

F1 Singapore Grand Prix – Thursday press conference

With Europe now firmly in the past, and the final leg of punishing fly-aways now underway, it was up to the drivers to talk about the bright lights of Singapore and the rigours of racing at night.

Present were Timo Glock (Marussia), Nico Hulkenberg (Force India), Sergio Perez (Sauber), Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus), Bruno Senna (Williams), and Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull).

Timo, obviously you finished second here in 2009. Is that one of the reasons why you say this is your favourite race?

Timo GLOCK: No, in general it's just the event here, the show. The first time we were here in 2008 I just the track and the event and for sure being on the podium was a great experience and good to be back to it and enjoy the time here.

So what is it about the track itself?

TG: The European races have enough run-off areas and here it's a bit different, the same like Monaco. If you do a mistake you end up in the wall and that's the challenging part here.

I believe you only arrived this morning however. Are you a little bit worried about getting acclimatised?

TG: No. I do that every year because we stay on European time. I just arrived this morning, went to the hotel and slept until 1pm or 1.30pm and I'm in the rhythm, so no problem. I'm not the only one who arrived so late.

Nico, great potential in Monza but less so here. They're very different circuits. How do you feel about this track?

Nico HULKENBERG: To be honest, quite positive. I think if anything this kind of circuit should suit us a bit more – quite a lot of slow-speed corners. There's not really one high-speed corner here. That is in our favour a little bit more than at Spa and Monza, the two last races, so I think we should be all right. As usual I think we'll be around the top 10 and hopefully inside.

But also one of the toughest races as well.

NH: It is. It is for everybody, you know. Always a race which touches the two-hour mark. It's pretty hot and humid. We know the circuit is physically demanding, a lot of nasty bumps and kerbs and if you get them wrong they'll launch you into the wall. It's a physical race, it's tough, but we're fit and up for it.

Lots of talk about your future. Is the contract with Force India done yet?

NH: Well, there's a good chance I'll be with Force India next year but as you know nothing has been announced yet.

Bruno, you feel that this circuit should suit your car. Is that correct?

Bruno SENNA: Yeah, definitely. Our car has been very happy on high downforce tracks and here we're running everything we have so it's good news for us. I think coming from a couple of difficult races where sometimes strategy played a bit of a part in our results we're hoping to come back and score some solid points for the team.

Looking at qualifying in comparison to your team-mate, it's heavily weighed in his favour. What's your problem in qualifying?

BS: It's not an easy situation. I think Pastor has a driving style that is better suited to the tyres. Last year I had a better run in qualifying than this year, which is abnormal, but the tyres have changed and so far it hasn't come down to my side too much. Last race the qualifying was close enough but I think there is always something to learn. My race pace has been very good and my consistency in the race has been good, so if I get qualifying right I know that I can score some big points for the team and that's the aim.

Well you're just behind your team-mate and he's had a win. Can you be a winner as well?

BS: I'm sure we can. We've seen a few weekends where we've seen someone has just suddenly jumped to the front and won the race and had a dominant weekend. If you get everything in the right window, with the way the cars work and the way the cars work then we are more than capable of having a good result.

Kimi, we've been talking about you being a winner this season for quite a long time now, so what chances here? Do you compare this circuit with Valencia perhaps, you're the lap record holder here as well?

Kimi RAIKKONEN: We'll try. It's not going to be easy. We have to see if we are in a better position than we have been in the last few races but it's a different place than Valencia and we have to wait and see.

What sort of circuit are you looking at, though. Is it the sort of place that could favour you?

KR: I don't know. I haven't been here with the team before. We don't now. I think last year they had a very difficult time but then it's a completely different story now. We will know much more tomorrow, usually it's been pretty OK this kind of circuit, so hopefully that's the case, but like I said the last two races haven't been easy for us but that was at different layouts than here so you never know.

You're close to second in the championship now. Do you think you could win the championship without winning a race?

KR: I don't know. We'll keep trying and try to score more points every race and hopefully improve. If we end up winning it will be great. But whoever has the most points at the end of the year deserves to win the championship. If that happens it's a good thing for us, but if it comes with a win or

without I don't care.

In terms of your comeback are you going to have another season in Formula One?

KR: You never know. There are a lot of nice things to do other than Formula One. Right now we have options and we'll see what happens.

Sebastian, obviously a winner here last year. Do you feel that the championship is just slipping away a little bit at the moment?

Sebastian VETTEL: I think that after the weekend in Belgium it looked much better, after last weekend in Monza it didn't look as good, so I think things can change quickly, so I don't see any reason why it should change now.

Do you feel the car is a little inconsistent in terms of circuit to circuit?

SV: Not really. I think that if you look at all the races that we've had so far I think consistency is the most important thing and I think we always have a car that was good enough to finish in the top five. I think that's pretty consistent, if you look at the championship so far. I think that's what you need and that's what you'll need until the end of the year. Obviously the more points you score the better it is but surely we were not in a position to win every race this year but I think we had a good car and I don't see why it should change in the next couple of races.

What about technical failures; are you still worried about that?

SV: Obviously it's not a nice thing to happen. It usually helps quite a lot if you are able to finish the race, to get some points so I'm confident it will improve but obviously two times this year we've had a problem with the alternator. We're working hard on it. It's a bit difficult because after the failure, you don't know exactly what was wrong, otherwise we would have fixed it after the first time and it would not happen again a couple of months later. But I think we've got a couple of ideas and it should be better in the future.

Sergio, second in Monza, very good potential result in Spa as well, but two circuits that are very different to here. What are your feelings about this race?

Sergio PEREZ: I definitely have a very strong feeling. As you say, it's not similar to Spa or Monza but I think we should be quite good here. It's very difficult to know what to expect but I think we can also be competitive here and this is our target, to fight for the podium again.

How important is the tyre strategy going to be here, because it was interesting to see your teammate doing a long stint last year at this circuit?

SP: The thing is, it's always very important, very crucial, the way you manage the tyres, the way you manage your strategy, so it will be quite crucial. I think it's quite important here as well, because you do have some big tyre degradation, especially coming from overheating the rears so it will be important to manage the tyres and it will be crucial as well for the strategy.

So can that give you a good result?

SP: I hope so. I hope we can be on the good side with the tyre degradation. We don't have any guarantees, so we have to see how we are tomorrow in terms of car balance for the long runs.

We've been hearing various rumours about your future for many months now; can you tell us if approaches have been made by major teams to you, which teams?

SP: As I say, in the position that I am, when I have a good result because I'm fighting for points and sometimes I'm able to get some good points so it's always the time when the rumours start but then you have another race and there are no more rumours and they are chasing the driver who has a good race. In that respect, I'm not really worried. I know that I have a very strong car for the next seven races so I hope I can deliver very strong performances.

But have approaches been made?

SP: No.

From major teams, no approaches?

SP: No.

Sebastian, you won eleven races last year; what is your opinion, is it possible to win the championship without winning a single Grand Prix?

SV: I don't know. It depends. I think it's easier if you win a lot of races. But it's not impossible. I don't know if there has ever been someone... I think Keke (Rosberg) won one race (when he won the championship in 1982). It depends what the others do. I think that's the most important... if you want to win without winning (a race).

Sergio, just following on from the earlier question. Luca di Montezemolo has repeated his assertion that again, you lack experience to join Ferrari. Could I just get your thoughts on that first of all, and secondly, over the past week, you have been linked with the possibility of joining McLaren should Lewis leave. Could I just get your thoughts on that as well?

SP: In respect of what Montezemolo said about experience, I fully respect his opinion. I have to know my position, probably, he means, to become a Ferrari driver you probably need more... I don't know, because it's only my second year in Formula One. I feel ready to do a good job, to be in a top team, to be able to fight for the title, for the championship, so in that respect I feel ready but I fully respect his opinion. Regarding the McLaren rumour, as I said, there are so many rumours around. Before it was Ferrari, and now it's McLaren. Always, when I have a good race, they put me in a different team. The most important thing is to keep doing a good job and try to maximise the car potential for the next races.

Bruno, what do you have to do in the next few races to ensure that you secure your seat at Williams next year? Do you think you need a podium perhaps, or maybe a win?

BS: I think the focus is to continue scoring points consistently. There's no target for anything. The target for me has always been, since the beginning of the season, to qualify and do the best job I can in the races and I'm sure that, coming to the next few races, I had a pretty decent run last year in a few of them, and I think that with added experience, I can improve and do a good job. Of course every time I get in the car I aim to get a podium or a win, but this is not always possible and if we can do something like that then great news for me.

For anyone really, no matter who; my taxi driver said yesterday that he thought it was going to rain on Sunday - local opinion -

and I just wondered that assuming you're not behind a safety car and assuming that it is actually raining as distinct from damp, I just wondered what it might be like driving here under lights with falling rain at racing speeds, if anybody's got any thoughts on that? It's different from any other situation we've found ourselves in.

BS: I reckon the glare from the lights on the spray from the car in front can be quite difficult to cope with but we've never had that situation before so it's going to be a bit of a learning curve. We've driven in damp conditions (here) which is already fairly difficult on this track but with spray, I reckon it's going to be a very big challenge and we'll see if it's going to be possible or not. Hopefully it's going to be just like any other day in the wet.

SV: Difficult to know, we've never driven in wet conditions here so we don't know how it will be with the lights. I think no one ever really drove a Formula One car at night during the rain with lights. I think it will be very slippery, because this circuit is not very grippy. I think it was a little bit damp at the beginning of practice last year so yeah, it will be slippery.

Sergio, given the rumour with McLaren, is there anything in your association with Ferrari that you think would not help you there, that could prevent such a move from happening?

SG: No, not really. I have a nice connection to Ferrari through the Ferrari Academy, but I am just part of the Ferrari Academy, not part of the Ferrari team, so it doesn't affect... As I said, still a long way to go in the season and I'm fully focused on the next races.

Kimi, you mentioned that there are plenty of nice things to do beyond Formula One if you weren't racing next year. If we exclude trucks and rallying, I just wonder if you could give us some examples of nice things you could be doing?

KR: I always said that I'm not desperate for Formula One and when I feel like doing something else I will. Now I'm enjoying it, I'm in a good team with nice people to work with. We'll see what happens. There is a lot of different racing and doing just normal things in your life outside of Formula One. I will wait and see.

F1 Singapore Grand Prix – F1 report

For Sebastian Vettel, the top of the timesheets has been a long time coming. The last time the Red Bull driver ended a practice session fastest of the lot was during FP2 at the European Grand Prix in Valencia, six races ago.

But the defending world champion has something of an affinity for the Marina Bay Circuit – last year's race winner has never finished the Singapore Grand Prix lower than P5, and he has topped the timesheets in at least one practice session here every year since 2009.

It was a tight fight at the front between Vettel and Lewis Hamilton. In their early timed laps, Hamilton dominated the first sector, while Vettel was untouchable in the second and third sectors – the times set by the two men varied by up to 0.6s per sector.

But by the time the chequered flag had fallen, the Red Bull had sped up in the first sector, while the McLaren had found its feet on the latter part of the track, and the times set by the two men were very close indeed.

Should this level of pace prove to be representative of the pair's performance for the duration of the weekend, qualifying will be a very tense spectacle.

Jenson Button in P3 was nearly a second slower than Vettel; a hair's breadth behind the McLaren driver was Fernando Alonso in P4. The gap between the leading two and the rest of the field was far more dramatic than any we've become accustomed to seeing over the course of this season, and their rivals will be scratching their heads.

That being said, the general spread across the field was fairly wide, because the seemingly endless stretch of corners on offer at Marina Bay is a configuration that rewards the ballsy – cautious driving begets slower times, and the F1 standings can be viewed as a representation of each man's level of confidence with his set-up this afternoon, and not necessarily his car's outright pace.

While there were some spins and offs, as is to be expected, the session was largely without incident. Bruno Senna and Pastor Maldonado both managed to have 'moments' in their cars; the Brazilian stopped on track while his Venezuelan teammate elected not to turn at Turn 9, and just aimed his car straight for the run-off.

Special mention should be made of two drivers at the back of the grid: Timo Glock and Ma Qing Hua. Glock finished ahead of both Caterhams, and by a not insignificant 0.9s over the slower Vitaly Petrov. Meanwhile, Ma acquitted himself well – the Chinese driver may have ended the session at the bottom of the timesheets, but there was a point in the middle of the afternoon where he was lapping 0.2s faster than his vastly more experienced teammate.

F1 times (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.50.566s [24 laps]
2. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.50.615s [15 laps]
3. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.51.459s [17 laps]
4. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.51.525s [20 laps]
5. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.51.576s [20 laps]
6. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.51.655s [19 laps]
7. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.51.658s [24 laps]
8. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.51.943s [2] laps]
9. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.52.273s [24 laps]
10. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.52.296s [19 laps]
11. Bruno Senna (Williams) 1.52.629s [25 laps]
12. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1.5.716s [16 laps]
13. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.52.839s [23 laps]

14. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.52.986s [21 laps]
 15. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1.53.028s [20 laps]
 16. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.53.080s [17 laps]
 17. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.53.189s [25 laps]
 18. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.53.227s [26 laps]
 19. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.54.908s [20 laps]
 20. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1.55.091s [16 laps]
 21. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.55.335s [22 laps]
 22. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.55.760s [22 laps]
 23. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.56.656s [21 laps]
 24. Ma Qing Hua (HRT) 1.58.053s [20 laps]
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F1 Singapore Grand Prix – FP2 report

After a fairly smooth F1, the second practice session of the Singapore Grand Prix weekend was something of a game of two halves.

In the early part of the session, it was an all-McLaren affair, with Jenson Button and Lewis Hamilton trading places at the top of the timesheets with the occasional bit of interference from Sebastian Vettel.

But Bruno Senna brought out the red flags after around half an hour, and it was after the session resumed that the game began to change. The Williams driver was uninjured in a shunt that saw the Brazilian clip the wall at Turn 19, spin across into Turn 20, and then found himself stopped in the middle of the track.

The red flags came out so that the marshals could recover the car: in the brief window that Senna was sitting in the middle of the track he narrowly avoided being hit as he was out of sight around a blind(ish) corner.

When the pitlane reopened with approximately half of the session remaining, teams spent a brief window setting strong lap times before the grid moved to high fuel runs and race simulations.

Two of the drivers to spend the most time on high fuel were Hamilton and Lotus driver Kimi Raikkonen; the McLaren exhibited superior pace and lower rates of tyre degradation over their stints.

Marussia continued to out-perform Caterham in the second session, with Timo Glock's best time only two-tenths slower than the best effort of Toro Rosso's Jean-Eric Vergne. It is not yet clear whether Marussia have made a great stride forward this weekend, or if their nearest rivals have fallen back on pace, but on current indications the former premise appears to be more likely.

Fernando Alonso was once again showing that he is the man to watch in any conditions; the Ferrari driver spent the session slowly chipping away at the leads set by Vettel and Button ahead, but was still half a second down on overall pace when the chequered flag fell.

Lap times were much improved on those set in F1: the drier track made such improvements an inevitability.

FP2 times (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.48.340s [27 laps]
 2. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.48.651s [24 laps]
 3. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.48.896s [26 laps]
 4. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.48.964s [26 laps]
 5. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.49.086s [28 laps]
 6. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.49.300s [30 laps]
 7. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.49.339s [32 laps]
 8. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.49.790s [32 laps]
 9. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.50.039s [28 laps]
 10. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1.50.161s [24 laps]
 11. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.50.263s [23 laps]
 12. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1.50.345s [24 laps]
 13. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.50.636s [32 laps]
 14. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.50.791s [26 laps]
 15. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.51.122s [28 laps]
 16. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.51.450s [21 laps]
 17. Bruno Senna (Williams) 1.51.452s [11 laps]
 18. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.52.009s [31 laps]
 19. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.52.218s [29 laps]
 20. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1.52.576s [27 laps]
 21. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.52.863s [27 laps]
 22. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.52.936s [26 laps]
 23. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.54.448s [26 laps]
 24. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.54.514s [30 laps]
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F1 Singapore Grand Prix – Friday press conference

At a press conference featuring the McLaren team principal, and with Lewis Hamilton's future still up in the air, it's hardly surprising that the questions were largely of a one-track nature...

Present were Jean-Francois Caubet (Renault Sport F1), Tony Fernandes (Caterham) Bob Fearnley (Force India), James Key (Toro Rosso) Martin Whitmarsh (McLaren), and Toto Wolff (Williams).

James, welcome back, new shirt, you've had your feet under the desk for a week or two now, what have you found at Scuderia Toro Rosso? What are the strengths and weaknesses?

James KEY: Thanks for the welcome Bob, I think – it's early days obviously – but I think one of the big strengths I noticed very quickly in the team is the enthusiasm everyone has and the ambition to make it succeed. Everyone is desperate for it to work, there's a real passion there, as you can imagine, being Italian in the team's origin. Primarily it's a very good atmosphere to work in, something a little bit familiar to me in a way, there's a bit of family atmosphere because it's a small team that's grown very rapidly. As a result of that with the rapid growth it means that it needs a little bit more gluing together in a way. There's still separate departments doing a very good job but it needs to come together – and everyone recognises that. It's just a case of going through that process. So, the strength, I think, is the will and the ambition of everyone. On the weakness side, I think it's just still a team that's growing. There's no lack of effort from everyone, it just needs to be given direction. There's certainly some work to do on the aero side, which is very clear and mechanical, for that matter, from a technical point of view. There's some pretty clear steps. Some of it takes time, some of it's fairly obvious for next year.

And what can you do for this year's car? What can you do for next year's car? Can you still put your stamp on next year's car?

JK: I think for this year, obviously time is short, and this is a time of year when you've really got to prioritise and so we're doing what we can with this year's car. What we can do now is obviously carried over to next year too. I think for next year, the architecture and a lot of the suspension geometry was already defined before I arrived, so it's a case of picking up what I can, together with the guys in Faenza and at our wind tunnel in Bicester from this point forward. I'd say there's probably 40 per cent of the car still to go, so certainly we can work on that. But I have to say a lot of very sensible decisions have already been made for next year's car, exactly what I would have done. Which is good. So, we're all aligned in our direction and we'll do everything we can in between now and Melbourne.

Toto, obviously a very competitive car this year: we've seen it in the top ten in qualifying quite a lot and of course it's won a race as well. How easy is that to preserve and to keep on, and improve on for next year?

Toto WOLFF: I think that most of the teams are going to have a carry-on car for next year. It's not going to be a massive development because everybody is looking forward to 2014, which is a big change. So, I hope we can carry the momentum and keep the good base of the car and then carry it over for next year.

And looking at your drivers but particularly one you have an interest in, what is Valtteri Bottas' future?

TW: I think Valtteri Bottas' future is Formula One. We have not decided yet where we are going to head to because we go on to give maximum support to the two current drivers. He has been with us for a couple of years now, so he is definitely part of our thoughts – but no decision has been made until now.

Bob, first of all, I think you've moved on already to next year's but already your car looks very competitive here. Last year here we saw Paul Di Resta do a phenomenal run of 31 laps on the soft tyre. Is this looking like a good result for you here? What are your thoughts? It's very early days I guess.

Bob FEARNLEY: It is early days. You don't know what fuel levels everybody else has been running on today. But it is reasonably encouraging for the first two sessions.

Looking at Jules Bianchi, his performance in the Magny Cours test. What's his future with the team?

BF: We're looking for stability for 2013 with all drivers, that's our first goal. But I think from the young driver test, it just goes to show how beneficial running the FPI programme was, because Jules was very quick all three days, particularly in the Force India car. So I think it's a testament to the team's effort to having a reserve driver who is really up and running and competitive all the time.

Jean-Francois, I'm sure you're expecting a question about alternators. What is it about Sebastian Vettel that it seems to happen to him and nobody else?

Jean-Francois CAUBET: First of all we started to have a problem in Valencia with two drivers Sebastian Vettel and Romain (Grosjean). It was not easy to detect or find because both alternators were completely melted and destroyed. So we were thinking it was an electric problem and probably the levels of power in the car, so we decided to change a bit the levels of power in each car. Spa was OK but again in Monza we have a problem with Sebastian two times and another driver also. We had a bit of fortune because we stopped the Lotus car just maybe some problem with the alternator and at the end it was not an electrical problem, it was a mechanical problem, a bearing probably. So, we are trying to change something. It is not easy because we detect that a few days but I think we are quite optimistic. The problem we have is that we are running the new solution in the dyno but only the race will give us an answer.

Do you think the heat is going to be a factor here?

J-FC: I don't know. P1 was OK, P2 was OK. We cross our fingers for P3, qualifying and the race.

Recently, you lost Monsieur Arbiteboul to Tony over here. How important a loss is that and what can he expect from his new CEO?

J-FC: I think it is good news for Tony. I was working with Cyril for eight years. He was working with Flavio in the team. We sold the team. We built a new strategy on the engine side. I think after eight years at Renault I think this is a fantastic opportunity for him to do something probably more concrete, more challenging but why not he will be back one day in Renault no?

Martin, there's been a lot of speculation about the team, how much of a distraction has it been?

Martin WHITMARSH: No, I don't think it has been. I think over the last three races we've got stronger and more focused. I assume that the distraction you refer to is Lewis but I think anyone who knows Lewis and witnessed Lewis last weekend (in Italy) and actually also this weekend

would say he's very very focused on doing the job. I think he realises that this year we have a strong opportunity to win a World Championship and I think we all realise that the right thing to do is focus and improve the car, don't make mistakes and maximise the points you can get from each race. I think that's what we're very much focused on. I know that there are stories and speculation that swirl around and I guess that's Formula One and I think we're content to get on with the job quietly.

Excellent performances in the last three races: you must be favourites to win a World Championship even though there is that huge gap, and there are seven races to go.

MW: I think you've got to be cautious. I think we were firm favourites going into the season, we were firm favourites coming out of Australia and it can change. I think we're very pleased that the last three events have been on very different circuits and we've been competitive at all of them. I think we're cautious here. Hopefully we can be competitive. What we haven't done is just pile in the points that we should have done, given the competitiveness of our car. I think after 12 or 13 races, I think we've been on the front row eleven times. We've clearly got a strong package and therefore we should be disappointed in the number of points that we don't have rather than the points that we do have. But you don't look back, you look forward. I think we've got quite a good development momentum so we're making the car quicker. I think we've got two great racing drivers who are very much focused on trying to win races and other things, so we're hopeful that we can get a result here and keep the pressure on. You've got to say that Fernando's done a great job to be where he is and that's going to take some effort to overhaul but it's certainly do-able and we're going to keep pushing as hard as we can.

Tony, you've got a new CEO in Cyril Abiteboul, what was the thinking behind hiring a CEO when you seem to have a lot of chiefs already?

Tony FERNANDES: Well, I think we're evolving into a little bit of an auto group with the cars division and technology division that we've put together which Riad [Asmat] is looking at, and I am not as involved so the team needs leadership. Cyril has been someone that I've courted for a while and we've finally persuaded him - with Renault's blessing - to come over to Caterham. It provides us with a (inaudible) for the F1 team going forward.

So will he be the team principal?

TF: Not at the moment, no. I will still remain in that job for a while. Eventually, maybe.

And your thoughts on your drivers for next year: is Heikki staying? What's the situation with Vitaly?

TF: Well, it's... I don't know. We will have to have a discussion at some point and we also have options on that front. I would like Heikki to stay, very much. He's been great for us over the last three and a half years. We'll have to sit down and decide where we go from here.

Martin, you described as fantasy reports that Lewis might be joining Mercedes. Do you still describe that as fantasy or did you seriously under-estimate the situation?

MW: I don't remember that but...

I do.

MW: ...good! I think if you told me that he had signed the deal as you said that was fantasy so in answer to the same question I would give the same response to that.

Martin, do you accept that Lewis has had an offer from Mercedes?

MW: I suspect that Tony here has made him an offer as well, he's a very good racing driver.

TF: I haven't!

MW: He's not ambitious enough, you see.

Martin, you risk losing a driver, potentially; have you started even thinking about a replacement yet?

MW: No, as I said earlier, I think we're very focused on trying to do a good job here.

To Bob and to Tony: there's a possibility that the regulations from next year onwards will be decided by the six top teams as opposed to the Formula One Commission. How do you people, as team principals of teams that don't fall within those six, feel about that possibility?

BF: I think that we would like the stability to stay where it is, with all teams being represented at the F1 Commission, Dieter, so I don't think there's any doubt about where we would like to be. Tony will have to speak for himself, but I think it's a much better balance when the teams are fully represented.

TF: I share the same view obviously. The one thing is though... the key is that all of us have to find a way of standardising regulations and having less changes and less irregularities but I think there is a danger that the six teams are hyper-competitive and sometimes things go on and on and on, so I do think that there could be an imbalance here but the key to me is not whether there are six teams or twelve teams or two teams, the key is to have simple regulations that won't have a tremendous amount of debate and we just will go racing.

Martin, why has it taken so long to solve Lewis's situation? Even by Formula One standards it seems to have taken an age.

MW: I think it seems a long time because of the speculation that people have made, but when you sit down and seriously put your mind to entering into a new contract it doesn't take too long. I think it's a question of priorities and other things we've been doing.

Martin, are you actually trying to pay him less money for his new contract?

MW: I'm sure he will want more money and I'm sure we will want to pay less - that's how business normally works.

Tony, you've moved into the new Leaffield facility, an immense complex. It's much bigger than what Caterham as a Formula One team is. What's the long term plan with the spare capacity there?

TF: I think over the next few months details will evolve as to what we're planning. It's not a hidden secret that I got into Formula One to manufacture cars and Lotus was my initial objective which went spectacularly wrong in many ways, shape or forms but the ambition and the vision is still the same and Leaffield will play a part in that vision. The brand may have changed but the vision and the idea of what we're trying to put together still exists. I think we are putting all the infrastructure in place to have a reasonable Formula One team. We have a reasonable car now, we just have to optimise it as much as possible. I think we've got some good people together, we're in a facility in a location which attracts other people into it, plus with our other two divisions it will all come together. I think in the next few months you will see some clarity as to what we're trying to achieve.

Jean-Francois, certain people continue talking about retaining the current V8s for an additional year or two after 2014. In addition to that, you'd said that you people wanted to possibly supply six teams with your 2014 technology. Where do you stand on these two points please?

J-FC: I think the V6 will be on the track for all the teams in two years. I think Mercedes, Ferrari and us are all changing our dynos from V8s to V6s so now it's impossible to make a change. For the teams, the strategy is to keep four teams and I don't know if it's possible to do more. I think that if you want to have good reliability, good performance you need to keep four teams, but if there will be a need for more, we don't want to close the door.

Martin, I can understand why you would want to laugh through some of the questions facing Lewis and put on a bit of a brave face but is part of you seriously appreciating the fact that there could be life without Lewis from 2013 onwards?

MW: As I said earlier, it's not a question of putting on a brave face, it's a question of focusing on doing our job, and we're concentrating on this year's championship. I think speculation on next year is something that we don't need to entertain or respond to so we're focusing on the here and now.

So does that mean there won't be an announcement until after the end of the season, because you've got to focus on all the races haven't you?

MW: We might wait until then, you never know.

F1 Singapore Grand Prix – FP3 report

As the pitlane opened for the final practice session of the Singapore Grand Prix weekend, it was to a hot and sticky track, with air temperatures of 31 degrees, and a track temperature of 34 degrees. As the session drew on, both temperatures fell in line with the setting sun.

The first man to put a time on the board was Sauber's Kamui Kobayashi, who lapped the Marina Bay Circuit in 1m56.339s. The Japanese racer was swiftly followed by half the grid, with times falling by around five seconds a lap over the first five minutes.

Despite this improvement, however, times are still significantly slower than those set in FP2 yesterday evening. Over the course of the next hour, the track will improve and times drop further still.

With only an hour in which to determine the ideal set-up for qualifying and the race, the circuit was heavy with cars throughout the session, and timing qualifying simulations became a matter of traffic management.

Half-way through the session, it was the McLaren pairing that appeared to be the strongest, while both Red Bulls and Nico Hulkenberg were also in the mix. With times not yet below the 1m50s barrier, the Red Bulls and McLarens were split by a not insurmountable half a second.

The first incident of the afternoon came about thanks to Sergio Perez, who clipped the barriers in the tunnel under the grandstands, sending sparks flying. The Mexican driver was able to get the car back to the pits, where the team are currently examining it for damage.

Next, Timo Glock stopped his Marussia on track at Turn 20 with a stuck throttle, bringing out the yellows in that sector. Mark Webber then repeated Perez' feat, causing a puncture and possible suspension damage with his own clip of the barriers.

As the session continued, Ferrari proved once again that they are never a team to be dismissed lightly – Fernando Alonso was the second driver to break into the 1m49s barrier, after Vettel, while Felipe Massa was hot on Jenson Button's heels.

The first man out on track on the supersoft compound was Williams' Bruno Senna, who managed a P2-worthy 1.49.715s on the red Pirelli rubber, 0.10s slower than Vettel's best time on the softs. But when the defending world champion did his own run on supersofts, the Red Bull crossed the line in 1.47.947s, 1.768s faster than Senna's effort.

It would be the first in a series of supersoft runs that saw lap times fall across the board before the session was brought to a premature end with only a few minutes remaining on the clock as Vitaly Petrov hit the wall twice at Turn 23, eventually stopping on track by the pit entry.

When the red flag fluttered, marking the end of the session, it was Vettel who came out on top.

FP3 times (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.47.947s [15 laps]
2. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.48.272s [15 laps]
3. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.48.623s [11 laps]
4. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.48.859s [16 laps]
5. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1.48.865s [17 laps]
6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.49.458s [13 laps]
7. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.49.684s [15 laps]
8. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.49.699s [16 laps]
9. Bruno Senna (Williams) 1.49.715s [14 laps]
10. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.49.981s [14 laps]
11. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.50.110s [12 laps]
12. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.50.524s [10 laps]
13. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.50.664s [16 laps]
14. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.50.777s [15 laps]
15. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1.50.840s [15 laps]
16. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.51.012s [15 laps]

17. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.51.059s [17 laps]
 18. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.51.272s [10 laps]
 19. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.52.290s [16 laps]
 20. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.53.781s [12 laps]
 21. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1.54.326s [14 laps]
 22. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.54.421s [14 laps]
 23. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.54.630s [9 laps]
 24. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.54.875s [14 laps]
-

F1 Singapore Grand Prix – Q1 report

Darkness has fallen over Singapore, but it's bright as daylight around the Marina Bay Circuit, where the pit lane has just opened for the first qualifying session of the Singapore Grand Prix weekend.

Whatever might happen on track this session, Pedro de la Rosa is almost certain to line up at the back of the grid following a five-place penalty issued for an unscheduled gearbox change. Given that the HRTs rarely qualify above the back two rows, P24 is a near certainty.

Another driver to face a penalty this weekend is Charles Pic – the Marussia driver has been given a twenty second time penalty for Sunday's race, plus a day's community service on the FIA Road Safety campaign to make up for ignoring red flags at the end of FP3.

Half-way through the session, it was a very odd dropout zone, comprised of a number of front-runners – Lewis Hamilton, who had one slow time on the board, and both Red Bull drivers, who had yet to leave the pits.

But Hamilton crossed the line on a second run in a timesheet-topping 1.48.285s, while Vettel popped up in P2 and Webber in P3 with their first timed laps. Vettel and Hamilton were split by a mere 0.002s, and we should be in for a tight fight between Red Bull and McLaren over the next two sessions.

With the front-runners in their usual slots, the dropout zone became a more realistic Jean-Eric Vergne, Kamui Kobayashi, Heikki Kovalainen, Timo Glock, Charles Pic, Narain Karthikeyan, and Pedro de la Rosa.

Just above, and hardly safe, were Daniel Ricciardo, Sergio Perez, and Vitaly Petrov.

The Saubers and Toro Rossos have been struggling this weekend, and it appears that neither team has been able to find the magic set-up bullet between the end of FP3 and the start of qualifying.

But all the change has been at the top of the timesheets, where times barely matter in this session. Vettel was sent out for a second run, even though his first run pace was good enough for safe passage into Q2. The Red Bull driver dethroned Hamilton, who has remained in the pits since setting his P1 time, but was soon bested by Kimi Raikkonen, who was beaten by Paul di Resta, who found himself bumped down by Romain Grosjean.

And at the bottom of the pack, all is as it has been for the past three years: we have the six drivers from 2010's new teams, plus A.N. Other. This week, the role of Mr Other is being played by Kobayashi.

Dropout zone

18. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
19. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham)
20. Charles Pic (Marussia)
21. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham)
22. Timo Glock (Marussia)
23. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT)
24. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT)*

* Pedro de la Rosa has been issued with a five-place grid penalty following an unscheduled gearbox change.

F1 Singapore Grand Prix – Q2 report

With Kamui Kobayashi out and Romain Grosjean fastest, Q1 was all about the two men whose stories dominated the Belgian Grand Prix three weeks ago.

There may have been 22 other drivers out on track, but with six of the Q1 dropout spots nearly a given, and the bulk of other times largely irrelevant, all the Twitter chatter between sessions was on Grosjean's pace and Kobayashi's hero to zero status. Three weeks is an eternity in Formula One.

The tight times set in Q1 meant that all and sundry headed out of the pits on the supersoft tyre, sacrificing a race set for qualifying promotion. But that is a tactical move – the duration of the softs make those tyres the primary race choice for the majority of teams this weekend, and Sunday's race is likely to see short stints on the supersofts with the bulk of the action being run on Pirelli's soft compound tyre.

Early on in the session, Mark Webber and Timo Glock had something of a tussle on track; the stewards are currently investigating possible impeding between the pair. At the time of writing, no decision had yet been made concerning blame or punishment.

It was a crash happy second qualifying, with Romain Grosjean clipping the wall and damaging his car mere moments before Bruno Senna took a chunk out of the wall with his Williams, which limped slowly back to the pits. It is unlikely the Brazilian will return to the track in this session.

Despite his accident, Grosjean was able to get back out with more than three minutes to spare, giving the Frenchman the chance of making it through to Q3. In the dropout zone at least until his first timed lap is finished, Grosjean has Senna, Jean-Eric Vergne, Daniel Ricciardo, Sergio Perez, Nico Hulkenberg, and Michael Schumacher for company.

Hovering at the edge of the dropout zone and keeping nervous watch of Grosjean's progress are Felipe Massa and Paul di Resta.

Grosjean does the business, crossing the line in P3 and demoting di Resta. But the Scot saves himself with a provisional P5, putting Massa in the dropout zone and Pastor Maldonado on the edge.

But as the chequered flag falls it all goes crazy, with times changing non-stop. Kimi Raikkonen gets knocked out, drivers pop in and out of the dropout zone, and the only thing for it is to wait until all laps are complete and the final eliminations revealed.

Out are Hulkenberg, Raikkonen, Massa, Perez, Ricciardo, Vergne, and Senna.

Dropout zone

11. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India)
12. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus)
13. Felipe Massa (Ferrari)
14. Sergio Perez (Sauber)
15. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso)
16. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso)
17. Bruno Senna (Williams)

F1 Singapore Grand Prix – Q3 report

With fourteen men eliminated, it is down to the last ten standing to finalise the grid for Sunday's 2012 Singapore Grand Prix.

There have been shock eliminations, unusual penalties, and blistering pace from surprising sources, so this last ten minutes promises to be a tense session with a real fight between Sebastian Vettel and Lewis Hamilton, the two strongest candidates for pole.

First to set a time in Q3 was Jenson Button, who crossed the line in 1.47.238s; the McLaren driver was instantly out-paced by his teammate, who claimed provisional pole (though these are early days) with a 1.46.362s. By contrast, Vettel's first effort was a comparatively feeble 1.47.694s.

With the session half run, those are the only three times on the board, and only Romain Grosjean is out on track and yet to complete a timed lap. The other six are in the pits, some yet to emerge and others having retreated there, tails between legs, after errors on their initial Q3 runs.

It's another one-run Q3 for the bulk of the top ten, a situation that has become boringly predictable over the past two seasons.

At the three minute remaining mark, Pastor Maldonado, Fernando Alonso, and Mark Webber headed to the track. Forty seconds later, everyone barring Michael Schumacher and Nico Rosberg had hit the circuit, and the Mercedes pair no longer had a chance of completing a timed lap.

Grosjean claims provisional P4, having come close to another prang, but is bumped down when Maldonado claims provisional P2 with a 1.46.804s. Alonso claims provisional P3, Webber gets provisional P5, Vettel takes P3 from Alonso, di Resta pops up in P6, and pole belongs to Hamilton by a half-second margin.

Provisional grid

1. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren)
2. Pastor Maldonado (Williams)
3. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull)
4. Jenson Button (McLaren)
5. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari)
6. Paul di Resta (Force India)
7. Mark Webber (Red Bull)
8. Romain Grosjean (Lotus)
9. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes)
10. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes)
11. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India)
12. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus)
13. Felipe Massa (Ferrari)
14. Sergio Perez (Sauber)
15. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso)
16. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso)
17. Bruno Senna (Williams)
18. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
19. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham)

20. Charles Pic (Marussia)
21. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham)
22. Timo Glock (Marussia)
23. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT)
24. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT)*

* Pedro de la Rosa has been issued with a five-place grid penalty following an unscheduled gearbox change.

F1 Singapore Grand Prix – Saturday press conference

After a nail-biting qualifying session that saw McLaren claim pole by half a second, all the talk in the press conference was of the many and varied challenges the Marina Bay Circuit offers a driver.

Present were Lewis Hamilton (McLaren), Pastor Maldonado (Williams), and Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull).

Lewis, a phenomenal margin, very, very quick indeed, well done.

Lewis HAMILTON: Thank you. The guys have done a fantastic job all week and to come here with some small things that have improved from the last race. Obviously we have high downforce here so we weren't sure where we would turn out against the others but obviously Sebastian was incredibly fast through most of the sessions, I'm not really sure what happened in the end. Nonetheless I'm very happy that I was able to pull that time out. A great lap, I'm very happy with it.

It must be a very, very difficult circuit indeed. We saw you make a couple of mistakes in Q1, very tricky around here?

LH: Oh, it is. It is absolutely. Just trying to find the gaps is quite difficult, particularly in Q1. And making sure your tyres are up to temperature, making sure your brakes are up to temperature without using them before you start your lap. And yeah, the first few laps I did on the prime was quite poor and I feel very fortunate that I was able to get at least one lap on them, so I didn't have to go again.

Pastor, where did that lap come from? Well done.

Pastor MALDONADO: We were working very hard because at the beginning of the weekend and during the practice we were a little bit lost with the setup and yeah, we were improving, especially during the quali, y'know, during the qualifying just trying to adapt the car to my style. We find naturally very well balanced, especially in Q2 and then Q3. I'm really looking forward to the race because yesterday we showed very good pace, very consistent so I think it's going to be a good one for us this time.

Sebastian, fastest in all three practice sessions. A little bit disappointed with third on the grid?

Sebastian VETTEL: Yeah, a little disappointed. Especially Q3. I don't know why we couldn't do the step. Nevertheless, third is a good position to start from. There is a long race tomorrow, a lot of things that can happen. I think the pace is there, we've proven throughout the weekend – but surely if you don't do the last step in qualifying it's a shame, because I think the speed was there. So, yeah, it didn't come together in the end.

Lewis, a final thought on tomorrow's race. What are the main factors?

LH: It's an incredibly tough circuit for tyre degradation, as we have at pretty much every track but especially as it's hot and humid here. So I think everyone is going to struggle with that, and I think we just have to try and get away cleanly at the start and stick to the strategy that we have planned and be prepared if it doesn't work.

So Lewis, well done, obviously as you say, tyre degradation the big thing but the walls... so many different factors, so many difficult things, and the heat as well, and at an anti-clockwise circuit. It must be a really tough circuit, this?

LH: It is, and I think everyone here will see that tomorrow. I think we all felt that with our long runs. Hopefully we've done the work we need to do to hopefully put together a good package tomorrow. We've put ourselves in the best position so I hope that we will be able to capitalise on that tomorrow.

Pastor, again it's fantastic that you're once again so close. Is this because it's a similar circuit, do you feel, to Barcelona?

PM: It's completely different than Barcelona. Especially because the lack of grip. We were struggling a little bit to put the car together but, including the qualifying, we managed to find a very good balance and we are really looking forward to tomorrow. Yesterday we did a couple of long runs and it's looking pretty good for us. The tyre degradation I mean. So I'm really looking forward.

Sebastian, any further worries about alternators or is that firmly behind you?

SV: There's no guarantee. It's hard to get a guarantee on anything in life, so we'll see. So far we didn't have any problems, no signs. Monza was a different story. Obviously we had a failure on Saturday and Sunday. Today no failures and hopefully tomorrow we'll be fine as well. So no concerns.

Sebastian, what happened in Q3, you seemed to have lost the speed a little bit?

SV: Yeah, I don't know to be honest. I think the speed was there but we weren't able to really improve, whereas in Q2 I got the lap in reasonably safely and I was a little bit off Lewis, I think, one and a half tenths. I was confident that we can go quicker somewhere, lower in the 46s region. I think Lewis's time in Q3 was very quick so... if, could, would, should... we don't know but I think the pace was there to do better than what we did in Q2 but in Q3 we just couldn't pick and in the end I was even struggling to repeat the lap I did in the beginning, so yeah, obviously a bit disappointing but I think the speed is there. We have been competitive throughout the weekend. The race is very long here, a lot of things can happen – safety cars – so it's important to be in the right place at the right time and then we go from there.

For all three of you: every race that we've had here has featured some safety cars, so to what extent do you guys take that into account for your own strategies in the race?

LH: Well, I think for us as drivers we just have to be ready to react, hope that it's neither of us and then we just leave it to the team to work on what we have to do. They will direct us what we have to do with fuel-wise and all those kind of things.

PM: I agree. I think either we need to be fully focused in this race on the conditions very very hot, very warm and we need to put everything together

to get a good performance. It's not only from our side, the team has to work together.

SV: It's difficult to know what happens. You can't drive round waiting for the safety car, to have a break but obviously there's little run-off here and we saw in free practice that if a car stops on the circuit then it's already enough to have yellow flags at least and a potential safety car in the race. It's difficult to know what happens but we'll see tomorrow I guess. So far we've always had one as far as I can remember.

To all three of you: how confident are you that you can overtake tomorrow during the race?

PM: I think it's possible to overtake here, especially because of the big tyre degradation that we will have tomorrow. I think everybody will be struggling with the tyres at some time, but the strategy-wise must be really good for everyone, just to try to be consistent but I think here it's possible to overtake. We have a long straight, good DRS, it's not going to be very easy but we have a couple of places.

LH: Yeah, I think he's said it pretty good. You can overtake here.

SV: Yeah, it's not the easiest circuit but it's not impossible.

Lewis, looking at the TV in slow motion, we saw that you touched the wall a little bit on the last lap. What happened? Did you feel something in the car or is it OK?

LH: I did?

You touched the wall a little bit.

LH: Yessss! [grins] That means I'm using all the road. I didn't mean to and I didn't feel it so it hopefully hasn't done any damage but I honestly didn't feel it.

Lewis, we've not seen too much emotion from you when you've got out of the car, either here today or following the victory in Italy. I'm just wondering if there's any particular reason for that.

LH: No, I'm pretty happy.

Really? Because you don't seem to be.

LH: I am.

Was it tough out there today, because obviously you're sitting there fanning yourself with a sleeve of your overalls? Was it a really tough one for you?

LH: It's easy for you to sit in your shorts - if you're wearing shorts - and T-shirt but I've got like three or so layers on and I've got this extra jacket on which doesn't help. It's pretty warm.

To all three of you: Pastor mentioned tyre degradation. The supersofts don't last a great length of time. The guys behind you, the Mercedes guys, didn't set a time so they've got a choice of tyres. How worried are you about the start of the race and what the guys behind you are doing for when you come out of the stops?

SV: I think that hopefully by the time we pit we have a big gap to the guys who are maybe on a different strategy. I think it's difficult to know now how long we will be able to stay out. Obviously we have a rough idea. I think we're all on the same tyre and the same amount of laps so we will see when the lights go off but I think it will be a difficult race for tyre degradation and I think the difficulty is that we probably don't know what to expect so we will see tomorrow, I think.

LH: I think this weekend there seems to be a bigger gap between all the drivers and teams so perhaps that will allow... that will mean that there are bigger gaps throughout the race. Maybe.

PM: I think that especially at the beginning of the race we are in very similar conditions, especially with the tyres, so it's difficult to predict what's going to happen, because this is an unusual race, an unusual track but I think it's going to be very tight for everyone, especially at the beginning.

Another question for all three of you: we heard today that the race contract has been extended for five years and that the organisers are open to the possibility of configuration changes. Are there any changes to the layout that you guys would like to see: hairpins, faster corners, anything like that?

SV: I think we've discussed it many times, every year actually, to find a better solution in turn ten which probably requires to take a little bit of land from the cricket club for those couple of days or maybe remove the pavement for three/four days. I don't know, but if you consider the costs for this whole event, I think taking a pavement away and putting it back on shouldn't be a big problem, but in terms of safety, yeah, I think that's one of the worst corners we have on the calendar, because you've got these big kerbs, big bumps and it's a bit tricky to find a better solution right now with the space we have, but I think that's something we need to work on.

LH: The same.

PM: The same.

F1 Singapore Grand Prix - Race report

While many pundits - both armchair and professional - predicted that neither Lewis Hamilton nor Pastor Maldonado would see the chequered flag in Singapore, the expectation was that the hot-headed Williams driver would cause multiple retirements with a first corner collision.

But for those men at the front of the pack, the first lap of the Singapore Grand Prix passed without incident. Maldonado was passed off the start by both Sebastian Vettel and Jenson Button, and Hamilton powered off into the distance, opening up a 1.2s lead by the end of the first lap.

The first third of the race was duller than ditch water, and slightly less exciting than watching paint dry. Bruno Senna passed Timo Glock on lap 4, in what was the first overtaking manoeuvre of the race (the movements off the start notwithstanding), and it looked as though we were settling in for a long, slow procession.

With brief moments of action on track in the opening phase of the grand prix, primarily limited to those backmarkers whose performances have little bearing on the race as a whole, the dark skies over Marina Bay lent themselves more to an extended nap than they did a night of watching stars under the stars.

But Formula One is a high speed sport, and change happens in a heartbeat – or a heartbreak.

On this occasion, the broken heart belonged to race leader Hamilton, who delivered a sterling performance over the first 23 laps of the Marina Bay Circuit before a gearbox failure saw the Briton draw slowly to a halt at Turn 5, hamstrung by a box of neutrals.

Hamilton was in the ideal position to cement his claim on the driver's title, but a potentially self-inflicted gearbox problem put an end to his race and a dent in his dreams.

The British driver was seen to skim the walls on his qualifying run on Saturday evening, in a move not all that dissimilar to the prang that forced Williams' Bruno Senna into a gearbox change and subsequent five-place grid drop. McLaren were aware of the fact that they were at risk of seeing Hamilton retire on Sunday, but decided that their best option was to take that risk rather than face a certain grid penalty on a track where overtaking can present something of a challenge.

You win some, you lose some, and Hamilton lost it all in Singapore.

The pre-race assumption was that an on-track retirement would bring out one of Singapore's mandatory Safety Cars, but action continued unimpeded by little more than waved yellows. Ten laps later, however, the first Safety Car of the evening was brought out when Narain Karthikeyan slid over the marbles and parked his HRT in the wall.

At last, there was something to write home about.

From that moment onwards, the character of the race changed utterly – a dreary procession became an incident and penalty fuelled drama, with retirements aplenty and battles for position throughout the pack.

Maldonado managed a single lap under the first Safety Car before he was forced into retirement thanks to hydraulics failure. At least, he would have done had he followed the pit wall's instructions to box when the problem was first identified. Instead the Venezuelan elected to remain out on track for a further two laps before finally admitting defeat.

It was impressive that the Barcelona race winner managed to hang on for as long as he did – from the start of the race it was clear that the Williams was not in the best of shape, although it was clouds of brake dust that alerted those watching to the fact that Maldonado was not long for the race.

When racing was about to restart on lap 39, Button and Vettel had a near miss behind the Safety Car. While their close call received little attention from the stewards during the race, it was the subject of a three hour post-race investigation that concluded with no penalties being imposed on either driver for what was determined to be a racing incident.

The restart itself brought about a whole new set of problems – and another excursion for Bernd Maylander – when Michael Schumacher rear-ended Jean-Eric Vergne in what appeared to be a colossal misjudgement in the dark, but which the Mercedes driver blamed on mechanical issues.

The stewards disagreed, and after the race issued the German driver with a ten-place grid penalty for the Japanese Grand Prix, justifying their decision by explaining that it was Schumacher's second such collision – both with Vergne – over the course of the 2012 season.

It was the stewards who worked hardest in Marina Bay on Sunday evening, overseeing investigations and penalties for nearly half of the drivers left on track at the end of play. In addition to the Vettel-Button and Schumacher-Vergne incidents already mentioned, the stewards were kept busy investigating Mark Webber, who was eventually issued with a post-race drive-through penalty for gaining an advantage by leaving the track when passing Kamui Kobayashi.

During the race, the back of the pack chaos at Turns 1 and 2 of the first lap was reviewed for possible penalties before the stewards determined that there were no penalties to be issued. Another racing incident under consideration before being dismissed without penalty was a lap 43 near miss between Bruno Senna and Felipe Massa: the two Brazilians enjoyed an aggressive dice that saw the Ferrari driver narrowly avoid seeing his race end in the wall.

After months of constant criticism, the Singapore Grand Prix saw a return to form for Massa, who is fighting to save his Ferrari seat. A typically poor qualifying session was negated when the Paulista recovered from a first lap puncture to finish in P8 following an impressive drive from the back of the pack.

Massa's performance on Sunday was reminiscent of the fighting spirit we last saw in 2008 – purple lap followed purple lap, and the second Ferrari worked its way up the grid with a series of impressive overtaking manoeuvres on cars the Brazilian has become more accustomed to trailing.

While Hamilton's championship chances were seriously dented on Sunday night, the worst affected team in Singapore was Williams, the only outfit to see both drivers retire. Having already said goodbye to a possible podium from their front row start when Maldonado was called in to the pits, Bruno Senna was forced to retire on the 57th lap of what became a 59 lap race due to the FIA's new regulations concerning maximum race duration.

The second Williams driver was miles outside the points when a total loss of power forced him to stop his FW34 on track, capping off a disastrous weekend for the team, and for Senna himself. The Brazilian driver's F1 future has been the subject of much speculation in recent weeks, and Senna did himself no favours spending seemingly every session becoming overly intimate with the walls and barriers of the Singapore circuit.

When all was said and done, the 2012 Singapore Grand Prix was a race of attrition that saw nearly one-third of the grid retire. Defined by its penalties and its Safety Cars, there is a very good chance that the night spent racing under the Singapore streetlights will have itself defined the 2012 drivers' championship.

Singapore Grand Prix results (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 2h 00m 26.144s
2. Jenson Button (McLaren) + 8.959s
3. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) + 15.227s
4. Paul di Resta (Force India) + 19.063s
5. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) + 34.784s
6. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) + 35.759s
7. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) + 36.698s
8. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) + 42.829s
9. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) + 45.820s
10. Mark Webber (Red Bull) + 47.175s
11. Sergio Perez (Sauber) + 50.619s
12. Timo Glock (Marussia) + 1m31.918s
13. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) + 1m37.141s
14. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) + 1m39.413s
15. Charles Pic (Marussia) + 1m42.925s*
16. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) + 1m47.967s
17. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) + 1 lap

Bruno Senna (Williams) RET
Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) RET
Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) RET
Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) RET
Pastor Maldonado (Williams) RET
Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) RET
Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) RET

* Pic's listed time does not include a 20-second time penalty imposed by the stewards.

F1 Singapore Grand Prix – Sunday press conference

While the three men who crossed the line first took to the podium and the press conference, as is traditional, the paddock spent the evening waiting with bated breath to discover whether the result would be changed after the race.

Present were Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull), Jenson Button (McLaren), and Fernando Alonso (Ferrari).

Sebastian you're a back-to-back winner here. What's the secret?

Sebastian VETTEL: I think it's one of the toughest races of the year to be honest. It's very long; the full two hours. The circuit is a killer. There's so many bumps, there's no space for mistakes and the race just seems to go on forever. Obviously we benefited from Lewis' failure. A couple of laps before that he lost some oil and then after that I think we generally we had very, very strong pace all weekend. I had a good start, which got us into second and in the hunt. The pace was there so... I'm just incredibly happy and proud because this is a such a tough race. I would like to dedicate it to one very, very special man, Professor Sid Watkins who passed away and we remember him for sure. I think he is one of the biggest reasons we can go out on a circuit like this and enjoy ourselves and be reasonably safe. He pushed the boundaries in terms of safety for all of us, so a big thank you to him.

Can you see something reminiscent of 2010; how you came from this position and just sneaked that win of the championship in 2010?

SV: I don't think Fernando would be too happy if it happened again in the last race. But it's an incredible season for all of us (inaudible) we have a lot of races left, the car seems to be competitive and we just have to use the momentum and keep pushing for these last races and see what happens.

Jenson, what happened at the re-start?

Jenson BUTTON: First of all, good evening everyone. Was that fun? Good. It was a pretty tough two hours for us. The re-start? Sebastian accelerated and braked for the right-hander and I just didn't expect that, such a speed difference. So I hit the brakes, locked up and just missed the rear of his car, because that would have been quite embarrassing. But we got through it and yeah it's a good second place. I'm reasonably happy with that. We all want to win, but you can't win them all.

Does that second place make up in some small way for Monza?

JB: Yeah it does, but for us as a team to have another failure this weekend is disappointing. The important thing for us is we have a very good car. I think the team are doing a fantastic job and it seems that every race we go to we really do have a chance of winning so that's important to us.

Fernando, you also have won twice here and now on the podium again. It must be one of your favourite tracks?

Fernando ALONSO: Yeah, good evening everybody. Of course, is one of the best tracks to drive, to enjoy. The weekend in general is out of our normal routine, let's say, of times et cetera. We enjoy driving here, the atmosphere is fantastic, the layout is quite interesting and it was a fun race again.

You still have a 29 point lead in the Championship but yet you haven't won since Germany. Are all of your opponents, are they all falling away or tripping over themselves?

FA: Well, in Monza is was Lewis winning the race and Sebastian retired. Here it's Sebastian winning, Lewis retiring, so for me it's OK is they keep doing it like this.

Sebastian, really should we have expected that result after practice – but perhaps not after qualifying?

SV: Yeah, it just underlines that we obviously struggled a bit yesterday, especially in the last section of qualifying. Up to then I think it was fine and the pace was there. The confirmation was straight away there in the grand prix when we found ourselves behind Lewis and were able to push him quite hard. I think he was obviously trying to save his tyres, we were trying to save the tyres. It's a bit of a different race, it's very tactical but I think the pace was there in the race throughout. Also, towards the end versus Jenson I think we could have an answer every time he was going quick and it was a good finish of the Grand Prix. Obviously it's a long race, a lot of laps – we did the full two hours again – but it's fun in a way, you are excited, a bit nervous before the race starts, knowing there is a little bit of a marathon coming, but I think that's what makes this race so special: not just racing at night, it's also the circuit with a lot of corners, a lot of bumps, making it extremely difficult. It's a great challenge for us. Very happy with the result, obviously. I think the team deserves a big thank you. In fact working in these conditions is very, very hot and in the garage it is another 10, 15 degrees hotter than outside. So not the nicest office to work in but obviously it's nice to give a little bit of champagne back and bring a trophy home – so I'm very happy.

And good for the Championship chances as well...

SV: Yeah, it looks better than before. Fernando finished third. I am not a genius but I think it's looking ten points better than it was before. There's a lot of races left and it's a bit difficult to predict what's going to happen. We have to make sure that we finish the races first of all. I think the pace is there, even if we are not quick enough to win then it is good enough to collect a lot of points. And we have to make sure we do that. It's a tough championship so far but we're still in it. We're still looking forward to the next couple of races, and obviously the target at the moment is to beat Fernando.

Jenson, the pace seemed to be there at the start but not necessarily at the end.

JB: Yeah, the pace on the supersoft was good. I could look after the tyres pretty well – not that it did me any good anyway because after the pitstops they had a gap because they went to new tyres earlier than me, so it didn't really work out. And on the harder of the two tyres, the balance wasn't as good and I couldn't really look after the tyres and degradation was reasonably high so, yeah, not too bad. Would have been nicer to have pushed Sebastian a bit harder: you never know around a street circuit when you push someone hard, so there was always the possibility that we could do one step better but it wasn't to be: Sebastian didn't make any mistakes and we came away with a second. Reasonably good points and it's nice to get some good points back on the board after the DNF in Monza.

After Lewis' retirement was there any concern in terms of reliability, or did they not tell you that?

JB: No, they didn't say anything. I obviously knew that it was a... I still don't know... but I'm guessing it was a gearbox problem. For about three or four laps it was spraying gearbox oil. I thought it was the backmarker at the time, and then I saw Lewis pull over so I knew that was from his car. It's disappointing for the team to have another DNF – two weekends on the trot. It's something that we need to sort out because as a team over the race weekends we're doing a great job and the pace is there with the car. Over the last few races the results we've had have been very good but it's just we can't seem to do that with both cars. It's something for sure we need to work on for the rest of the season.

Fernando, for you was this pretty much the best you could hope for?

FA: Yes, definitely. I think we were not very competitive this weekend so we struggled a little with the pace of the car and yesterday we managed to put a good lap in Q3 and that was a little bit the best part of the weekend. Because if you start at the rear I think you are having problems all the race, so starting in fifth, it was OK. Then the start was so-so. We lost position with di Resta and then we recovered in first and second corner, and then we fight a little bit with Maldonado so I think the safety car arrive in the worst moment for us because we have stopped and changed the tyres five laps before the safety car, so we didn't have the pitstop for free like the others did. So, it was, I think with all these difficulties, if we put altogether, arriving third in our difficult weekend is for sure a fantastic result in terms of points.

And in terms of your rivals obviously with Lewis not finishing...

FA: Yes, again I think it's a very positive weekend. A very good weekend. Of the four or five contenders, we lost points with one, with the other three we increased our advantage, so obviously, as I said, when we are not quick enough to win more points against three of our opponents, I think it's positive.

Sebastian, when you were chasing Hamilton, you were losing three to four tenths on several laps in sector two alone, although you were recovering it a little bit in sector one and sector three. Was there any particular reason for that, because you did mention that turn ten was a difficulty yesterday?

SV: No, not really. I saw that I was gaining a little bit in the first sector, not sure in the second sector but I could see that I probably lost a bit but I think Lewis has been very quick in sector two all weekend. Also, I think I was fairly close to him, so obviously the closer you get, it's a bit of a disadvantage but I try to keep the gap fairly much the same, lap by lap. I didn't really mean to close the gap, because I know that the closer I get, the more grip I lose, and obviously I will lose tyres just by running close to him and losing downforce so I think it was a tactical race in the beginning, especially the beginning of the second stint after the first pit stop. If you go all out in one lap you probably go a second faster but then you do this exercise for three laps and Jenson is coming. It's the races that we have these days but I think, as I said, Lewis was already quick in sector two so it was probably not a surprise to lose a little bit against him.

Sebastian, you say this is a tough circuit. What does it feel like to win twice in a row?

SV: Very good. I'm very happy. I think this is one of the best races to win in terms of atmosphere. Everything is a little bit special here. It's a surprise in a way, because we haven't been racing here for fifty years – Formula One hasn't been racing here for fifty years but it still feels like a real classic already. It's nice. I think everyone likes coming here. It's a bit funny to be in the European time zone and a little bit against everything else in this city. It's great to get the opportunity. It's a great city, more than five million people living here and the circuit is right in the middle. When you do the drivers' parade and you see a lot of people around the track it's nice just to be part of it, obviously even greater to win, which was great last year, but is even greater this year to repeat it. I'm very happy, especially with this year's championship. It's very tight. We probably didn't have the fastest package this weekend but we still won the race. I'm very happy.

Fernando, in the second stint you were consistently catching up to the leaders; what was different in that stint compared to qualifying and the other parts of the race?

FA: I don't know. I think we were pushing a little bit harder and we were in free air. In the first stint we were fighting a little bit with Pastor and then we were probably a little bit more competitive with the soft tyre compared to the super soft, so maybe that was the reason.

To all three of you: what are your expectations for Suzuka and your specific car, each of you?

SV: I think we have to improve. I think there is still a little bit that we need to gain. I think that at the moment McLaren is the fastest car and the Ferrari is a little bit of an allrounder. It's always quick and always there so we need to make sure that we see the chequered flag. Reliability will be important but it's a fun track so I'm looking forward to it. The Sauber will be quick, unlike this weekend and we will go from there.

JB: It's always very difficult to know because it's such a different circuit to this one but if you compare it to Spa, and it's reasonably similar to Spa - but without the run-off areas - it's a circuit that should suit us pretty well. I still think that the Red Bulls will be strong as they were in Spa. Qualifying was great for us and the race was as well, but in the race our pace was no better than the Red Bulls. It's going to be a competitive race, I think. We really don't know where the Ferrari will stand on that type of circuit. It's going to be a competitive race, and one I'm very much looking forward to.

FA: Yeah, a little bit difficult to predict. I think all this year we've been up and down for all the teams and it's the same for us. For sure, we need to improve the performance we saw here. We struggled all weekend. Positions five and 13 for our cars is not what we were hoping for so we need to be in a better position in Suzuka. Maybe Silverstone is also quite similar to Suzuka and we were quite OK there so hopefully we can repeat that kind of performance.

Fernando, maybe your first stop was a little bit early; one or two laps more, for the traffic, I think - or no?

FA: I don't know. We more or less stopped when we felt that the tyres were dropping off too much and we didn't want to lose too much time. So we stopped. We found some traffic there and we struggled to overtake. After that, we had good pace so maybe... I don't know. It's difficult to... or it's easy to see after the race. I was happy with the pit stop call.
