

Fl Korea Blog - Sunday press conference

It was an entirely uncontroversial post-race press conference that took place at the Korean International Circuit on Sunday afternoon.

Present were Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull), Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus), and Romain Grosjean (Lotus).

Q: Sebastian, tell us how that race went for you. You had to deal with two pace cars at the same time during that race. How was it for you?

Sebastian VETTEL: Yeah! Not great getting stuck behind the safety car. Obviously we had a little bit of a gap. Extremely happy with the result, great job by the team, we had two very good stops. I think it was quite good to have the safety car coming out the first time, we were just a couple of corners before the pit entry. And then fortunately we had enough pace to always open up a little bit of a gap even though I think Kimi and Romain, to be fair, were pretty competitive the longer the stint was. So I think they did maybe a better job with their tyres, looking after their tyres. But, all in all, yeah, fantastic. I'm just loving what I do. The team is fantastic, I think we all have a good time and just enjoy the moment really.

Q: Kimi, finishing second, well done buddy. You had to start a little bit further back in ninth place. How was the drive to get yourself back into a chance of getting on the podium?

Kimi RÄIKKÖNEN: It was OK. I mean from the beginning I lost I think one place on the first lap, no, on the first straight, but then there was an accident so get it back. The car was just understeering too much, the whole weekend, even today, so I have to try to look after the front tyre and that was really the limitation on how much I could push and obviously we were stuck behind the traffic after the pitstops and then we decided to stop earlier and it was a good move and obviously the safety car helped a little bit but we had the speed and we could run until the end. So even without the safety car we could have maybe run until the end and still have a podium position. So it was good – but not ideal.

Q: Tell us about the pass on Romain going into Turn One. It looked rather close.

KR: I think he moved a few times on the left. I got a good run, he made a mistake in I think the second-last corner and I got the good run and I heard that there will be yellow flags at the end of the straight so I knew he's not going to pass me back with the DRS because it's not open with the yellow flags. So I thought I would try to overtake and it was not too difficult.

Q: Romain, well done, you did such a cracking drive. Obviously getting yourself into second place, that lovely fight. Tell us the story of the fight with Lewis to start with.

Romain GROSJEAN: Well I think it was pretty good fun. We had a good start, good run for the back straight and then could go for the place with Lewis. Then I think he kept a little bit of KERS to go for Turn Five and I had to defend a little bit but it was pretty good at the start and then after the first pitstop again, same story, so yeah, it was a hard job. And then it was good to be very close to the Red Bull. They didn't go too far away so I think we had a good chance to catch them back but unfortunately for me – and luckily for Kimi, that's good for the team – the safety car came and we had to pit at the same time and the same tyre age. I think we wanted to get a little bit of an advantage. Then I made a small mistake, my fault and Kimi could pass me – and then yellow flags at Turn Four, Turn Three and I couldn't use the DRS. Tried to push hard at the end, good to be back on the podium, good for the team and happy to be here.

Q: Seb, one thing we kept hearing about was a little bit of concern about the right-front tyre. What was the issue there?

SV: This track, it's known that the limit is the front-right. We saw it the previous years, and basically it's good to have the team on the radio warning you – because obviously you see what's going on, the tyre grains immediately and then kind of stabilises. But when it stops graining basically there's nothing left and that's quite dangerous because it's quite likely to have a big lock-up. You have a flat spot, which could end with pitting the stint earlier than you want or having a tyre puncture. So yeah, they were quite worried, similar to last year. I thought I had it more or less in control but obviously it's good to communicate.

Q: And what about leaving here, we've got Japan coming up. Looking forward to that? Is that a place you enjoy? By the look on your face yes.

SV: I think it's the best track in the world, to be honest. The fans are crazy – completely crazy in a positive way so really looking forward to Japan. I think all of us who get massive support there, big fans of motorsport, passionate about Formula One and I think they enjoy the whole weekend, so I'm very much looking forward to one of the highlights during the season.

Q: Sebastian, how important was it right at the start of the race to get that cushion?

SV: Yeah, it's always tricky here because the way to the first corner is quite short but then you have two big straight lines. To be the first car is the worse because you have no tow. I had a good start and could focus on the first corner. I had a very good exit and was able to get a couple of metres between myself and Lewis and then I think Lewis was in more trouble with Romain from behind into Turn Three and I obviously benefit from that and had a little bit of cushion and again for the next straight and then kept the lead – which I think was crucial. After that I tried to build a gap and keep it quite consistent. I knew that on the soft tyres it will be tricky and yeah, obviously with the safety car later on it got quite busy.

Q: And did you expect to do only around 11 laps on the soft tyre right at the start?

SV: Well, to be honest I think we came in last. I think we reacted to the other people behind. I think Lewis pitted lap nine, Romain lap 10. In that regard we had to react because obviously a ten, twelve lap-old supersoft tyre is slower than a new Prime, so we were responding to them. I think we could have stayed out another two or three laps but yeah, it didn't really hurt our strategy. I think we estimated more or less to pit around that time.

Q: And given what was going to happen, with that last safety car, when you came in for a stop did you have new Primes and how hard were you pushing after that?

SV: The safety car came in. Fortunately we were... I think I was turning into Turn 15 and I saw the safety car coming out so we pitted immediately. So did Romain. I think Lewis... Kimi pitted a couple of laps before that so his tyres were a little bit older but obviously took quite a long time before the safety car came back in and then there was another safety. So I think in terms of tyre age it was no problem. Obviously the cars get lighter towards the end, so fortunately we didn't have to challenge the absolute maximum out of the tyres because I think the Lotuses were probably a little bit better in terms of endurance. Yeah. So, I think the speed was there and in the end obviously I tried to build up a little bit of a gap to Kimi and keep it quite consistent.

Q: Kimi, eighth in the early stages, could you imagine being second at the end?

KR: We have done that before, so obviously... it's not ideal to start so behind and not having maybe the best weekend. Bit similar to the last race really but the car was a bit better in the race. Still not ideal, a little bit too much understeer and I lost one place or two places at the start and then got them back in corner three. And then I was able to pass people and then sat behind them again after the pitstop. I had more speed but I couldn't get past and then we decided to stop a bit earlier and when the safety car came for whatever it was, five laps or something, obviously it helped a little bit for us to close the gap in the front but we managed to pass all the cars apart from these two guys already, before the safety car. So it maybe helped a bit in the end because my front tyre was in quite a bad way, it kind of ran out of the rubber in the end. So I couldn't go much longer any more – but obviously that's the part of racing. Sometimes it helps you a bit.

Q: I'm sure you were pushing hard right at the end but just nothing you could do about Sebastian?

KR: No, I mean. Let's put it this way: even if we would have started behind him, we still don't have the speed of him. Not far off from him in the race with a little bit from all the tyres but I mean it's so difficult to overtake if you're not massively faster. So, I think that was pretty OK what we did today.

Q: And a pretty good result for the team.

KR: Yeah. I think that's the more important. For them to get their... not the maximum points but not far off. I think we scored quite a bit more than the guys in front of us in the championship so it's good for them.

Q: Romain, that chase in the early stages, were you absolutely on the limit there when you were trying to catch him?

RG: No, I think we played it pretty well. It was a good first lap and a good exit of the first pitstop fighting with Lewis who was very quick on two, three laps but I think then he had an issue with his tyres. I looked at the board at one stage and think from one lap to another one, I had the feeling he lost 0.8 seconds to me. And it seems that every time there will be a battle with Seb, there's a safety car coming. Same as Germany unfortunately. We had the plan to pit quite early, just a few laps after the safety car came, trying to jump him and go for a very long last stint – but it didn't work because of the safety car. But basically the car was very good. I mean at one stage we thought that we will switch to three stops because the front was going away – so I pushed a bit harder and then the team told me, "can you try to make it to two?" So I backed off a little bit but the car came back even better and I was looking consistently quick and so on. And then I think bad luck for me, a safety car came. I did a small mistake on the restart, Kimi could go into Turn One. I was going to use the DRS to get the place back and again, bad luck, Turn Three was yellow. It is what it is. It's my fault, I went a bit wide in Turn 15, not the end of the world I think. What is good is that Seb has not been flying away today. We were always within four seconds of him and looking pretty well on the long stint. It's not a track that is favouring us with the front-limitation. We all suffer with front-right tyre graining and that was the problem, the main problem. We know we take care more of our rear tyres. So, it's good to be back on the podium, good to score a lot of points for Lotus and let's go to Japan which is the most beautiful track of the world.

Q: We were talking about your confidence earlier on in the weekend. I guess it's been given a boost. What's it going to be like in Suzuka.

RG: Hopefully we go for P! I don't know. I think it was good to have a good start, to be able to fight at the front and it's good to have a strong qualifying, a strong race. I don't need any luck to be there. It just goes how it goes and it's looking pretty good. The car is suiting me more and more and I think we can still learn a little bit but there we are.

Q: (Ian Parkes – Press Association) Seb, at the start of the second safety car period, were you aware that between turns one and two the car ahead of you was not the official safety car? Did you have any thoughts about it at all? Was there anything on the team radio, did they say anything, because Bernd Maylander was actually at the back of the field?

SV: I saw... I think it was a BMW or... no sorry, it looked like a BMW. I think it was a Hyundai or Kia SUV. You want the number plate? It was not Bernd Maylander's, so it was not the safety car. I saw that. Obviously then the team said 'yellow flag', it wasn't quite clear that it was the safety car but then the safety car board was flashing and I lifted and obviously saw that there was another car on the track, took quite easy to make sure I got past. I didn't know what the incident was until I saw the smoke and so on. Obviously they said there was a crash. So I knew it was not the safety car.

Q: (Ian Parkes – Press Association) You now have a 77 point lead in the championship – I don't know if you're aware – but you can now win the title in Japan next week. What does it mean to you now to be standing on the brink of that fourth successive world title?

SV: Yeah. I'm trying not to think about it to be honest. I'm trying to focus more on the present I think we obviously had the incredible chance, I think two years ago, to do so. We did it but I think there are still a lot of points to get, even though it looks very good for us. There's still a chance for Fernando, I think, so we have to stay on top of our game but to be honest, I think I said on the podium, we're just having a good time. We enjoy the fact that the team is working very well. The car is working... it's on the edge to be honest, more so than you would probably think from the outside but it's obviously nice when you get the results like Singapore or this weekend. To be honest with you, I don't really care. I look forward to Japan because it's one of the nicest tracks of the whole season.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – O Estado de Sao Paulo) Romain, can you describe to us the conversation with the team when you were in the situation to fight with Kimi? We could hear some parts of the conversation but not all of it.

RG: Our radio is quite bad, I have to say. I don't hear most of the conversations either. I just made a mistake, Kimi could go for it and the unfortunately there was a yellow flag at turn three so I couldn't get my place back. I was quicker today but then we have rules not to fight. It's a track where it is most impossible to overtake even though there are long straights. I mean in sector two and three there is so much issue with the front tyres so you cannot get close enough and then lose a lot of downforce, lose a lot of lap time. I should have avoided that astroturf in turn 15 and it would have been the end of the conversation.

Q: (Abhishek Takle – Midday) Sebastian, you spoke earlier on the podium about this circuit being a little bit difficult on the front right tyre and we heard radio transmission from Rocky [race engineer Guillaume Rocquelin] saying ‘it’s opening up, take it easy’ but then you set the fastest lap. Was it perhaps more of a concern on the pit wall than in the cockpit?

SV: No, I think they obviously have a lot of data that they go through and they could obviously follow pretty well what was happening on the track. Obviously I have my eye on the front right, it’s quite easy to see. It’s more tricky with the rear tyres in the mirrors, but we know that this track is pretty monster for the front tyres, especially front right, also from previous years. And then obviously – Romain described it pretty well – once the tyre does come back, inside the cockpit at least you have the feeling that the car is alive again, the car is alive but actually the tyre is dead, there is no more rubber to grain so the tyre is more or less worn, so it’s quite tricky, because if you have a big lock-up, that could mean that it’s the end of the race. You have to come into the pits because you have a massive flat spot so I was aware but I could see that there was still a lot of rubber left and that the tyre was still graining. I think I was aware of the risk but it was still OK.

Q: (Frederic Ferret – L’Equipe) To Romain and Sebastian, do you think the Lotus had the pace to beat the Red Bull today without the safety cars?

RG: I don’t know how much Sebastian left in his pocket. I figured it was pretty close after the... well, while I was close to him, I didn’t want to close the gap too early, because you know that if follow a car by too much, we are all aware that the front tyre is the issue so you lose a lot of downforce from the fronts so you grain even more. So every time he was a little bit ahead I was giving a gap and then following the gap and I was surprised how our pace at one stage... I thought the front tyres were going away but I was surprised our lap time was still improving, so I was catching a little bit back and I think the last stints would have been pretty epic without the safety car, because that was basically the longest one on the tyres and we were going right to the end of their life so that could have been either the gamble to go for the lead... maybe both of us... I don’t know if we would have reacted but it would have been close and no more rubber on the tyres.

SV: Yeah, I think it would have been close. You never know whether the safety car helps you or not. I think Lotus probably had more range today. I think we had a little bit more pace initially but I think Romain could have afforded for the last stint to pit a little bit earlier than us. Maybe we could not react to that immediately because we know that it will be tight for our range, so I think it would have been close without the safety car, but in the end, I think Kimi was obviously quite consistent, doing lap times around 1m 42.0s and we just had two or three tenths in hand. Maybe at the very end, a little bit more. I think he was also controlling the gap to Romain behind but as I said, maybe in terms of raw pace we were a little bit quicker, but in terms of range, the Lotus was again very strong.

Q: (Trent Price – Richland F1) Question for both Lotus drivers: you said after the first initial graining phase that the times were improving but that safety car... was there anything on your Friday data to suggest that you might have actually made it to the end, without the safety car?

KR: We would probably have tried it, or looked at some point at how the tyres... without the safety car we gained a lot of time and lap places if we’d stopped earlier in the last pit stops, so who knows? In the end we didn’t stop again now. You can always say that if but it makes no difference. You have to react and do what you think is the right thing and sometimes certain things help you. My front tyre was pretty done in the end but we finished the race in a pretty good position. We would probably try to run until then anyhow.

RG: Well, I think we hold the long runs on Friday to see how it goes and we choose which tyre we preferred. I think everybody did, it was the medium tyres and now we know after one stage it would balance the car a little bit. The question is how much to push at the beginning because the first few laps are the most critical from the front tyres. Yeah, it more or less looked as it was on the plan and then once you fit the prime tyres and you do your second stint, you know how much you can extend the last one and they can try to calculate the degradation and so on to give you the best chance to have the longest stint possible.

Q: (Luigi Perna – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Kimi, you had some action moments in this race, coming from the back, first with Fernando Alonso, then with Romain. From the start of the race to the finish of the race, can you describe it and did you enjoy it?

KR: Yeah, it was nice, I think we had pretty OK speed and then we made the most of it after yesterday. The car still wasn’t ideal today but we managed to be a bit faster on used tyres than some others. At the beginning I managed to overtake a few cars and then I got stuck on the second... after the pit stop I got stuck with the same cars again and then decided to stop earlier. I was pretty OK after the restart. Romain made a mistake and I managed to pass him and just didn’t have enough speed at the end and not enough tyres were left compared to them, because they stopped later. It was good fun but I would rather start in the front and finish in the front. It would have made our life a bit easier.

Q: (Abhishek Takle – Midday) Sebastian, the three world titles you’ve won so far have all come at different circuits. At which circuit would it be the most special for you to win your fourth World Championship?

SV: To be honest, I don’t think it really matters. I think it’s an exceptional situation anyway. Even though it looks very good, it’s still not over so we shouldn’t feel too comfortable. Which track? It’s not really important. Sure, there are a couple of tracks that probably mean a little bit more to the drivers than others. I think generally there’s no track on the calendar that I dislike but there are a couple of highlights. I think I mentioned on the podium next week, Japan, is one of the highlights in the year, but regarding the championship I think our target is to win the championship and not to win it in one place in particular.

F1 Korea Blog - Race report

It was like déjà vu all over again, when Sebastian Vettel pulled off another textbook racing start at the Korean International Circuit, opening up a 2.1 second lead over the course of the first lap and setting the stage for yet another lights to flag win.

Behind the defending world champion the race was for the two remaining spots on the podium. There was a brief moment on lap 11 when Vettel did not control the pace; the young German was in the process of making his first pit stop and passed the lead of the race over to teammate Mark Webber. The Australian made his own stop on the next lap, passing the lead back to the driver who does little else but dominate races.

Lewis Hamilton lost second place to Romain Grosjean early in the first lap, setting the stage for an ongoing battle between the two. Hamilton was the first of the pair to pit, but Grosjean made his own stop for fresh rubber one lap after the Briton, and when he emerged from the pits he was perfectly placed to battle the Mercedes driver for what was then fifth place. After the first round of stops were complete, the lap 11 battle between Hamilton and Grosjean – won by the Frenchman – saw the two racers fighting for the right to bookend Vettel on the podium.

For the first half of Sunday's race there was the prospect of a decent battle between the Mercedes and the Lotus, but Hamilton was struggling with extreme levels of degradation that saw him lose considerable time to Grosjean. On lap 19, the pair were split by 1.5 seconds. By lap 24, the gap was 5.8 seconds, and Hamilton was on the radio to the team saying "I've been through the graining process, they're dead."

One lap later and Grosjean had an 8.4 second lead over Hamilton, whose team had yet to call him in to the pits. By lap 27, Hamilton was 15 seconds behind the Lotus and being passed by teammate Nico Rosberg, who had been gaining at the rate of 2.5 seconds a lap. Rosberg sped past Hamilton, a broken front wing sparking all the way, and was called in to box while the Briton desperately pleaded to be allowed to box, telling the team "these tyres are f***ed".

On lap 30 Hamilton pitted at last, but with a slow stop for Rosberg when the broken front wing proved tricky to remove Mercedes' race was in tatters. Also in tatters was Sergio Perez' right front tyre, which delaminated Silverstone-style on lap 31, bringing out the Safety Car and giving Vettel – who was perfectly placed at the pit entrance – a free stop in the process.

The restart at the end of lap 36 was chaotic, with a spinning Adrian Sutil collecting Webber in an incident that saw the Australian stranded trackside, his car engulfed in flames. The Lotus driver pairing fought hard at the front, with Kimi Raikkonen getting the best of his teammate, before the Webber incident brought out both a never-before-seen Safety SUV and then the real Safety Car with Bernd Maylander at the wheel.

In the last 15 laps the Korean Grand Prix came alive behind the race leader, with Grosjean giving chase to Raikkonen while Nico Hulkenberg and Hamilton fought hard for fourth place. The Sauber was far superior on Sunday afternoon, with far more traction on the corner exit, while the Mercedes was visibly lacking even in the straight line speed that is traditionally its strength.

With ten laps to go, Fernando Alonso joined the Hulkenberg-Hamilton fight, but the Ferrari driver was unable to improve on sixth place. Vettel took the chequered flag with a 4.224s lead over the second-placed Raikkonen, the narrowest of his recent winning margins.

2013 Korean Grand Prix results

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1h43m13.701s
2. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) + 4.224s
3. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) + 4.927s
4. Nico Hulkenberg (Sauber) + 24.114s
5. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) + 25.255s
6. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) + 26.189s
7. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) + 26.698s
8. Jenson Button (McLaren) + 32.262s
9. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) + 34.390s
10. Sergio Perez (McLaren) + 35.155s
11. Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) + 35.990s
12. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) + 47.049s
13. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) + 50.013s
14. Charles Pic (Caterham) + 1m03.578s
15. Giedo van der Garde (Caterham) + 1m04.01s
16. Jules Bianchi (Marussia) + 1m07.970s
17. Max Chilton (Marussia) + 1m12.898s

Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) RET
Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) RET
Adrian Sutil (Force India) RET
Mark Webber (Red Bull) RET
Paul di Resta (Force India) RET

F1 Korea Blog - Saturday press conference

After another Vettel-dominated qualifying session the attendant media were treated to what may have been the shortest press conference in F1 history.

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

Q: Sebastian, you seemed to take this pole position more seriously than ever. Were you really under threat from Mercedes?

Sebastian VETTEL: Well, I think it was fairly close, as we could see, obviously. I had a very, very good lap in Q3, my first attempt. I knew that it will be tricky to beat that time – for myself. I tried again but obviously the second run I caught, I think Kimi, on the warm-up lap and then I was a little bit too close. We didn't have that much time in hand to drop back further, so not ideal but fortunately the first lap was good enough. I think, as expected, Mercedes was very strong. I think they feel pretty comfortable in the middle sector. So it's a tight battle, bit of a surprise this year we're pretty good in sector one, which is mostly straights, so the car is pretty good through those two corners that we have in the first sector and it seems that it's competitive down the straights which is always helpful – also for the race. It's the easiest part of the track to make up time. So in that regard I think we've got the balance right this weekend. Improved the car from yesterday. I wasn't entirely happy after the final practice yesterday so all in all we can be very happy with what we have achieved. So, that's why I was pretty happy after qualifying, to be honest.

Q: Lewis, yesterday you said you had the best Friday. Did you hope to be a little closer to Red Bull Racing, or even ahead of them?

Lewis HAMILTON: Well, we always hope – but we did as good a job as we could. I felt like I got the most out of the car and perhaps there's always a little bit of room to improve but in general it's been a good weekend so far, so I really hope that tomorrow we're able to fight with them y'know? We'll

wait and see.

Q: Is there a threat from behind? Do you think Ferrari could be the threat from behind?

LH: There are threats all around y'know? But I'm looking forward. So we'll wait and see.

Q: Mark, what about you? A difficult qualifying for you in a way because you're thinking of where you're going to start. I noticed that your speed trap time was about 5km/h up on Sebastian's.

Mark WEBBER: Yeah, we had to take a bit of pace out of the car for quali. Not much but just looking at how we would compromise quali a little bit more for the race. Actually pretty happy with quali. I could be two positions further up but that means I'd be 11th instead of 13th with the penalty. It was a pretty tight quali, as Seb touched on with two Mercs, Seb and myself. It was a good little battle. I think the race will be interesting. Obviously well and truly out of position but we will fight and come back through.

Q: You said you were looking for improvements in the setup of the car in both long- and short-run pace as well. Did you get that today?

MW: Yeah, I think we certainly improved the car in some areas we wanted to focus on, compared to yesterday. But conditions were a bit different today as well – so you've also got to keep an eye on that. They're going to be even more different tomorrow, so the long run in P2 might not be too relevant in the race tomorrow but we've got all of our ducks lined up and worked out what we needed to work on for the race and we'll see how it pays off tomorrow.

Q: Sebastian, there is the possibility of rain tomorrow. Presumably you prefer a dry race though?

SV: Well, I don't really mind. It's not a disaster if it starts to rain. Same as usual we have rain tyres in the garage but obviously they're talking about heavy wind. To be honest I arrived on Wednesday and it was very, very windy on Wednesday. Since then the wind seems to have died down and I think the typhoon has changed direction. I think tomorrow should be fine in terms of conditions – whether it is dry or wet. If we get some of the rain from the typhoon isn't 100 per cent clear at the moment but, as I said, it doesn't matter. Most important is that we did the job today and, yeah, looking forward to the race tomorrow.

Q: Sebastian, you seemed to have quite a lot to chat about in parc ferme at the end there...

SV: Yeah, just talking about the laps. I think it's a difficult lap. You obviously start with a lot of straights and then you've got all the corners at the end, so it's difficult to get the lap together, to get a clean lap in, many chances at the end to make small mistakes which lead into another and into another. Obviously Mark and I both aborted our last runs early so we were the first ones in parc ferme and had a bit of time in hand.

Q: Interesting DRS here in that you have two successive DRS zones; how much of a threat is that, do you feel?

SV: To be honest with you, it largely depends on tomorrow's conditions, the wind. I think we had a race two years ago where there was a massive head wind. It's a long straight from turn two down to the hairpin in turn three. Obviously it gives you flexibility to have the DRS zones right after each other, also on two quite long straights so we'll see. I think you can pick your corner but there's another straight after that where you could lose the position in case you gained it in the first place, so the same goes for turn one as it does for turn three.

Q: How pleased have you been with the car in the fast corners here, it is quite twisty?

SV: Yeah, pretty happy. Yesterday, I wasn't entirely happy, the car was good but I think we managed to improve it today and we seem to be able to go with the track which is usually the most important thing. The track ramped up throughout qualifying and I think we picked up pace and just went quicker. As I said, I was very happy with my first attempt in Q3. Unfortunately in the second attempt I ran into the back of Kimi, I think, but it was very tight. When I crossed the line, there wasn't that much time to drop back any further. That's how it goes sometimes but when you get it right around here it feels very nice.

Q: Lewis, how much are you looking at the successive DRS zone? Is that going to work in your favour if you hold position after the start?

LH: I don't know. Yeah, you've got the long straights; I really don't know what to expect tomorrow. I'm just going to be pushing as hard as I can to get past Sebastian and to put myself in the best position to fight. Hopefully long run pace is not so bad so let's hope that's the case tomorrow.

Q: That two tenths of a second margin between yourself and Sebastian: is that roughly what you expected? Are you happy or unhappy with that?

LH: I'm happy, I'm happy to here for sure. I'm happy that the car is as competitive as it is. The guys have done such a good job to put us up this high. I'm happy with the performance so far this weekend and I think there's more to come.

Q: And you've improved the car over the last couple of days?

LH: Yeah, fine tuning it. It's very difficult sometimes, you get to the limit and it's difficult to know what to do but just small tweaks here and there which have helped.

Q: Mark, we were talking about how you've taken pace off the car; is that pace in the corners and how does that affect the car?

MW: Well, we didn't set the car up to be super slow in qualifying but we had to keep an eye on the race so it's wing level, obviously (gear) ratios, a lot of little things which you try, to have a little bit more of a balanced view of the weekend because we know that I was going to be out of position. Irrespective of if I qualified on pole, I can't qualify on pole by ten places further ahead than pole because it doesn't exist, so I knew I was going to be out of position, and I had to factor some of that in so we have done. Yeah, you would like your cake and eat it obviously, have all the downforce on the car for sectors two and three and then have a super super top speed but that's not possible, in a Formula One car you need to compromise which we have and we'll come to it tomorrow.

Q: Has that changed the strategy as well?

MW: Yes.

Q: And just to clarify, does that give you a free choice of tyres, because you're starting outside the top ten?

MW: No, it's a nice penalty actually! You have to start on what you qualified on as well. We'll do that and we'll see what we do with the strategy from there, but it might not be too different to everyone else. There's not many options here.

Q: (Abhishek Takle – Midday) Lewis, how crucial do you think it will be for your chances of victory tomorrow for you to get past Sebastian at the start, because they look pretty strong in the first sector and down the straights?

LH: Just from past experience, it's very difficult to overtake here so I anticipate it's... I'm going to need to try.

F1 Korea Blog – Saturday report

Qualifying for the Korean Grand Prix began with a certain sense of inevitability – after Sebastian Vettel's strong showing in FP3, the general belief was that Red Bull would be dominant once again.

Sauber's Esteban Gutierrez was the first to set a timed lap in the first stage of qualifying, but the Mexican racer was soon outshone by more experienced drivers from the bigger teams. As has been the case on most Saturdays in recent memory, Red Bull were the last team to send their drivers out on track in Q1 – with no concerns over being knocked out early, saving tyres for Sunday is the defending world champions' qualifying strategy.

Mercedes and Ferrari were both strong early on, while Jenson Button delivered a decent showing for McLaren, but once Vettel was unleashed from the garage there was little any of their rivals could do but bow to the inevitable. The German's first timed lap saw him safely in P3, far from the dropout zone, and with no need to waste rubber on a second attempt.

Teammate Mark Webber stole that P3 on his first timed lap; the Australian needs as strong a qualifying session as possible to make up for the ten-place grid penalty carried over from Singapore. Despite being safe near the top of the grid, Vettel elected to run again in Q1, crossing the line in P2 and displacing Gutierrez, who had delivered an impressive 1m38.725s lap. In the dropout zone when the chequered flag fell were the four usual suspects plus the Williams driver pairing.

After an unusual flurry of runs on the supersofts during Q1, all eyes were on the Q2 strategy calls when the pit lane opened. And the red runs continued, thanks in part to the high deg levels that make the supersofts the weaker option during Sunday's race.

Ferrari were the early pacesetters, while Gutierrez and Nico Hulkenberg continued Sauber's run of form. Mercedes had the top two slots on the timesheets when the session was two-thirds complete, but it was at that point that the Red Bull pair started their first timed laps. Webber jumped straight in at P2, while Vettel claimed the top spot seconds later, knocking the Australian down to P3.

Force India struggled for much of Q1, and Q2 was no different, with both drivers spending the session languishing in the dropout zone with the Toro Rosso pair. Jean-Eric Vergne went out for only one timed effort, a risky strategy that left the Frenchman in P16 when the chequered flag fell. Daniel Ricciardo had more than one tour of the track in Q2, but was unable to make it through to the final session.

With the ants marching two by two all afternoon, it was the driver pairings from Red Bull, Ferrari, Mercedes, Lotus, and Sauber who were left to fight it out in Q3. Breaking with tradition, Vettel and Webber were early out of the pits and onto the track. Hamilton and Rosberg set early laps, but couldn't best Webber's first effort of a 1m37.464s, while Vettel went straight to the top with a 1m37.202s.

With two minutes remaining, all ten drivers were out on track, nine of them doing their futile best to fight off the inevitable. And an inevitability it proved to be, with Vettel delivering another commanding performance to secure pole.

Provisional grid

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1m37.202s
2. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1m37.420s
3. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1m37.531s
4. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1m37.679s
5. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1m38.038s
6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1m38.223s
7. Nico Hulkenberg (Sauber) 1m38.237s
8. Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) 1m38.405s
9. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1m38.822s
10. Sergio Perez (McLaren) 1m38.362s

11. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1m38.365s
12. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1m38.417s
13. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1m37.464s*
14. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1m38.431s
15. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1m38.718s
16. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1m38.781s

17. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1m39.470s
18. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1m39.987s
19. Charles Pic (Caterham) 1m40.864s
20. Giedo van der Garde (Caterham) 1m40.871s
21. Jules Bianchi (Marussia) 1m41.169s
22. Max Chilton (Marussia) 1m41.322s

* Mark Webber qualified in P3, but will start from P13 thanks to a 10-place grid penalty incurred for collecting his third reprimand of the season in

F1 Korea Blog - Friday press conference

It was a well-timed and fascinating press conference that took place on Friday afternoon in Yeongan, with six of the paddock's logistics experts weighing in on the proposed 22-race calendar, added costs, and the return of in-season testing.

Present were Ron Meadows (Mercedes), Massimo Rivola (Ferrari), Dickie Stanford (Williams), Andy Stevenson (Force India), Graham Watson (Caterham), and Beat Zehnder (Sauber).

Q: Greetings gentlemen, and it's nice to have you at your first FIA press conference. A question for a number of you, first of all: the team manager role, what does it mean, what does it consist of? Perhaps we could start with you Graham?

Graham SMITH: The team manager is basically the orchestrator of the weekend for the logistics side of the team. Obviously directly working with the engineering group to get the desired result by the end of the weekend. It's a fairly full on position, sometimes can be a bit slow, but generally flat chat.

Q: Andy, anything more to add to that?

Andy STEVENSON: Yeah, it's a very similar role, I think, in all the teams. I always look at myself, as well, as a person that gets landed with the jobs nobody else wants to do. When things go wrong I'm at fault and when everything goes right, the team's done a good job.

Q: Beat, I think you're a stickler for the rules as well. You have to know the rule book I think.

Beat ZEHNDER: Yeah of course, this is part of our job, but besides what Andy and Graham said, we're trouble shooters as well. So if everything goes wrong on a weekend we're the first person to contact and we're the ones to solve any problems.

Q: Now, here, Ron, of course you don't have the benefit of the motor homes, the benefit of your trucks. Tell us about how different this sort of race is, these 'flyaways' are, logistically speaking.

Ron MEADOWS: The actual flyaways, the more recent ones are some of the best races we go to for facilities. We have magnificent garages, big hospitality areas. It's really easy compared to a Monaco where you're all compressed and the motor home is half a mile down the road. These races are really quite easy to service.

Q: Massimo, for you?

Massimo RIVOLA: I think the same. It's a different scenario, moving trucks and hospitality in particular Europe is pretty demanding, so I would say that I like Ron's idea that flyaways are actually easier to manage.

Q: And for you Dickie?

Dickie STANFORD: Similar thing for me. The flyaway races, everything's here, so you just literally move in. You're not moving the trucks or anything around Europe. It's quite straightforward to come to a flyaway race.

Q: But actually moving the equipment and stuff such as fuel and that sort of thing?

DS: Well, we move the fuel around Europe, so it's very similar coming to a flyaway race.

Q: Graham, coming back to you. The management of the crews. How do you manage to look after the mechanics and keep them in top-flight trim all the way through?

GW: Yeah, it's a very long season, so it's important that we look after our people. Clearly we are a resource-limited team so we have to be quite clever and wise about how we do that. We try to rotate a few of the guys in and out where possible, Yeah, just keep your health in mind and then over the course of the year, with the help of my support team, just manage the guys as best we can.

Q: Andy?

AS: As the calendars do get longer, with the extra flyaways, the strain on the crew is quite intense. We certainly focus at Sahara Force India focus on fitness and wellbeing. We work very hard on the diets of the guys when we're away travelling and their general fitness. And we've seen this year it has paid off. We've had a lot less injuries this year and the crew are just generally in better shape. So they're able to cope with the job. Also along that we make sure they're comfortable. We try to arrange all their travel schedules and hotels and everything to the best of our ability so that they are comfortable and happy in their work.

Q: Beat?

BZ: This is one of the most important things - that people are feeling well. The good thing in a Formula Team is that all these guys are kind of self-motivating, so you don't have to do an extra bit for that. But, as Andy said, the most important is that they have decent flights and hotels and wellbeing. People tend to get ill towards the end of the season, especially the last two or three races, because travelling through so many time and climate zones is demanding on the body and physics.

Q: Final question from me, to the front row. We're going to see in-season testing next year. How are you going to manage that? What do you envisage having to do for that?

RM: We had a team meeting yesterday, with all the teams involved, and we came up with a schedule and I don't think it's going to be too difficult. We used to have eight filming days, which was an awful lot of arranging for 100kms, where now at least we're going to be in the same venue where we raced and we'll just leave one crew behind and we'll rotate it, so I don't think it will be too bad.

Q: How much equipment do you think you're going to have Massimo?

MR: Well, Ferrari is normally one of ones with the most - more than 40,000 I would say. I agree with Ron. You know that Ferrari is the teams that pushed the most to get in-season testing back and to be honest I think that at the end it will be not so much more expensive than what we had in the past, with aero days and filming days, so everything will be much more organised for sure. So for us the job it will be, I would say, easier.

Q: Dickie?

DS: You'll use your race equipment and just bring down to the test as little as possible, just trying to keep the cost down.

Q: And personnel?

DS: Personnel? Probably like Ron we'll rotate the crews.

Q: (Alex Popov – RTR) It's about the first Russian Grand Prix next year. We have a new date of 5 October. Beat has just been in Sochi just one week. But the question is for all of you. What's your impression, what are your thoughts about this first Russian Grand Prix. Which difficulties do you expect from this?

BS: I can comment on the facilities on the Olympic Park and it's very, very nice there. The track looks nice and all the new buildings that are set up... it's fantastic.

Q: You were there last week?

BS: I've been there last weekend, yes, for a demo event. It's a little bit windy.

Q: Andy, what sort of thing will you do? Will you do a reconnaissance? Have you been there already?

AS: We haven't been there yet but I'm sure we will do a reconnaissance before it's time for us to get there but we – and certainly I – always look forward to new events: the new challenges, the new tracks, to find out our way around. There are a lot of circuits that we go to year in, year out. I don't want to say that's boring but it's much of the same each year so I'm always excited when we have a new venue.

Q: Graham, what sort of problems do you envisage, what special demands may come from racing in Russia?

GW: Well, hopefully there's no problems. Generally FOM are pretty good at paving the way for us to get our equipment in and out of the country. There's always small issues with the new races that come up when you arrive but generally – hopefully – it'll go alright.

Q: Ron, are you planning a reconnaissance trip?

RM: We'll certainly do a recce, though I'm not sure what date that will be but we're really excited to go to Russia – we've never been as a team, it's a very interesting country and recently had a driver in Formula One and hopefully soon will have some more.

Q: Massimo?

MR: Yeah, the same. And in addition, we have a sponsor in Russia so we're very keen to do that. To be honest, any time there is a new race venue we always keen to exploit the new chances that come up and collect more sponsorship. It's good to go to new places.

Q: Dickie?

DS: We'll be doing a recce at some stage early in the year. I've been to Moscow to do an event there and thoroughly enjoyed that. I'm sure the teams will enjoy the new race.

Q: (Kate Walker – GP Week) Question for all of you. You touched on the logistics of adding in-season testing but we're looking at a possibly 22-race calendar next year. Adding the in-season testing to the far-away pre-season tests plus the longer calendar, what kind of headache is that going to be for you logistically but also financially?

RM: Logistically it's obviously going to be more of a challenge than this year but the biggest issue at the moment looks like being the triple-header. So we need to speak to FOM but in FOM we have a fantastic partner who arranges all the logistics. They do a fantastic job so if they think it's achievable it must be achievable because they've never failed us yet. And as far as the financial aspect, it's give and take really. It opens up more doors. We probably will spend a bit more on logistics but we're going to get to see people in Russia, go back to Austria, we're going to go to Mexico and it opens up a lot more doors for sponsors, drivers, team members.

Q: Massimo, is that the major concern for you? The triple-header?

MR: To be honest I'm still hoping we come back to the 20 races as per the current sporting regulation. We will see. At the moment the calendar is not the best calendar possible in terms of logistics. So, even the first race in Australia, alone, is not ideal. From the logistics side I would prefer to stop and do a race in a back-to-back coming back from Australia. For sure there are some good commercial reasons behind this that I am not aware of but we will see. When the calendar is 100 per cent fixed we will manage it.

Q: Dickie?

DS: Yeah, the triple-header is looking a bit interesting! But I'm sure we'll find a way around it. We always do.

Q: Beat?

BZ: For us the biggest headache is definitely personnel because we as a small team, we have to cover all races, tests and even demo events with the same number of people, the same crew. The more events you have, obviously the more difficult it gets. Then the triple-header... I think we would have to start packing up on Saturday in Monaco to make it to Jersey.

Q: Andy?

AS: The schedule looks very interesting and certainly challenging. As I said earlier, we like new venues and enjoy the challenge. For our team certainly the thing that we are going to find very difficult is the in-season testing. The four in-season tests are going to stretch us and that's something we're not looking forward to.

Q: Graham?

GW: I agree with Andy. It's the in-season testing that's probably going to push us to the edge. We had the meeting yesterday with the other teams and discussed the venues we were potentially going to go to. We started putting that down on a calendar and it started to look quite a daunting task. Obviously again we'll have to manage the personnel as best we can to achieve that. I think like all regulation or rule changes that happen in Formula One, we all start off thinking 'how are we going to do that?' and year in, year out we seem to achieve it: get to the end of the year, look back, think 'OK' and move on to the next year.

Q: (Alan Baldwin – Reuters) I want to ask about the triple-header but more for specific detail. Monaco is a race where cars get smashed about quite a bit and you have to get them, in theory, to New Jersey within a matter of days. Could you give more details about the complications of that and also how you plan for a triple-header when one of the races may not happen?

AS: We haven't focussed on it too much just yet. It was only announced last week to the teams, or to the public in general, and we'll wait until the calendar has been ratified before we put any resource into understanding exactly how we will deal with it. As always in Formula One, if a challenge is put before us, we will make it work. So, we'll wait until it has been ratified.

Q: Beat?

BZ: Technically, it will be very difficult to have a back-to-back from Monaco to Jersey, because normally the freight will leave for Canada, let's say, on the Saturday before the race. And so that's why, if you're only able to send your freight on a Monday or a Tuesday, it compromises your weekend quite a bit.

Q: Graham, how does it affect a smaller team, something like that?

GW: It's probably not dissimilar to everybody else. They've still got to pack their pallets and pack their cars up and move their personnel around the world. So, it's probably slightly more challenging but we're all in the same boat. I think we all carry pretty similar freight weight and sea-freight and so forth. But it is difficult when the calendar's not 100 per cent fixed and you're trying to pre-empt what's going to happen – but the Monaco to New York does look particularly challenging...

MR: I can say that even for a top team it's something almost impossible, to be honest, to be done. But as I said, we will see the real calendar and then we figure it out.

Q: It could be said it's even more difficult for a top team as you have more equipment.

MR: At the end, as I said, we have more freight. It's not that a top team has such a big advantage having such a back-to-back. It's going to be almost impossible to do it.

Q: (Frederic Ferret – L'Equipe) Dickie, you knew of the good old days when Williams were winning; how different is the mood in the team nowadays and as an old pillar of the team, how can you help and motivate all the team to bring Williams back to the top?

DS: That's a difficult one! Yes, I've seen the winning days and the current days. To motivate people – as the guys were saying earlier on – you look after them, you try and do your best for them. You're still trying as hard as anybody up and down the pit lane so you just have to try and keep the guys motivated by any means possible. They're all there, they want to win. I think everybody in the pit lane is there for that reason.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – RacingLines) Gentlemen, under the old Concorde Agreement you were obviously members of the Sporting Working Group which has now been replaced by the Sporting Working Committee, which is more a discussion forum rather than one that can actually take decisions for forwarding up to the Formula One Commission. Does this change or in any way jeopardise or prejudice the decision-taking process from the sporting regulation point of view?

MR: I think that so far, as a group, we won't change our approach, so if we have a guideline from our team principal or the strategy group it doesn't matter, we will have the guideline. With the guideline we have we will try to sort out the best rule wording or the best rule to apply in certain conditions. I don't think it really changes (anything) too much but at the end, it's just the fact that you have to be co-ordinated even better with your team principal so it's part of the normal job, I would say.

RM: So far we haven't seen any difference since we haven't had the Sporting Working Group since the Concorde Agreement was signed between the FIA and FOM. So maybe ask the same question in two or three months time and see if anything's changed but so far, this year, we've been operating as previous years.

Q: How often do you actually meet?

MR: Six (times) per year, roughly.

Q: (Stuart Codling – F1 Racing) Gentlemen, I'm led to believe that it was the sporting directors who ultimately vetoed the putative Pirelli test in America. I was wondering if you could clarify what the difference is between Ferrari testing a 2011 car in Barcelona three weeks before the Spanish Grand Prix and McLaren testing a 2011 car in Austin, three weeks before the US GP? Maybe Andy you could take this as we understand that Force India rounded up the posse?

AS: I would like to take it on, yeah. We had absolutely nothing to do with it. I believe it was an FIA decision. The first I knew that it wasn't going to happen was when McLaren told us that the FIA had notified them that they weren't happy with the test.

RM: We read about this morning in Autosport. There was no discussion yesterday at our meeting.

BZ: I think the difference was that we didn't know about the Ferrari test. At the time.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – RacingLines) The two responses that I had about my question came from teams whose principals are actually on the Strategy Working Group whereas the others are now excluded entirely from that input because their team principals are not on the Strategy Group. So how do you people in the back row, for example, feel about it?

GW: I can only vouch for what I've seen so far which is that we still have our meetings that we've been having for the last few years in the same format. We proposed a question to Charlie (Whiting) individually about where we stand going forward and he's very adamant that our meeting will continue in the same vein, helping to structure the sporting regulations going forward into 2014/2015. Most of the rules that are in for next year have been decided through the same group. Obviously, as Ron said, we'll give it three months and see what happens but at the moment, it's continuing as it was. Yeah, clearly we don't have the voice at the strategy table but we'll hopefully get people to use common sense in the right direction.

BZ: Well of course we're still meeting on a regular basis and we have a voice and sometimes we have to maybe raise our voices and to speak up, not that one side of the paddock is going to sleep. We, as a group, have to work out proposals which will be accepted or not by the Strategy Group.

AS: I think for me it has changed quite a bit and certainly from our point of view, since the Monaco agreement was signed, things have been very different this year and I think carrying on into next year it's going to be the same. I don't think the process is as good as it used to be and certainly for the smaller teams, we don't have as much say as we used to.

BZ: But the problem there obviously is that in the absence of a Concorde Agreement we have a simple majority vote at the moment and so it's not what it used to be with the 70 percent majority or unanimity.

Q: (Chris Lyons – AP) Ron, you said there was a meeting yesterday regarding in-season testing. Are there any changes you can

update us on? What details can you give us on that?

RM: We did schedule some dates for next season for in-season testing but we need to speak to Charlie Whiting first to get clarification that he's happy so I think we'll let Charlie announce them.

Q: (Kate Walker – GP Week) I wanted to get back to the sexy subject of logistics and finance and in-season testing because I've been told that it's going to cost about an extra ten million a year on the team's budget but also you've got the problem of rebuilding a car post-race, doing the test and then rebuilding it to send it off to the next race. To what extent is that actually going to be possible, especially for those teams with smaller budgets who are finding it a bit hard at the moment?

DS: Actually rebuilding the car after a race or test actually doesn't make any difference. We tend to do that now between the double-header races so it's not going to make that much difference. On a flyaway, after the race, you strip the car down, you rebuild it on Sunday night before you pack it up to go to the next race. In Europe, you'll strip it down, rebuild it completely and then send it to the next race. On costings of the extra races, we don't know yet. We haven't costed anything out. The calendar's only been out for a week and so we haven't got that far.

MR: Well, I wouldn't employ the guy that told you ten millions more for a few tests. To be honest, I don't think it's going to be like that. To be honest, I think it's going to be more efficient, in general, for testing, but obviously if you have more flyaway races, that would cost (more) because of the freight costs but that's not a huge difference.

RM: It's obviously going to cost more than this year because we didn't have any in-season testing, we just had filming days but I think you're going to have a bigger bang for your buck, you're not going to be driving to some airfield in north Yorkshire, hoping it's not raining. You're going to be going to Barcelona and doing 500 kilometers of useful testing.

AS: We think there is going to be quite a large cost implication, especially in the way that we run our team and with the resources we have available to us now, it won't be possible for us to attend the four tests as planned. We have brought to the table other options, cheaper options that wouldn't give us an advantage but they couldn't be agreed so we're either left with the choice of attending the test or not attending the test. We've put calculations together that we would estimate around eight million for us to attend the four tests.

BZ: I think the difference is the different points of view. Obviously the eight in-season test days are replacing four straightline tests or aero tests, three young drivers and six out of the eight PR days but we, as a small team, we've hardly done any straightline tests – we have a fantastic 1:1 wind tunnel which is as good as a straightline test. We've done the three days young driver test and every year we've done one PR day to get rights-free footage. Obviously if you do eight PR days and possibly straightline tests it's going to be more expensive and for us it's definitely – I wouldn't say a killer but it's going to be much more expensive than we were used to over the last three years.

Q: (Alan Baldwin – Reuters) Just for a matter of interest, on the calendar – and I suspect I probably know the answer already – but does Mr Ecclestone consult you guys on the calendar for your input on logistics or does it just come out of the blue as a fait accompli and you have to deal with it?

DS: No, he doesn't consult us. Whether he consults team principals I don't know, we wait until we see the calendar before we know what's going on.

MR: No, we are not involved in that.

Q: (Ted Kravitz – Sky Sports) Just back to the pre-season testing for next year, the second and third tests will be in Bahrain. What concerns, if any, do you have on both the working conditions – a lot of guys having to work all day in very hot conditions – and on general safety and security?

BZ: We're here to organise events and to organise them as well as possible but whether we should go there or not is political and I am not here to do politics.

MR: I think we should get a little bit of mileage on our new engine so Bahrain is a venue where you normally have good weather so that was the priority. The priority was to go to the Middle East; to chose Abu Dhabi or Bahrain was not a matter for us.

AS: Again, the same as Beat. I don't think we're here to comment on the politics, but as far as the test venue and for pre-season testing with the new power units, I really couldn't think of a better place to go. The temperatures aren't going to be that hot, we're probably going to expect 22/23 degrees at that time of the year, and it's actually a very good way of bringing the crews up to the speed, ready for a hard season so I think that the dates that are scheduled are pretty good.

F1 Korea Blog - Friday report

The opening practice session of the Korean Grand Prix weekend is one of the most challenging of the season, thanks to a dusty and unused circuit that is as green as it gets. Friday mornings see a laughable lack of grip leading to errors aplenty, even from the more experienced drivers on the grid.

It was Kimi Raikkonen who had the most dramatic incident of F1, with a late-session crash into the barriers that tore much of the front end off his Lotus. On the radio, the popular Finn came out with a typical understatement, telling the team only 'I hit the wall', information they had already established from the broadcast feed.

Raikkonen was the only regular driver to make such a big mistake on Friday morning, but up and down the grid his compatriots were spinning and running wide as they struggled to find grip on the slippery surface. F1 also saw a number of reserve drivers taking part; of those it was Marussia's Rodolfo Gonzalez who ended the session with the distinction of biggest crash to his name.

Lewis Hamilton topped the timesheets when all was said and done, leading Sebastian Vettel by the slimmest of margins. Of the top ten, Felipe Massa was the man with the least running under his belt after an early puncture – coupled with the need to preserve tyres for the weekend ahead – saw the Brazilian side-lined in the Ferrari garage.

On Friday afternoon Hamilton made it two for two, topping the timesheets once more with a slightly more comfortable lead over Vettel. But it was small comfort, with the two champions split by a tenth. Given Red Bull's recent dominance and their tendency to leave something in reserve on a Friday, Vettel is still the smart pick for pole on Saturday and the win on Sunday.

There was little of note to report from FP2 – improved grip levels meant that there were fewer spins than had been on display during the morning's running, while Raikkonen missed out on the first fifteen minutes of the session while the Lotus mechanics completed repairs on his car after the morning's shunt.

FP1 times (unofficial)

1. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1m39.630s [20 laps]
2. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1m39.667s [20 laps]
3. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1m39.816s [19 laps]
4. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1m40.117s [20 laps]
5. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1m40.215s [22 laps]
6. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1m40.374s [18 laps]
7. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1m40.396s [19 laps]
8. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1m40.677s [15 laps]
9. Sergio Perez (McLaren) 1m40.860s [20 laps]
10. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1m40.880s [13 laps]
11. Nico Hulkenberg (Sauber) 1m40.899s [20 laps]
12. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1m41.432s [18 laps]
13. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1m41.482s [22 laps]
14. Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) 1m41.626s [21 laps]
15. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1m41.924s [19 laps]
16. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1m42.002s [20 laps]
17. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1m42.043s [18 laps]
18. James Calado (Force India) 1m43.008s [21 laps]
19. Charles Pic (Caterham) 1m43.660s [20 laps]
20. Giedo van der Garde (Caterham) 1m43.883s [19 laps]
21. Max Chilton (Marussia) 1m44.100s [14 laps]
22. Rodolfo Gonzalez (Marussia) 1m46.810s [10 laps]

FP2 times (unofficial)

1. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1m38.673s [31 laps]
2. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1m38.781s [30 laps]
3. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1m38.797s [32 laps]
4. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1m38.844s [35 laps]
5. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1m39.114s [30 laps]
6. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1m39.226s [34 laps]
7. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1m39.444s [31 laps]
8. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1m39.757s [33 laps]
9. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1m39.774s [29 laps]
10. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1m40.006s [34 laps]
11. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1m40.007s [34 laps]
12. Sergio Perez (McLaren) 1m40.152s [31 laps]
13. Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) 1m40.186s [33 laps]
14. Nico Hulkenberg (Sauber) 1m40.210s [34 laps]
15. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1m40.446s [30 laps]
16. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1m40.552s [26 laps]
17. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1m41.117s [35 laps]
18. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1m41.289s [34 laps]
19. Giedo van der Garde (Caterham) 1m42.461s [36 laps]
20. Charles Pic (Caterham) 1m42.798s [35 laps]
21. Jules Bianchi (Marussia) 1m43.108s [31 laps]
22. Max Chilton (Marussia) 1m43.441s [29 laps]

F1 Korea Blog - Thursday press conference

Despite the silly season rumours that have run with abandon for months, and the presence of a few key drivers in the seat shuffle, the opening press conference of the Korean Grand Prix weekend was a rather staid affair.

Present were Jules Bianchi (Marussia), Paul di Resta (Force India), Romain Grosjean (Lotus), Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber), Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes), and Felipe Massa (Ferrari).

Q: Paul Di Resta, you've had a bit of a drought over the past five races or so. Do you put that down to bad luck?

Paul DI RESTA: I suppose you can, but at the same time we've had some unfortunate issues. But I think the important thing is to keep pushing on. Singapore was obviously looking like it was going to be a great result from a difficult qualifying session, the speed was in the car, but it wasn't to be. Hopefully this weekend we can get it together and get points back on the table, which is always the goal within the team.

Q: The team has suggested that you've been affected by the change of tyres since the British Grand Prix, would you agree with that?

DIR: I definitely think the tyre hasn't helped but I think at this stage, and this far in with the new tyres, can you blame that? We've not optimised it like we did the last set, but I think everybody within the team has a great handle on tyres and it's just about unleashing the potential of them. We've maybe not got it over the whole weekend but the way we managed the tyres in the race in Singapore was obviously better than most people were able to. We just need to try to get the qualifying performance and I think if we can do that then it gets us back on track and we start having a good

weekend again.

Q: I hope so, thank you. Jules, obviously you've signed, we've had the news of that this morning that you've signed again for Marussia, although there were several other seats available, but you've resigned for Marussia. Your feelings about that?

Jules BIANCHI: Obviously it's a great feeling for me. It was a really late call this year and I've already signed for next year so it's amazing for me. I'm really happy to stay with Marussia because I feel really confident with them, I feel like at home. So I hope it will be a great season next year and I really want to thank them for that.

Q: How do you feel about the potential for next year, particularly with the Ferrari engines. And also your own potential, how are you going to develop?

JB: For sure, I will feel a lot more confident because I will have a lot more experience in Formula One, I will have all the winter testing. We will have new rules, with new engines, with Ferrari. For sure that will be a great thing for the car and for the team. I don't know what to expect but for sure we will have an improvement.

Q: Esteban, you had your best qualifying in Singapore. Was that the circuit, just everything coming together? How important was that for you?

Esteban GUTIERREZ: It was very important, because it was getting very critical not being able to qualify properly. Obviously when you start P9 or P10, there's a huge difference between starting P10 and P16 or P17. It also changes a lot your perspective because you're fighting with better drivers at the front as well. It was, I think, a great experience, a good step and a very solid one and I'm looking to keep this in a consistent way until the end of the year.

Q: And obviously we've got a Mexican Grand Prix on the calendar for next year. Tell us how important it is for your country to have that grand prix, for motor sport in your country. But also, about the circuit itself, because I think you've been there. Is it ready for a grand prix?

EG: It has to be adapted. They have to do some work. Now there is a closer chance it will happen but it's not yet assured, so they're working very hard and I'm sure that the promoters are trying to find a way to make it happen. Obviously for us it would be a very special one.

Q: Felipe, it is four weeks since the announcement regarding your future with Ferrari. Can you tell us more about your future in Formula One?

Felipe MASSA: Well, not yet. So it's to concentrate to the last race. We talk with a few teams, y'know, and I don't think it's the right time to speak about that. I think it's the right time when you know where you are going. For the moment we are aware, I think, of some good opportunities. It's better to wait and say at the right time.

Q: You're getting on quite well with the current car it seems. You've out-qualified your team-mate five times this year, last time in Singapore. How do you feel about the current Ferrari?

FM: I feel OK, I feel good. I mean I feel comfortable inside the car and managed to put some points in the last races. Important for me, for the team. Just concentrate to carry on like that these last races and try to get some more podiums, some more better results even from what I had until now. I think qualifying is going well as well, so let's try to do everything we can to get some good results now in these last six races and finish well with Ferrari after our long and nice time together.

Lewis, last year you had an incident-packed race here but at the same time you've had a couple of second places as well at this circuit, included that wet race in 2010. What are your memories of this circuit and what are your feelings about this race?

Lewis HAMILTON: I don't really remember any of my races here! I remember qualifying at the front on one race but otherwise we've had some half-decent races but I haven't won, so there's nothing really good enough to remember, I'd say.

Q: I particularly remember in the wet, when you were going around and around and around behind the safety car and you saying "C'mon, let's go racing."

LH: Ah yeah, I remember that. But that's normal, that sort of thing.

Q: Since Silverstone you've had a good run of points as opposed to your team-mate who hasn't had quite the same run of points. What do you put that down to? A difference in driving style between the two of you?

LH: Well, the last couple of races haven't been so good for me. But before that, yeah, again I've just grown with my understanding of the car. Growing an understanding of how to really extract the most from it. Working better each time as we're growing as a team in terms of how we communicate and everything. So I hope this weekend is even better in that sense. We're constantly making changes, even after the last race weekend, there were some things we can improve on, particularly on communication. So we're hopefully going to see a better weekend this weekend.

Q: Is there one type of circuit that's better than another?

LH: No, no. I'm actually really surprised this year that the car is good everywhere. It's been a real blessing and I anticipate it should be strong again here this weekend. Whether or not we can keep up with the Red Bulls, we'll see – but my target really is to get these guys, the guys in the red.

Q: Romain, Eric Boullier in his preview of this race gave you a big vote of confidence saying that you had really come together, that you performing extremely well. How do you feel about your performances recently?

Romain GROSJEAN: Pretty good to be honest! I knew we were on a good run since the Bahrain Grand Prix except Monaco where I had a bad weekend and Canada where we struggled a little bit – but things were going together and I think it shows up in Germany that the final things came together and it was better and better. Singapore was a good race as well. We came back with a more normal package, the car was back at the front, which is enjoyable and hopefully it's going to be the case for the last six races of the season.

Q: Was Singapore a track that you liked or do you just have the confidence now? Has there been a breakthrough in some way?

RG: Well, I think it was not a track that I liked or disliked. It doesn't change much on the lap-time or the driving style. I tried to get on with everything I can and the car is getting better and better. I think we had a very slow start to the season. Since then we worked hard and it's like we lost all the testing and the first three races. So, started on the back foot but bring things together and Singapore was back to the normal wing level after let's say after Spa and Monza where we struggled a little bit more and should be good for the rest of the season hopefully. And, y'know, just keep doing the

same thing as we're doing.

Q: (Abhishek Takle – Midday) Felipe, following on from the earlier question about your future, how optimistic are you in terms of your chances of getting a competitive drive next year and should you not get a competitive drive next year, would you still want to continue in Formula One?

FM: Well, I think I'm quite optimistic that I'm going to find a good direction, a good solution. As I said, I will not change my mind. I want to have a car that can give me some good possibilities to fight, not a car in which I would not have a chance to fight. So if I have that, I'm not interested, as I said.

Q: (Frederic Ferret – L'Equipe) To all of you: first of all, how do you rate this track as a driver, and secondly, what do you think of next year's calendar with 22 Grands Prix?

RG: It's too far from Seoul.

FM: I think it's a very nice track, I like to drive here. Regarding the calendar, I think it's a lot to think about because it's not really comfortable, not just for us as drivers but for the teams, so I think if there were a little bit better thinking behind it they can do a much better calendar for next year.

LH: I really love the track, they did a good job. It's nice to drive. You don't get as many people coming to watch as we would like but as Romain said, it's quite far from the main city. Just arriving today, seeing how beautiful the weather is, the scenery around it, it's really quite a peaceful place. In terms of calendar, I love racing so I would do many more if I had to but as Felipe said, it's difficult on the team. The year's getting so long. I think we're already testing in January so there's not a lot of down time for the guys back at the factory or us people who are travelling.

FM: I think the problem is that there are races where you go to Japan and then you're not going to another race straightaway, so you're going back to Europe and then you're coming back here. You can do many races – not a problem – but you need to do it in a better way.

Q: Esteban, your first impressions?

EG: Well, it's going to be an interesting track to get to know, it's my first time driving this track and I've already had a look at some media footage and it looks quite an interesting track.

JB: Well, I did F1 last year with Force India. It was a good track, I liked it so now we have to wait and see how it is in racing.

DIR: Again, like everyone, I think it's a good track to drive, it's got a nice flow in the last sector. Equally, it's got some good opportunities if you're attacking or defending in the first sector. For the calendar, I think it's obviously a great thing to go to new countries and new tracks and let other people experience the sights of Formula One, so very positive and I think like Lewis, driving's important and however many races that will be, I want to be the one who's taking part.

Q: (Trent Price- Richland F1) Felipe, Fernando's been relatively vocal about saying that it was the tyre construction that affected Ferrari mid-year and Nicolas Tombazis says no, it was more of a development curve that we took in the wrong direction. You've done a lot of Friday work on the car; where do you see where the issues are?

FM: For sure, if you don't have the car to win the championship you didn't do the perfect job, it's clear. We've had so many little things that either didn't work as you expected to fight for the championship, but I don't think you need to put names on the table. I think you need to speak about the whole group of work. I think that's the most important thing.

Q: (Livio Oricchio – O Estado de Sao Paulo) To all of you: since the Spa race, Sebastian Vettel set three poles and won three races, even on a circuit where he couldn't be so fast, Monza, for example. What's your point of view about that; how can he get such a big advantage from one moment to another one?

FM: Well, I think if you look at the last race, how his pace was, qualifying and in the race. If you appreciate that few teams will have new pieces on the car from now until the last race; similar to what he did in the last race, he's going to have some more victories, I think. For sure, his pace was better than everybody in the last races. It depends on the track, especially in Singapore. We're going to tracks where you need more downforce and they always show great performance as well. We will see. I hope it won't be like that but the chance is pretty much in their favour, that he can have more victories.

LH: I agree, there's not really much more to say.

RG: Well, they look quite impressive. They did a good job to bring them something that brings them a decent lap time gain so no, P2 is almost like a victory.

DIR: I think all you can say is that the combination has not only worked this year but it's worked over the last four years. The difference that they've made from the beginning of the year to now is obviously working out in their direction and nobody is challenging them.

Q: (Abhishek Takle – Midday) Felipe, Pat Fry said in the run-up to this race that you're going to be using the Friday practice sessions to test 2014 parts, so how involved are you going to be with that programme of testing those parts?

FM: I hope I can test everything they give to me for next year, to have some experience, to understand a little bit. I don't know. To be honest, this year there's not a lot to be done for next year so the car will be completely different next year. So many things will be different so I think it's not so easy to try things on Friday for next year because everything will start from zero next year. But if we have some new pieces, I hope I can have them.

Q: (Simon Cass – Daily Mail) Paul, is your contract situation sorted out with Force India for next year, do you have a contract, because Vijay (Mallya) says he's going to leave the decision late as he usually does? I was just wondering where we were with that.

DIR: The team's policy is not to discuss contracts at the moment, so I think you need to go to the press office and speak to them. I'll concentrate on this weekend and the driving part of it.

Q: (Dan Knutson – Auto Action and National Speedsport News) Lewis, is it possible to do a perfect lap and then, if you do that, how do you improve on it? Not just here, anywhere.

LH: I don't think there's a perfect lap. I think you can always improve, even if you do pull off a great lap, there's always some areas where you feel you could potentially gain, but then perhaps you lose in other areas. So getting a perfect lap like in the simulations we have are generally perfect laps. I think that's something we're all trying to do every single time we go out and the closer you get, the more exciting it gets.

Q: (Ben Edwards – BBC) Lewis, quick question: just looking back at the Singapore race. When the team analysed the performance of both you and Nico and Sebastian, you were so close to him in qualifying in terms of team pace, then he had that two seconds a lap advantage when he was sprinting, but do you think that was a bit of a false picture because he was very much pushing to open up that gap and maybe you guys were obviously in a different position in that race. Do you think that the gap we saw open up

was a slightly false picture?

LH: I don't, personally, think so. No. I think that's the true pace of their car. Perhaps they have a lot more in the bag than we get to see, so it's just cruising, generally. I think in the race on the restart everyone's pushing flat out so there should be no reason why they should be able to pull away that much quicker. If you look at their on-boards, he's on the power, full throttle at least twenty meters before everyone else which is a huge advantage.

Q: What sort of reaction does that make you have and the team have; what can you do about that?

LH: There's nothing we can really do, we're always asking for rear downforce, always want to be able to get on the power sooner. But the last time I was able to put the pedal down that quick was what, 2007, 2008? 2007 when we had traction control, so it's a lot different.
