

## Fl Japan Blog - Sunday press conference

After an exciting Japanese Grand Prix but no end to the championship – yet! – it was a reflective group of drivers who faced the media in the FIA press conference.

Present were Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull), Mark Webber (Red Bull), and Romain Grosjean (Lotus).

Q: [Sebastian] Nine times a winner already this season – but the championship is still alive. Tell me all about it.

Sebastian VETTEL: Konnichi-wa, first of all. Yeah, first of all, I would like to say thank you to all the fans. Every time we come here, the appreciation, the respect we get as drivers is incredible. Obviously, I'm blown away with today's race. I had a very, very poor start. I think it was right between Romain and, I think, Lewis and I clipped a little bit the front wing. I think Lewis had a puncture after that. I couldn't go anywhere. After that we were patient, looked after the tyres and had incredible pace towards the end. So we managed to get past Romain, beat Mark on another strategy so, all in all, fantastic. I'm so overwhelmed every time we come here. Thank you very much again for the support.

Q: Who made the final decision on what tyres you were going to run? We got the impression you made the decision right at the very last moment.

SV: Well, to be honest, it happened... I think the decision was already made in the first stint because we stayed out longer, so we obviously took into account that we lapped slower than the others who were on fresh tyres, in order to push them later in the race. We had a similar race in 2011, where I think I came in always as the first and I was under enormous pressure towards the end of the race and got passed by two cars. So this time we did it the other way around: had enough pace in the car to look after the tyres, control the race. Yeah, it was not easy to make the two-stop work, especially in the middle stint – but I think the first stint was crucial to make the decision to stay out and then decide for a two-stop, which turned out to be... [interrupted]

Q: Mark, your last grand prix in a Formula One car at Suzuka, one of the great all-time tracks. Tell us about it.

Mark WEBBER: Yeah, it's an amazing circuit. The race today was pretty good, I'd say. Obviously I would have liked one more step on the podium but there were different strategies going on. Seb went longer in the first stint and then it unloaded his race a bit better than mine at the end. So, in general, pretty happy with second but, yeah, hey, you always want a bit more but we got the best out of what I could today. Both of us had very poor starts, which put us on the back foot a little bit and then after that it was just really trying to pace the car again on the tyres and making sure they survived to do the sort of strategy we wanted to. In the end we went to three-stop, which put us a little bit on the back foot but still we got back to where we were.

Q: Romain, we were writing you off last year, we didn't think you'd have a seat, and here you are, on the podium. How does that feel?

Romain GROSJEAN: Well, much better than last year for sure. What a start! Terrific. From the past not the best memories here but today was just a very, very good race. The car was fantastic on option tyres to start the race with and we did manage to pull away. Then the Red Bulls catch us a little bit I think, but generally with the work we did, we are the only ones able to follow those guys. We almost catch the Bull I said to my engineer today – it's a home race for my engineer and I think he's very happy. Always very good to come here, always very proud of the fans and being on the podium at such a difficult track – it's good.

Q: Sebastian, you're ever so close to pulling it off with your fourth consecutive championship. What are your thoughts going into the next race?

SV: First of all, I would like to enjoy today. I think it was a fantastic race. I love this track. As I said, the people are great and make it a very, very special place for us. I'd love to enjoy that first, obviously it does no harm when you win, for the championship. I've won now four times here in Suzuka, which is incredible. I'm really looking forward to next year, to be honest. Regarding the championship, as I said, I think obviously we have a very, very good gap but we still keep pushing. I think we've proven in the last couple of years that we never give up. I think we've won one or two championships because of that. Obviously this year it looks very good at this stage – but it's not over before it's over.

Q: Sebastian, you really did seem to enjoy this victory hugely. Is it because of the various problems that happened along the way? The start, for example, the first corner, one or two lock-ups, an interesting tactic...

SV: Yeah, certainly – but I think mostly it's because of the circuit and the fans to be honest. It's one of the highlights in the year. I love this track and I've been very, very fortunate to have a great car in the past and against this year, being able to finish on the podium and win four times now. Incredible. When we leave the hotel in the morning I think it's the same for all of us. It makes it so special. The people are crazy about Formula One. They really, yeah, admire us, which is very nice. They love what we do and appreciate the fact we go around. You have the people on the grandstand yesterday, I ran the circuit and there were I think 5,000 people on the grandstand just watching. They are amazed by Formula One and I think that makes it so special and taste so sweet. As you touched on, obviously with the race today, a horrible start but then a fantastic comeback.

Q: That long middle stint – a 23-lap middle stint – and there were one or two lock-ups. Were you affected by that or were the tyres in good condition all the way?

SV: Well, you know, you struggle more in the end obviously. I tried to control the gaps. Obviously we started already to go longer than Romain and Mark in the first stint, so we took into account that we lap a second a lap slower for two or three laps compared to them in order to get the range in the next stint and then tried to extend that to really put them under pressure towards the end. That was, let's say, the game plan. Obviously after the first pit stop I think very soon in the second stint, Mark decided to go for the three-stop, which wasn't far off. Before the race I think we targeted more towards two stops but the tyres weren't holding up as well as probably we thought. As I said, I really tried to manage the gaps in the beginning of the

stint and then close the gap, which worked brilliantly, especially with Romain. The end of the second stint I was just on his tail when he pitted, able to stay out another couple of laps and then I had more or less fresh tyres when I was able to pass him, so, yeah, great strategy. It obviously worked. We made it... we didn't lose the patience early on. Tried obviously to make the stints as long as possible to help us at the end of the race.

Q: Mark, I guess you were hoping you were going to be able to challenge Sebastian during the closing stages. That's what the engineers suggested to both of you in fact – but you just couldn't get past Romain.

MW: Ah, no. I don't think the battle was going to be with Sebastian at the end to be honest. I think that it was pretty much done when we didn't do enough damage on the three-stop against Seb's pace on the two. I think we tried to race Romain at the start and then in the end we switched to the three. So I was the meat in the sandwich, trying to beat Romain on a two and then all of a sudden we decided to do a three. I was a little bit surprised. I asked was it the right thing to do because I felt we could get to the lap we were looking to get to. Of course Seb was two or three laps longer, four laps maybe but in terms of the target lap that we looked to get for the two-stop I thought was achievable but in the end Seb did a good race, the strategy worked out perfect and yeah, the three was... not absolutely ridiculous but it's a bit more high risk we know, and you have to clear people obviously, so yeah, piggy in the middle, trying to do both. In the end, we got back to where we were in terms of position but Seb jumped both of us. But a great result for the team, a sensational result for me in my last time here in Japan in Formula One. The fans are incredible. I enjoyed the grand prix today, it was nice to have fresh tyres a bit more, which is always enjoyable around Suzuka. So that was today's race.

Q: I mentioned drama-filled for Sebastian, one or two things happened to him, what about yourself?

MW: Apart from the shocking start for both Seb and I, that was really it. After that we could plan our race accordingly. It wasn't what we expected to be honest, both of us didn't do anything off the front row. So that put us on the back foot already and Romain was quite strong on the option but I don't think he was that strong on the prime. Anyway, as I say, I did everything I could today. It's not too bad a result obviously. It's nice to be back on the podium after the last few races where I think we could have certainly have been there but we weren't. All in all, I leave here happy and off to Oz tomorrow for a bit more surfing.

Q: Well done. Romain, tell us about that start because it was a lightning one.

RG: Yeah, it was probably one of the best: I just spoke with Seb [about it]. When I dropped the clutch I said 'whoah, whoah, that's a good one, come on, come on go for it'. Amazing. Then when you're leading it makes the thing easier on the first stint. We were very quick on the option. The car was using less the tyres and I could open the gap. Unfortunately, it was less good on prime than option today for some reason, rather than yesterday when it was the opposite, so the pace dropped a little bit and Seb was really too quick for us. I think it would have been nice with Mark until the end of the race but we caught some slower cars, lapped cars, and they really blocked me a lot. I lost the position against Mark. I don't know if I could have held him until the end but, yeah, it cost me, I think, quite a lot. Never mind, we were the only car to be able to follow them. We did not even think about racing them before the race and the strategy says that our target was Lewis, so, so far it was a pretty good race and for sure being ahead in the first corner helps quite a lot but we did a very good job to come back from a disaster Friday to have a very good Saturday and Sunday.

Q: You were right in the middle of a backmarker battle right at the end there – there was a lot of traffic around. A little bit of sadness having been out in front and finishing third?

RG: I thought it was the day that the first victory was coming. Honestly on option, I did struggle a little bit but then I could pull away to Mark and I said "our car is beautiful today, it's gonna be good," and then Mark pitted earlier than what we thought, we fitted the prime – hard tyres – and the degradation was not the same any more and it was making it harder to drive. I think I lost second with the Caterham in the middle stint when Mark catch me just before he pitted and then on the last few laps there were a lot of cars in front of us. I know it's not easy for anyone to let us by but on such a nice big track it costs you a lot. As my tyres were really on the edge every small aero... wing perturbation will cost me a lot and at the exit of the chicane a little bit of wheelspin and Mark could go for it. So, a bit of a shame to lose the second position but never mind, I think the positives that I gain outweigh... were challenging them and that counts for us.

Q: (Michael Schmidt – Auto, Motor und Sport) Mark, you spoke about the second stop but the first one was already pretty early for a two stop strategy. Was it just to do an undercut on Romain, or do you feel that you were in the role of a rabbit to challenge Romain to follow you and then obviously it paid out for Seb?

MW: Yeah, we were obviously looking to get in the lead, to put some pressure on Romain. I don't think the option was easy to handle for any of us. I wanted to put some pressure on Romain towards the end of that stint. We were more or less in the window for a two stop. As soon as I pitted after the prime, the guys said 'yeah, we're on a two stop, it's no problem. Look after the tyres and we'll stay on two.' And then I was on two and then we switched to three so I think they just saw that it was just a quicker way for me to do three stops. That's what they thought, that was the reason they did it. That's the reason for that.

Q: (Dan Knutson – Auto Action and National Speedsport News) Mark, in those laps, you were trying to get Grosjean but you couldn't quite get him down the straights: what was happening through the chicane and down the pit straight?

MW: Well, at the end of the race, the DRS is not as effective because you're on the limiter, basically. We managed to get off the chicane a bit better on the... when you arrive on someone you want to get the job done pretty quickly. First sector is obviously not that easy because... Romain is a bit low on tyres but they also had more downforce than us. I was quite low on wing. When I arrived on him, I was obviously hoping to get it done a little bit earlier but it was also knowing that his tyres were going to be quite tired, getting towards the end of the race as well. The backmarkers didn't work out for Romain, it's a bit of a nightmare when you catch so many guys: they all want the DRS, they all want to fight and in the end, it was beneficial for me to pounce when Romain got not the best run with the backmarkers, which was no fault of his own.

Q: (Frederic Ferret – L'Equipe) Romain, what do you think you still miss to get a victory: another car, another team, another strategy? And the same for you, Sebastian, about Romain.

RG: From my side, I think, today, was a little bit of pace on the hard tyre. We covered Mark on the first stop. It was two laps shorter than what we thought and then again, the second stop was just a little bit earlier than we thought because of the tyres' age and so on. And I think we missed Friday, so we had to do a long run in FP3 to know how the tyres were going because from Friday we had no information from our long runs, we really struggled with the car, so we lost that information that we are normally pretty good on. Today the hard tyres didn't behave as we expected and before the race, honestly, we said we'll start on option but then what's going on in the second stint, we didn't know if we had to fit option or prime and it was just an unknown. I think the Red Bull today was... we said in the strategy meeting that we never thought that we could beat them. So we are where we expected to be. Just sometimes, it's a little bit of everything. Today was not the luck missing, it was not the start, the driving, it was just a little bit of pace from the car.

SV: Well, I think after the start and the first stint, I thought that it would be a great race for Romain. Obviously we tried to make our stint longer and

so on, to come back in the end but they looked very strong. I think they struggled a little bit more on the prime probably but then again as he just said, they didn't expect to race where they ended up racing. I think he drove a fantastic race today. I don't think it's a matter of... he can beat me, he beat me last year at the Race of Champions. I put the car in the wall. I think it's not a matter of that. The race is long. Today obviously favoured us over the distance which is a little bit unusual compared to the Lotus because I knew that being in third, losing out in the first stint, usually the distance is more, you know, let's say the strength of the Lotuses. I think Romain did a great job, great performance all weekend I think, great qualifying yesterday again, outqualified Kimi. We know that Kimi is a strong driver. Last year I think Romain made some mistakes but the most important thing is that we learn from these mistakes as drivers so I think he learned a lot of things and gradually he's improving, so big respect for that.

Q: (Anne Giuntini – L'Equipe) Mark, last year you had an incident with Romain here. Did you change your mind about him during this year, especially in this race, but also the whole season?

MW: No, I think it's very clear that Romain has a very different mental approach to the job at the moment this year. He's driven some quite strong races, putting together the whole weekend which is a sign of a driver starting to get a bit more relaxed and confident. A lot less mistakes, not just in races but in practice so it's not... You know, we're not here to blow smoke up his arse but in the end he's doing a very good job this year and it's a big step for him because last year, in Formula One, also the first year against Fernando in Formula One wasn't easy for him and to come back... yeah, he's doing a good job. It starts and stops with him. Hope he doesn't improve too much more before the end of the year! And we can keep going.

Q: (Kate Walker – GP Week) Sebastian, you haven't won your fourth consecutive title yet but it's almost certain to happen this season, barring something very odd. Now you're also a man who collects an awful lot of race wins, record after record. What means more to you: going down in history with the likes of Fangio and Schumacher as one of three men to have collected four consecutive titles, or to stand on the top of every podium on the calendar?

SV: I think I prefer the second thing you said. You know, I love racing. When I was small, I was dreaming about Formula One and honestly never thought that one day I would be able to test one of these cars. First time I tested the car, it was... Mark drove in the morning, I drove in the afternoon. I shit myself the first couple of laps and I thought, alright, that's for real men, not for me. Then I got used to it and obviously wanted to do more. A couple of years later, obviously I had the chance to get a drive. Red Bull gave me the chance at Toro Rosso to get some races. It's incredible what's happened over the last couple of years but nothing has changed in the way that I still love racing, I love the challenge, I'm still nervous when I wake up on Sunday, still excited when I walk on the grid and tense, looking forward to the race. Enjoying – not the numbers – but enjoying the fact that I'm racing and a great crowd today, a fantastic day. As I said, I think it would be a shame if you were too tense and if you tried to force things too much. I think you have to allow yourself to enjoy it because this is not normal, it doesn't happen to everyone. I think I'm very fortunate that I'm one of these 22/24 guys in Formula One. As I said, we leave the hotel, great respect from the fans, they're cheering, they're shouting our names and it's just great. That's what I'm looking forward to most, obviously try to do it again. I love trophies so I don't mind collecting a few either!

Q: (Livio Oricchio – O Estado de Sao Paulo) Sebastian, after overtaking Grosjean, did you ask the team what position Alonso was in in the race?

SV: No.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – O Estado de Sao Paulo) Did the team inform you?

SV: After the race. Obviously I knew that in the last stint, once we got past Romain, I knew that Mark was the biggest threat from behind. He was on fresher tyres and pretty quick. Obviously he got stuck with Romain a little bit which helped us. But I didn't really... I didn't ask and I didn't want to know because there are still things that can happen at the end, even if you have a little bit of a gap and so on. We've seen today a lot of lock-ups; I was wide once in turn two, at the beginning of the race. Mark just said he knew where I was in one of the stints in the race because there was smoke here, smoke there. I was struggling a little bit with locking up the tyres. I was busy enough, also carrying the car to the chequered flag.

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## F1 Japan Blog – Race report

Japan's beloved Suzuka Circuit was the scene of Sebastian Vettel's fifth consecutive victory on the Red Bull racer's way to his fourth consecutive driver's title, but it was the twos and threes that really counted on Sunday afternoon.

While it may have been another win for Vettel, it was hardly the textbook affair we have seen at recent races, with a lights-to-flag victory resulting from the German ingénue opening up a multi-second lead over the course of the first lap before powering on to victory. Far from it.

For the first time in recent memory Vettel got off to a poor start, having lined up – unusually – behind teammate Mark Webber. Both Red Bull drivers were left standing by Romain Grosjean, who appeared to have fitted a jet engine to his E21, such was his pace on the first lap of the Japanese Grand Prix. Lurching along in the Frenchman's wake Vettel made contact with the Mercedes of Lewis Hamilton, leading to wing damage that would force the Briton into the pits and – eventually – out of the race.

Despite his eventual victory it was an error-strewn afternoon from the defending champion, something Vettel himself admitted in the post-race press conference, drawing attention to the series of lock-ups that characterised his progress around some of the most challenging corners on the current F1 calendar.

One man who made far fewer errors was Grosjean, who followed his stellar start with a commanding performance that saw the Lotus in the lead for much of the afternoon. It was on lap 41 that Vettel finally made it past the Frenchman for the lead, slipping past the Lotus on the straight and off to certain victory.

At the time of the manoeuvre Vettel was four laps past his second and final stop of the race, after an impressively long second stint that saw the German complete 23 laps on a new primes. Grosjean – also on a two-stop strategy that saw him pit for new primes on lap 29 – was on rubber eight laps older and was there for the taking, with an ever-shrinking lead in the face of a charging Vettel.

Webber, meanwhile, had been changed from a two- to a three-stop strategy mid-race, raising questions in the cockpit and press room alike. Speaking to the media after the race the Australian was convinced that he could have made a two-stop work, but demands from the pit wall that he cover Grosjean meant that there was little Webber could do but hope for a second-place finish.

While the team were convinced that a three-stop would have been quicker for their number two driver, the close running at the front of the pack coupled with the time lost in the pit lane meant that – even to the uninitiated – a win from a three-stop surrounded by drivers stopping twice was going to be mathematically impossible, no matter how fresh the Australian’s rubber in the closing stages.

And when push came to shove, the relative youth of Webber’s tyres faded into irrelevance as the Australian emerged from the pits in third place, shod in used mediums already past their best. What life was left in the rubber was lost in the fight with Grosjean, and there was no grip – or time – for Webber to give chase to his all-conquering teammate.

Further down the pack, Fernando Alonso finished the race in fourth place after a series of impressive battles, not least with the Lotus of Kimi Raikkonen and the Sauber of Nico Hulkenberg. The 10 points Alonso gained on Sunday afternoon were not enough to make a dent in Vettel’s championship lead, but they were enough to delay the inevitable until the Indian Grand Prix in two weeks’ time.

#### 2013 Japanese Grand Prix results

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1h26m49.301s
2. Mark Webber (Red Bull) + 7.129s
3. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) + 9.910s
4. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) + 45.605s
5. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) + 47.325s
6. Nico Hulkenberg (Sauber) + 51.615s
7. Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) + 1m11.630s
8. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) + 1m12.023s
9. Jenson Button (McLaren) + 1m20.821s
10. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) + 1m29.263s
11. Paul di Resta (Force India) + 1m38.572s
12. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) + 1 lap
13. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) + 1 lap
14. Adrian Sutil (Force India) + 1 lap
15. Sergio Perez (McLaren) + 1 lap
16. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) + 1 lap
17. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) + 1 lap
18. Charles Pic (Caterham) + 1 la
19. Max Chilton (Marussia) + 1 lap

Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) RET

Giedo van der Garde (Caterham) RET

Jules Bianchi (Marussia) RET

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## F1 Japan Blog - Saturday press conference

Another Saturday, another Red Bull pole. But for once it was a different driver who took centre stage at the post-qualifying press conference.

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

Q: Mark, congratulations. It’s been a long time this pole position this year. It’s your first time fastest in a qualifying session.

Mark WEBBER: Yeah, it’s a great track. We all enjoy driving here. The laps weren’t too bad to be honest. You always want a little bit more here and there but in general it was pretty good. Sebastian had a problem in qualifying, so a little bit of a hollow pole position if you like, because he still did a phenomenal lap, but I’m happy to be on pole. You’ve got to grab the opportunities when you can and still put the laps in. Bit of a mixed session, people were throwing options and primes all over the joint in Q2; people were on scrubbed and unscrubbed. So it was a bit of a mixed session in terms of trying to predict who was showing their hand. But in the end we did the laps when it counted and that’s what was important. Very, very nice farewell for me to have pole here on my last attempt at Suzuka on a really phenomenal circuit. I’ll never forget the first sector today. That’s what us guys strive for and yeah, our profession is all about that so it was a real highlight for a lot of us out there today.

Q: You said yesterday you needed to find performance. You obviously found that performance. How did that come?

MW: To be honest we needed to check the car this morning with the different wind conditions. That’s important. I think you’ll see everyone today went a lot quicker. So we were factoring that in. The circuit had changed a lot. Also, it’s a very strange circuit, it’s a very out and back track, it’s a very narrow circuit, a lot of kilometres but in a small gully, so obviously that was something we have to take in mind in terms of our preparation today for the wind. I think we did what we could. We’ve still got some quick cars around but in general we’ve got a good car for the race. Head down tomorrow.

Q: Well done. Sebastian how much do you think losing that time this morning hurt you?

Sebastian VETTEL: Well obviously we had a problem this morning but I don’t think that made a difference in terms of finding the rhythm, I think we’ve done plenty of laps around this track. First of all, congratulations to Mark, I think he did a very good lap. We did have an issue in qualifying but I’m not a big fan of ‘without this, with this, if this’. It’s always unknown. As a fact, we are P2. So, happy, obviously, with the result. Front row for the team, which is great. The car was phenomenal today, as Mark touched on. The first sector – I think you realise afterwards that the car was fantastic through there and you don’t get many days like that, where the car feels great and you can really push it to the limit. Enjoyed qualifying and happy with second place.

Q: In fact, in the two laps you did in Q3 it looked as if you just went a little bit wide out of Spoon on one lap and I'm not certain what happened in the middle sector on the final lap.

SV: Nothing. I kept it on the track. Obviously I tried hard on the first attempt, a little bit too hard. Tried hard on the second attempt but managed to stay on track. Obviously you gain a little bit before you go off track in the first attempt and then you lose down the straight and obviously the second time around I was a bit more conservative but gained down the straight, so overall it was a net gain. But, yeah, I think we were all pushing to the limit today, as Mark touched on. Again, with the wind it was tricky, some gusts here and there but in the end we are pushing and mistakes happen.

Q: Lewis, I don't know how happy you are with third place. You've been a major challenger all weekend.

Lewis HAMILTON: Yeah. No. I'm really happy. I think the team did a great job so far this weekend and realistically it was difficult, or almost impossible, to finish ahead of these guys. They've had a much better package generally for a long, long time but I think we've come a long way and to be as close as we are, I think is a huge compliment to the team. The car was feeling good. My car felt awesome so I can't imagine how it felt for them – and congratulations to Mark. I'm looking forward to racing them tomorrow.

Q: What's going to be the major factor tomorrow? A lot of people talking about tyre management and making sure you don't lock-up – that it's too easy to lock-up at this circuit.

LH: Well, there are not many big braking zones but locking is always an issue. Degradation is going to be really the key tomorrow. I hope we can get a good start, being on the cleaner side and be able to at least put up a little bit of a fight for these guys, don't let them walk away with it too easily.

Q: Mark, it's usually you who makes a really good start away from the press conference but the important thing is can you make a good start away tomorrow?

MW: Yeah! Haven't been too bad of late, I don't think. We're doing the prep we can, the clutch is in good shape and we should be able to get away well and head down after that for a good race.

Q: Who's going to be the major threat do you think tomorrow?

MW: At the front of the grid in the grand prix there's no-one ahead of you so it always has to come from behind if there's a chance, so I'll focus on myself and try and get some gaps if I can. Obviously Seb, Lewis, Lotus as well in the race. Who knows? You've just got to be mindful of the fact of tyre management, get the strategy right, execute a clean grand prix from driver, pitstops, everything together. It's got to work. We're more than capable of that. Obviously a super-experienced team, we know what we've got to do tomorrow. Looking forward to it.

Q: Sebastian. What was the problem this morning? What actually caused you to lose so much time this morning?

SV: We decided to change the batteries on the car because we had an issue with KERS. Unfortunately we had the same problem in qualifying – so I think we have a little bit more time after qualifying now to have a look and see whether there's something else broken or damaged. The whole team was pushing very hard. Obviously my car crew but also Mark's car crew helped out to fix the car in time and get it out for qualifying – so we tried everything. It worked sometimes and as I said I'm sure we'll find the problem tonight and hopefully it works tomorrow.

Q: Lewis, Were there big changes in conditions today, what with the wind? And also drivers were reporting more grip as well.

LH: Yeah. The wind direction changed, I think 180°, so you had a tail wind down into Turn One but then massive headwind going through the Esses, so it changed the characteristics of the circuit massively. I guess every car will have gained a lot more downforce, so it got a lot quicker today.

Q: And how much has that changed for the race itself?

LH: I believe... I was told it's going to be like FP3. I think it was a little windier this afternoon, potentially. Hopefully it should be the same tomorrow.

Q: (Frederic Ferret – L'Equipe) Mark, did you put the black cat on Seb's car and do you think that this is the end of your bad luck curse this year?

MW: You just have to look forward. It's tough enough as it is to see the results that you lose, the amount of points that we've lost, there's a lot of things which are out of my hands which you can get frustrated by but at the end of the day you have to look forward because it takes energy if you look back, so looking forward. Yeah, we have a great opportunity tomorrow. When I started up the last lap, when I came out of the last chicane and I thought it's my last lap in a Formula One car here at Suzuka – come on, let's really enjoy it but also put the car on the limit. I did my best. I enjoyed today; tomorrow will be the same mentality. It's a beautiful circuit in a Formula One car, the tyres are finishing the lap which is also brilliant for us to push for most of the lap so in general it's a nice day, and as you say, let's hope it continues for another 24 hours and in India and so on and so on, to finish off as nicely as we can.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – O Estado de Sao Paulo) Mark, there's no way not to ask this question: your teammate needs a victory to maybe – maybe – become World Champion. Here you are in front of him on a difficult circuit to overtake. Would you consider to work for the team?

MW: I think it's such a long year. Seb's had a phenomenal year. He will do his race tomorrow, I will do my race. It's not like it's the last race of the championship, obviously, in terms of what can unfold or whatever. Sebastian has a big points lead because of the work that he's put in up to now. He can't qualify on pole for every race. Tomorrow is a new day and let's see how it's looking at the end of the race. Normally you talk about these things and they never happen but in general, yeah, we'll be there for ourselves tomorrow.

Q: (Abhishek Takle – Midday) Mark, we saw some replays of you exiting the pits in front of a McLaren, Perez. Can you explain what happened? Were you aware... were you told he was on a flying lap?

MW: He backed off so the engineers told me that he had finished his lap so we could pull in front of him because he was going to pit. If he was on a quick lap obviously I would have got out of the way.

Q: (Trent Price – Richland F1) For all of you: we've seen a lot of drivers lose a lot of time in the chicane over the weekend; have you guys opted for a compromise set-up for that or is it just something in the characteristics of the cars?

MW: The chicane is a normal compromise problem for this circuit. It's a very slow chicane, it's from a big speed in terms of braking, there's also a bit of rise in there if you want to use the kerbs, and things like that and then the traction is also very important. As usual, with every Grand Prix track we go to we try to compromise the car as best we can. We're aware there's a lot of lap time in the chicane but there's also a lot of lap time in the first sector so we do what we can. The driver sometimes has to fill the pockets in terms of those compromises.

SV: Sorry, what was the question again? I have the results here. Sorry. I think Mark has... I think you lose a little bit of the tyre towards the end but I'm sure that's what he said.

LH: Same.

Q: (Dan Knutson – Auto Action and National Speedsport News). Mark, you said it's a bit of a hollow pole because Seb had problems but out of the 12 (poles) how does this rate? Is it still quite sweet because it's at this track?

MW: Yeah, you're right Dan. You've got to take them when you can get them. It's not like they hand them out. It was still a big lap. I've had a few laps in qualifying where I've had to attempt to qualify as best as I can without all the weapons as well and today we had the weapons sharp and we did a pretty good job on a phenomenal circuit. When you drive here... this is the links golf course of the golf world or the big wave stuff for the surfers or whatever. For us, it's a really testing circuit. Unless anyone sees a Formula One car here live to see what happens in a sector, it's very hard for them to understand how quickly we go through there.

Q: (Ian Parkes – Press Association) Seb and Mark: McLaren team principal Martin Whitmarsh has confirmed that Peter Prodromou has signed for the team, potentially for next season, certainly for 2015. Can you two guys give us an idea of what Peter has brought to Red Bull over the past few years, given the titles that you've won?

MW: Peter's a great guy, obviously a huge amount of experience. Always enjoyed working with him. Obviously he's an integral part of the team and did good job, been there a long time. It's the first I'm aware of how formal you're talking about it but these things happen in Formula One. There's a lot of good guys moving around in teams. We're open to that and that can happen. If that's the case, I obviously wish him all the best. That's the small industry that we work in.

SV: I only heard of it just now. As Mark touched on, he's obviously been a very very strong character in the background responsible for a lot of good stuff that has happened to us over the last couple of years. Whether it's more than just a rumour or not I'm not sure. Independently, he's a very nice guy and whatever he decides to do, as Mark said, you wish him all the best. For sure I hope he stays with us but I don't know. I only just heard, when I got out of the car.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – O Estado de Sao Paulo) Mark, you have been facing problems at the start of the race in many races and here, maybe, it's one of the most difficult because it's downhill. Do you have any special preparations for the start?

MW: Do my best, mate. Fingers crossed and go from there. We've had a few good ones. Obviously some pretty average ones: Seb in Singapore, it was not the best for him but Lewis has had some good and some poor ones as well. At Nurburgring we went straight round the outside of him so it can happen but I love taking the challenge on and tomorrow we will face it and do what we can to get into turn one first and then the race starts from there.

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## F1 Japan Blog - Saturday report

By and large, the final practice session of the Japanese Grand Prix weekend was a quiet affair, made notable primarily by a KERS issue for title hopeful Sebastian Vettel, whose teammate Mark Webber was the fastest man of the morning. Adrian Sutil was the only casualty of the sunny session, taking off the nosecone of his Force India in a collision with the barriers at the exit of Spoon.

The good weather continued into the afternoon, and qualifying took place under clear skies. Esteban Gutierrez was the first man to set a time in Q1, a respectable 1m33.547s that was soon bested by the likes of Kimi Raikkonen, Romain Grosjean, and Jenson Button.

There was a moment of high drama in the Sauber garage when Gutierrez returned to the pits, leaping quickly out of a flaming car. The team put the fire out in seconds, and no injuries resulted, although the cause is yet to be determined.

Back out on track and Fernando Alonso went to the top of the timesheets with a 1m32.371s lap set before either Red Bull driver had left the pits. First out was Vettel, who crossed the line in 1m32.397s. A P4-worthy lap bested immediately by Webber, who dropped Lewis Hamilton from the top of the timesheets with a 1m32.371s effort.

With slightly more than three minutes remaining of Q1 the session was red-flagged as Jean-Eric Vergne's Toro Rosso pulled to the side of the track in flames. After a brief delay – and commendably quick action from the marshals – the session restarted with 2m55s remaining on the clock, enough for one more timed lap from the field.

Jules Bianchi left with the masses for his only timed lap of the session, a 1m34.958s effort that left the Marussia racer in the dropout zone with his teammate, the Caterham pair, Vergne, and Sutil.

After all that drama, the second qualifying session was fifteen minutes of relative calm. It was the Red Bull pair who were last out of the pits in Q2, with Webber on his out lap getting in the way of Sergio Perez, who was on a flyer. As expected Vettel shot straight to the top of the timesheets, while Webber was just over two-tenths slower in second.

The close action in Q2 was at the back of the pack, where gaps were measured in hundredths of a second, knocking out Perez, Paul di Resta, Valtteri Bottas, Gutierrez, Pastor Maldonado, and Daniel Ricciardo.

Vettel and Webber were quick out of the pits in Q3, with the Australian four-tenths faster than his teammate on the first round of timed laps. The gap from Webber in first to Hamilton in fourth was just shy of one second, with only four times on the board with three minutes left on the clock.

As the clock counted down the times popped up, with a strong first sector from Vettel ruined by an error in sector two that cost the defending champion pole. That honour went to his teammate, whose 1m30.915s was fastest of the afternoon, while Hamilton and Romain Grosjean made up the second row.

Provisional grid

1. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1m30.915s
2. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1m31.089s
3. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1m31.253s
4. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1m31.365s
5. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1m31.378s
6. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1m31.397s
7. Nico Hulkenberg (Lotus) 1m31.644s
8. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1m31.665s
9. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1m31.684s
10. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1m31.827s

11. Sergio Perez (McLaren) 1m31.989s
12. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1m31.992s
13. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1m32.013s
14. Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) 1m32.063s
15. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1m32.093s
16. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1m32.485s

17. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1m33.357s
18. Max Chilton (Marussia) 1m34.320s
19. Giedo van der Garde (Caterham) 1m34.879s
20. Jules Bianchi (Marussia) 1m34.958s \*
21. Charles Pic (Caterham) 1m34.556s \*\*
22. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1m32.890s \*\*\*

\* Jules Bianchi qualified in P22 but will start from P20 thanks to a ten-place grid penalty incurred for receiving his third reprimand of the season in Korea.

\*\* Charles Pic qualified in P20 but will start from P21 thanks to a ten-place grid penalty incurred for receiving his third reprimand of the season in Korea.

\*\*\* Adrian Sutil qualified in P17 but will start from P22 thanks to a five-place grid penalty incurred for a new gearbox.

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## F1 Japan Blog - Friday press conference

It was the turn of the technical boffins to face the media on Friday afternoon in Suzuka.

Present were Dave Greenwood (Marussia), Pat Fry (Ferrari), James Key (Toro Rosso), Tom McCullough (Sauber), Paul Monaghan (Force India), and Jonathan Neale (McLaren).

Q: Dave if I may start with you. You've got a new partnership starting... I guess it's started already. In fact, that's the question: how's it going?

Dave GREENWOOD: Yes, it's going extremely well at the minute. The partnership has been running since just around the time of the August break. Obviously a lot of data going back and forth, mainly on the design side at the minute - the big challenge of integrating the engine within the chassis is what we've been looking at, the cooling side, those kinds of issues. So, it's going well. It's progressing well. Everything's on target at the minute so we're very happy with what's happening.

Q: There have been quite a few changes to the team's technical operation. How's that coming along?

DG: Yeah, we were disappointed to see Pat leave, he was a big part of rebuilding our team. But really, it's Pat's legacy that's left behind, which is carrying on. So it's all the same designers, the same aerodynamicists, the same people leading those team so really we're just getting on with the job in hand and just fully focused on the 2014 car.

Q: When you say his legacy, was that an organisational legacy - putting up structures?

DG: Absolutely. Putting up structures, discipline, good engineering practices, all the good stuff engineers should do every day and just making sure everyone's doing it and they're all on the same sheet.

Q: Tom, obviously a fantastic result last weekend with fourth and in fact you've also scored points in the last three races. What's changed, what's different?

Tom McCULLOUGH: To be honest we started the year uncompetitively, in position. The pace from the midfield wasn't too far but we just weren't scoring the points. We kept coming home from every race weekend, analysing the data, both in low-fuel qualifying and long-run race pace and thinking to ourselves 'we're not that far away, but we're just the wrong side'. We decided to push on the development of the car. We introduced our biggest update package by far for Budapest - totally changed the concept of the rear of the car aerodynamically. Did a lot of work really from the front wing right the way through to the rear wing on the car - it's a very different car to what was actually launched. And we've just addressed the main problems that were limiting us from a car balance and a lap time point of view. The change of tyres happened around the same time too, so lowering the front ride height on a Formula One car tend to help you as well. But, fundamentally, for us the biggest difference really started in Budapest. We didn't score points but we saw how the car was working aerodynamically and we've just built on that from there really.

Q: And now you're locked in a battle in the Constructors' Championship with your former colleague and now neighbour up there from Toro Rosso. So how's the development? Is that still continuing?

TMCC: We brought forward our final update package from India to the previous race in Korea, so there are now no more new parts on our car between now and the end of the year. We've had to push the development of this year's car a little bit more than we wanted to, just because we were on the back foot at the start of the year and we had a few problems to address. So, we've been developing both cars in parallel, this year's and next

year's car. At the moment, level on points. We were a bit lucky with some circumstances last weekend but I think as Jean-Eric said yesterday, it's sort of game on from here really. We're starting with the same points, pretty similar car performance from track to track, there's not a lot in it. So, there's going to be a good little fight between now and the end of the year.

Q: Yes. James, as JEV said yesterday, it's now a five-race championship for you. What are your thoughts on it?

James KEY: I think what Tom says reflects it well. It is going to be close, to the point where certain tracks and certain conditions suit the different cars slightly differently. It's going to be tight. It's exciting to be in a battle like that. But not where you want to be with five races to go with a massive regulation change next year. It's another balancing act. I think it's going to be interesting and it is a five-race championship. Starting from this point the rest is all information we can use in these next five races.

Q: What's Toro Rosso's reaction going to be? Have you stopped your development or have you got more coming?

JK: On the aero side we have. We brought our last bits in Singapore. We've got a few small items to come. Mechanically, there's sort of an ongoing development process a little bit with trying to adapt to the tyre change still because that had a negative effect on us we think. We kind of know why but there are still a few things to do. There's a little bit of that going on but fundamentally the car is what it is now, there's nothing major coming along at all at this stage. And clearly with next year's car very much the focus of the team there's not much resource to do that.

Q: So, it's really almost going to be track specific from now on?

JK: I think yeah it's potentially going to be down to small detail.

Q: Jonathan, obviously Honda is looming but quite a long way away still. What is the situation? Did you go and see them, have you been to see them here. How closely are you now working with them?

Jonathan NEALE: We are seeing them here during the course of this weekend. It's an exciting proposition for us to be back with them. We've been working very closely for 10 months or so since we dropped the flag, which is not long in Formula One terms but they're a powerful organisation and moving heaven and earth at the moment and that's an exciting prospect. But although that's on the horizon we're very much focused on the work we're doing with Mercedes at the moment because, as the others have alluded to, the step change in regulations for next year means we've got to do the job twice in two years, so we've got our work cut out.

Q: And in terms of drivers that still seems to be fairly fluid as well?

JN: Yeah, as Martin and Jenson said during the Korean Grand Prix weekend we've confirmed what we're doing on that side but the other side is still open for discussion. But we're under no immediate pressure. I know there's a lot of media expectation, I understand that but there's nothing in the regulations, no structural reason why we'd want to make that decision without careful consideration. So that's what we're doing.

Q: Still very much watch this space then?

JN: Yeah, very much so.

Q: Pat, first of all, a big challenge from Mercedes in the Constructors' Championship. How much is that actually hurting 2014?

Pat FRY: In terms of development, we've got some parts coming through for the next couple of races but that's already in the pipeline, that's not really affecting the 2014. Obviously it's quite a close-fought battle with them. They've got outstanding qualifying pace and their race pace is sometimes good, sometimes bad. Again, I expect that'll be another one of those five-race championships you were just talking about.

Q: Was Korea a bit of a blip? You'd actually finished second in the previous three races.

PF: Yeah. I think where we qualified in Korea is similar to what we've been able to do before really and there's no point hiding behind our poor qualifying pace. The race, in reality, we were caught in traffic and couldn't get past so credit to the people who were there holding us up a little.

Q: So is it looking better for this weekend?

PF: I hope so, yes. So far.

Q: Paul, obviously huge progress since the summer break. Things have completely changed, you've dominated every race since then. What changed?

Paul MONAGHAN: A few small items. It's been remarkably subtle, the pieces that have gone onto the car but the collective effect has been enormously positive and it's spread to many areas and that's opened up a few little other paths of development which we've managed to exploit and yes, we've been very lucky - and enjoyed it.

Q: Obviously you had a huge amount of damage on Mark's car last weekend. Can you give us some indication of what's been required since then?

PM: It's very easy to summarise. Pretty much everything behind the oil radiator was ruined. So it's a whole new car from the cockpit backwards for him. New chassis, or a replacement chassis, and everything is new there behind it.

Q: Was that all built up here, did you have all the spares with you?

PM: The majority of them actually were with us, yes. A few parts have made their way out here but we've survived remarkably well.

Q: (Dan Knutson - Auto Action and National Speedsport News) Paul, as Mark's time in F1 winds down, give us an idea of how it has been to work with him over the years?

PM: I've known him since 2002, I think, when he was Renault test driver. He was committed then, he's still very committed now, always professional, always gives good feedback. He complements Sebastian extremely well. They both contribute to car development and he's continuing to do so. It's been an outstanding career, hasn't it? Very impressive.

Q: (Dieter Rencken - RacingLines) Gentlemen, there has been a lot of talk about Formula One possibly adopting customer cars. Now this concept could put some of you out of a job for obvious reasons and turn others into super salesmen. Where do you stand on this particular issue from an engineering or technical perspective?

JN: It's a contentious subject which of course is why you asked the question. I think that on the one hand Formula One still has to be the pinnacle of motor sport and there is a certain sense of technical endeavour in that, providing that we moderate that from a financial point of view. Customer cars



is a game-changer, certainly for the independent teams: it fundamentally changes that business model and I think before Formula One goes about that, I think it needs to look at the economic sustainability of the various business models that exist. Whether you're premium brand, whether you're independent or whether you're an entrant into it, then in any market sense, you make sure that you've got something that works holistically. Technically, for us, it's not as big a deal. I think commercially it's a much bigger issue but I don't think the technical guys will say it's too much of a challenge. But it would fundamentally change for me what Formula One is and I think Formula One is about the pinnacle of motor sport and that technical element is very important to it, and I believe that the independent teams would say the same thing.

PF: Well, I suppose in reality it's more a question for the team principals than engineers really. From an engineering point of view, I'm sure it would be relatively easy to put something in place but it's more, as Jonathan was saying, about which way do we want to see the sport going.

PM: From a purely technical point of view, Formula One is the Constructors' championship – there's a Drivers' championship and a Constructors' championship and therefore, solely from that point of view, then we ought to compete against one another. However, we currently sell parts to other teams as we're permitted to do so, so an amount of part-sharing, to ease the burden on other teams that wish to buy certain components from us, then I think it's absolutely the right thing to do. If that expands a little bit and all the teams agree, then it's probably a helpful thing for the sport.

DG: Personally, I think we've got the balance about right at the minute. What you can and can't buy from someone else is probably about the right place and still gives us the ability to be engineers and go off and design things and not just take wholesale someone else's parts. I think in effect it allows us to buy the really complicated bits – gearboxes, hydraulics etc – and then lets us go off and concentrate on the other parts.

TMcC: Yeah, I really can't add too much more. For us, as performance-base engineers running a spec car or a customer car wouldn't be as much fun. Like Dave was just saying, some of the more complicated expensive parts with a lot of tooling research and development, I think the balance is pretty good at the moment. Then we, as trackside engineers, can push hard on the performance side of the car and that's a fantastic opportunity for people like myself working with great wind tunnels, great bunch of people, just developing performance.

Q: James, Toro Rosso have just invested quite a lot in their technical assets recently.

JK: Absolutely. It's often maybe misunderstood but Toro Rosso's very much a team in its own right. We work well with Red Bull where we can, for example the same engine for next year and so on but yes, we have invested. I think, certainly, there's a commercial side which is not within the remit of technical directors to comment on but technically it's not difficult but there's a big emotional thing there because we are all competitive people who want to go and beat the other guy and a big part of that is making your own car so it's quite a big topic on a number of levels, I think.

Q: Anything further to add, Jonathan, having heard from the technical directors?

JN: Only that I would echo that the balance of being able to trade parts to a team that maybe has a smaller budget or is a new entrant I think is a really important part of attracting investors in, because as in any business you want to invest what resource you have in what makes a difference and it takes time to put the capital footprint down and to put the competence in place. If you're trying to do all that from day one, your chance of survival and then running properly into the series... I think the risk is induced and you make it less attractive as an investment proposition.

Q: (Sam Collins – RaceCar Engineering) Question for the guys in the back row: one of the things you guys are indulging in is a battle for Constructors' positions but at the same time you're trying to develop quite a complicated car for next year within the resource restriction agreement. How are you managing the cost of developing the car against the cost of trying to get those points to get the Constructors' positions and the money it pays out, particularly in the case of Marussia as well.

DG: To a certain extent we have thrown most of our weight behind 2014 and quite a long time ago but that's not to say we've not had small developments which have come recently and they've been extremely cost-effective developments which has helped as well and the financial burden of 2014 is big as well. Basically, by judging small mechanical upgrades that can maybe help optimise the aerodynamics of the car – by that, obviously, I mean suspension to allow you to run in the place and the track to get the best downforce from the map you've got – so we've worked a lot on those small parts which can give you gains for not very much money and also not very much lead time which is good. So we're still doing a certain amount of filtering back ideas from the track back to design: is it easy to design, is it easy to make, can we do it for the next race? Yes, OK, let's go for it, but the emphasis is very much on 2014.

TMcC: Yeah, for us it's a little bit different due to the position we've found ourselves in at the start of the year, as I sort of mentioned earlier. Nowadays, as well as cfd, the wind tunnel, aerodynamics on the track, these are all things which we are monitoring all the time and trying to improve. The regulations next year are obviously quite different from our power train point of view, the influence of the exhaust on the downforce is obviously quite different but for us, fundamentally there are some flow mechanisms and understanding of this year's car which we really had to get on top of and understand before we just abandoned it an early stage and got straight into the 2014 car, so we've had a bit of a different approach. Now, from a resource point of view we've had to be careful not to throw too much at this year's car but it's always that balance as an engineer: fundamentally understanding this year's car was pivotal for us to design a good car next year so we've played that balance.

JK: I think similar thoughts really. There are certain things you can learn this year which will help you next year but a lot of the major bits are not carry-over at all so it really is a balancing act of trying to efficiently do what you can, let's say in the latter half of this season primarily, for this year and make sure you're not losing focus on next year. It's always tricky because when these regulations come along so does an opportunity to take a step forward but there will be a risk of damaging your previous year if you do that, so it's very much a balancing act. I think with the lack of the carry-over of a lot of the stuff that you do, you have to try and – as Tom says – tune a little bit of what you need to understand to make it relevant for next year as well.

Q: (Dan Knutson – Auto Action and National Speedsport News) James, now that you've had a chance to look at the cars, what caused your drivers to retire in Korea?

JK: It was actually a brake duct issue which I've never seen before. It was very frustrating, we had the same problem on the same lap for both drivers and it obviously meant, unfortunately, that we had to retire them which was a real shame. I think points for Daniel were relatively clear and secure and in fact we were just about to tell him to push to try and catch the guy ahead at the end so it was very frustrating for all of us. It was actually a structural failure on brake ducts which shouldn't cause any damage but they led to us having to retire the cars because of temperature problems.

Q: Did it have any overheating impact on the engines, is there any reduction in life in the engines?

JK: No, we think the engines are OK. It was a general effect around the car when you have something which moves and causes a flowfield issue. We think we're OK there. It didn't actually cause any more damage than the parts themselves that broke in the end but unfortunately it was enough to have to retire.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – RacingLines) Jonathan, you said earlier on that you've got to do the job twice, i.e. in 2014 and then again in 2015. A lot of teams have two separate design operations, one working on the next year and the other on the one thereafter. Is that the approach that you've adopted and does that fit into McLaren's matrix system?

JN: No. There's just so much to be done in the near term that it's all hand on deck. We're 12 weeks away from the end of the year, 16 weeks away from putting the car out for a test or something like that. I think a Formula One car is 13,500 parts with the engine as one part number. There's a lot of work to do with almost no carry-over. Everybody will be focused on trying to get the learning out of this and I think there's so much still to be discovered through those early two or three months of running these cars, both from a reliability and energy optimisation, aerodynamics, the new flow structures around the car. I'm not quite sure what you would start your next one on so we've got to learn and digest all that first.

Q: (Sam Collins - RaceCar Engineering) How do the five engineers here feel about going into the 2014 competition season with no running on the wet tyres with the new powertrain?

PF: I'm honestly not quite sure how to answer the question really. The wet tyre performance at the moment is a little bit of a challenge and how would you ever test a tyre and prove it I don't know. It's one of those impossible questions to answer but I'm sure we're all going to be uneasy over that step into the unknown. I'm sure you can say that at the first test, when we run out on slick tyres, for instance, exactly how are the tyres going to behave with the new powertrain. The torque delivery of the power units are quite dramatically different and I suppose the stress that's put on the tyres in qualifying compared to the race will also be dramatically different from this year. I think there's a learning curve on both the slick and the wet tyres to be honest.

PM: It's going to be interesting, isn't it? We'll see what happens. Like all of these things, once you're faced with a wet track and the car's got to go, then you will deal with the circumstances as they arise to you. It's a challenge, we'll all face it and we'll all treat it in different ways and I'm sure we'll all come out the other side thinking it wasn't too bad.

DG: Yeah, I echo the two guys' comments, honestly. You'll deal with it as it happens and those who've made the best job of it will get something out of it. I guess that's one way to look at it.

TMCC: Not really much more to add really. With the wet tyre you've got torque delivery to deal with and you will work with those parameters to get the most out of your package.

JK: Same.

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## F1 Japan Blog - Friday report

The ants were marching two-by-two in Suzuka on Friday morning, with the drive pairings from the top four teams in the constructors' standings taking up the first eight slots on the F1 timesheets. Lewis Hamilton took top honours for Mercedes, while champion-to-be Sebastian Vettel was first of the Red Bulls in third place.

Friday morning dawned bright and sunny over Formula One's most popular circuit, with ideal track conditions and grandstands packed with Japan's uniquely passionate fans. Unusually for F1, the fans had plenty to watch, with the teams undertaking a decent amount of running on the challenging Hugenholtz track and drivers making an unusual number of errors.

It was at the back of the grid that the bulk of problems took place, with both Jules Bianchi and Giedo van der Garde running into trouble at Degner, while Pastor Maldonado found himself three-wheeling at Spoon when his wheel came loose and attempted a lap on its own. Bianchi's shunt had far-reaching consequences; the Frenchman damaged the chassis of his Marussia and was forced to sit out FP2 while repairs were completed.

Mercedes' strong performance in the morning was promising, but does not make an interesting weekend a certainty. Red Bull traditionally mask their pace on a Friday, keeping something in reserve for Saturday's qualifying session, and Vettel's four consecutive wins coupled with three career victories in Japan speak of likely success in Suzuka again this weekend.

Vettel asserted his dominance over the field in another error-ridden session on Friday afternoon, one that claimed a number of more high profile scalps than the morning's running. Kimi Raikkonen, Sergio Perez, and Maldonado all saw their sessions cut short by accidents on track, with Perez' shunt requiring a check-up at the circuit medical centre. The Mexican racer was deemed to be fine by the doctors.

Maldonado ran into the barriers at Degner 2 early on in FP2, running nose first into the wall that claimed Bianchi's Marussia in the morning. While the front end of the FW35 suffered significant damage, it is unlikely the Venezuelan racer will lose any more track time than that lost on Friday afternoon, with only a limited rebuild needed.

Next to crash was Perez, who ran sideways into the barriers at Spoon, damaging his car significantly in the process. Finally, Raikkonen beached himself in the gravel at Dunlop after losing control of the rear end of his E21 on entry into the corner. There was a near miss for Fernando Alonso, who spun but recovered early on.

Most of the session was given over to long runs and race simulations, as is traditional on Friday afternoons. While the pace belonged to the Red Bull, their rivals looked to be more competitive than has been the case at the last two circuits, opening up the prospect of an interesting race on Sunday afternoon.

F1 times (unofficial)

1. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1m34.157s [19 laps]
2. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1m34.4878s [19 laps]
3. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1m34.768s [24 laps]
4. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1m34.787s [20 laps]
5. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1m35.126s [14 laps]
6. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1m35.154s [16 laps]
7. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1m35.179s [15 laps]
8. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1m35.364s [17 laps]
9. Sergio Perez (McLaren) 1m35.450s [27 laps]
10. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1m35.635s [19 laps]
11. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1m35.868s [22 laps]

12. Nico Hulkenberg (Sauber) 1m35.900s [18 laps]
13. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1m36.066s [20 laps]
14. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1m36.165s [19 laps]
15. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1m36.178s [12 laps]
16. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1m36.340s [23 laps]
17. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1m36.399s [18 laps]
18. Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) 1m36.760s [22 laps]
19. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1m37.595s [22 laps]
20. Jules Bianchi (Marussia) 1m37.629s [8 laps]
21. Giedo van der Garde (Caterham) 1m38.025s [15 laps]
22. Max Chilton (Marussia) 1m38.763s [18 laps]

FP2 times (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1m33.852s [35 laps]
2. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1m34.020s [35 laps]
3. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1m34.114s [36 laps]
4. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1m34.202s [17 laps]
5. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1m34.411s [30 laps]
6. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1m34.442s [36 laps]
7. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1m34.473s [30 laps]
8. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1m34.698s [35 laps]
9. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1m34.912s [34 laps]
10. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1m35.087s [32 laps]
11. Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) 1m35.089s [36 laps]
12. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1m35.109s [34 laps]
13. Nico Hulkenberg (Sauber) 1m35.182s [34 laps]
14. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1m35.275s [35 laps]
15. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1m35.341s [25 laps]
16. Sergio Perez (McLaren) 1m35.709s [8 laps]
17. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1m36.136s [41 laps]
18. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1m36.722s [6 laps]
19. Charles Pic (Caterham) 1m37.630s [31 laps]
20. Giedo van der Garde (Caterham) 1m37.905s [36 laps]
21. Max Chilton (Marussia) 1m38.121s [33 laps]
22. Jules Bianchi (Marussia) NO TIME SET [0 laps]

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## F1 Japan Blog - Thursday press conference

Another week, another Thursday press conference in which six drivers faced the media to discuss contracts, the ever-popular Suzuka Circuit, and the prospect of an era of snooze-making action on track.

Present were Jenson Button (McLaren), Nico Hulkenberg (Sauber), Pastor Maldonado (Williams), Charles Pic (Caterham), Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso), and Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull).

Q: Sebastian, just a few days ago you described coming here as coming to the best track in the world. Can you explain why it is the best track in the world? I'll ask everyone else the same question, so prepare your answers.

Sebastian VETTEL: I think generally we race on the best tracks in the world and, as I said, I think Suzuka is one of the best, if not the best, in my point of view. As a driver, just going through the first sector is fantastic, with the high-speed corners. It's a track where we really get to challenge ourselves, get to push the cars to their limits and obviously it's much more intense feeling the car at the limit in a high-speed corner rather than in medium or low-speed (corners). There are quite many around here. It's a very tricky track, very challenging. Another great corner, I think, is Spoon, which is off-camber on the way out and therefore it's quite tricky to keep the car on the right line. So, all in all, it's a place where we love to race. On top of that there is a fantastic atmosphere, crazy Japanese fans. They are very passionate about us coming here and I think all the drivers we do get a lot of respect when we come here but equally a lot of support.

Q: Jenson, an extraordinary record here - you've finished all 11 of your races here, plus the two in Fuji as well. Your thoughts on Suzuka?

Jenson BUTTON: Yeah, I'm not sure that's really the best record to have around Suzuka but, yeah, it's great to be back. I love this circuit. I think most of us do. It's a very unforgiving circuit. Very fast and flowing, especially from one up until, well, actually, after the second Degner. It's a really good section up there. So, very enjoyable. It's a tricky circuit to overtake on, but I think the DRS zone is hopefully going to help a little bit with that. But it's always a flat-out race, with hardly any rest. We've got the hard and the medium tyres here, so it's going to be pushing all the way, which is what we love as racing drivers, especially around a circuit like Suzuka. So, hoping for a good weekend.

Q: Charles, just one race here so far.

Charles PIC: Yeah, last year. It was my first time last year and it's not the easiest track to learn, especially the first sector because it's very fast. But definitely it's one of my favourites. I think it's one of the tracks, with Spa, where you get the most sensation out of the car. I like it very much.

Q: Pastor, you finished eighth here last year?

Pastor MALDONADO: Yeah, this is my third time here. Very nice track. I agree with all of them - it's one of the best of the season. I think all the drivers are very happy to be here. The fans' community is very big. It's a special weekend. I hope to do my best to be in the points again this year.

Q: Jean-Eric, 13th last year, what are your thoughts on the circuit?

Jean-Eric VERGNE: It's a track that I love. Obviously all the drivers love it. It's a great atmosphere. You can really feel the whole history here. Obviously, as Spa, it's a track where you can, in a way, stretch the legs of the car, which is a really nice feeling.

Q: And Nico, seventh last year, I think.

Nico HULKENBERG: Last year was a good race for us. Also one of my favourite circuits. I think everything else has been mentioned by these guys.

Q: An individual question for you all. Sebastian, also you mentioned last weekend that the car was very much on the edge. We see these extraordinary performances from you, almost weekend after weekend. How easy or how difficult is it to drive?

SV: I think it's never easy. Obviously I think the car, don't get me wrong, it's on another level when you compare for example with Charles' car, there is a difference for sure. But no matter how quick the car, in the end, makes it around the track, you will always push the car to its edge and try to get the best out of the car. We obviously have been to Korea a couple of times and we know the trend of the track, especially throughout the race – the front right is on the limit. So, therefore, you obviously try to set up your car to fight that sort of problem and, yeah, I think overall it's never easy. We had to push a lot in the race. We were under pressure from behind with Lotus. Obviously we were strong enough to always have a little bit of a gap but yeah, you could not, unless maybe in the last two laps, I could not lean back and rest too much.

Q: Jenson, somebody very close to you a few years ago said you were becoming a Honda man through-and-through. That possibility emerges again in 2015 if you're still with McLaren. What are the chances?

JB: There's a chance, yes. There's definitely a chance. I think first of all it's great that Formula One has another engine manufacturer that's interested in coming back in. I think that's very good for the sport and hopefully it will bring others back into the sport. Japan... it feels that Japan needs either a driver or a manufacturer in the sport. Obviously it's been a little while since they've had a manufacturer and with no Japanese drivers on the grid now. It's a country that really does love its motorsport, has true racing fans. The guys said there were hundreds of people out on Wednesday, on set-up day – yesterday – when it was chucking it down with rain and they were watching them set-up. That's a true racing fan – none of this Monaco stuff! So, it shows it's in their culture and in their blood. I think it's very special for Japan to have a manufacturer in the sport – but obviously that's not for another year and a half. We've got a long time before that and hopefully a very good year next year with Mercedes-Benz.

Q: Charles, you so nearly led the team to regain tenth place in the Constructors' Championship last weekend in Korea. Do you think that can happen before the end of the year?

CP: We hope so. It was very close in Korea. We need 13th place and finish 14th. So... yeah... we will keep pushing very hard to get this 13th place. It's very important for us and also to prepare well next year. So we will do everything we can.

Q: Pastor, it hasn't been a good season so far this year. What are your thoughts on staying with Williams? Your future with Williams?

PM: For sure it was a hard beginning of the season and quite hard times for us as a team. We've been working very, very hard, 24 hours per day, trying to improve our performance and trying to do something different to improve the car performance and at the moment, we find some way but maybe it's not enough to catch the teams who are quite close to us. For sure, it's nothing to do. We need to keep trying, we need to keep doing until the last race I think. There are still five races to go. We've been quite close, even last weekend, to being in the points. We had some problem in the last part of the race but yeah, I'll keep trying to get some more points before the end of the season and then... we will see for the next year. At the moment I have a contract and it's looking quite good.

Q: Jean-Eric, I think you thought things were going to be better last weekend than they were. What was the problem? What actually happened?

JEV: First of all, we struggled the whole weekend to find a correct balance. In the end both cars retired because of brake-ducts being broken. It was probably the issue that we had in the weekend. So we changed many things for this weekend. Obviously Sauber has done a very good job to catch us back so now they are just in front in the championship with the same points. Now for us it is a five-race season. So, we're pushing like crazy. I believe we've got a good car and if we put everything in together we will score some more points. That's definitely our target.

Q: Nico, how come it's coming good at this stage of the season? What's changed – you or the car?

NH: I haven't changed! I certainly haven't changed. I think the car. Of course we've put on some updates: a big one in Budapest – which we now understand better and better – and then some small bits and bobs. I think the tyres did the rest. And what we did in Korea I think was outstanding. I'm really happy and proud about that but we probably punched above our weight there and out-performed a few cars which we shouldn't do. But there was this opportunity and we grabbed it. So that was very good.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – O Estado de Sao Paulo) Sebastian, you had a very fast car since the beginning of the season. Then from Spa, you've had four poles, four victories; the gap increased even more to your competitors. How do you personally explain that?

SV: I wasn't on pole in Spa. As you mentioned, I think it's right to say that we had a very strong car from the beginning of the season, strong enough to always finish in a very very strong position on Sunday afternoon. Lately, I think we've been very strong in qualifying as well whereas at the beginning of the year Mercedes definitely seemed to have the upper hand. I think there's no real explanation from our side, there's not one part that went on the car and all of a sudden it was that much quicker. I think we were able to improve the car so that arriving at Spa the car was better than it was in Hungary. Since then, we've just tried again to improve, there's new bits coming every race weekend, even though sometimes it's a very small package, but even so, we're pushing very hard, trying to improve the car. I'm sure the others do the same but it seems that we've had lots of good parts coming lately and making the car quicker. Also, I think there's a factor of you understanding the car more than at the beginning of the season so you are able to react quicker, change the set-up in the right manner. Obviously there's not so much time available. If you look on Friday, you have one chance overnight to make a change and I think we got better as a team in that regard to get closer to one hundred percent on Saturday morning already and then benefit throughout the weekend.

Q: (Frederic Ferret – L'Equipe) Sebastian, if I'm correct, in 2008 you climbed Mount Fuji; can you tell us more about that? And can you tell us more about your helmet, last year with the Japanese flag? Where is it now and does it mean something special for you?

SV: Yeah, climbed the... well, climbed is not really the... you don't need a rope to go up there. We started very early, together with Alexander Wurz, it was a fun trip and we climbed or we walked up so we reached the summit as soon as the sun came up which was very special. There were a lot of people telling us off because it's too cold and it's too late in the year but actually it's not a problem, so it was quite cold at night but not too bad. It was a

very nice experience to be up there, it's very high, close to 4000 meters above sea level, so it was a unique experience. Regarding the helmet of last year, I'm not sure... I think it's at home. Always in Japan, the last couple of years we came here with a special helmet design. I'm using an Arai helmet which is a Japanese manufacturer and obviously it's their home Grand Prix, not just for my helmet but also for many other helmets. It's nice to give a little bit back to them, but also to the fans, to come up with a special idea and I think also this year's helmet looks very nice.

Q: (Abhishek Takle - Midday) Nico, you've given Lotus a deadline to agree a deal (for next year). Can you update us as to what's going on there and if not Lotus, what are your other options?

NH: I've not set a deadline. I think that was a misunderstanding and someone not laying it out correctly. What I've basically said is that I would like to have clarification or certainty by the end of October.

Q: (Abhishek Takle - Midday) Nico, Eric Boullier said that weight would not be an issue if he chose to give you the drive. Does that reassure you after all the talk about heavier drivers being marginalised, that at some point you might not find a seat next year?

NH: To be honest, not, and there's no one from the team who has personally told me that weight or height is an issue, but this whole discussion, for me, is not worth having because I am what I am and I can't change it.

Q: (Ian Parkes - Press Association) Sebastian, I was wondering whether you have read or heard about Lewis Hamilton's comments following the race in Korea?

SV: Yeah, I was told. Obviously it's very nice to hear something like that. I think I can only give it back, I think. There is respect amongst the drivers, obviously there's a lot of stuff that gets written and said but I think that the most important thing is when you go up to another driver, whether you feel respected or not and I think that is the case. I think Lewis is one of the best drivers currently in Formula One. I get along quite well with him lately so I can only say 'thank you very much' and give it back.

Q: (Ian Parkes - Press Association) Can I just follow up on that? You obviously read about Lewis's Tweets but I was referring to his immediate post-race comments?

SV: Sorry, I didn't hear (those).

Q: (Ian Parkes - Press Association) The post-race comments referred to the fact that your era now was as predictable as the Schumacher era, in that when you watched a race back then, you watched the start, fell asleep and then by the end of the race, you knew who had won.

SV: Well, that's a compliment, first of all. I think it's very different. I think there's probably one race which was a bit of an exception. If you take Singapore, the gaps we had and were able to build up were incredible, to lap two seconds quicker than the cars behind us, but obviously it depends on who was behind us at the time and which tyres (they had) and so on, but anyways, what I want to say is that if you take Korea which I think is more similar to Spa, the gap was something between three and six seconds for the whole race. If you look at ten years ago, it was more like thirty to sixty seconds which is a big difference. Don't get me wrong, it's a nice cushion to have in the car, when you see that you're three seconds down the road, but equally you know that if you make one stupid mistake - in Korea, for example, a lock-up which was very likely and three seconds is nothing compared to thirty or sixty.

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