

Fl Italian Grand Prix – Thursday press conference

There may have been six drivers at the Thursday Monza press conference, but there was only one question the press wanted answered: McLaren, Mercedes, or neither?

Present were Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) Jerome D'Ambrosio (Lotus), Lewis Hamilton (McLaren), Felipe Massa (Ferrari), Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso), and Nico Rosberg (Mercedes).

Jérôme, welcome back. How prepared are you? Have you been able to prepare for your comeback?

Jerome d'AMBROSIO: Well obviously it's been short notice. On Monday really. It's been a bit of a hectic week for me, getting stuff done as much as I could before here to get really prepared as best as I can. As I say, I haven't had time to think about anything really: just really getting things done and that's it.

I guess you've been training though, keeping in shape, waiting for this moment?

DAM: Yes, definitely. As a third driver that's part of the job: you have to keep fit and everything. It's not something easy, not a lot of mileage on, but I did everything in the drivers' meetings, with the engineers and everything, trying to keep up to date as much as I could with every tool I had in my hand, to be as prepared as I can if something like this happened.

So, what's your aim in the race itself? What should we expect?

DAM: It's a difficult question to answer simply because I don't have much information to set myself a position target – or anything. I really want to stay focussed on what I've got to do, with the job, with the engineers, in the car. Stay focussed on that. Once that is done correctly we can hope for something good on Sunday – but only if I stay focussed on my job, so this is what I will try to do.

Nico, we keep looking at China and wondering what's happened since then. Last weekend again seemed to be difficult.

Nico ROSBERG: Yeah definitely we've had some more difficult times now, lately and a little bit of a drop in performance relative to others – we know that. And we've been looking into it, we understand a lot of the reasons, and we've been pushing very, very hard to turn things around again and I'm sure the next few races are going to be a little bit better for us – how good is difficult to say.

Is the car difficult to drive, does it just not suit you any longer? What's the nature of the car now?

NR: Amongst other things the balance is difficult, yes. Especially the last two races, due to the fact that both tracks had very long corners and especially in those long corners it has been difficult.

So Parabolica could be difficult for you.

NR: Parabolica would be a little bit more difficult for me, yes, but this track, with the low downforce and everything, I think is going to be less of a problem.

Daniel, first of all, last weekend looked as though it was going to be good, and you did manage to get some points. What are your feelings about last weekend and looking at this weekend as well?

Daniel RICCIARDO: It was nice to get some more points on the board – unfortunately longer than I was hoping since Melbourne but good to get a few more. The first stint was looking all-right. Obviously we benefitted from the mayhem at the start and we got as high as fifth, I think. I was hoping to finish up there but unfortunately we dropped back a bit in the end to ninth. But still definitely good for myself and the team to get both cars in the points. Hopefully we can build on some of that momentum and Monza obviously is a nice place for us to come: the team's home grand prix and I've got a little bit of heritage myself – so it's nice to come in with the momentum of Spa and hopefully score some more.

The Ferrari engine seemed to be pretty good in a straight line – how's that going to affect here as well:

DR: Yeah, hopefully it helps us. Hopefully that remains. We'll see, I guess, once we're out on track tomorrow but as always, all teams bring a Monza downforce setting for this race and we'll soon find out if ours is going to be competitive enough. Looking forward to it, to say the least.

And what are the aims for rest of the season? What are your intentions?

DR: Would love to get points more regularly. Would love to improve on my ninth position. I would love to get a top five – I think that would be a good achievement for myself and the team. But we'll take it step by step for now: as I said, it's a nice grand prix for us and obviously the team's only victory came here so it would be nice to keep a story going for this grand prix.

Lewis, I'm sure you're aware the paddock is full of comment about the rumours that came out yesterday. Do you have a comment to make yourself?

Lewis HAMILTON: Not really.

So, do you know where you're driving next year?

LH: No.

And in terms of this race, what about last weekend's performance from Jenson Button. How does that affect your feelings about the upcoming Italian Grand Prix?

LH: Jenson, he drove fantastically well in the last race and he showed that the car is very, very competitive – and we generally should have very similar performance here, hopefully. On our side of the garage we hope it's a better weekend for us. It can't really get worse.

So, how do you approach this weekend? Just looking for victory, as ever?

LH: Ah no, just to pick up the pieces and get back to racing. It'll be nice too... we've done a lot of work analysing and a lot of preparation for this weekend. It'll be nice to get into the race, when you're doing so much preparation and so much waiting the most important thing is to see your way to the race.

Fernando, first of all, just to confirm, are you perfectly OK physically?

Fernando ALONSO: Yes.

Because you were complaining of some whiplash in your shoulder?

FA: Yeah it was after the race, two hours after the Spa race there was still some pain in the back, but then on Monday morning I woke up absolutely fine, feeling 100%, so it was good news, because you never know, the day after the crash anything can happen. So it was good news on Monday morning to do a completely normal day.

You're a two-time winner here, what do you feel your chances are here in the race on Sunday?

FA: Well, for sure it's not going to be easy. In terms of performance we've been not so quick in the last two or three grand prix. It was eight tenths from pole position in Hungary and eight tenths also in Spa. It's five days from that qualifying so I don't think we will recover eight tenths by magic button. But I think what we need to do is to maximise our performance, to extract from the car the maximum and hopefully that will give us some chance to be on the podium or if everything goes well, for sure a victory here is very special for all the Ferrari tifosi that will support us here, so we will try to do our best.

Felipe, were you pleased with the performance in Spa and how do you feel about this race?

Felipe MASSA: Well, very pleased with the performance in the race (at Spa). I think our car was more competitive in the race than in qualifying. In qualifying we were struggling a lot, especially in sector two. In the race the car was better. The car was a little bit stronger. We were able to fight and able to overtake quick cars as well. Due to the problem on the first corner at the start... I did a very, very good start, I overtook three or four cars straight away but because of this problem in the first corner I had to go completely outside of the track and I lost the positions and even more so I had to start again, my race, after the safety car. So if I had been able to be in the same position I had got to at the start, it would have even been possible to maybe fight for the podium.

Do you think the car is good in low downforce trim?

FM: I think so. The problem is that Spa is much different than this track. In Spa you do need good downforce, especially in sector two and everything. Here it's a different track and we'll see how the car behaves on this different track. So we hope we can have a great weekend, both of us, for our incredible fans here.

What about your own future? Is there any news on that? Do you have a deadline?

FM: Not yet. Just concentrate on the races and on the results. I hope it will not take very long but let's concentrate on the races, try to do the best, having a good result and that's the most important thing.

Lewis, could you explain to us what happened with you and the team after you showed the telemetry on Twitter? How do you explain this fact?

LH: Nothing happened. I had the head of the PR department ask me to take the picture off and I did.

Question for Fernando. Okay, it's always 25 points but to win here, it's Monza, it's a Ferrari place and after last Sunday it looks like fate owes you one as you couldn't build your lead and you lost points, you couldn't match Schumacher on 24 races scoring, so what a sensation this would be winning here.

FA: Well, I think Monza is a special win, because for any Ferrari driver it's a lot of support that you feel from the tifosi from today until Sunday and you want to give something back to them and the best thing is obviously a race win, but from a championship point of view it doesn't change too much. Even if you're not fighting for the championship, winning in Monza will be special anyway, because the podium celebration with all the people on the main straight etc is nice for anyone, not only fighting for the championship. So we will try to do a good race and see how many points we can make and have clear in our minds what is the priority this weekend.

A question to Nico. Do you have any idea who will be your team-mate next year?

NR: No.

Good afternoon Lewis. Just in general terms from your personal perspective, what would be the attraction, the positives in joining a team like Mercedes?

LH: I have no idea. I've not really thought about it.

OK, could I turn it round to you Nico? From your perspective, what would be the attraction for Lewis to join a team like Mercedes?

NR: I can say from my perspective. My perspective is that Mercedes and Ferrari are on one level in terms of the history in F1 and the standing. It's very, very special to drive for the Silver Arrow, and especially to win with a Silver Arrow.

Lewis, does that resonate with you?

LH: (laughs)

So, looking at it in general terms: McLaren have won the last two races and Mercedes have only won one race in the past three years, does that put it into perspective for you as to where your priorities might lie?

LH: I don't think I'm really looking for anything to be put into perspective. I drive for McLaren, we've won the last two races, we've got another great weekend, hopefully, ahead of us and that's what we've got to focus on.

Jerome, in what way has Romain Grosjean helped you prepare if indeed he has done so?

DAM: Honestly, we haven't had much contact with Romain since then. We generally do have a good relationship at the track and normally at the track. We don't keep in touch so much otherwise. So that hasn't changed between Spa and here. I think it's been only two or three days and the real hard work was with the engineers. I've been provided with a lot of information from both drivers from the engineers and then that's it. If something happens during the weekend, I have a very good relationship with Romain. We've worked together in lower classes, so for sure he's going to be there, and the same with Kimi. If I have something I want to ask then I will and I'm sure I will get an answer. This was not the time to speak with them, between the two races.

Felipe, do you think you will be able to beat Fernando again before the end of the season?

FM: Yes

Here in Monza?

FM: Well, I'm trying everywhere.

So how important is qualifying for you on Saturday?

FM: Very important. I think qualifying is definitely important for us, just to have an easier race. I think maybe qualifying was not so great for me this year but I always had good direction, good pace in the races, not counting the first few races but afterwards, yes. I think qualifying is very very important so we focus on that and try to have an easier direction in the race, especially from the beginning to the end.

Lewis, you said you want to stay concentrated on this race, but in your eyes, when do you want to decide to have a clearer idea of next year?

LH: I don't have a deadline - obviously before next season I think would be useful. I'm in a great position, and I just need to focus on preparations for these races. We've got a long way to go before the end of the season and Jenson and I have showed in the previous race that there's great potential in the car and in the team, so that's really what I need to try and focus on most.

Lewis, in the last few races we've seen strong performances from McLaren amidst some pretty chaotic weather: hot, cold, wet, dry and so on. We're now hitting the really really hot stretch of the season, from here on in. Are you concerned that with the tyres there might be a dip in form as we're getting back into the hotter climes or have you guys cracked the rubber at last?

LH: I don't know if we've cracked it, but we definitely have been improving quite a lot. Jenson proved, at the last race... he did a one stop, one of the few people to do a one stop race so there's something going well with the car. Here will be very tough, I think, but everyone's in the same boat but we are definitely working very very hard to make sure that we're on top of things when it comes to these hot circuits, because tyre degradation is going to be key, I think, particularly in some of these hotter climates. But we went pretty well in Hungary so it wasn't a disaster there but it could have been better so we need to improve on that.

Fernando, your car was completely rebuilt after the crash. Are you worried about that or are you confident that you will have a Ferrari in perfect shape?

FA: No, not worried. Obviously we make some changes and we went back to some parts of the car that we've been using three or four races ago and then for Monza, specially, there is a very unique aero package here so the car is a little bit different to any other track. Even with the Spa car it had changed. It was planned to change nearly completely for this race, so I don't think it's making a big difference.

Fernando, when the championship is so close and the cars are so close, do you really think it could be possible to win the championship with no more victories, only podiums?

FA: Who knows? I think that depends on your opponents and also what they do. If they keep sharing victories, it's possible to win without any more wins but at the moment, we see McLaren very strong in Germany, nearly won the race there, won the race in Hungary, won the race in Spa so they can win three or four consecutive races and your gap disappears. As we said, already from the last six or seven Grands Prix, we need to focus on which one is second in the championship at the moment which, today, is Vettel so this weekend we try to finish in front of Vettel, like at the other weekends we try to finish in front of Webber.

Lewis, on the twitter subject, I know everyone is playing it down, but Jenson said after the race that he was disappointed that you had tweeted the details of the wings and everything else. Have you spoken to Jenson, have you cleared the air with him about it? It seemed to us that Jenson was seeing more in that tweet than maybe you did.

LH: I haven't spoken to him, don't plan to, moved on from it. Obviously it wasn't the best thing to do and it won't happen again, so move forward and focus on this race.

Lewis, when you look at a contract or renegotiation or look to move, at your stage of your career, what is it you are looking at? Is it purely money or are there other factors?

LH: I want to win.

Pure and simple you want to win.

LH: Yes.

And is that win 2013 or win 2014, which is a big season, things change quite drastically in 2014, don't they?

LH: Yeah, I always want to win, every year you compete, that's why us drivers exist and that's why the teams exist. It's just making sure you're in the right place to do so.

Being in the right place, does that mean that it might pay to be in a team that manufactures their own engine and their own energy recovery systems rather than being with a customer which McLaren will be?

LH: It doesn't mean anything.

Jerome, so you say you've got plenty of information from your team. Do you think there would be room for more testing days in the calendar from your experience?

DAM: I have no idea yet.

Do you feel that you've had plenty of time in the car?

DAM: You mean so far?

Yes

DAM: Obviously so far, I don't feel like I've had plenty of time in the car. I had one time in Mugello on a fairly wet track. No, for sure I think it's good to get more time in the car and I can get much time in the car but I've got other things... I was really involved with the team all season so far, back at the factory as well, so I will try to capitalise on that.

Jerome, are you going to change your attitude of driving now you're coming back, having already had some experience in Formula One?

DAM: No, there's no reason to change myself, change who I am and the driver that I am, stepping in for the weekend, I think that's the worse thing you can ever do. I will approach the weekend as I have approached all the racing weekends I have been to so far. Of course, it's a special one, we are in Monza. I'm part Italian, it's a bit of a home race for me so I'm really cheered up for that and really going to give - as you always do - 100 percent that I have, but I'm not going to change the way I am and the way I drive.

Felipe, Lewis is quite relaxed about not knowing where he's racing next year, but I guess in your case you're pretty frustrated. Could you just explain how frustrated you are, and also what percentage chance you think there is of you staying at Ferrari next year?

FM: For sure, I expect to be in a different position in the championship to what I am but I'm just concentrated on my job which is driving the car, driving the quickest speed that I can. As I said, I am frustrated with my qualifying, not with my races and I'm sure that if I can improve the qualifying, I can be very strong in the races and completely change the results. As I said, I didn't sign anything for next year yet but I think we have the possibility to sign and let's wait and see. I don't know when but I just need to concentrate on the results of the races. I think that's the main important thing for my future as well.

Fernando, was Monza also a special race for you before becoming a Ferrari driver and what is your special memory of this race? If you have one special memory.

FA: It has always been special, because of the speed that you reach on this circuit, so for us drivers we love to drive fast cars, we love the speed so when you come here and especially with the V10 engines, we reached 370/375 kph so Monza has always been special. As I said, I think the podium ceremony here is a little bit more emotional than any other place. But obviously when I joined Ferrari it was a different level and the enthusiasm and support that you feel is probably the best race of the calendar for us in terms of emotions. Best memory here would be 2010 when we won here, so first time driving for Ferrari. It was a special weekend so hopefully we can repeat this moment soon, this year or the following years.

Question to all of you, but not Jerome: do you have any concerns about the fact that there is a newcomer - of course, he's not a rookie - but a newcomer coming into the field at the wheel of a good car? Do you have some concerns about that, especially for the start of the race?

FM: For sure not.

FA: No, I don't think so.

NR: No concern, because he's had experience last year so he's not a rookie.

Fernando, Felipe, in Barcelona and in Montreal, you had great changes to your car and Ferrari made a great step forward. You have regularly said you are now eight tenths slower than the fastest car. Is there room for a new package from Ferrari to make it similar to McLaren, for example?

FA: I think so. I think there are still three months of competition. There are still eight races to go, so all the teams bring some updates to every race. We just need to make ours work a little bit better than the others. In February or March we were more than a second behind the front runners, and then around Barcelona or Canada we were two or three tenths. In two or three months you can make a lot of progress. We just need to be clear on that and make some good steps which I'm sure and confident will arrive sooner or later.

Jerome, you just mentioned that this is your second home Grand Prix. Could you remind us if you have some relatives here in Italy: do you come to Italy sometimes, and which part of Italy do they come from?

DAM: OK, so a bit of funny background here. I have grandparents from Naples in Italy, Monte Casino and one from Naples. Italy is a bit of a second home race for every racing driver in the sense that when you're involved in go-karts you are involved in Italy most of the time, with Italian teams and for me, personally, I've grown up in the racing scene in junior formulae in Italy in Formula Renault, in F3000, Formula Masters, Italian teams and so on. I've spent a lot of my life and definitely, yeah, this is why I consider this personally as a second home race.

F1 Italian Grand Prix – F1 report

It was the first dry Friday morning that a press room of hardened hacks could remember. Sure, there has been some dry running this season, but the last fully dry weekend was in Valencia. It can't rain all the time, except when it does.

But Monza, that temple to power in its purest form, came up trumps with regard to the weather – the day broke to glorious sunshine, and when the pitlane opened for F1 it was to a warm and dry track on which tyre temperatures were a non-issue.

With the dry running came the opportunity to test out those new components that have been sitting in storage since Hockenheim, and the flo-viz paint was out in full force. Except on the Marussias, where the team elected only to coat the left-hand side of the car.

This being a circuit designed for speed, Monza can be viewed as more of a battle between engines than a battle between cars. And for the majority of the session, it was the Mercedes power plant that ruled the roost.

Ferrari gave a more than respectable display, with both cars in the top five, but the Renault engines were considerably slower: Kimi Raikkonen and Mark Webber were in the lower reaches of the top ten, which was dominated by Mercedes-powered machines.

The first incident of real note came with just over five minutes remaining, when Fernando Alonso stopped his Ferrari on track at the first chicane, bringing out the yellow flags in the process. At the time of writing, the nature of Alonso's problem was undetermined, with Ferrari saying only 'problem for Fernando'.

With two minutes left, Pastor Maldonado brought his car to a halt at the first Lesmo corner, again for reasons currently unknown.

The rest of the session saw chicane-cutting from all and sundry, but no significant issues.

Fastest man of the morning was Michael Schumacher, who topped the timesheets at the circuit where he announced his first retirement, back in 2006, those halcyon days when the world still had two pennies to rub together.

FP1 times (unofficial)

1. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.25.422s [26 laps]
2. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.25.733s [29 laps]
3. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.25.762s [26 laps]
4. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.25.800s [22 laps]
5. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.25.861s [27 laps]
6. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.25.944s [30 laps]
7. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1.26.046s [25 laps]
8. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.26.323s [26 laps]
9. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.26.390s [24 laps]
10. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.26.504s [19 laps]
11. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.26.508s [18 laps]
12. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.26.518s [21 laps]
13. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1.26.641s [26 laps]
14. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.26.746s [23 laps]
15. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Lotus) 1.27.180s [29 laps]
16. Jules Bianchi (Force India) 1.27.192s [22 laps]
17. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.27.373s [25 laps]
18. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.27.789s [24 laps]
19. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1.27.855s [27 laps]
20. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.28.578s [20 laps]
21. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.28.751s [26 laps]
22. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.29.207s [21 laps]
23. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.29.331s [21 laps]
24. Qing Hua Ma (HRT) 1.31.239s [26 laps]

F1 Italian Grand Prix – FP2 report

While free practice reports are widely available on the internet, reviews of lunch at the Paddock Club aren't. So if you want to know what happened in FP2 (short answer: not much), then go to the motorsport website of your choice.

If you want to know what happens when a journalist is given a bottomless glass of champagne and endless rounds of food, then keep reading.

Still here? Good.

Everyone persists in a delusion that life in Formula One is endless champagne and designer labels. And for some, that might be the case. But freelance journalists who cover all their own costs often subsist on a diet of plain baguette and wear head to toe Primark don't really do champagne, unless someone else has bought the bottle.

So when an invitation to lunch at the Paddock Club lands on one's lap – rare as hen's teeth, let me tell you – the clever journalist leaps on the opportunity with both hands and eats and drinks to their heart's content.

Eating in the Paddock Club is rather like being a hobbit. In the real world, one pudding would do. In the Paddock Club anyone who eats fewer than two puddings may as well not have turned up.

The meal started with a Michelin-esque starter of a duo of fish, comprised of fried baby calamari in a shredded potato basket served with a garlic mayonnaise, a timbale of smoked salmon, and a mixed asparagus salad with truffle dressing.

For the mains, it was a buffet choice of four options. Lacking the four stomachs of a cow, I restricted myself to the sea bass, which was served with the best salsa verde I've eaten, and a selection of green vegetables including pak choi and that crazy broccoli that looks like something from an alien planet.

After a seemly break for digestion, the first of the puddings was brought out – a crepe stuffed with baked apricots, topped with a brandy basket stuffed with apricot sorbet and fresh strawberries, plus one of those fancy spun sugar decorations that looks amazing but ends up sticking in your teeth.

I thought we were done. But no! It was time for the trio of ice-cream.

The hobbit-style feast was washed down with oceans of champagne – my half-empty glass was whisked away despite my protestations, as the staff insisted it was no longer chilled enough to drink. I was perfectly happy with it, but service demanded I was given a fresh one.

If the rich and famous spend their days eating in the Paddock Club, I have no idea how they maintain those size-zero figures. Unless expensive calories don't count?

Times for FP2 are below, if you're interested.

FP2 times (unofficial)

1. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.25.290s [32 laps]
2. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.25.328s [35 laps]
3. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.25.348s [17 laps]
4. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.25.430s [43 laps]
5. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.25.446s [41 laps]
6. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1.25.504s [42 laps]
7. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.25.546s [40 laps]
8. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.25.547s [36 laps]
9. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.26.068s [32 laps]
10. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.26.094s [38 laps]
11. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.26.104s [35 laps]
12. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Lotus) 1.26.157s [36 laps]
13. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.26.394s [31 laps]
14. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.26.404s [42 laps]
15. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.26.724s [33 laps]
16. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.26.730s [17 laps]
17. Bruno Senna (Williams) 1.26.783s [39 laps]
18. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1.26.841s [39 laps]
19. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.26.864s [36 laps]
20. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.27.222s [36 laps]
21. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.27.944s [36 laps]
22. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.28.968s [36 laps]
23. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.28.575s [34 laps]
24. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.28.779s [21 laps]

FI Italian Grand Prix – Friday press conference

It's all about the engines. We may have a year and a half before the 2014 engines will first be driven in anger, but there's a lot of speculation and discussion currently underway. The senior team personnel press conference on Friday afternoon in Monza saw a lot of powerplant discussion.

Present were Eric Boullier (Lotus), Pat Fry (Ferrari), Christian Horner (Red Bull), Monisha Kaltenborn (Sauber), and Franz Tost (Toro Rosso).

Franz, a new technical director. One has departed and a new one has arrived. First of all, can you explain what happened with Giorgio?

FT: First of all I want to thank Giorgio Ascanelli. He did a very good job over the last six years, when he was with us because we must not forget that he had to build up infrastructure at Toro Rosso. When he started there were around 20 engineers and today there are around five times the number. He did a really great job. We were quite successful. As you know in 2008 we won the first grand prix with Sebastian Vettel, therefore thank you very much for this. Now times have changed, we are looking forward to a new challenge and therefore James Key is on board with us.

So, what can you hope for from James in the short term with this year's car and in the longer term with next year's car, which presumably has already been started?

FT: First of all, this year's car, we've arrived into September where we can't expect so many changes. I think we will come up with some upgrades for the rest of the season, but there were planned and in project already before James joined us. But he is now very much involved in the design of the new car, which already started around two months. But nevertheless he will have hopefully a lot of influence over next year's car.

Presumably you're very encouraged to see what's happening with Sauber, which was James' last car?

FT: Sauber is doing very well. The car is very fast and hopefully he will do a similar good job, as he did at Sauber.

And the same engine of course?

FT: Exactly.

Pat, first of all, tell us about Alonso's problems today?

Pat FRY: Well, this morning, obviously, he had an issue, which stopped us running a little bit early. This afternoon has been a bit of a messy afternoon for us. We had a problem with a brake system and finally a gearbox problem stopped us running right at the end. Fortunately, we managed to do all the long-run work with Felipe. We didn't get the entire programme done with Fernando, but we answered the questions we needed to ask.

Was that quite a high mileage engine? And what about the gearbox, do you get a penalty for that?

PF: Gearboxes are free on Friday obviously and the engine was obviously a Friday engine at high mileage.

In terms of the performance this year, you've turned round a car that was not particularly competitive at the beginning of the season, particularly around Barcelona and the Mugello test. What did you do then and what can you do now? Was it modifications or was it set-up changes.

PF: Mainly modifications to the aero package. I think we made a reasonable step forward in Barcelona and we made another reasonable step forward in Canada. I mean, every race we bring new parts but I think those are the two steps that I suppose stand out when you look at the performance of all the teams. But I think we've still got a long way to go to be happy with our performance level.

And the aero package here: how is that working?

PF: Yeah, everything seems to be behaving sensibly. It's a little bit of an extreme circuit here and I'm sure there will be different downforce level choices with people and it should make for an entertaining race anyway.

Eric, we've seen Romain Grosjean here. Presumably you've had quite a chat with him. What has he said and what have you said to him since last weekend?

EB: Nothing much to add to what had been said in the media here. Just to his clear understanding that it was a severe penalty he got and talking about the reason why and how we can change things to make his weekend a little bit easier to handle for him. Basically this kind of discussion.

Last weekend, Kimi at one point was complaining about lack of power on the radio...

EB: He was asking 'can I have more'. During the race we have different strategies. We knew that Sebastian was too far in front of us to catch up and so we went into a fuel saving mode and obviously that's changing a little bit the mapping and the performance of the engine. He was just hoping to be back to the normal fuel system.

Jerome D'Ambrosio steps in having done a few laps earlier on this year at Mugello, but only that. In retrospect would you perhaps give a reserve driver more laps, or maybe even a Friday for example?

EB: The plan was to give him a couple of Fridays and more over the whole season. But because of the performance we had to reconsider a little bit the strategy and ambition of the team maybe for this year. It's always when something happens that you say 'I should have done this differently'. Obviously I am happy with what he did bring. We gave him also a couple of runs with an old car, a three years old car in different demos and that helped him as well to keep a little bit some feeling with a Formula One. But yeah, if he would have a more mileage he would have fit a little bit better even if he did a good job today.

Christian, last weekend there seemed to be an issue again about power. I'd like you clarify what it was all about - was it set-up or gearing or what the problem was last weekend for the Red Bull team?

Christian HORNER: The problem you're referring to was?

At the top of the hill.

CH: Basically with the lack of running on Friday because it was obviously raining your gear ratio choice is made on Friday night and we elected to go quite aggressive with our top gear. With 20/20 hindsight we would not repeat that decision in a similar situation and we would go a bit longer. What was happening was once our drivers were getting in the DRS zone and opening their wing they were getting into the limiter and weren't able to capitalise on the DRS. Therefore, with Sebastian, the progress that he made was coming back up the hill through Blanchimont into the chicane. He did a great job passing quite a lot of cars around the outside and inside in that last chicane.

That must have been very satisfying to get the result you did get given the problem in the traditional overtaking area.

CH: Yes, I think it was actually one of the best race I've seen Seb drive to be honest. His performance last week was very strong. It was great for the team to score points on a day when our main rivals weren't on track because of the incident on the first corner from which everybody, thankfully, emerged unscathed. It was a strong race, particularly by Sebastian. Our pace on Saturday we didn't quite understand in qualifying over a single lap because we looked quick in the morning and then that performance eluded us in the afternoon. Our race place on the Sunday was actually very strong. We were flexible with our strategy, we managed to make a one-stop work well, particularly for Sebastian. Mark's strategy was a little bit more conventional but overall it was positive points for the team.

And you've got some good tracks coming up, some tracks where you've excelled in the past. What are your feelings about those?

CH: I think the one thing we've seen in 2012 is that past form is irrelevant this year. It's impossible to predict what your form is going to be like from circuit to circuit. Obviously we arrive at each grand prix and we try to maximise the car and the package we have. This weekend is no different to that. Singapore is another challenge in itself, a bumpy, twisty street circuit compared to the long straights and flowing corners here at Monza. That's the big challenge of Formula One is to try to be consistent across all 20 venues, of which we've got eight to go.

Monisha, last weekend you went from Heaven to Hell in a very short space of time. What sort of impact did it have on the team?

Monisha KALTENBORN: Well, we are used to these kind of situations where you think it's looking good and it doesn't quite work out. Until the formation lap it was really looking good for the team. We had a fantastic race weekend until then. One of the best qualifying positions so far for the team, and it all looked really good. Then suddenly on the formation lap, we see how things are billowing out and it ends up really badly. So, what we did then is analyse what happened on Kamui's car and see where we can still improve. Because that's important for us. We see quite often that if qualifying works out well, we have good race pace and then we can really get a lot of points home. That's what we did. We took a lot of positives home from that weekend, that the car is very competitive, and we need to make sure that we don't make mistakes during the race weekend.

Were you particularly looking at what happened on Kamui's car? Sergio obviously got involved in the incident...

MK: Sergio really couldn't do anything, he was just terribly affected by that incident. On Kamui's car we had to find out why there was that smoke and why the start was not that good.

Any conclusion to that?

MK: We know now what happened, we analysed that. And whatever the team can do, we'll definitely do.

In terms of your technical team, tell us how it's working these days. It's been like this since the start of the season, but you don't

actually have a technical director, do you?

MK: No, we don't have a technical director, that was my choice. We have three main areas which we consider to be critical for the development of the car – which is the aero, the design and what we call the vehicle performance. Their heads are in this committee. They sit together and decide on a technical direction. If there are any other issues then we four, with me in there, sit in there and try to find the best solution. It seems to be working and it's a bit of a history at Sauber that we've always had very strong heads of department and the people under them. It's always been the backbone of the team and it works well.

Franz, I would like to ask you to recall some memories of the 2008 Grand Prix – the whole emotion, the whole weekend. Was it a confirmation for you, and for Christian, that Seb is going to be a future champion?

FT: Let me say it in this way. We started already on Friday, if I remember right, to prepare the cars for Sunday under wet conditions because the weather forecast was quite clear: it said there was a high risk of rain. And I remember that we said to the drivers, 'stay out, do as many laps as possible', because here in Monza under wet conditions it's a little bit different than on other tracks because there are not so many possibilities that the water can runoff and therefore you have exactly to know where to drive. Sebastian Vettel and Bourdais did a lot of laps and we found a good setup in those days. And then I was quite happy on Saturday during the qualifying when the rain didn't stop. And then, of course, on Sunday, when it rained when the race was started under the safety car. Once Sebastian was in front I was quite convinced that he could at least finish the race within the first five positions. I didn't think that he could win the race but then he did a fantastic job. And then the team also during the pitstops made a good job and then at the end fortunately we won this race. But we must not forget there were very special circumstances. We clearly could see in those days that Sebastian Vettel's learning curve and his performance improved from race to race. And I was convinced that he could do a really good job at Red Bull Racing. That he won then the championship already in 2010 you couldn't know in 2008. But that he will have a good future, this was quite clear for me.

Pat, looking ahead to Suzuka, what do you need to have a fast car there and how will your car go there?

PF: Well, I suppose it's dominated by efficiency and aerodynamics. It's just that we need to keep up the constant drive we've been doing all year, as everyone is, just to improve the efficiency of the car.

To the four team principals, 2014 obviously there's a major change in engines. The four of you are customers of engines – in other words you don't have teams producing your own – what sort of progress has been made on the costing issues and what are your expectations in this regard?

CH: I think 2014 is going to be an interesting year. The engine is radically different. I think that it's important that the engine doesn't become the crucial, single performance differentiator – I think that would be particularly unhealthy for Formula One and for the engine manufacturers involved. In terms of cost of supply I think the difficulty with introducing new technology and advanced technology such as the 2014 engine, it comes at a price. And I think all of the independent teams are very eager to know what that price is and what the impact of that price will be. I don't think it's the right market for Formula One to see an increase in costs. I don't think that's ultimately sustainable. But hopefully it won't have an impact on the fiscal side.

MK: We have been very clear about our position. At the moment a lot of details are unclear on the technical side and also the price. We've also very clearly said that we don't want to go down to those times many years ago where engines were so horrendously expensive. I think in the last year, in this whole movement with cost-cutting and the engine freeze which took place. Now costs have really gone down a lot and we don't want to take three steps back again with this new engine and end up at a point which was there many years ago.

FT: It's quite clear that this new powertrain in 2014 will increase the costs. It's not possible to make it cheaper, as we get it now, because there's a new engine, we have the new ERS system, there's the new batteries and everything will for sure increase the costs. And 2014 will become an expensive year. Now the question, how is the depreciation in the following years? Just maybe to level the costs, on an acceptable amount. This we will see and I hope that we can negotiate this with the manufacturers, I hope the manufacturers will be as fair as they were in the past. And then I'm convinced that we will find a solution.

EB: I do share the same position. It's a concern, the costs of the new powertrain. We expect either through the engine RRA or different discussions we can have with the engine manufacturers... you know it's going to be reasonable... we don't see new technologies is going to be difficult to bring the price down, cheaper than now – but if there is an increase we just expect a reasonable increase.

Pat, yesterday Michael Schumacher said that covered cockpits were necessary, they will be introduced in the future for sure. Do you agree with that or are there other options on the table from the Technical Working Group?

PF: Looking back at the start of last weekend's race, it was a lucky situation. It could have gone very badly, so I think the whole of Formula One was very lucky. A flying car or a large piece of car flying in the air is still the one thing that we struggle to protect the drivers against. There's obviously been quite a lot of research by the FIA which is still continuing. They've looked at the covered cockpits and then different roll cages as well, so I think that research just needs to continue really, as quickly as it can.

What is your opinion of the projected increase in fees paid to the FIA for next year?

EB: Well, as you said, it's a potential increase. We have not been officially informed yet about this change by the FIA. If that's the case, we obviously will need to understand why and what will be the justification for such an increase, because there is a massive difference, as you can understand, between the current level (and the future one).

CH: I think it's important to understand what's involved in the increase, what's included within it, what we pay that's external from the current entry, for example. There's only been a brief discussion about it at the moment. I'm sure there'll be further talks in the coming weeks.

MK: As Eric said, we've only been learning about this from the media. The FIA has not really got in touch with us so we have to wait and see what they really propose and what their intentions are but apart from that, I think the FIA is fully aware that there are many teams out there which are already in a financially challenging situation and if you put further burden on them like this – depending on the package – you should be careful about the situation.

FT: It doesn't match so much with the cost reduction but we have to find out what is the reason behind this and we have to know more details and then we will sit together with the FIA and then we will see where we end up.

Given the successes of Fernando Alonso during the course of his career and how he's driving this year, can I get the opinion of everybody on the question of him being the greatest driver of his generation?

CH: I think it's always very difficult to compare drivers across generations. You have to look at the equipment at their disposal, who their competitors were at that time. Fernando, for sure, is one of the all-time great drivers in Formula One but I personally find it very hard to judge where and how you compare different generations. There are generations which we didn't even see which only people as old as Bob [Constanduros, moderator] would remember and I think it's very difficult to judge drivers from different generations.

EB: I do share what my colleague next to me has said. It's clear that it's difficult to judge and compare different generations. What we can say today is that in the career of a driver you have different phases and I would say that Fernando is at the top of his form today.

PF: He's obviously an outstanding driver, isn't he? I had the pleasure of working with him in 2007 and again now. I think I would agree that it's hard to actually compare even drivers in different cars. What is the actual performance of the car? The only driver you can really compare to is your teammate because you have like-for-like tools. He's certainly at the top of his game this year

FT: From the arithmetical point of view it's Michael Schumacher because he won seven titles and then Fangio, Prost, Senna and because these drivers have done the best job or did the best job during their career and to compare drivers within different periods of time is simply not possible.

MK: As it has been said, each time was so different that it is indeed so difficult to compare, but I think it's highly impressive in a season that despite all the different winners and things like that, Fernando has been so consistent, always just bringing the car home and getting all those points. It's extremely impressive, the way he's doing it.

Going back to the 2014 engines, in addition to the actual spec change, we're going to see a reduction in the number of engines available to each driver from eight down to five, that at a time with no real track testing. Are you concerned that the 2014 championship may be determined by engine reliability rather than driver skill?

EB: Yeah. The concern is when you have a big change in the regulations is that you don't want an engine reliability issue, especially when you are limited to five engines per driver. You don't want to have an engine powertrain dominating compared with the others so there's a lot of question marks which I think have been raised by the Technical Working Group and even different groups working with the FIA. We have to rely if possible on the regulator in the governing body to make sure that everything will be in place, to make sure that reliability of such issues are fixed for the beginning of the season, even if it's not going to be easy to challenge for the engine manufacturers, but we have to believe everything has been planned at least.

CH: I think Eric has summed it up very well. I think the other key thing to remember is that technology will be very new. Basically 50 percent of the power will come mechanically and fifty percent of the power will come electronically and I think the technology will be very immature and then you're talking about homologation of engines as well at the beginning of the season and I think it would be very easy to freeze in an advantage or a disadvantage which would be unhealthy for the sport, I think, so hopefully there will be some constructive discussion in the coming weeks to ensure that a performance advantage or disadvantage for a manufacturer of which potentially there will only be three, will be able to be addressed if somebody undershoots, particularly in the early years. It will all converge over time but as the technology is particularly immature there could be quite large variances, certainly in the first year or two.

Is that a discussion that is currently ongoing?

CH: I'm sure that in the Technical Working Group they are talking about it but it's a challenging topic. It's a difficult time to be introducing a new engine, obviously, under the financial climate that we currently have but that's where we are and hopefully in the time between now and when the engine is introduced, measures can be made to ensure that not only costs but competitiveness of a power plant can be measured and controlled accordingly.

MK: Well, the risk is absolutely there and maybe we then have to also... or the engine manufacturers allow them certain activities next year regarding the reliability and maybe that could also have cost implications, positive ones, for us, so I think we have to be open to discuss that and look into that.

FT: The 2014 powertrain package will become a great challenge from the technical side, because there are so many new factors which have to be taken into consideration. It's not only the engine, it's the air system, the batteries and it's not only the reliability, it's also the cooling. I personally fear that the field will not be as close as it is currently. I think that maybe one engine manufacturer will come up with a special solution and those cars will be far in front, as we saw in the turbo years. I just hope that the three manufacturers will come up with similar solutions and that the output of the powertrain will be at a similar level, that we also will see in 2014 a nice and interesting Formula One season as is currently the case.

PF: I think the 2014 power unit is a very interesting technical challenge, lots of complication, and the drive to improve performance and efficiency is going to be massive. Dealing with reliability is certainly not an insignificant problem. There were certain teams which want to run an engine in an old Formula One car. That has been discussed at the TWG - I was keen to do that because I think it will help improve the reliability, running it in a proper car with all proper G-loading and everything. That was vetoed or voted out, whatever the right term is, so we're left trying to answer the questions on the dyno. We will answer some of the questions but we certainly won't answer all of them. There will be an element of risk when you go into the February testing, when you're going to have three tests to sort it out. If you've got a major problem, you're in a bit of trouble. Best we get our design right to start with, I suppose.

Eric, there have been a couple of stories about Robert Kubica getting back into a rally car and trying that out. Has there been any kind of contact with you over the last few months? If he were to get in touch with you, would you be at all interested in giving him a ride in one of your older cars for old times' sake?

EB: It's a long time that we haven't been talking about this. No, I did read in the press, like you, that he was doing some rally and actually he's supposed to do a rally next weekend or something like this, but we don't have much contact. I have contact with his management but nothing else. I've not been updated about his current state for a long time.

Eric and maybe all of you: in this era of no end of season testing, how important is the simulator?

EB: You know the simulator has now reached a very good level of detail, to get the drivers familiar, to bring out the real use of a simulator which is not related to the driver. It's true that in the position today, where some drivers are stepping into Formula One in the last three or four years with thousands of kilometers of testing, to generally get used to the team with the process of Formula One, with the procedure of the car, with everything, it's easy, obviously, to step into Formula One. With the current format, now, most of the drivers now have to step in with zero miles under their belts which is a bit tricky. But there is an economic reality as well. Testing costs a lot of money, a lot of resources as well, because not only money, we are already having a busy calendar during the season and we have set up - Lotus F1 are set up to have one crew for the whole season, so adding extra testing would obviously have consequences on the resources, so the question is up in the air, let's say. Is the balance today good enough with simulator and with a few test days at the end of the year? I don't know, I don't have the answer. I know that the balance today is working but is it fair or not?

FT: Testing is very very expensive. If you want to go out for a test, you need your own test team. We cancelled the test team because of the costs three years ago. I think this was the correct decision. Regarding the young drivers, as Toro Rosso is a young drivers' team, normally we do it in this way that young drivers which are coming into Formula One get the possibility to run on Fridays in the morning, and I think this is a good possibility to step into Formula One, to learn everything. And every team can do this. It's not only restricted to young driver teams and therefore I think the current balance which we have from the regulation side is a good one.

Christian, you mentioned before a potential freeze of an engine advantage when the engines come in in 2014. Is that one of the reasons why Red Bull is so keen for an engine RRA to be introduced with a chassis RRA, possibly in 2013?

CH: Er, no. The reason that we said that there should be... if an RRA is to come in in full force and policed by the FIA it should encompass all aspects of the car of which the engine and power unit is a significant part, because some teams in Formula One belong to automotive or are automotive subsidiaries that produce both chassis and engines and obviously some resource will come between chassis and engine and it's impossible with a chassis-orientated RRA to eliminate elements and treat, in our opinion, all parties transparently and fairly. Our view is that if you're going to look at a resource restriction of any form, you've got to look at the formula in its entirety rather than cherry picking certain elements, and obviously the engine is a key cost driver and therefore should be included within any overall package rather than just, as I say, looking to cherry pick certain items and cost drivers.

Christian, your colleague Helmut Marko, if he was reported correctly, stated that he felt that the Sauber was the fastest car out there. Given that it's a James Key car, given that James is going across to Toro Rosso, are you concerned that possibly Toro Rosso will produce a faster car than you next year? And would you invoke drink orders in that case?

CH: I think the Sauber has been a very good car this year. I think it's been clear at different races that they've had very good pace, including less than a week ago in Belgium. The changes in the regulations this year were significant and it seems to have concertina-ed the field significantly and that also includes the likes of Williams, Lotus have made a big step as well this year, so you turn up to a Grand Prix not knowing who is actually going to be competitive, how competitive your own outfit is going to be. I think James Key has done a good job previously, not just at Sauber but the teams that he's been at prior to that and I think it was an obvious choice for Toro Rosso when they were looking to restructure, to include James within their line-up. I think as far as the future is concerned, I'm sure he is going to be looking to make his mark there and the teams are open to race. Sebastian Vettel won his first race here in 2008 in a car that was designed in Milton Keynes and run by Toro Rosso, but the teams were free to race each other and that will continue to be the case.

Franz, when I visited you in May, you were speaking about your expansion plans and you were going to move into new factories etc during the shutdown. What sort of progress was made there?

FT: Step one of our building is finished now and it's mainly for the composite department and we moved the composite department into the new building during the shutdown and fabrication has already started. You are invited to come there to see it. It looks good.

FP1 Italian Grand Prix – FP3 report

Despite recent memories of rain-soaked weekends in Monza – 2008 springs to mind – there is something about this legendary Italian circuit that makes one feel as though the Autodromo is permanently swathed in soft autumnal sunshine.

The cars caper through the trees, their liveries glinting in the dappled shade, and pass through corners that evoke memories of nearly a century of racing: Lesmo, Ascari, Parabolica. History lives, and in Monza it sings.

With only an hour in which to finalise set-ups before qualifying, FP3 should see a nearly endless stream of traffic out on track, as cars are tested, tweaked, and run again. But the early stages of final practice saw a lot of empty tarmac while mechanics got down to business after the first round of installation laps.

And there was quite a lot of work to be done. While the action on track was much of a muchness, with no real incidents of note, they were firing on all cylinders on the pit wall and in the garages.

Jenson Button spent much of the session complaining of understeer, as is his wont, and the team acknowledged their driver was experiencing an unspecified problem on his right rear. Despite the complaints, however, the McLaren driver spent much of FP3 towards the top of the timesheets, three-tenths down on early pace-setter Fernando Alonso.

It was a troublesome morning for Michael Schumacher, who has been battling a seemingly endless run of problems on his Mercedes. The latest edition was KERS failure – not a problem in practice, but a potentially serious handicap in qualifying if the issue is not fixed over the lunchbreak.

Another team to struggle this morning was Sauber – despite the obvious pace demonstrated by both drivers in Spa, both Sergio Perez and Kamui Kobayashi complained of balance, with neither man able to dial in the right set-up for Monza's long straights. There have been rumours all weekend of damper trouble for the team, which could explain their difficulties today.

With two minutes remaining, Sebastian Vettel drew his car to a halt with as yet unidentified problems with his electrics. Rumour has it he has suffered another alternator failure, but that has yet to be confirmed by the team.

At the end of the morning it was Lewis Hamilton who topped the timesheets, with a 1.24.578s set in the dying minutes of FP3. Hamilton bested Alonso's time by 0.001s – it's very tight at the top.

Paul di Resta was issued with a five-place grid penalty overnight following an unscheduled gearbox change.

FP3 times (unofficial)

1. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.24.578s [18 laps]
2. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.24.579s [15 laps]
3. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.24.849s [20 laps]
4. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.24.909s [16 laps]
5. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.24.994s [17 laps]
6. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.25.036s [22 laps]
7. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.25.160s [23 laps]
8. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1.25.255s [19 laps]
9. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.25.289s [20 laps]

10. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.25.383s [18 laps]
 11. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.25.389s [21 laps]
 12. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.25.406s [17 laps]
 13. Bruno Senna (Williams) 1.25.461s [21 laps]
 14. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.25.563s [23 laps]
 15. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.25.689s [22 laps]
 16. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.25.706s [16 laps]
 17. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Lotus) 1.25.973s [20 laps]
 18. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.26.003s [19 laps]
 19. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1.26.657s [18 laps]
 20. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.27.267s [16 laps]
 21. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.27.454s [20 laps]
 22. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.27.728s [19 laps]
 23. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.28.035s [23 laps]
 24. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.28.384s [17 laps]
-

F1 Italian Grand Prix – Q1 report

This should be a tight qualifying session from start to finish. In the final practice session this morning, the first fourteen drivers were covered by a single second, while Lewis Hamilton and Fernando Alonso in P1 and P2 were split by 0.001s.

With a pile of penalties to take into account when all is done and dusted, there will be a number of drivers desperate to make the most of the next hour with a view to improving their already scuppered chances for tomorrow's race.

Paul di Resta was issued with a five-place penalty overnight for an unscheduled gearbox change, while Pastor Maldonado has two five-place grid penalties hanging over his head from last week's Belgian Grand Prix.

Five minutes into the session and all drivers minus Jenson Button and Pastor Maldonado had ventured out on track, with times on the board from 18 men. But those early exploratory laps have not been kind to the drivers, with seven men currently foul of the 107 percent rule with lap times not representative of their cars' capabilities.

At the session's mid-point, there were no times yet on the board from Button, Nico Hulkenberg – who stopped on track in the first sector – and Maldonado.

Once those men have completed timed laps, it is unlikely that any car will fail to qualify – the Marussias and HRTs are safely out of reach of the 107 percent rule, and there are no fears that the McLaren, Williams, and Force India are not up to pace. Presuming, of course, that Hulkenberg is able to complete a lap before the session draws to a close.

With Force India reporting that their driver has an as yet unspecified technical issue, Hulkenberg will probably start tomorrow's race from the back of the grid, unless Maldonado picks up another penalty or six...

Five minutes remaining, and it looks as though the dropout zone will be comprised of the six usual suspects plus the Hulk. A somewhat less tense session than anticipated, but there's a lot to play for in Q2, thanks to the tight spread of times.

The real battle is between former teammates Hamilton and Alonso: the two drivers spent Q1 trading purple sectors – with Alonso largely on top – and ended the session covered by less than a tenth.

Dropout zone

18. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham)
 19. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham)
 20. Timo Glock (Marussia)
 21. Charles Pic (Marussia)
 22. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT)
 23. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT)
 24. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India)
-

F1 Italian Grand Prix – Q2 report

With no major surprises in Q1, other than the technical issues that knocked Nico Hulkenberg out of contention before the Force India driver had put a time on the board, it's all to play for in what promises to be a tense Q2.

Five minutes in to the running and all drivers barring Lewis Hamilton are out on track, with times on the board from fifteen of the seventeen contenders. And with Hamilton now out on track, it's a busy few minutes at the Autodromo.

Fernando Alonso continues to show the pace he's been demonstrating all day, and sits atop of the timesheets 0.013s ahead of Jenson Button despite the McLaren driver besting the Ferrari in the first two sectors. The McLaren has been struggling in the last sector all weekend, and it is there that Alonso has been able to show off the true measure of his skill behind the wheel.

At the session's mid-point, the top four slots on the timesheets are occupied by the McLaren and Ferrari pairs, and Q3 promises to be a nail-biting shoot-out between the hometown (kind of) heroes and the upstart garagistes from Woking.

Both Mercedes drivers have been struggling with the chicanes, which Michael Schumacher and Nico Rosberg have been treating as optional – unable to turn in at the appropriate moment, the Silver Arrows have instead been threading the W03 through the bollards at slow speeds.

Red Bull have been struggling this weekend, with limited pace around the Italian parkland. Mark Webber is currently sitting in the dropout zone, while teammate Sebastian Vettel is in a precarious P9 – 0.2s improvements from two drivers would see the defending world champion knocked out in Q2 for the second weekend running.

Joining Webber in the dropout zone with two minutes remaining are Sergio Perez, Bruno Senna, Kamui Kobayashi, Daniel Ricciardo, Jerome D'Ambrosio, and Jean-Eric Vergne.

Good laps from Maldonado and Kobayashi have knocked Vettel down into the dropout zone; the German driver has one more chance to make it through and a number of competitors out on track trying to claim that last slot in Q3 for their own – not least his own teammate.

Vettel saves himself with a provisional P9, and manages to hang on for a place in the final round.

Dropout zone

11. Mark Webber (Red Bull)
12. Pastor Maldonado (Williams)
13. Sergio Perez (Sauber)
14. Bruno Senna (Williams)
15. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso)
16. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Lotus)
17. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso)

F1 Italian Grand Prix – Q3 report

As the pitlane opened for the final round of qualifying in Monza it was the two red cars that were first out onto the track, delighting the attendant tifosi.

Thanks to a nifty pass by Felipe Massa, it was the Brazilian driver who topped the timesheets with a 1.24.436s, six seconds faster than his teammate. Expect the media to proclaim that Fernando Alonso's seat is at risk. Or maybe not.

With his first lap Lewis Hamilton crosses the line in 1.24.010s, claiming provisional pole from the beleaguered Brazilian.

Sebastian Vettel's first effort is one second slower than the pace set by Hamilton, while Jenson Button in provisional P3 sees him four-tenths slower than his teammate.

Two-thirds of the way through the session and there are no times yet on the board from Michael Schumacher, Nico Rosberg, Kimi Raikkonen, Paul di Resta, and Kamui Kobayashi, although all five men are currently out on track.

Rosberg knocks Vettel down into P5, then Schumacher knocks both men down a place with his own provisional P4, half a second slower than Hamilton's benchmark time.

Just under two minutes remaining, and all ten drivers are out on track.

Kobayashi's first time sees the Sauber driver in P8, while Paul di Resta's first timed lap started with a purple sector one. The Force India driver has five places to make up, thanks to his five-place grid penalty for a gearbox change.

Di Resta does it, crossing the line in provisional P2 with the opportunity of another run should he wish to take it. Tyre preservation is not going to be as important this weekend, with Pirelli predicting a one-stop race for most drivers, so it is less vital that teams guard their rubber this afternoon.

Alonso has been struggling this session, and has managed only a P10, while Felipe Massa was in P2 for a millisecond before Button bested his time to make it a full-McLaren front row with Hamilton on pole.

Provisional grid

1. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren)
2. Jenson Button (McLaren)
3. Felipe Massa (Ferrari)
4. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes)
5. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull)
6. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes)
7. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus)
8. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
9. Paul di Resta (Force India)*

10. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari)
11. Mark Webber (Red Bull)
12. Sergio Perez (Sauber)
13. Bruno Senna (Williams)
14. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso)
15. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Lotus)
16. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso)
17. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham)
18. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham)
19. Timo Glock (Marussia)
20. Charles Pic (Marussia)
21. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT)
22. Pastor Maldonado (Williams)**
23. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT)
24. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India)

* Paul di Resta qualified in P4, but will line up in P9 thanks to a five-place grid penalty for an unscheduled gearbox change.

** Pastor Maldonado qualified in P12, but will line up in P22 thanks to two five-place grid penalties issued in Spa: jumping the start, and causing a collision.

F1 Italian Grand Prix – Saturday press conference

It's always good to see an unfamiliar face at the post-qualifying press conference, and while the face in the third chair is well-known in the paddock, it had been far too long since we'd seen him at a Saturday press conference.

Present were Lewis Hamilton (McLaren), Jenson Button (McLaren), and Felipe Massa (Ferrari).

Lewis, Ferrari were fastest with Fernando in Q1 and Q2 but you managed to save the best for last.

Lewis HAMILTON: Yeah, it's been a tough weekend but we've managed to work on the setup and the package the guys bought from the factory – and they've done a fantastic job. So, congratulations to the team and great for the lads. Yeah, managed to get a half-decent lap at the end of Q3, or at the beginning of Q3, and it's great obviously for the team to have me and Jenson at the front.

Jenson, it's been very close all weekend. How do you see the race from where you're starting?

Jenson BUTTON: First of all I'll just echo what Lewis said. For us both to be on the front row, it's fantastic for the team. I think the last few races have really shown our strength and qualifying both of us on the front row is great – I don't know if any other team has been able to do that this year. Tomorrow we'll start thinking about in a little while but – I don't know, even being on the front row is not going to be an easy race here but it's the best place to be.

Felipe, we saw you working with Fernando this morning in practice, and again in qualifying, doing slipstreams, helping each other out. It worked for you, but where's Fernando?

Felipe MASSA: I think he had a problem, to be honest. I mean he's supposed to be in a good direction for the qualifying as well, so I don't know which problem he had but he had a problem in Q3 and was not able to complete his lap. But anyway, I'm happy with the lap I did, so I was able to do a good lap. I was always caring about the tow, to find a good tow, but then on the last run when I did my best lap I was completely outside of the tow, so it was better for me, and I was able to do the best lap from the weekend in the last try in Q3, so happy to be here. It's always a very important race for us, so looking forward for it.

Back to you Lewis, you mentioned it's a tough weekend, obviously a lot of distractions going on off the circuit. How easy has it been for you to put all of that out of your mind and focus on the race tomorrow?

LH: I haven't had any distractions this weekend so it's been quite positive. The support from my family and friends, as always, has been incredible, so just been enjoying the weekend. It's been pretty smooth so far.

Lewis, well done, it seems to have been a perfect weekend for you so far but just now you called that a half-decent lap – it's good enough for pole...

LH: I think practice was a lot better for me. I had much, much better laps in practice but I can't complain. Generally I didn't think that lap was anywhere near good enough and I was up, I think, a couple of tenths in my second lap but I was in a train of cars: Kimi and two Ferraris in front. So, I wasn't really able to better my lap but none the less I'm happy and I'm really happy for the team because they've been doing a fantastic job. Obviously had great success in the last race with Jenson and to have us both up here is where they deserve.

The stats say a lot of winner from pole position over the last ten years, something like nine out of ten have won from pole position. So that must be encouraging as well?

LH: Not particularly – I think that one that wasn't a winner was me! In 2009 maybe? When I was on pole.

You seem to have hit the ground running from the start of the weekend, and just yesterday you said it was just fine-tuning. Is that what's been going on?

LH: Yeah, yeah, just getting used to the setup to try to find us a time everywhere. It's a beautiful track, just such an incredible circuit, and I think, probably the more and more you drive it, the more you appreciate it. Of course you have to respect this circuit. It's such high speed. And also the fans here are absolutely incredible. Such passionate people who love motor racing, pure motor racing, so it's great to see.

Of course it's great to have an all-McLaren front row but is it better to have your team-mate alongside you or would you prefer somebody else?

LH: It's not bad or good. It's good because it's good for the team and we can score maximum points for the team tomorrow. And so that's, for me, the way I think.

Jenson, a winner last weekend as well, and here you are on the front. You've qualified second here before. Your feelings about being second on the grid?

JB: Relatively happy. I started the weekend pretty happy with the car. We tried a couple of things on Friday, which I don't really think worked out for us, so we were struggling a little bit on Friday afternoon. Today the car has been much better. In qualifying because of the heat – it was much hotter than this morning – the car is moving around a lot more. This place, it really reminds me of karting, because it's all about keeping the minimum speed up, especially through Ascari and Parabolica. So you're always listening to the engine revs through the apex and you know if you're quick or not. It's a really interesting place to drive. In Q3 I realised how much a tow makes. In practice we were getting tows but it was difficult to work out if it was actually quicker or not. But in Q3 it was and I was able to get a reasonable off Vettel, which surprisingly made a good difference.

Ferrari seem to have practiced the tow this morning and put it into effect, certainly for Felipe, this afternoon. Is that something McLaren considered?

JB: No. That's something that we... well, personally, I feel it's very difficult to plan something like that. It's difficult to get it right. You concentrate too much on it, you can do, and you can get your breaking point wrong or something. It's a tricky one. The way that we did was much better, just finding traffic on the circuit, so it worked reasonably well.

Felipe, how much of a difference do you think it did make, having that tow?

FM: For me it was no different because I made my best lap without the tow. We were trying a lot to have a good direction for the two. It's never very easy to make that in qualifying but I think we were able to do a little bit in Q1 and Q2. Fernando helped me on the first try on Q3 but he was supposed to do his lap on the second time, I was supposed to help him on the second lap. And then we came in at the same. And then I was behind Vettel, he braked completely, he almost stopped his car in the second chicane. I passed him so I said I'd try, just to see, as I never did one lap without the tow. I think it was nice to try even knowing that I had already my first timed lap in Q3. I tried and I improved, so I was pretty happy to do that. The car worked quite well in the corners, so maybe you lose a bit on the straight but we were able to gain more in braking and cornering. I think it was good: it was a nice qualifying. Unfortunately, Fernando is not here because he had a problem with his car but he was very quick as well. Let's concentrate on the race tomorrow where I'm in this place, and I'm very happy to be here.

Yes, it's your best grid position of the year and here you are in front of the Italian fans, so very satisfied?

FM: Yeah, very satisfied it's in this place. But I'm happy and really looking forward to it. It's a very important race for us, a very important race for me. And I'm looking forward to a good race in front of these fantastic people, as Lewis just said.

Lewis, did the pit wall tell you that Fernando had a problem and when you found that out, was it a big relief? It seems that qualifying was likely to be a fight between you and Fernando today.

LH: I didn't hear of any problem. I saw on the TVs, as I was doing my first lap, I saw that Fernando pulled in out of his first lap and then in the second I just assumed that he was up ahead, so I was just pushing and focusing on my laps.

Felipe, Monza is usually a very good race for you. Can we tell our readers that Massa has re-found his talent?

FM: Yeah. I'm happy with the car. We were able to do a good lap so we are heading in a good direction, very happy with the performance and concentrated for the race. Unfortunately I never won here at Monza in Formula One but I've always done good races. Before Formula One I always won all the races I did at this track so I think it's a very nice track which I enjoy a lot. I used to live close by when I was doing Formula Renault so I really enjoy this place and I hope we can have a fantastic race tomorrow.

Lewis, how have you prepared yourself mentally since you arrived in the paddock this morning? Has something changed compared to the other races, due to the particular context? What are your rituals?

LH: It's been pretty much the same. I've qualified on the front row for quite a few races now so I just continue to do the same thing. I think it's nine times or something that I've been on the front row this year, so it's been pretty good qualifying for us.

Felipe, considering how you've gone on Friday and this morning, is it realistic to believe you can beat McLaren in the 53 laps of the race?

FM: That's always the direction we need to take. We go to the grid thinking about victory, thinking about doing the maximum you can to win the race and that's what I'm going to do tomorrow. They are very strong, they are quick but we have 53 laps in the race, we know how different the race can be compared to qualifying so for sure I want to try everything I can.

Jenson, you will probably not be in the same team as Lewis next year. Tomorrow, does it give you more motivation to fight?

JB: Where am I going? Sorry. That's the first I've heard of it.

Does it give you extra motivation to fight Lewis?

JB: Yes. I think we all love a good fight and we all love a challenge. Having a competitive teammate, sometimes you think 'damn, sometimes I wish I didn't have such a competitive teammate' but a lot of the time it's good because it pushes you and you can see where you are in terms of your performance in a race weekend. There are positives and negatives, but I think there are more positives than negatives.

FM: Which are the negatives?

If I'm not mistaken, none of you three have won here in Formula One. Could you explain to us your feelings today that you have the best chance to win tomorrow? Felipe, I think that it's also important to finish on the podium. I think you missed the podium since Germany 2010, I suppose or Korea?

FM: Yeah. It's important to everybody. None of us won here before so it's very important for everybody, very important for me. I know how important it is for me. As I said before, I will try everything to win and to do a good race.

Felipe, is this extra pressure for you? We all know how important it is for you and we expect the best of you, but do you feel this is extra pressure?

FM: I think I know very well the pressure I have so it doesn't change anything. We just need to do the best on the track. You always have a lot of

pressure. We just need to concentrate on the race. It's a very important race tomorrow for me but also for the team so let's concentrate on that. When you race for Ferrari you always have a lot of pressure.

Jenson, Lewis, Martin (Whitmarsh) said on TV that it will be an interesting first corner. How much thought do you give to that between you? Do you discuss it or just race it?

LH: Just race it.

JB: It doesn't matter who is next to you, it's always an interesting first corner as you put it, especially here. It's a reasonably long drag down to turn one. You can't plan turn one.

FI Italian Grand Prix – Race report

After the confusion and chaos that marked the start of last week's race it was with a sigh of relief that we saw the start of the Italian Grand Prix pass by without any serious incidents. One flying piece of front-wing endplate and they were off, coursing through the gorgeous Monza parkland.

Lewis Hamilton got an excellent start, and would have delivered a lights to flag win were it not for five laps spent staring at the back end of Sergio Perez' C31 after his only pit stop.

But the better start came about courtesy of Felipe Massa, who passed Jenson Button for P2 before challenging Hamilton in to the first corner. But Hamilton kept the Ferrari behind him – just! – and opened up a 1.2s lead over his Brazilian colleague over the course of the first lap.

The real dramas this afternoon took place in the middle of the pack, where an unusual group of drivers were fighting it out towards the lower end of the points before a series of retirements opened up the opportunity for a serious fight for the podium.

While Jean-Eric Vergne was the first man out of the race, thanks to a rear suspension failure that made itself painfully obvious when the Toro Rosso bounced over the kerbs and into the gravel at the first corner on lap 9, the first of the high-profile retirements came about when Jenson Button drew his McLaren to a halt on lap 34.

Prior to Button's retirement, the British driver was delivering a strong performance in P2, having reclaimed that lost position on lap 19, when Massa began to slow in his Ferrari shortly after the team reported losing all telemetry from the Brazilian's car. Button then returned to P3 after his pit stop, emerging behind the Sauber of Perez, who had yet to stop.

Button's fuel pick-up problem was the first of a series of high profile retirements: the McLaren was followed to the pits by Sebastian Vettel, who retired with alternator failure on lap 48. Three laps later, Mark Webber was brought to a halt by the team following extensive tyre damage with two laps remaining after an impressive slide and save around Ascari.

And bookended by the two Red Bulls was the Force India of Nico Hulkenberg; the German racer's day came to a premature end after the team decided that braking issues that had plagued Hulkenberg since the first lap were becoming potentially dangerous.

With the triple retirements of Button, Vettel, and Webber removing three drivers from the points in fairly short order, the earlier fights lower down the pack took on a new significance.

After a decent but unspectacular start, Fernando Alonso was up to P6 by the third lap, stuck behind Vettel's Red Bull. On that lap, the German driver made it past Michael Schumacher, and all of the ducks were lined up for a three-champion battle.

Alonso and Schumacher spent the next few laps dicing, with a spectacular battle on the straight, and on lap 7 the Ferrari driver made it past the Mercedes, zooming ahead and into the next battle with Vettel.

The Vettel-Alonso battle took a few laps to brew, but by the time the pair pitted in sync on lap 20, and raced each other down the pitlane, the fight was on in earnest. There was revenge to be served cold, and on lap 26 Vettel took it a step too far, pushing Alonso wide into the grass at Curva Grande and earning himself a drive-through penalty in the process.

While it was not the defining moment of Alonso's race, the incident lit a fire in the Spaniard's belly, and the Ferrari driver spent the rest of the afternoon on a charge that ended with a podium finish. And were it not for the pace of the rapidly advancing Perez, Alonso's P3 from P10 could well have been a P2 for the tifosi.

Hamilton may have won the Italian Grand Prix, but the undoubted man of the match was Perez, who made up for Sauber's double disappointment in Belgium with a career-defining drive that saw the C31 chewing up more experienced drivers and passing them with such ease that he may as well have been lapping backmarkers, not passing champion after champion.

In a neat bit of symmetry that was pointed out on Twitter after the race, the three drivers on the podium were the three men taken out by Romain Grosjean during the first lap of last week's Belgian Grand Prix.

Italian Grand Prix results (unofficial)

1. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1h19m41.221s
2. Sergio Perez (Sauber) + 4.356s
3. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) + 20.594s
4. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) + 29.667s
5. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) + 30.881s
6. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) + 31.259s

7. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) + 33.550s
8. Paul di Resta (Force India) + 41.057s
9. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) + 43.898s
10. Bruno Senna (Williams) + 48.144s
11. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) + 50.316s
12. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) + 1m15.861s
13. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Lotus) + 1 lap
14. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) + 1 lap
15. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) + 1 lap
16. Charles Pic (Marussia) + 1 lap
17. Timo Glock (Marussia) + 1 lap
18. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) + 1 lap
19. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) + 1 lap

Mark Webber (Red Bull) RET
Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) RET
Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) RET
Jenson Button (McLaren) RET
Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) RET

FI Italian Grand Prix – Sunday press conference

After a thrilling Italian Grand Prix it was a light-hearted press conference in Monza, with the drivers laughing and joking with each other when it wasn't their turn on the microphone.

Present were Lewis Hamilton (McLaren), Sergio Perez (Sauber), and Fernando Alonso (Ferrari).

How is it to win the Italian Grand Prix in front of all these fans here?

Lewis HAMILTON: It's been fantastic to win here; you've got the best crowd. I'm just so happy for my team; it was really a fantastic day.

Now you're catching up on Fernando. You're 37 points behind. It's got to be a pleasure?

LH: Fernando is a two-time world champion, he's incredible. I'm very, very happy for him.

Thank you. So, I take my hat off (to you), Sergio. You did an incredible job. I think you even surprised Fernando here. How did you work this fantastic race for yourself?

Sergio PEREZ: It was a great race for me, for my team. It's unbelievable to get a podium in Monza, with all these people. It's really, really special.

What was the strategy? What tyres did you use?

SP: I went for prime and then I stopped very late in my first stint and then I had fresh tyres at the end. It's unbelievable, thank you very much.

So, Fernando, it was a difficult race for you, from where came from, please explain.

Fernando ALONSO: It was a difficult race starting from tenth. But we knew that we had maybe the quickest car maybe this weekend. We missed pole position yesterday but today we had the pace to recover positions, so it was good.

Lewis, isn't that just the best podium in the world, with all those people, what do you think? And you got out your best Italian as well.

LH: I tried – but you couldn't hear anything!

That looked a fantastic win, virtually lights-to-flag, apart from during the pitstop. Trouble-free?

LH: It was pretty trouble-free – I don't think I had any problems throughout the race and the guys did a great job through the pitstop. And I got a good start for once, so very, very happy with that.

Any issues with tyres at all? Was it fairly straightforward?

LH: Yes.

And no problems mechanically or anything like that? Obviously your team-mate had a problem.

LH: Very, very unfortunate for Jenson, we were running 1-2 at the time and it would have been fantastic for the team to have won here and have first and second. I don't really know what went on with his car but it was very unfortunate.

Were you told to do anything to your car?

LH: No.

Sergio, how much did you enjoy that? It must have been amazing to be on those softer tyres and just be overtaking, overtaking?

SP: Yeah! It was really enjoyable. One of those races where you have the pace and you are the one attacking. It was very crucial moments during the race, especially during my first stint, to go that long and to be able to keep the pace was not easy at all. I did quite a lot of laps on those tyres. Then in the second stint we managed to go maximum attack and I was able to have good fighting with some drivers. It was just a great race.

Kimi put a bit of resistance, didn't he?

SP: Yeah, but I mean Kimi's a very fair driver. He left enough room, not more than needed, and it was alright with all the drivers that I had the fight, they were all leaving good room, and it was a very enjoyable fight with all of them.

How much do you worry that the tyres are suddenly going to drop off? Or are you confident all the way through?

SP: With the first stint I was a bit worried, especially with the data we had from Friday. I was a bit worried I was feeling some degradation from the tyres, so I was a bit worried that it was going to drop, that the tyre was going to drop but once I got until lap 20 it was looking really good. Before that I was in contact with the team every lap, trying to say that everything was fine. Every lap I asked them to stay in contact every lap, just in case we were in need to change the strategy.

Fernando, after qualifying tenth, I guess third place is good. Still a bit frustrated or not?

FA: No, no. Absolutely perfect Sunday for us. Obviously the win was out of reach after the problem yesterday. Starting tenth is not easy to think about victory, so if you cannot win, podium is next target. In all the simulations and all the predictions we had, it was never a podium finish, so basically it's much better than expected. Jenson was out of the race and the two Red Bulls... so perfect Sunday maybe.

And you picked up a couple of places at the start...

FA: Yeah, the start was good. Obvious we didn't have maybe the best start but it was enough to overtake two or three cars, good first corner and then those two first laps were, I think, making the difference of our race. We overtook di Resta, Kimi, Michael very quickly. And that gave us the opportunity to follow Sebastian and the quick cars that were there in the first five positions. So, when you find yourself sixth after two or three laps, the race improves a lot.

Then you had a bit of a moment with Sebastian, where you found yourself on the grass through the Curva Grande. What happened there.

FA: Nothing really to say.

Do you think he didn't see you? Or what?

FA: [no audible answer]

Fernando, yesterday you said it wasn't a good day but it would be OK in the worst case if both McLarens win. The day was even better because only one of them are front of you. Sergio was there. What can you say? You build up your lead in the Championship.

FA: Yeah, definitely. Yesterday was a disappointment day for us and especially for our fans. I think they were supporting us massively this weekend and we really had the opportunity to be on pole or in the first row and we missed it. So, we were sad for us and most of all for the fans. So, yeah, looking at the Championship, we say we need to concentrate who will be second. It was Vettel yesterday and we were happy for the McLarens to be strong this weekend. And yeah, the race went like a movie for us, like a dream.

Sergio, you were sick the whole weekend, and how much did that cost you during qualifying and if you had started here up in front maybe you could have challenged Lewis for the win.

SP: It's always difficult for sure, I don't think we had the pace in qualifying, on a single lap, to be even close to gaining the front row or close to the top five. We were not quick at all, we were lacking too much speed on the straights and that was our problem. Yes, I've been sick all weekend. It's been difficult but it did not affect me at all, yesterday in qualifying I did not have the good lap. I was too close to Bruno Senna so I lost a lot of downforce – it was the reason why we qualified just out of the top ten. But more than that... maybe top ten was reachable but more than that, not. It helped us, in a way, to change the strategy. We risk, I don't know if we were the only one, or one of a few, to go for prime and it worked quite well. We were a bit worried about the warm up in the beginning but it worked quite OK.

To Lewis, it's the third victory in a row for McLaren. Is it a clear message for Ferrari, looking at the Championship?

LH: I don't think so. I think Ferrari were as quick as us this weekend. At least as quick as us this weekend. I think if Fernando had better qualifying, I'm sure he would have been up there with me and made the race perhaps a little bit harder than it was. No, I think Ferrari seem like they're very, very quick and we need to stay on it to try to continue to compete with them.

Question to Lewis, after hearing that Button was out, you have obviously drove a bit slower the last laps of the race. My question: have you paid attention to the engine range?

LH: No, you just try to... I was cruising. The last 20 laps I had a 14 second gap. At the time Felipe was behind and he, even though I was cruising, he was going slower than me and then I heard that Fernando had overtook, and it was Fernando who began to catch so then I pulled out a little bit more time and matched his time just to keep it relaxed and then this guy here [Pérez] started catching me at a second a lap. So probably the last four laps I started to push a little bit more, just to maintain a little bit more of the gap.

To Sergio, do you think your overtaking on Fernando will hurt your chances to be in Ferrari next year?

SP: Ask him. I don't know. I'm sure... I'm not at all... I'm fighting for my team and will always fight for the team that I'm in. I will always give my maximum I can. And I will fight any driver, no matter if it's Fernando or Lewis, I will fight for my team to get the result – and I think every driver will do the same.

Lewis, you put an Italian flag on your helmet, you wanted this win, what does this mean now that you have it?

LH: Yeah, it's an incredible experience for me to come to Italy, a place that I love a lot. I've come here for many many years, since I was 13, met lots of great people here, really do genuinely love the people here and the culture and the food and the country itself. I put the flag on my helmet just as a sign of respect. This is a very historic circuit and when I was driving, I was thinking that all of the greats have won here so to finally get a win here is just the icing on the cake, and I hope that this is the start of something good in the future, coming here. I've not had the best results in the past, and hopefully in the future we will have a little bit more support here.

Lewis, what does it mean for you to win in Monza?

LH: I just answered that. It's very very special, very very special.

Sergio, is this your best race so far in Formula One, and how important has been to do it in Monza in front of the Ferrari guys as a Ferrari academy driver?

SP: I think it definitely is a very nice podium to be on here in Italy, because it's very special to see. It's a very special race which you don't feel

anywhere else. So to have my first European podium in Formula One is very great and it's a very special place to have it. I think it was a fantastic race and I'm very pleased with the result.

Fernando, were you surprised by Vettel's action; you seemed to be forced off to the left side of the corner at that moment? Were you scared that your race could be compromised at that point?

FA: I think it was compromised. I lost ten laps behind him so I lost whatever seconds there were at that moment after the incident, also the laps behind him. I'm sure the car is damaged because at 330kph you are jumping over the gravel. I don't think that the floor and everything - all the details that you take care of because the race - will be completely fine after those jumps.

Fernando, do you think that the guy alongside you is going to be your main competitor in the championship?

FA: We'll see, we will see in the next couple of races and how the teams develop the parts. At the moment McLaren has won the last three Grands Prix and they are in top form. I think from Jerez they won in winter testing, who was the driver that I respect more and that was Lewis and we're still here. In the 11 or 12 races afterwards we are first and second in the championship. It will be tough until the end.

To Lewis and Fernando, Fernando, several times you have said that you love the Singapore circuit, it's perfect for your style and Lewis also loves to drive on street circuits. What do you project for the next race, now you're both fighting for the championship?

FA: Well, we'll see. I think it's a very nice race, very nice atmosphere in Singapore and not only for the race on Sunday. I think from the day you arrive, Wednesday or Thursday, it's a special weekend, you feel it. All the times and everything is out of the normal routine and I think you enjoy the change a little bit more and I think the circuit is quite interesting, very challenging. I think you enjoy driving there. Fans are always very close to us in that circuit as well and I think there will be a nice atmosphere, a nice fight. Personally I hope it will be a good test for us because there are a lot of new things that we will bring to Singapore, so let's hope we can fight for the win.

LH: I second what Fernando said. He's just given us the information, that Ferrari are going to be bringing lots of parts to the next race, so I will go back to my team and push them to...

FA: It's not only Singapore.

LH: But I really do enjoy racing with Fernando and I hope that we get to have lots more close battles.

Sergio, in Singapore, it looks good for you now because this race didn't look good for you and you did very well, whereas Singapore is a different track. What do you expect?

SP: I definitely expect to be better than here but here was a big surprise for us. I think the strategy made a very big difference for us, because we had the pace to be where we finished today. I think Singapore will definitely be a better one - I don't think the best for us but if we come here and look better, I think we can be competitive if you consider we lose half a second on the straights here so I think we can be quite competitive in Singapore.

Fernando, you said you were really lucky here, but how much does the car need to improve, because sometimes you cannot depend on being lucky?

FA: Yes, obviously I don't consider that we've been lucky. We've just been unlucky, even yesterday, compared with many of the others, and today someone broke some parts that is probably something that is not right, as we broke some parts yesterday that we need to investigate and it's our mistake. In Spa we've been unlucky because we didn't break any parts so we didn't make any mistakes, it was just a car landing on us, so I don't think that we are particularly lucky but it's true that we need to improve the car, to improve the performance a little bit, not this weekend because to be honest we had the fastest car with McLaren, so we were very happy to fight all the free practice, qualifying and now in the race for the top positions, and hopefully we can continue this in another track, because we know that Monza is a very unique layout, so if we continue like this we will be happy, and that's our aim.

Fernando, in your opinion what was the difference between the movement of Vettel today and the movement you made in the same place last season? Was it more aggressive? What's your opinion?

FA: I think we need to see it on TV. Last year it was not penalised, this year it has been. I think there is a big difference for the people who understand this movement.

Checo/Sergio, this is your third podium after Malaysia and Canada; when and where do you think your first victory will come?

SP: I hope sooner rather than later. I want to win. I already have a second and a third, as you say. I want my first victory to come and I hope it can come before the end of the season.

Fernando, when you were fighting against Vettel and you were on the grass, what were you thinking at that moment?

FA: Nothing. I tried to get off the grass and continue the race. I wanted to finish the race and not have another DNF because of an accident, just taking some margin, the same as when Sergio arrived a second quicker than us in the last part of the race: what can we do? We tried to defend the position a little bit but we cannot be crazy and try to do things that are impossible to do.

Fernando, very tight first corner here. From tenth on the grid what was your approach for the start and how did that first corner go for you?

FA: Actually I have a very open mind in terms of strategy for the first corner. I just wanted to see how the car started and how the first 200 meters went and after that decide. The start was good in the first 200 meters so after that the approach was aggressive. After you make a good start, you need to continue, and you cannot lose what you gain in the first 200 meters. We risked but it was close. As you said, very tight first corner here, so it's very easy to lose your front nose or whatever. It was tight but it was good.
