the fight.

By the time Webber ran wide, Vettel had worked his way back into the points. It may have only been P10, but the Red Bull driver's grit and determination caused a number of anxious faces on the Ferrari pit wall – the Scuderia had hoped that Vettel's early problems would be the miracle they had been hoping for all weekend.

But it was not to be – it took Vettel a single lap to work his way up from P10 to the title-threatening position of P7, at which point the German racer found himself frustratedly staring at the back end of Kamui Kobayashi's Sauber before the Japanese driver pitted. It would not be the last the two saw of each other on track on Sunday afternoon.

As the first round of pit stops began the track was clearly suited to intermediate tyres, not slicks, and the pitlane was heaving with drivers lining up to get reshod. But there were those out on track who appeared impervious to the rain whatever their rubber. One such man was Hulkenberg, who climbed his way up to P2 during the stops, and passed Jenson Button for the lead on lap 18.

The Force India driver held onto the lead through his own pit stop on lap 23, and was tailed by both McLaren drivers even as the Woking pair switched places behind him. On lap 48, Hamilton finally made it past Hulkenberg when the German driver span, holding the door wide open and gifting the British driver with the race lead.

Which isn't to say that the thirty laps in which Hulkenberg led the race were bereft of action. The 2012 season finale was an absolute thriller of a race, 71 laps in which every position change necessitated frantic calculations to determine just who was in the lead of the drivers' championship.

One watershed moment took place on lap 17, when Vettel passed Alonso. The Ferrari driver pitted on the next lap and Vettel one lap later, so in sporting terms the move was largely irrelevant, but psychologically? Alonso had been overtaken by his only championship rival, a man his team had informed him was spinning like a top at the back of the grid on the very first lap.

With that one manoeuvre, Alonso was made aware that the fight for the drivers' title would be even more challenging than he had anticipated.

The next few laps were relatively peaceful, until the advent of a Safety Car on lap 23. Alonso had been complaining of debris on the track, the result of a seemingly endless stream of major and minor collisions, plus the detritus left over from the first lap collisions, and Race Control agreed.

Bernd Mayländer led the pack until the end of lap 29, when Hulkenberg held the lead at the restart and Webber ran off track at Turn 1. One lap later, Hamilton passed Button for P2 in Turn 4 while the charging Kobayashi passed Vettel before taking down Alonso on the next lap. Alonso returned the favour on the following lap, and Vettel was stuck staring at the rear end of Kobayashi's Sauber for the second time.

It would be short-lived, however, as Massa deftly nipped past Vettel on lap 34, using his DRS to overtake the helpless Red Bull.

The drama then calmed down for a few laps, in a relative sense. The action-packed race saw noteworthy moments on every turn of the circuit, but the next potentially race-defining – championship-defining – incident took place on lap 36, when Massa made it past Kobayashi, leaving Vettel in the Japanese racer's wake for the third time in the race.

The next fifteen laps saw an increasingly frustrated Vettel attempt to make it past Kobayashi, but to no avail. The Sauber driver made his car as wide as possible within the legal limits, and as a man fighting for his F1 future Kobayashi was in no mood to make it easy for the defending world champion to claim his third successive title.

In the end, Vettel didn't make it past Kobayashi. The Red Bull driver pitted for fresh rubber on lap 52, and on lap 54 he was forced to pit again when conditions changed and the track as suitable only for inters. It was a slow stop that complicated Vettel's championship challenge, but the boy wonder kept on fighting until the end, eventually crossing the finish line in P6.

Between Vettel's two stops came one of the major incidents of the Brazilian Grand Prix. Hamilton and Hulkenberg were still fighting for the lead and lapping backmarkers when a bodged overtaking attempt saw the Force India driver lose control of his car, sliding into Hamilton and breaking the McLaren driver's suspension. From what could have been a race win Hamilton was forced into the indignity of retiring from his final race for the team that had nurtured his career since boyhood.

Teammate Button was the man to benefit from Hamilton's retirement; the British racer inherited the lead as Hulkenberg struggled to recover from his foray into the other MP4-27 and held onto the advantage till the end of the race, crossing the finish line in first place and bookending his 2012 season with wins.

But for the two men fighting for the drivers' title, the race was far from over. Alonso came out of the tyre panic pit stops in P3, behind teammate Massa, and it was little surprise when the Paulista waved the Spanish driver past, giving him every chance to take the title.

Lower down the pack, Vettel was given a helping hand of his own by countryman Michael Schumacher, who ceded P6 with little in the way of defensive driving.

And just when we thought it was all over bar the shouting, Paul di Resta nominated himself for the 'Idiot of the Season Award', driving into the wall at the final corner and bringing out the Safety Car on the penultimate lap of the race.

While the Safety Car was recalled at the end of lap 71 so that drivers could cross the finish line in race mode, it was the only sour note in one of the most thrilling races in one of Formula One's most exciting seasons. With only one corner in race conditions and no chance of any overtaking, the action-packed wet and dry race sputtered out like a damp squib.

F1 Brazilian Grand Prix – Sunday press conference

For the last time this season, the top three finishers in a Formula One Grand Prix lined up to face a grilling from the press.

Present were Jenson Button (McLaren), Fernando Alonso (Ferrari), and Felipe Massa (Ferrari).

First of all, a question for the winner. For sure, you've done a fantastic job all year round? But the best race was the most exciting race I ever saw in Formula One. The question for you is, I'm sure you're very happy in this race, but are you happy also that you get Hamilton out of the way?

Jenson BUTTON: First of all, I want to congratulate the whole team. This is the perfect way for us to end the season. We started on a high and we've had ups and downs, and to end on a high is fantastic. It bodes very well for 2013. Congratulations guys. We fought for second in the Constructors' today but these boys were a little bit too strong. Thank you very much.

Alonso, I'm sorry. You did a fantastic job all year round. Massa can say, you have some accidents that were not your fault. I'm sorry about you because I have also... I lost two championships at the last race, I know how it feels. Actually, I'm asking about your feelings now.

Fernando ALONSO: Well, first of all I feel very proud of my team, very proud of the season we did. Obviously we lost the championship now, but I don't think, as you said, that we lost here in Brazil, we lost in some races where we were a little bit unlucky. But this is a sport, but when you do something with your heart, when you do something with 100 per cent, you have to be proud of your team, happy for them, and we will try next year.

And my friend Massa: you started the year not very good but you have been improving all the time. What about next year? Are you going to start in the right way?

Felipe MASSA: Yeah, for sure. I think the second part of the year was the preparation for next year. It's such an emotion to race here. I think the race was really fantastic. For sure, it could have been a better position than what I finished but anyway I didn't know what to say. Just crying and I didn't know what to say. I didn't know what to feel, it was so amazing.

Jenson, congratulations, what an amazing race for you. First of all, that tyre strategy, staying out, it really worked well for you. JB: Yeah it did. It was one of the toughest races I've had. It was very tricky. It was on that point many times when you think Inters is the right tyre. I kept asking the team "what's going to happen with the weather: it's supposed to be light showers?" Well OK, we'll see how we go but it was so, so difficult. You're locking up tyres here and there but you've just got to push to the limit. You have to wait for the team to give you the information about all the other people on Inters so it's not just about driving the car at that point. Y'know, you need every single piece of information that's out there to know that you're doing the right thing. But it was a really good race. Obviously things were made more difficult with the first safety car. Lost 40 seconds, the race was between me and Nico then. It was made a lot more difficult. And then when the safety car came in I grained the front-right tyre. I really struggled but when that went away it was good. The two guys in front obviously had a coming together, which helped things but in that sort of race you never really know what the outcome is going to be. We still had a lot more rain coming. We still had to make the right call on the pitstop again, which I think we did, and then we just tried to hold the gap really to the Ferraris, which was about 20 seconds, which was difficult in itself, because there was so much water out there for Inters. But really happy with the end result. We started the year so strong and we've ended it so strong. Just a few areas that we need to improve in the middle of the season. It's sad that Lewis isn't here to enjoy his last race with the team but it's racing and these things happen. I'd like to bid him farewell. We've had a good time together over the last three years and I think we've proved that on the first ten laps of the race with how close our fighting was. I hope he has a good career in his next team. Lastly, I'd like to congratulate Sebastian on his third title in a row. He's very, very impressive so congratulations to him and also Red Bull for clinching the Constructors' at the previous race.

Fernando, you wanted unusual circumstances but it seems they weren't either the right ones or not enough. But it was just an incredible race for all of you.

FA: Yes, it was good I think. It was more or less what we wanted. Mixed conditions and very, very difficult race. It was one of the most difficult races we ever drove, I think with the conditions out there and you feel that you are with the wrong tyre every lap but you ask the team and everyone is in the same position so you need to keep fighting. There was a lot of risk every lap to crash and have an accident and finish the race there. So we could not afford this for sure because we needed a podium finish to have any chance, so it was a very delicate situation but we managed very well and again we starting in eighth or seven or something like that and we finished in the podium one more time. As usual in the last couple of races. So this can only be achieved with perfection from the team, with good strategies, with good start, with good pace in the car. And today we mixed all again and it was very fine. Obviously you are not in control of what your rivals do. And I think we need a second place and Sebastian eighth or something like that, which we know that is a very strange combination of results because to be out of the first eight positions for Red Bull in this race is not so easy, so we were hoping a little miracle, as we were hoping for all through the year, I think from the start to the end it was a dream and we had this little present to fight for the championship until the last race. So we enjoyed the race, we did our job and the dream continued until today. And this was... thank you for the team to have a perfect season.

Felipe, on the podium at home, you were also the perfect team-mate, and also an emotional podium for you.

FM: Yeah, I think it was so emotional. Not just the podium, I mean what's happened all through the year, y'know? I think everything came together in the same moment. And I didn't know what to say, didn't know what to think, I mean I just couldn't even breathe. It was very emotional. The race was good, we made some mistakes on the strategy but you never know. It was raining, stopping, raining, stopping and you never know what to expect. And I choose also together, to try that strategy but then after we saw, I saw myself again in 11th and just was quite aggressive overtaking cars and I think from there on the race was incredible. It was very good. And for sure with... together with this problem on the strategy, I mean the race I suppose should be different. Suppose even to fight for the victory maybe, y'know? Under normal circumstance. I think all together the first part of the season, which was a disaster and then after that was completely different; doing what I like, doing what I know, the performance I know and I think when we put everything together it just collapsed.

Fernando, when Seb had his first lap spin, did the team get on the radio and tell you what had happened, or did they just let you get on with it?

FA: Yes, yes, they told me that they had a spin and he was last. But nothing because the conditions were so difficult that being last, 11th or 12th was not a big drama at that time but obviously it was one more time to be cool and to calm down. The race was on and it was very strange situations and very strange conditions on the track and obviously when Sebastian was quite far down after the spin it was obviously a message to calm down and stay cool because we need to keep it in the track. That was sometimes the most difficult thing. It was not about lap time, it was not about one-tenth it was just to survive every lap. So it was the most difficult thing in the race.

Question for Fernando, where and when do you think you lost this championship?

FA: Many, many places. Obviously I have two retirements in the year, over 20 races and the two retirements was not engine problem, not gear problem, not driver error. It was nothing. It was one car puncturing your rear tyre and one car passing over you. Nothing really you could do in these two starts. So for sure there you lose a couple of points. There were also some races that we have some strange decisions let's say, and some penalties, so maybe we lost also there.

Fernando, before you did your last pitstop, Sebastian went in for another set of dry tyres and then took Inters. You stayed out, how difficult was it for you to find the balance? I mean you stayed out on probably very used old tyres. And who did the decision to stay out?

FA: It was a shared decision, obviously. It was getting quite wet and the pace was starting to be six seconds slower, then eight, and then the last two laps were 14 seconds slower than the normal dry pace. They call me to put the new tyres, dry tyres, two laps before and I said "guys, it's raining quite a lot, so let's wait one more lap. Give me one more lap because I don't think it is ready for new dry tyres or for intermediate." And then we wait one more lap and it was very clear that it was intermediate conditions, so we were lucky in that lap.

Question to all drivers: this season was usual or unusual for you - and why?

JB: I think it's pretty obvious it was quite an unusual season, especially at the start of the year, having seven different winners from so many different teams. We don't see that in Formula One so often. Well, ever. I think a lot of it was down to the way we were getting the tyres working or not getting the tyres working. But also I think a lot of the teams, the teams that aren't normally at the front, I think they've done a very good job over the winter. But through the year when the bigger teams work out how to use the tyres and also, you know, the development race, suddenly you see a difference towards the end of the season. Not as big as some might have thought. I don't think we would have expected a Force India to be leading the race today. So, I think it shows Formula One is a lot closer than it used to be; in terms of regulations it's a lot tighter and also with not many regulation changes, it brings the field very close - and I think we'll see that also next year.

FM: I think he said everything.

Fernando, did the team inform you every single lap what was going on, behind and in front of you, considering the championship fight? And if you can make some comments about Felipe because he has been helping you a lot in the last few races.

FA: Of course, I was constantly updated with the positions of our rivals. At the beginning of the race for the Constructors' Championship and also for the Drivers' Championship. After Hamilton retired the Constructors' Championship was a little easier for us so we were concentrating the Drivers' Championship. Nothing really to say, it's good to have some information because sometimes you don't know if you're fast enough or you are too slow and when you see that the pace is OK and your rivals are fighting at the back, there is some extra motivation. And about Felipe for sure it was a very, very good second part of the year with some podiums and some very good performance. If I found myself fighting for the World Championship at the last race it's also thanks to the teamwork, and when we say teamwork it's engineers, we say people in Maranello, we say sponsors and we say the drivers. There are a lot of tests that have been done in the simulator with our test drivers. There is a lot of test that Felipe was doing in the simulator also in the summer and there is the Friday practice that without a team-mate... you can share the programme and you can trust the results... it's impossible sometimes to work. Maximum trust, maximum confidence in Felipe's work every time in the races, in the practice, in the simulator, we are a team. We are united. And in the last two races, three races, there was also some help in the race itself in terms of positions gained etcetera. So this is also due to the position in the championship that Felipe had no more options and the team decide this. As I said, fantastic team and thanks to everybody, we were in this situation.

Fernando, two questions, do you know something about Vettel overtaking Kobayashi with yellow flag and the second question is about the future: in what aspects must improve Ferrari to win the championship.

FA: The yellow flag, not any news, only Jenson was in front of me when we arrive in the podium. There was some kind of hope when he told me there is some yellow flag problem but then I think it was not true. I don't know, I came from the podium here, so maybe you have more information. For future, I think we need to improve the car. I think we have the best team in terms of approaching the races, preparing the races. Zero mechanical problems, zero problems for the year. Good pitstops, good starts, good strategy. But we were too slow. We were behind the Red Bulls, behind the McLarens, and now in the last couple of grands prix, behind Williams, Force India. We were clearly slower than them in pace. So this is something we must improve next year because we cannot fight for a World Championship if we are too slow. We can be a little bit slower but not that much. And this year it was something strange, combinations that allowed us to fight until the end but I'm not sure we'll be this lucky in the future.

Alonso, please, do you feel more frustrated for not being champion or satisfied having been to the end of the championship?

FA: I'm very satisfied. I think it's very good feeling what I have now. It was very frustrating maybe in Abu Dhabi, feeling, two years ago because we have in our hands and we lost it. It was some kind of frustration there. Here is completely the opposite. I'm so proud and I'm so happy to fight until the last lap with the package we have in hands. That is the best thing for me, to feel proud of myself, it was by far the best season of my career and I will remember this 2012 like some dream season. Obviously we didn't achieve the points to win the title but I won so many things this year: so much respect from everybody.

Fernando, last year in Brazil you called 2012 as your best season ever. Do you think this one was even better?

FA: Yes, yes definitely. I think last year was very good, I was very proud of the season, how we approach races, how we improve mistakes we done in 2010 and this 2012, as I said, apart from the competitiveness of the car, if I repeat the 20 races, it would be difficult to do anything different of what we did because everything was so good for me.

Question for Felipe. The last time you entered through that door four years ago was maybe the most bitter moment on your career. You did whatever you could to try to fight to the championship and lost it to Lewis. Four years later you come through the same door and it's even emotional, can you tell us what changed and what happened through that time and how to you feel about returning to the podium in Brazil?

FM: Well, I think it happen so many things in this time, from the last time I came from that door after the race and now. It was actually not a great timing on my career, and before was just great times. I had a difficult time but I think I learnt a lot. It was a life experience, y'know? Which is always important for you to learn, to understand so many things. I think the most important thing is to understand, and to turn around and go back to the good direction. To do all you know. Which I always believe I am able to do - and I think I'm showing now. So, coming back through that door is always a great feeling. And not just through that door, but in this place and being competitive. I think I was competitive the whole weekend. Even in the race, with the problems I had in the race but anyway I was always competitive. And I think that's really what makes me proud. To be here, to enjoy, to do the best you can and to do all you know, without any bullshit. Just to know and enjoy.

F1 Brazilian Grand Prix – Sebastian Vettel press conference

Following the traditional post-race press conference, triple world champion Sebastian Vettel faced the media solo.

Sebastian, after such an incredible afternoon, has it sunk in yet that you're a three time World Champion?

SV: No. I've hardly had any time for myself yet, really. It's very difficult to find the right words, especially after the race today. I think everything that could go wrong went wrong. As a matter of fact, though, I think we always kept believing. Instead of getting angry and frustrated about the situation, imagine yourself, you are the wrong way round at turn four. It looked exactly like that (what I can see now), I had a lot of cars coming and I was in the wrong way. Obviously, then I went off the brakes, because obviously everyone was going in this direction and to join them, I tried to roll down hill and avoid cars driving backwards and we kept the car damage to a limit. Obviously we could see in the dry conditions later on that the pace wasn't there and I was obviously slow down the straights, which made it very easy for others to pass us and very difficult for us to pass someone then we lost radio, we probably did the pit stop at the wrong time. I went on another set of dries; a lap later it started to rain. Came in for inters, the inters weren't ready because we had no radio communication, they couldn't hear me. And then we obviously caught back up in the wet in intermediate conditions. Fortunately the pace was there because, as you know, you can make up for the loss of car pace that you have by probably driving a different line and trying to do something different to others. Then to limp home, under the safety car - obviously at that moment I didn't know if it was enough. I was told a couple of laps before that it should be fine, but then I didn't know. I saw the crash between Nico and Hamilton, obviously retiring, so Hulkenberg and Hamilton out of the race, and I knew that Fernando was ahead, and they were ahead of him at the time that I could see during the first safety car, so I didn't know. Then, to get told (that I was ahead in the championship) was unbelievable. Unfortunately the guys couldn't hear my answer because the radio was broken. No, it's difficult to find the words right now. Obviously it's still full of adrenalin. Incredible race today, as I said. I think they tried everything to make it even harder for us, not just the others but also the circumstances: as I said, with the damage on the

car, losing radio, in these conditions, when communication is so crucial, stopping just a lap too early, not having the tyres ready because communication wasn't there. Where do you start, really? I think you guys had your show and we had to really fight until the end.

You've broken all sorts of records by becoming a three time consecutive World Champion; what does it mean to you?

SV: It's difficult to find the right words. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think there are only two guys who have done that before. Obviously you need to be in the right place at the right time but I also believe that you can create your own luck and work for what is coming up. I think that one of the great things about Formula One is that you can not necessarily compare only yourself but you can compare your time, your era if you like to ten, 20, 30, 40 years ago. Obviously times have change but I think they will keep changing because that's what we do. I think if you look around the world there are a lot of things that have changed. People around the world learn not only in Formula One and in every other sport but also in everyday life. I don't know what to say. We are in Sao Paulo here, the place where Ayrton Senna was born and came from and the place where he was buried. To come here and win the Championship for the third time, I don't really know what to say. I have to say a big thanks to everyone in the team. Of course, this sounds like a bit of a standard phrase. Sometimes we get criticised for bringing up standard phrases like that but I really feel that as one of the guys in the team, I don't feel more important or less important. Of course I know I'm driving the car and of course I know that if I turn right in a straightline I hit the wall and that's it. It's pretty easy in that regard, but I really feel as one of them. What we achieved today is not what happened today in the race. It's what we've been working for since I really joined the team. Together, everyone here at the track, back at the factory, it's a massive amount of work getting done throughout the whole year. Now, tomorrow the season is over and the guys are already flat out for the last couple of weeks preparing RB9 and next year. You cannot afford to lift. Obviously, I think I'm in a very very fortunate position, compared to many guys in the team, but I think you do this job - there might be some but all the guys in the garage and all the people I know in the factory - you do this job not because you really care what is written on the cheque you get at the end of the month. I think you do this job because you just love Formula One, you love motor sport, you love the excitement here. I said to the guys yesterday: 'am I nervous? Yes.' I think if I wasn't nervous now, imagine, I would fail, what am I doing here? I have a great chance, I'm in a great position and I don't really care what's going on. So I said 'yes, I am nervous' but then again we are nervous every time. It's what we need to get us started, to get us in the groove so that we are present, we are sharp, as soon as the lights go off we are not sleeping, we react and we are there. And today we had many of these occasions where you can argue you have to be present otherwise it goes wrong. It was a very tough race but we were present all the time. We remained ourselves throughout the whole year, even though people did some things that we would never consider doing, trying to achieve our targets but it's not in our hands, and it's not our job to rate and to comment so much. We have to make sure we do our own homework and most importantly, I said them to yesterday as well and throughout the year, 'enjoy.' Many times I try to stop and on the grid there are so many fans around here... on the parade lap they scream... yeah, maybe sometimes they scream for Alonso, sometimes for Massa, sometimes for Schumacher, sometimes for Rosberg. That's not the point. In the end you are one of them and it's a privilege to race in front of such a big crowd, so many people coming to see you racing and having the chance we have had today just makes it more enjoyable. I think many times in these kinds of situations it's so easy to lose focus. Obviously we have won 2010, 2011. I had a very smart guy who once told me the hardest thing was winning after winning, because you get the attention, you get the pressure but you focus on how to win again, rather than focusing on the small steps it takes. That's what I always try to remember myself or remind the guys in the team. It's just another day, another race and we have to be ourselves and make sure we enjoy it and the rest will be just fine.

Can you describe the accident on the first lap from the start?

SV: Yeah, the start was quite good. I was quite happy. Then I think I was bit too early on KERS and didn't get KERS until turn one but nevertheless, I was side by side with Mark and he squeezed me to the inside, so your angle for turn one becomes worse and worse. It's very easy if you try to be stubborn and fight until the apex that everyone just keeps turning in and you are the one parked on the apex and you lose your front wing so I had to back off, obviously slow down a lot, go down to first gear, everyone around the outside used that momentum, and I lost a lot of positions. Then down to turn four, I was benefitting from the slipstream in front, relatively safe to Paul who was behind, as far as I remember, and then I got the hit in turn four for no reason. I don't know what happened. I think someone probably... I think it was Bruno, I was told it was Bruno... he was probably fighting someone into turn four. It was drizzling since the start of the formation lap and it was quite slippery in turn four, we knew that. Maybe he forgot. The same thing I mentioned about the fact that in turn one I had to back out of the situation because your angle just becomes narrower. If he was on the inside, which I suppose - I haven't seen the footage - BOOM and I was the car that he used to stop himself. They didn't help us.

Sebastian, what do you think about your fans? Do they help you in your success?

SV: Well, I think the support we had this year is again even more than we had last year. Obviously we are still a very young team in that regard, we cannot compare ourselves to Mercedes, Ferrari, McLaren and these kind of teams. They have been around for centuries and for us, we are still pretty young, but we can see and feel that our fan base is growing, there are more and more people coming to the track with Red Bull shirts, supporting us. More and more people write and support. The amount of positive feedback we get is obviously very useful, it helps you a lot. People obviously try to lift you up if everything goes right and they try to knock you down when you do a mistake or you do wrong. I think first of all, for yourself, you have to remain the same, let's say, neutral, as in, you're never as good as they are, as they say and never as bad as they say. If you remember that, I think it already helps a lot, as least it does for me. If you feel down or things go against your way, then it's incredibly helpful to have support and many people telling you that they still believe in you. Support outside from the fans but also inside: I mentioned the guys working on the car in the garage - imagine you walk into your office and everyone gives you - without saying a single word - the feeling that things will be alright. It gives you confidence, energy without having to say anything. It's extremely useful and very helpful and it only helps you to be stronger.

Seb, what about driving with the damage you had? Was it worse in dry conditions and did the rain in some way help you?

SV: I think in the end we had the conditions that we were supposed to have, as in, nobody knew when it starts to rain, nobody knew how much rain there would be and nobody knew when the rain would stop. I think the best example for that, even though we have all the technical equipment you can imagine these days: radar, forecasts and so on, you wouldn't pit a lap before the rain arrived if you would know. We did, which didn't help, but I think generally, to answer your question, in the dry conditions we were not quick enough. I was stuck behind Kamui but we were nowhere on the straights, and also our tyres were suffering and we were not quick enough to fight, to go through the field because the car was damaged. I looked at the floor and it didn't look nice. I'm quite happy because I could continue. Many times you have an accident like that in that corner and that it's, that's the end of the race so I was very happy for that. In wet conditions I think you can make up a little bit of time here and there by - I wouldn't say commitment because I'm sure everyone else is committed. Everyone is pushing as hard as he can and what he feels comfortable with in his car but I think you can verify in terms of the lines, the usual things when it starts to rain. Obviously it's quite slippery here in the wet and I think we benefitted from the time we had in intermediate conditions because I think we were quite a bit quicker - or more competitive than in dry conditions.

Which one of the problems you mentioned at the beginning was the most difficult to handle and how often in this race did you think it was game over?

SV: I never thought it was game over, one: because I kept believing and two: because, as a fact, I didn't know where I was for most of the time.

Obviously I saw which position I was in on the pit board but I didn't know where Fernando was. To make out whether it was enough or not, I needed to where he was but that was not the main focus for the whole race. With the amount of difficulties I mentioned, I think we had our hands full to keep the car on the track. It was very very difficult to drive the car. I was very aggressive and snapping quite a lot, so I lost the rears many times, fortunately stayed on track most of the time. It was a pleasure but it was a lot of work. I felt happier in intermediate conditions because I could make up by choosing different lines than the guys I was racing and benefitting from that, because in dry conditions we lost a lot down the straights. I think everyone's exit speed, for example, in dry conditions was fairly similar, because even if you were two/three kph quicker it's a lot in the dry but the car was so draggy down the straights that we had no chance. I think you saw that after the restart, the train in front was gone and I was behind and I was nearly eaten up by Kamui and Mark around the outside. We lost a lot in the dry and in the wet we could make up for it.

Sebastian, would you say this is your hardest title and if so perhaps the most rewarding? And if it's not either of those, how would you characterise it?

SV: I think it's always difficult because in the end, if you compare, you talk about something that happened in the past and obviously it's not as present in our heads as this one. I think, nonetheless, it was a very very tough season for us, on track, off track, a season with ups and downs for everyone but as I mentioned before, I think we always remained ourselves and kept doing it our way, and I think that made the difference in the end. I think for us, for me, it's always most important that you're happy with what you see in the mirror and you're honest to yourself, because what's the point in trying to fake or pretend being something else, someone else? You are always the first one to notice, you're always the first one to know if you are cheating yourself. In that way, I think it was because people tried everything, inside the lines, outside the lines, to beat us and the amount of questions we had to deal with, stuff we had to deal with throughout the season didn't make our lives easier but the key was to remain ourselves and I think that made the difference in a way. I'm not holy, I make mistakes like everyone else but I think the way I was brought up was to be honest and admit if you do something wrong. Yesterday in qualifying three, on the first run, I made a mistake. I was pushing hard but I overstepped the mark and maybe in that regard qualifying wasn't perfect but then I have no problem to admit it. As I said, I was brought up that way to be honest and I also believe that's a reason why we succeeded in the end.

I think you said in one of your TV interviews just now that people have tried to play dirty tricks, but you never expanded on that, so could you give us an explanation?

SV: Sorry but I think I've mentioned everything I have to mention in a way. I think it's clear but it's not for us to rate... I said as well in the same sentence, but obviously I don't pass it on, as usual, it's not for us to rate or comment on that, because it's not our decision, it's not in our hands. We have to focus on what we have, what is in our hands and getting excited about what others are doing... what's the point? Of course you can but it only carries you away and distracts you and you lose your focus, and by that I think it's a distraction, you can't focus on achieving your optimum which is the only way that doesn't guarantee but the only way that really helps you as much as you can to be in the position that you want to be after 20 races.

Seb, congratulations. What did Michael say to you when you guys met in the weigh-in and at the rate you're going, how do you rate your chances of beating his record of seven world titles?

SV: I don't think I'm commenting on that because it's nonsense. I think that whatever he has achieved in his career is unbelievable. People tend to forget but he was dominant like no other driver ever in Formula One during his time. Obviously his comeback was a bit different. He unfortunately didn't have the car to probably prove what he's capable of. That's how it goes sometimes. I'm sure he doesn't regret anything. I'm sure if you ask him, that's what he says. I think he was extremely fair, not just today. I think he's one of the guys who can race really hard, and I mean there's not much between your car and the other car, travelling at 50 kph or 300 kph. He knows his car limits and he knows how not to overstep the mark. It has been fun to race him the last three years. Obviously for most of it I have been in a better car, so I enjoyed that, obviously, but again, today was very fair and I said thanks for not defending too hard. He said 'what's the point, you were much quicker. You were going to pass me anyway.' It's something you can learn in karting when you're racing. You come from the back with more pace than the go-karts around you or the people around you, it's to work together. There are some guys who are racing for 17th place and they are defending 17th place as if it was the last lap of the last race but sometimes in a way, you need to work together and whoever is quicker at the time maybe dictates the pace, let him go, go behind him and then every time he passes someone you go with him. I think if Michael had defended a lot, it would only have slowed both of us down and then maybe someone else is coming from behind and passes him, so he ends up in a worse position. I think he's smart enough to know in what situation he is in and what car he's fighting with at the current time.

Sebastian, you've won three titles in a row with the same team; what is your next challenge, winning another title with another team?

SV: The next challenge, I think... first of all I want to enjoy now. I tried to explain to you the whole time that the most important thing is to be present and I don't want to get carried away with next year. I'm very happy now and I want to have a good time with the guys now for tonight and let's see how long. Surely at some stage you try to charge the batteries, it's been a tough and long season and come back in shape next year. I'm with the team. I have a contract until - I think you know better than me - at this stage, until the end of '14. I'm very happy with what we have achieved so far and I don't think this story is over yet. I'm very happy and extremely committed to give everything I have, also in the next years when I'm with them. At the moment, I don't see any point thinking about another team or something else. I'm extremely happy in the position I am. It's incredible what we have achieved. Christian came on the radio after the race and mentioned the names that have achieved similar - and he forgot Prost! So I told him but I had no radio so he couldn't hear me, but you could hear that they were obviously very busy, everyone was shouting on the pit wall. He started with Michael, that was the obvious choice which is quite easy to remember, Senna, Lauda, Piquet and then it was starting to get all loud and noisy. I think he mentioned all of them except Prost, so I told him 'you forgot Prost, he's got four.' Fangio as well. Sorry. Nearly forgot.

Sebastian, you came into this season having won nearly everything last year and you had a hard beginning to the season. What happened there and what happened after Singapore, where everything seemed to change for you?

SV: Well, I think one is the technical side, the other one is maybe what happens inside you. It has been a tough year, as you mentioned, extremely close. We had seven different winners in the first seven races. Up and downs for everyone. Obviously back then, I already knew that every place, every point will probably matter in the end. In the end it was closer than what we hoped for but at some stage, people were not even mentioning us when they were talking about the championship, but I think the most important thing was that we always kept believing. Since the start of the season, we were fighting with the car, the car wasn't similar to last year's, I couldn't... it's difficult for you to understand, but I couldn't use my tricks or my style to make it work and manipulate the car the way I liked. I didn't have enough rear stability mostly to work with the brakes and get the car into the corners, to the apex, the way I like. We tried everything and I think at some stage, we just did a step that was big enough and in the right direction that allowed me to do more of what I like, so naturally it came in our direction. We picked up pace, we were more competitive, we were in a better position and still it was tough, some races. For sure, it was not a piece of cake, because still the car was not like last year, you cannot compare. Obviously everyone lost a lot of downforce and stability so we were always up against it but yeah, we were always really focused on every single

step. I mentioned before trying to really work on the car. Sometimes we made steps in the wrong direction, we paid the price but also we learned something. We learned then, for next time, not to confuse ourselves too much. I think this year was very tricky for everyone, working with the tyres, getting them in the right window. Towards the end of the season, more and more people were confident with that but that's because you make mistakes and you learn from them. That's because the cars get better, you improve them and with more downforce and more grip, things just get a little bit better.

I don't know what your recall of every race you've raced is like but would you say that that was the single hardest Grand Prix you've done in your career?

SV: I said it on the radio but again you didn't hear that: I said it was for sure the toughest race not, just, of course... being in a situation to fight for the championship means that you're not on holiday but just look at the stuff that went wrong. It's hard enough if you lose radio communication for a start in these circumstances, because if there are any circumstances where you really need to talk, it's these. Then we got turned around, the car was damaged, since lap one, we were dead last, we came again... we came back, changeable conditions all the time, we did a stop for nothing which only cost 20-22 seconds and had to come in again when it started to rain the lap after but still we finished sixth. Sixth is still a very good result. Some races this year we would have been happy to finish sixth, so we can be very happy with that, and obviously it happened to be the last race and the championship decider and it went in our favour so not much more to say.
