



F1 Singapore Blog – Getting to know the Marina Bay Circuit

It is often said that the Singapore Grand Prix is akin to a Monaco of the east, but those saying it tend to be alluding to the glamour of the event.

The two races have another key ingredient in common – despite being street circuits with few overtaking opportunities, they are two of the most popular events on the calendar among F1 media and personnel.

There's a lot to be said for the glamour of racing at night; for starting your 12-hour working day with a breakfast meeting at 3pm. As a city, Singapore is *buzzy, glamorous, exciting*.

Marina Bay's most memorable moment is probably best left swept under the carpet, but Robert Kubica's performance in the dying laps of the 2010 race was a thing of beauty, and a drive to be treasured.

Kubica's run of overtakes last year is the exception at Singapore, not the rule, but despite the lack of wheel-to-wheel racing it is a track the drivers enjoy.

"It's almost two tracks in one: there are quite a few fast corners, which require good setup and a bit of commitment, but there are also lots of tighter 90-degree bends, which are slower and more technical," McLaren driver Lewis Hamilton said.

"You've got to keep it precise through these and just be patient, waiting for the tyres to bite before getting on the throttle. If you're impatient, then you end up losing time because you over-stress the tyres and you over-drive the car."

There is a strong likelihood of a Safety Car at Marina Bay – we have seen one at every Singapore Grand Prix thus far. The, anti-clockwise direction, 23 low-speed twisty corners and close walls mean that precision driving is key, and any mistake is soon punished.

"The circuit itself is extremely challenging for both the cars and drivers: it is the toughest of the season for the brakes and gearbox," Mercedes' Norbert Haug explained. "In the final sector alone, the drivers must negotiate 10 corners in the space of 1,500 metres and there is very little margin for error on such a twisty and bumpy street circuit."

The other casualty of the track layout is likely to be the DRS, which has not made much of an impact in recent races and is unlikely to do so soon.

The slower speeds on offer lead to a high downforce set-up from the teams, who need to balance aerodynamic and mechanical grip to get the most out of their car's potential on the street circuit.

The Bay Marina track surface is notoriously bumpy, which puts added strain on the tyres. After the 2008 race, Felipe Massa called the bumps and kerbs "little tortoises that would wreck the car if you get something wrong". The track has been altered since, but it's a good line anyway.

"It's a long and windy high downforce street circuit, which is typically quite bumpy," Sauber technical director James Key explained. "It needs good mechanical grip. Traction levels and braking stability are important as well. It's a hard circuit for the brakes. We'll be running a high downforce configuration, and we will be working on the mechanical grip."

One of the key factors in Singapore is the physical challenge that the race presents. The local climate is hot and humid, and the slow pace of the 309kms run means that the race is the longest on the F1 calendar, stretching to nearly the full two hours allotted by the FIA.

Mark Webber explains.

“The Singapore night race is a challenging one,” the Australian driver said. “The track’s bumpy and although the 1500-odd lights do a good job at illuminating the circuit, it’s not like racing in daylight and that makes it tiring. It’s also the longest race of the year, running close to the two-hour time-limit set by the FIA, and the intense heat and humidity makes it pretty warm in the cockpit. You have to watch your hydration during the build-up to the race.”

But while the high temperatures are bad news for the drivers, it is good news for those teams – Ferrari in particular – who struggle to get heat in the tyres on occasion.

The evening race means the circuit has all day to absorb the sun’s warmth – and that generated by the support races, which are also laying down rubber. Track temperatures should be in the high 40s before any F1 action begins, and it will only increase over the course of the session.

Given a dry day’s running, Q3 should see some impressive lap times as the teams compete for pole on the supersoft tyre.

But we’re unlikely to see a dry day all weekend. While afternoon rains are traditional in Singapore, current forecasts call for scorching heat and daily thunderstorms. Any rubber laid down will be washed away on a daily basis, and track conditions will be variable at best.

The track is tough on brakes, with most of the lap run at slow speed. The turning track layout means there are 15 braking events per lap, and the lack of long straights doesn’t leave much time for the brakes to cool.

“The short straights and many first and second-gear corners require a very high level of downforce to give good braking stability and traction,” Virgin team principal John Booth said. “It is a hard circuit on the brakes as there are so many braking zones and so few straights to cool them down again.”

Gearboxes are also crucial. A significant number of corners are taken in first and second gear, but gearboxes are put under pressure with near-constant changes. According to Mercedes, during the Singapore Grand Prix “drivers change gear 71 times per lap for a race total of at least 4,331, nearly twice as many as in Spa”.

While comparatively little of the lap is run at full throttle, and the slow speeds wouldn’t appear to put much strain on the engines, the combination of the high external temperatures and constant braking do not allow for much of an opportunity for cooling.

The current configuration of the Marina Bay Circuit has been in use since 2009, a year after its debut on the F1 calendar. The original pit lane entry and exit were modified, and Turns 10, 13, 14 were slightly altered. The track measures 5.073km; presuming it runs for the full distance, the Singapore Grand Prix will last for 61 laps, bringing the total distance run to 309.316 kilometres.

Given that racing in Singapore only started at the now infamous 2008 event, the group of past winners – whether racing in F1 or otherwise – is miniscule: Fernando Alonso (2008, 2010) and Lewis Hamilton (2009).

The group of previous pole sitters is marginally bigger: Fernando Alonso (2010), Lewis Hamilton (2009), and Felipe Massa (2008).

Fastest laps in Monza have been claimed by Fernando Alonso (2009, 2010) and Kimi Raikkonen (2008).

The current lap record at the Italian circuit is Fernando Alonso’s 2010 time of 1.47.976s, set at an average speed of 169.138kph.

F1 Singapore Blog – Thursday press conference in Singapore

It’s the beginning of one of the most exciting weekends on the F1 calendar – the Singapore Grand Prix. F1’s only night race is the prize of modern F1 circuits, and one the whole circus feels privileged to visit each year.

Present at the Thursday drivers’ press conference were Sébastien Buemi (Toro Rosso), Timo Glock (Virgin), Sergio Perez (Sauber), Daniel Ricciardo (HRT), Nico Rosberg (Mercedes), and Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull).

As tends to be the case at these things, the drivers were vocal of their love for the town and track. This time, however, it all sounded genuine.

“I think it is a very good race,” Vettel said. “One of the best we have in the season. It’s a night race so very much looking forward to it. The circuit, as we touched on already, is one of the toughest for the drivers. To keep the focus it is extremely important so it should be a good race.”

Buemi is also looking forward to the weekend, but acknowledges that Singapore presents its own challenges.

“I think it is going to be a very tough race,” the Swiss driver said. “Like you said all those points are making it a little bit harder for the drivers and the teams. We will have the super soft tyres and the soft as well so we will have to look after the tyres especially in the first few sessions. The weather is a bit unpredictable. We don’t know if it is going to be rain or not. It takes a long time to dry up as well so you have got to take this into consideration. Then I think the circuit is quite bumpy so you have got to have in a way a soft car, you need to have a lot of downforce but you need to find a good compromise which is never easy with so little running. But still I think it is going to be a very good weekend and we will definitely enjoy it.”

The Singapore race is often compared to Monaco. They’re both glamorous, they’re both street circuits, and they both take place near water. But from a drivers’ perspective, they’re pages from the same playbook.

"In a way it's tougher than Monaco," Vettel said. "Obviously I haven't been around that long – maybe you should ask Michael – but I think over the last couple of years we have resurfaced [Monaco] again and again, and tried to make it smoother and better, safer.

"We've just been here a couple of times – this is the fourth time – but it's much rougher than Monaco in a way. It's very bumpy. At some places there's not a lot of room for mistakes – generally there's little or no run-off on street circuits but I think that given the lap is so long and there are so many corners, it's quite hot, it's humid, I think it makes it a tougher challenge in a way than Monaco. It's a different track, but I think it's tougher around here."

Glock agreed with his countryman.

"I would say Singapore is quite a bit longer than Monaco, but in general it's not that different – maybe it's slightly more bumpy here," he said. "And that's it really. It's at night yeah, but that's the difference."

Speaking of night racing, Vettel was asked whether more grands prix should take place in the dark.

"I think it makes it very cool around here, it's something very special, something we all look forward to," he said. "Here and obviously Abu Dhabi, we start just when the sun goes down. It's exciting for us and I think it's also more exciting to watch, in a way. It doesn't mean that all the races have to be night races now, because then it wouldn't be something special, so I think the rhythm we have is very fine and with one or two – maybe three – races in the future per year. I don't know where. It could be very nice."

The drivers were all asked to weigh in on the physical challenge that is Singapore, in the wake of comments by Jenson Button that the race was too long. Their replies have been copied in full below.

NR: Jenson can always stop if he gets a bit tired!

SV: I think it's fine as it is. It's the usual distance. Sure the speed is slow here because the average cornering speed is quite slow, so we need a lot of time to manage the 61 laps in the race, but it's one of the biggest challenges we have, so the focus has to be extremely high throughout the race. It's very hot, the humidity is very high. It's very tough for the drivers, the whole thing happens at night, it's more difficult for your eyes. I think it deserves to be a tough challenge. It's long but it's OK.

TG: It's definitely one of the hardest races but I'm used to [how it was in] 2005 when I did ChampCar. Every race was nearly up to two hours. If you do Milwaukee oval race and you have 225 laps to do, that's a long one. But I have to say, last year here was one of the toughest races for me because I was eleventh at some point in the race and I could hold up a lot of guys behind me and these 15 laps were some of the hardest I think I have ever had to drive. It's all about staying focused and quite similar to Monaco. As I said, if you make a mistake, it's over.

Given the current mathematical likelihood surrounding the end of the championship – which could well happen this weekend – Vettel was asked question after question about securing the title this weekend.

"As you said would, could, should," he replied. "So far we haven't won anything. We are in a good position but still some way to go. We have to race and do our normal job and try to achieve our best. It is one of the most difficult tracks for the car, for the drivers. It is a long, long way to the chequered flag. A lot of people talk about it but certain things have to happen. It reminds me a little bit of the situation we faced in Abu Dhabi where people came up every two or three minutes giving another option that is possible. Out of I don't know 1,467 options this could be one. It's not the objective for this weekend. The target is to optimise our performance and then either we get surprised or not?"

The defending champion is in no hurry to secure his crown in Singapore.

"Generally our target going into the season was to defend our title," Vettel said. "We are in a very good position. There is no reason that the target should change. It doesn't really matter when, it matters to us that it happens and that is what we are working on."

As newbies, Ricciardo and Perez were asked to opine on the differences between F1 and the junior formulae.

"I think it's definitely different," Ricciardo said. "In a lot of junior categories you go 100 percent from the green light to the finish and you don't have to worry about other factors coming into play. Fuel effect isn't really anything and your tyres last the race. I think, for me, the more difficult thing, or the different thing to get used to, is maybe at times driving more conservatively. You're always tempted to push 100 percent/100 percent but you have to think about what's best for the tyres and for strategy and situations, so that's probably a brief summary of the differences that I'm experiencing."

Perez agreed.

"Yes, I think you have a lot more things in Formula 1, like different tyre compounds and you have to drive in a different style on each of them, to try to make them last as long as possible," he said. "It's a bit similar to GP2 in that way, in that you have to save the tyres a bit, but you also have to be on the limit and try to save the tyres as much as possible. You are always changing your style during the race. This is something very important and important to learn, and you've got to learn during the races, because to make them last and be fast, you have to be changing your style every single lap, every single corner."

Finally – and amusingly – Timo Glock and Nico Rosberg derailed a question about Vettel's performance this season.

SB: I've known Sebastian for quite a long time now. He's been winning everything that he has raced in so I think he's doing a really good job, especially last year when he clinched the title in the last race. This year he's had the perfect season, nothing to say. It's been a wonderful season, winning nearly all the races. He's just getting the maximum out of the car and the team. He's done the best job of everyone.

NR: Good driver and deserves to win.

TG: There's not much to add on that. I think Sebastian won the title last year, had a lot of ups and downs. This year, I think he's just managed to have a near perfect season up until now. I have my money on him to win the championship this weekend so he has to push for it.

NR: How much did you put on him?

TG: I'm not telling you!

NR: I heard 20,000, is that true?

TG: Not really, no.

SP: I think he's really a complete driver, and I think he deserves to win the championship this year.

DR: Seb sets a good target for us younger drivers, definitely. I think if we can repeat or maybe even one day try and do better, I think it's the ultimate. He's definitely set the benchmark, particular for us Red Bull Juniors. We'll try and follow.



F1 Singapore Blog – FPI in Singapore

What a free practice session that was! If Friday evening in Singapore was anything to go by, all practice sessions should be capped at an hour.

While FPI is traditionally 90 minutes of very little happening (installation laps and final flurries for times notwithstanding), FPI in Singapore offered drama heightened by the reduced duration.

Shortly before the F1 cars were due to hit the track at 6pm, FIA Race Director Charlie Whiting declared that damage to the kerbs caused by the support races had rendered the track unsuitable. As a result, the session was delayed by half an hour while the marshalls made quick work of removing the offending items from Turns 3 and 14.

Once the pitlane opened, it was business as usual. In other words, not much happened other than a few installation laps, as – by and large – teams took the decision to preserve as much rubber as possible for the longer FP2. The changing light conditions in FPI mean that the session is less representative of the race, and the name of the game is preparation for Sunday, not timesheet topping on Friday.

Before the session reached its mid-point, we had our first moment of on-track drama, care of a collision between Mark Webber and Timo Glock that the majority of insurers would blame on the Red Bull driver.

Webber was on a flying lap, and rounded a corner to find the slower Virgin ahead and on his line. Lacking the time to avoid Glock, there was little Webber could do but minimise the effect of the collision. The two cars touched, bits of Red Bull front wing went flying, and Glock suffered a puncture, but the prang was largely harmless.

Moments later, however, the session was red-flagged when Team Lotus driver Heikki Kovalainen pulled to a stop at Turn 18, flames pouring out of his wheel. There's something about Singapore and flames for Fireman Heikki, who retired from last year's race after an impressive blaze that he was left to put out himself.

This year, the fire marshals were much quicker on the draw, and the fire was extinguished before the car was turned into a puddle of melted carbon fibre. Kovalainen's problem appeared to be with the brake ducts, although my original typo of brake fucts seems somehow more apposite...

With less than ten minutes remaining, the session was red flagged again when another kerb was found to be loosening under the high levels of suction created by passing F1 cars.

When the pitlane reopened for business there was just enough time remaining on the clock for cars to complete one timed lap should they wish to do so. While around one-third of the grid opted to remain in the pits, those with new components to test this weekend hit the tarmac – every lap is an opportunity to harvest additional data.

Of course, times were set in this session, and you can see the full list below. But given that it was a pretty extraordinary FPI with reduced running, and that the cars you'd expect to be quick were, it hardly seems worth paying them much attention. By all means, read things into the gaps if that's the way you roll, but remember – extraordinary circumstances like this evening's running are unlikely to be repeated this weekend.

Well, unless more kerbs fall apart, that is...

FPI timings (unofficial)

1. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.48.599s [10 laps]
2. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.49.005s [15 laps]
3. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.50.066s [16 laps]
4. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.50.596s [11 laps]
5. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.50.952s [12 laps]
6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.52.043s [14 laps]
7. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.52.251s [13 laps]
8. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.52.416s [12 laps]
9. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.52.435s [13 laps]

10. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.52.815s [13 laps]
 11. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.52.991s [17 laps]
 12. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.53.050s [17 laps]
 13. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.53.399s [18 laps]
 14. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.53.703s [19 laps]
 15. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.53.749s [12 laps]
 16. Bruno Senna (Renault) 1.53.765s [17 laps]
 17. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.53.785s [16 laps]
 18. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.54.736s [8 laps]
 19. Jarno Trulli (Team Lotus) 1.54.821s [9 laps]
 20. Heikki Kovalainen (Team Lotus) 1.56.198s [8 laps]
 21. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin) 1.57.798s [13 laps]
 22. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.58.792s [6 laps]
 23. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT) 1.59.169s [17 laps]
 24. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.59.214s [18 laps]
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F1 Singapore Blog – FP2 in Singapore

After an action-packed – if short – F1 earlier this evening, FP2 was something of a damp squib. Well dampish, at any rate.

The highlight of the evening was the extended running that we saw after the curtailed earlier session led to teams preserving tyres for the second practice run. Where F1 saw drivers complete laps in the low teens, FP2 saw most men complete twice as much running as they did earlier in the evening.

And it all came down to the tyres, as has been the case all season. [Insert your own flattering Pirelli comment here. I'm all out.]

Times were fine on the softs, but once Felipe Massa went top of the pops on his supersofts, the front runners dove for the pits. Once back on track, Massa was knocked back into an eventual P4, nearly one second slower than pace-setter Sebastian Vettel.

Because yes, you guessed it – the fastest man on four wheels did it all over again in Singapore. Which isn't to say that tomorrow's pole position is a given. It's just nearly a given, as pole has been all season.

But back to the action on track. While we didn't see flaming cars, flying kerbs, or a series of red flags, there were a few incidents worth noting.

Paul di Resta suffered unexplained car issues early on in the session that led to the Force India mechanics removing the Scottish driver's floor for a thorough investigation. Enough time was lost that the Scot was able to complete only eight laps to everyone else's twenty- or thirty-odd.

Jenson Button was the first man to bring out the yellow flags – albeit briefly – when he missed the braking point at Turn 14, locked the brakes, stalled his car in the middle of an awkward attempt at a three-point turn, and ended his session early. Hence the P10 position on the timesheets, three seconds off his teammate's pace.

Next man to get the marshals waving was Buemi, who hit the wall in free practice for the second race in a row. The Toro Rosso driver had his smash at Turn 23, then scooted along for a bit with a broken wheel – dangling tether and all – before giving up the ghost and calling it quits for the day.

And in terms of drama, that – as they say – was pretty much that.

Naturally we saw times changing throughout the ninety minutes, but a quick glance at the timings below will show you what we all knew already: Red Bull are fast, Ferrari are in a position to challenge them, and McLaren are also contenders. Of course, that's a sentence that could be written about any of the warm races on the calendar.

FP2 timings (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.46.374s [33 laps]
2. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.46.575s [28 laps]
3. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.47.115s [22 laps]
4. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.47.120s [23 laps]
5. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.47.265s [28 laps]
6. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.48.418s [27 laps]
7. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.48.866s [32 laps]
8. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.49.578s [27 laps]
9. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.49.730s [29 laps]
10. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.49.751s [10 laps]
11. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.49.792s [14 laps]
12. Bruno Senna (Renault) 1.50.241s [31 laps]
13. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.50.345s [8 laps]
14. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.50.399s [29 laps]
15. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.50.790s [28 laps]
16. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.50.897s [24 laps]
17. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.50.937s [30 laps]
18. Heikki Kovalainen (Team Lotus) 1.51.950s [26 laps]

19. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.52.257s [15 laps]
 20. Jarno Trulli (Team Lotus) 1.52.489s [25 laps]
 21. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.53.579s [25 laps]
 22. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin) 1.54.649s [25 laps]
 23. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT) 1.54.754s [29 laps]
 24. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT) 1.55.198s [26 laps]
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F1 Singapore Blog – Friday press conference in Singapore

Ordinarily, I'd spend hours distilling the press conference into pithy comments for your delectation. But ordinarily it wouldn't be 3.30am in a closing media centre.

The Friday team personnel press conference in Singapore starred Riad Asmat (Team Lotus), Jean-Francois Caubet (Renault Sport F1), Robert Fernley (Force India), Norbert Haug (Mercedes), Gerard Lopez (Renault), and Sam Michael (Williams), and has been copied in full here.

Q: Bob, first of all, what happened to Paul di Resta today?

Robert FERNLEY: We had a problem with the brakes, the machining of the brakes and the hydraulics. Paul has a lot of steel, he'll bounce back tomorrow

Q: Obviously the performances are improving and Vijay Mallya has emphasised that. The thing is carrying it through to next year. That is the task isn't it?

RF: Well, I think next year is a completely different programme. What we had to do at the beginning of this year was to take a step backwards in order to understand where we lost our way at the end of 2010 and what you see now is the evolution of all that work coming through. Obviously with the change of regulations with the blown floors next year is a completely different ballpark.

Q: Have you already started work on next year? When are you finishing development on this year's.

RF: We started work on next year's some time ago. This is probably the last major upgrade that we will do for the 2011 car.

Q: And the battle with Sauber?

RF: Very hard. They are very competitive. They are not going to give in easily, so we will have to work as hard as we can.

Q: Is that something you look forward to?

RF: Yes, very much so. They are a good team, working hard. I mean all the teams in all fairness in that midfield area are incredibly competitive and we are going to have to work very, very hard to hold onto sixth place. Sam managed to beat us last year by one point. I don't want to repeat it this year.

Q: Jean Francois, you are heading for a World Championship victory I am sure. That is almost certain, but what are Renault's feelings about it?

Jean Francois CAUBET: I think if we win the championship this year it will be the 10th time in 20 years. We think we did a good choice to sell engines and stop managing a team and I think the long-term strategy we will have with the Red Bull team is a good thing for future of Formula 1 and Renault.

Q: What is Renault Sport's position within the Renault group as it were?

JC: Renault Sport is doing only Formula 1. We were 200 people last year. We will be 250 next year. It is a key point and the board is pushing Formula 1 in Renault now for the long term. I think that is good news.

Q: Is that expansion because of the new engine?

JC: Yes, I think we have 25 people coming from Renault mainly to develop the electric side of the V6 but we will have 40 next year and one team is 10 people more.

Q: Riad, a new job as CEO. Tell us about your new job and what it concerns?

Riad ASMAT: Well, I guess we have expanded in actually owning a car company as well as an engineering business and ever since certain developments that is the new role. I look into not just the Formula 1 side of things but the actual road car and engineering business from this point. A bit more work actually.

Q: So you are in charge of everything?

RA: Well, technically!

Q: You are from Malaysia but also Singapore as well. How do you see the Singapore Grand Prix?

RA: I think it is one of the best on the calendar as well. Just having family from Singapore helps. I am assured support in one form or the other. It is just next to Malaysia so we represent Asia to a certain degree and we hope we will be able to push our name, our brand, into the region.

Q: There are rumours of a name change but also a change of location for the team, whatever it might be called. It has been for so long in Norfolk it is difficult to imagine that Team Lotus will be elsewhere.

RA: I'll take the one question first which is the location. Our home in Norfolk, in Norwich in Hingham, and that is, for sure, never going to change. That will be maintained as one of our parts but as a team that is growing and progressing we need to have a look at how to get more efficiencies out of the team and one of the main areas is to be in the motorsports belt of the UK. It is something we are looking into and when the time is right we will make the necessary announcement. But for sure Hingham is our home.

Q: Will you keep facilities there?

RA: Yes, we bought the place and it is home for us. We will never go away. On your second point?

Q: The name change?

RA: Name change. No decision as yet. We are still Team Lotus as you can see but as my shareholders have mentioned we are open to anything and we will see how it progresses from this point.

Q: Gerard, we hear about new facilities and new investment in the team. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

Gerard LOPEZ: Yes, we essentially wanted to bring the place we are in right now, Enstone, up to the best standards in Formula 1 and it was missing a couple of things. One was the wind tunnel, which was still only 50 per cent scale. The second one was the driver simulator and then also a couple of logistical areas so we have decided essentially to expand the factory. Improve the wind tunnel up to 60 per cent, which is the maximum allowed and build the new simulator.

Q: Is that really state-of-the-art or even better than anybody else's?

GL: I think everybody else that is a state-of-the-art team has the 60 per cent tunnel so I think that is matching essentially the best. On the simulator, as far as we know, it is probably going to be one of the very best simulators in the business.

Q: Are there plans for further investment?

GL: We have to invest every day essentially, just because it is a Formula 1 team so things become obsolete quite quickly. I think we have maxed out in terms of personnel. When we took over there were about 480 people. There are 520 I believe now, so we increase that number. The investments will continue essentially as much as we need to, to try and be where we want to be, which is a top three team in Formula 1.

Q: Your third driver is the new GP2 champion Romain Grosjean. What are your plans for him?

GL: It's a question that I need to take from a different angle, also of a management company that manages his career. I think the plans for a GP 2 winner, especially one that wins it in such a convincing manner, is to be in Formula 1. We are going to try and help him sit in a Formula 1 car next year.

Q: Actually you were in a difficult position until quite recently of having five drivers for two cars potentially.

GL: And more. There's people that are interested just in case. But right now we have a commitment to Robert (Kubica). He has done amazing things for the team. We know what he is capable of and I think any team would take him if he is capable of delivering the same thing. Our commitment is to try and see if he can come back and we will wonder about anything else afterwards.

Q: Sam, a sad moment for you isn't it, leaving Williams?

Sam MICHAEL: It's been a great 11 seasons with them. I think they were such a prestigious name and it has been an honour to work with Frank (Williams) and Patrick (Head). This weekend is the last race and the main thing for me is that we finish everything off properly which we are doing. I leave Williams with a very good relationship with the company. I have nothing but good memories of the place but it is time for a change after so many seasons.

Q: When exactly do you join McLaren?

SM: That's not decided yet. That is something being discussed privately so it's not really appropriate to go into that here.

Q: But you've got a bit of gardening leave have you?

SM: Well, as I said, I better not discuss that here.

Q: Tell us about the technical challenges of this circuit?

SM: Well it's a street circuit, so it has very low grip. There is always a lot of oil on the circuit so you always get a lot of progression of lap time during the weekend as the Formula 1 tyres pick up a lot of the debris and contaminants on the surface. It is similar to Monte Carlo, which is like that as well. The most important thing is slow-speed corners, getting rid of understeer, making sure traction is good. There are no real high-speed corners compared to a normal closed circuit. It's a maximum downforce track and quite a few kerbs as well around this place. You can do a lot of damage there. Normally quite difficult to overtake around a track like this but with DRS and the tyre situation there should be plenty of overtaking on Sunday.

Q: Is it a little less bumpy than before?

SM: The track itself is. The actual tarmac, but the kerbs are just as big. They are hitting the kerbs even harder now.

Q: We have seen quite a lot of bits and pieces coming off most cars.

SM: That's right. A lot of that is because they are trying to take more and more kerb as there is lap time in it.

Q: Is that something we have seen today or are we going to see that for the rest of the weekend?

SM: Well I think today you will see a lot more of it as the drivers are trying to find out how far they can go and how much damage they can get away with. Then tonight you will repair your car and tell them where you can and can't drive.

Q: Norbert, Michael Schumacher's performances over the past couple of grands prix. Two fifth places.

Norbert HAUG: Well I think he was excellent in the last two races. He was very good in some of the other ones, probably not at the right position. Our current car is not capable of doing a much better job and I think especially in the races, especially after the starts, nobody overtook more cars than Michael did in the first lap. He is an excellent starter, still a fantastic racer and the more we improve our technical package the more he will deliver. I think we know from Nico (Rosberg) what he is capable of doing so we have a very strong driver combination. I think a lot of people got excited in Monza. It was fantastic to watch and the guys like us who like racing enjoyed it very much. I can understand Martin (Whitmarsh). I had a word with him afterwards. I can understand Lewis (Hamilton) but if they had been in our position they would not have acted differently and I guess 99 per cent of the television viewers enjoyed it. Probably more than that.

Q: Do you expect those sort of performances to continue for the final six races or was that just the two low downforce circuits?

NH: Well it certainly fitted much better to the current package we are having. This race here in Singapore, first of all it is a fantastic event I have to say and hopefully it stays forever on the calendar. It is producing the most spectacular television pictures. It is so unique and we all have to thank the organisers and Bernie (Ecclestone) for making this event happen. But it is a challenging track. It probably looks not such a typical street course but you

could see what happened today. The walls are very close. The drivers push to the limits. We discussed that right now so I think there will be a lot of surprises here. For us, it will be challenging. We made a good step between first practice and second practice. We're heading in the right direction. Hopefully there is a little bit more to come but we honestly cannot expect a Monza or a Spa like performance under normal circumstances. But, having said that, this race will have safety cars probably. You need to be there. There is a chance of rain, whatever, so that can be quite a mix up in the field and we need to be prepared. Michael will deliver. There is no doubt he is as committed as ever. I think we have to see that he was outside of Formula 1 for three years. The formula changed a lot. There is no testing and so on and so on. He gets more mileage and he gets better and better and I think not a lot of drivers could have done a better job than he did in the last two races. His race speed, if you compare it to Nico, looks very balanced and Nico is – and I think Sam can describe that as well – certainly one of the most talented, most experienced ones. One of the definitely top five drivers and if you can compare yourself after a comeback, after a break of three years, with one of the young superstars, then you are heading in the right direction. For me it is a little strange to say Michael will create surprises because he won everything, he won more than anybody else, but believe me the better our car goes the more he will deliver and he is fully committed. He is an asset to the team, doing a fantastic job, keeping the together, motivating everybody and we are 100 per cent pleased to have him with us.

Q: A question to all of you. What do you think of Sebastian Vettel's performances this year. Don't you think that his domination harmed the sport a little bit and would you want him in your team?

RF: Let's take it a step at a time. I think Sebastian has done a fantastic job this year as have Red Bull and it is up to the rest of the teams to challenge them. I don't think Red Bull should be asked to slow down. We need to get our act together and to be competing with them so hat's off to them and well done. There have been many, many years when a driver has dominated or a team has dominated so I think you have got to look at the overall package this year of racing and I think it's been outstanding across the board. I think the show is probably the best it's been for a long, long time. The fact that one team and one driver has dominated I don't think has detracted from that. Would I like Sebastian in our car? I think we have got two or three rather good drivers. I am quite happy with what we have thank you.

JC: I hope that when Sebastian will have the title, if it is this grand prix or the next grand prix, he will push a little bit more as I am sure the race will be more interesting at the end. For Renault, it is difficult to ask the engineer to slow down the engine or blow up the engine. I don't think so.

RA: Well he has done a fantastic job again. I think it is also the team that has done their part. Again, their domination I refer to Bob's point. We have seen domination and it is up to us to push ourselves. We are from behind but we hope to achieve some sort of success in the future. On him being a part of our team, I don't think we can afford it, but we have got a good couple of drivers right now and we are happy with what we have and we will push on from there.

GL: I would concur – not trying to be boring – but I think they have the best car and they have somebody who can use it to the maximum, so he deserves to be where he is. I actually know him quite well for a long time already, so I can pretty much tell you that he deserves to be where he is today. And I will say the same thing as far as the drivers go: we have drivers that we like but he's a great guy.

SM: I think he's done a fantastic job for the second year in a row now. It's not the races when Red Bull are dominant, it's the ones when they are not that show that he's really something special. He's won races when perhaps maybe they shouldn't have won and he's managed to drag... although the car's clearly very good, they haven't been dominant at every single circuit and some of the races that I've seen him win this year have been pretty impressive. So definitely hats off, he's deserved it.

NH: Sebastian is certainly a very special guy, very talented guy. I've known him since his early days in Formula BMW ADAC, the supporting races of DTM. Then he was a Formula Three driver with Paul di Resta. He learned a lot, he's a very focused guy, a very intelligent guy, a very demanding guy and an absolutely nice chap. We absolutely have to take our hats off to him. He's great, he deserves every single point he has got, probably more because he was unlucky here and there and he deserves what he has got. I don't think that the World Championship isn't interesting; in fact I think that this is one of the most thrilling seasons ever and I've been around for quite a while. The Pirellis have done a good job, the DRS has done a good job, there have been lots of surprises. There was Jenson Button being last in Canada for example, and then winning, doing lap times two seconds quicker than anybody else all of a sudden. There was Michael's performance there, as an example. I could continue for hours. There were lots of surprises in Formula 1 this year, which nobody would have expected, even the specialists. There was always a certain dominance in Formula 1. There were the Williams days, I remember, the McLaren-Mercedes days, the battles with Ferrari and now it's the Red Bull days with Sebastian and also Mark doing a good job. But for sure, no dominance will last forever. We know that from the past. Everybody else will work very hard. We have a good relationship with Sebastian, friendship, I respect him very much and I think it's the same the other way around. We are, as I pointed out, very satisfied with the drivers we have. We want to climb up the ladder with the combination that we have, make another step next year and then we will see where we are.

Q: Now that you've had a couple of weeks to reflect on the Sky - BBC TV deals, how do you guys see it affecting your businesses in relation to marketing and sponsorship?

RF: I think we need a little bit of time for it to evolve with Sky. I think we're going to see a different format and a lot more depth and it's very difficult, at this point, to really appreciate what they are going to do. If you listen to the plans, they are very, very exciting. I understand it from a UK point of view that the free-to-air is challenged a little bit but I think there will be different levels of the sport now and different elements that Sky will bring to it which should be very, very exciting. I think we need to give them a little time. I don't think it's fair to judge until we've seen the sort of product that they're coming out with.

NH: I think you need to see things right: it was BBC taking the decision if I'm informed correctly and I think it was a great job from Bernie, from Sky, from everybody else to step in and now we will see what the development will bring, but of course the initiative from the BBC. It was not the commercial rights holder selling non-free-to-air and I think that it is very important to keep that in mind. I can understand the BBC's position but the basic plan was a different one. It's a good combination still. I think pay TV... this channel in England is completely different, for example, to Germany. I heard that they have ten million or whatever subscribers so basically you can have a lot of viewers. But I'm not qualified to judge that in detail, but I think it is important to realise how it all started.

Q: Riad, if I understand it correctly, if you finish in the top ten again this year as you did last year, you move up a column which obviously brings certain financial benefits under Concorde. But by the same token, you have more to lose if you change your team's name, unless you get permission from everybody. How are you going to tackle that juggling act if you do change your team's name?

RA: I guess there is a process that we all have to go through but as I highlighted, it is a process that we will undertake if and when the decision is made but it's something that hasn't happened yet so I can't comment.

Q: Are you confident that you will get that permission?

RA: I've got no motion of doing anything right now in terms of changing the name or anything like that so I can't comment.

Q: Gerard, on the one side we are hearing about massive investments as we heard about early on; on the other side we're hearing

stories of doom and gloom about bank loans and bankruptcies and all sorts of things: selling the team, Group Lotus wanting to buy the team. Could you clarify these issues please?

GL: It's been one of the surprises for me in Formula 1. The fact that any time we have a new driver, any time we announce something, any time I take a trip to Brazil or Russia or whatever, suppose I'm looking for money for the team. The fact is that we're involved in a lot of businesses. This one, as a matter of fact, is one that we hope is going to be breakeven at some point in time. It's not but it's not one that needs to make money for us. We make money somewhere else. I used to answer this giving examples and so on. To be honest, I don't care any more because if it was reality we wouldn't be there for a long time. I think the team that we took over had about 480 people. We saved those jobs and added about forty jobs to those. Facts speak for themselves. As I said, I used to get quite angry every time I would pick up something like that. Now it's almost like crying wolf and nobody cares. The fact is that the facts are there: we are investing, we're adding sponsors. Our drivers, whenever they get called pay drivers, I actually feel bad for them, not for us because at the end of the day, there is no driver that I think or I hope could bring enough money to actually carry this kind of team forward. I find it disrespectful to those guys. I used to find it disrespectful to us, to be honest with you. Now I don't any more so now what we do is we get on with the things that we have to do. We make the investments that we have to make and at the end of the day we will see – in terms of results – what will be in the future and hopefully we will be wherever our investments carry us, which is to be one of the top three teams.

Q: Sorry, carrying on from my previous question, at the moment there is about 97 percent of people in the UK that watch Formula 1 on free-to-air TV. Some numbers that we've gathered in the last couple of weeks show that only about seven percent of those viewers are going to be interesting buying a subscription. Does that not hurt your sponsors and their interests in the team and their expectations of their payback?

RF: Probably just coming back onto that is that you've been very focused on the UK. It's a global market. Obviously we want to make sure our fans in the UK are serviced as well as possible, but at the end of the day, it was the BBC that made a decision. Bernie put together a super compromise. There will still be the ability to watch it on BBC and watch every race, but then you've got the added value... I'm not so sure your numbers are going to be right when it comes down to the real agenda. I think you will find that a lot of people will switch over.

NH: I'm not a specialist in that market but you need to apply the right facts. Where does the figure of seven percent come from? If I'm informed correctly, you can watch each and every Grand Prix free-to-air, this is still the case, and so maybe it's an addition, if it's played in the correct way. We have to wait and see but there was no alternative.

Q: But basically you're not worried about your sponsorship?

NH: No.

Q: Sam, I know your interest is much more on the sporting side than on the financial side of things, but on a broad principle, Williams going forward in the years to come – not just next year but in the years to come – are they in a situation where they will be able to make decisions on drivers based purely upon what they bring to team in terms of ability or is Williams in that situation now where it's got to look more towards sponsorship and the financial aspects rather than just pure talent?

SM: If you take the first part of your question about Williams financially, they are obviously entering a lot of different areas of their business such as WHP with the hybrid power system – that's standing out to be a very... an industry that's going to open up a lot over the next few years. They already have contracts with major motor manufacturers, so that's one area that's quite strong. They're obviously investing pretty heavily in Qatar. There's the new Jaguar programme as well. There's lots of different areas that Williams is diversifying into to ensure... which a lot of other teams have done as well. McLaren is a good example, earlier than Williams, and that will continue to be more and more profitable as years go on. That will help Williams put themselves into a good position. Other teams have done it, there's nothing to say that Williams can't either so I can't see that that will be an issue for them in the future. With respect to their finances, if you then come to their drivers, if you look at the two drivers this year. We've got Rubens who is obviously an experienced guy, a multiple Grand Prix winner. Although Pastor Maldonado is a rookie, he's GP2 champion and he's run pretty close to Rubens all year. If you take out the first four or five races, which is entirely normal for any rookie, I would normally say that a rookie needs a couple of years, but you can definitely start to see the signs as to whether the guy is capable or not by mid-season and I would definitely put Pastor Maldonado in that category. And if he wasn't in that category, he wouldn't have kept his drive going forward. So I can see the guy having an even stronger year next year when he knows all the circuits, because he's still on a slope. He'd never turned a lap around here before this evening, so I would say that to say that Williams are taking their decisions on drivers from a financial point of view is not really correct at the moment, because otherwise they wouldn't be choosing the drivers that they have. I think Williams will make the choices that are best for the company and the best results. That's what it will come down to.

Q: Question to Norbert and Jean-Francois regarding engines, both at the moment and 2014 onwards. We used to have a situation where there was a maximum number of teams that an engine supplier could supply. In 2014, we could possibly have as many as five manufacturers supplying twelve teams and when you look at it, somehow five into twelve doesn't work that well, particularly when you've got one manufacturer supplying four teams with engines. What do you people think the maximum should be allowed, both from a sporting and a financial, commercial point of view?

NH: For me it should be an open market, that's it, basically. I hope we're in a position to have five engine manufacturers, that would be very pleasing for all of us, I think. This is even more competition, but maybe we have less than five, we will see. It doesn't look bad at the moment. The rules are heading in the right direction; over a five year period there will be lots of cost saving. All us engine manufacturers work very constructively on that point together with Ferrari and Renault, especially Cosworth also and our target is to save thirty percent budget over a five-year period which is challenging but which is achievable. For us, if five teams chose the engine X, then they should do so, it should be a free and open market.

J-FC: By regulation, today it's four teams, but I share that same advice. I am pushing for an open market because we are in Formula 1 and regulations cannot solve all the problems. I think the key point is not how many teams, the key point is which teams because when we are dealing with top teams, it's not easy to have one or two top teams when you provide the same engine. The problem is more with who and how many teams.

F1 Singapore Blog – FP3 in Singapore

There are no prizes for anyone who guessed correctly that Red Bull would end the final practice session on the top of the timesheets.

But it's not quite as obvious as it first appears. Mark Webber's 1.46.081s was the headline-grabbing time, while teammate Sebastian Vettel managed only P3 in the timesheets after he ran into traffic on the supersofts.

With no incidents to speak of – other than the expected occasional off-track dalliance – FP3 was a quiet session at the Marina Bay Circuit. No flags, no carnage, and the only real debris flying off the underside of Lewis Hamilton's McLaren after a bottom-scraping ride over the kerbs.

Jaime Alguersuari also had a moment on the kerbs. The Toro Rosso driver, who appears to be practicing for his pilot's licence, went aerial in a pretty dramatic run. Other drivers, including Mercedes man Michael Schumacher, also achieved brief moments of lift-off, but nothing as impressive as the Spanish DJ's.

Fernando Alonso, who finished the session in P4, delighted spectators with a display of wall-scraping laps on the soft compound that proved to all and sundry that the two-time world champion has more faith in his car this weekend than he's had all season.

The first 20 minutes or so of the hour's running were the usual series of installation laps. Then we were treated to half an hour of longer runs on the soft tyre as teams fine-tuned their set-ups, before the final ten minutes provided a series of qualifying simulations on the supersoft.

As is always the case, lap times tumbled when the red stripes came out, but with only ten minutes available traffic proved to be a problem for most.

FP3 timings (unofficial)

1. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.46.081s [15 laps]
2. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.46.108s [17 laps]
3. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.46.345s [14 laps]
4. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.46.396s [14 laps]
5. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.46.936s [20 laps]
6. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.47.831s [14 laps]
7. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.47.837s [12 laps]
8. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.48.711s [12 laps]
9. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.49.057s [15 laps]
10. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.49.304s [16 laps]
11. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.49.583s [17 laps]
12. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.49.679s [18 laps]
13. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.49.816s [18 laps]
14. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.49.851s [17 laps]
15. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.50.189s [15 laps]
16. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.50.229s [15 laps]
17. Bruno Senna (Renault) 1.50.523s [14 laps]
18. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.50.547s [17 laps]
19. Heikki Kovalainen (Team Lotus) 1.52.510s [17 laps]
20. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin) 1.52.697s [19 laps]
21. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT) 1.53.728s [17 laps]
22. Jarno Trulli (Team Lotus) 1.53.823s [18 laps]
23. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.53.829s [16 laps]
24. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT) 1.55.203s [17 laps]

F1 Singapore Blog – Q1 in Singapore

It was a slow start to qualifying in Singapore on Saturday night, as the cars chose to leave the pitlane in dribs and drabs, not the usual outpouring.

Given the traffic problems in FP3, it is hardly surprising that track space is the name of the game in the next hour. Well, that and setting a good time, but that's always a priority and hardly bears mentioning.

As the action got underway under the floodlit skies of Marina Bay, air temperature was 30 degrees and track temperature a relatively cool 31 degrees. Rain is not expected in this session.

The first ten minutes brought laps from the majority of the grid, with the expected regular changes at the top as the faster cars crossed the line. And by the time the session was half-run, there were times on the board from every driver, with a provisional 107 percent time of 1.53.844s.

Vettel sat at the top of the leaderboards at the ten minute mark, with 0.6s in hand over P2 man Jenson Button and a further tenth on Lewis Hamilton in P3.

As usual, the tyre of choice in this opening salvo is the harder compound available. Here in Singapore, that means Pirelli's soft tyre. The supersofts will come out in force in Q3, and will be seen on any nervous teams in Q2.

With six minutes remaining and a largely silent racetrack, the dropout zone is made up of Heikki Kovalainen, Vitaly Petrov, Jarno Trulli, Daniel Ricciardo, Tonio Liuzzi, Timo Glock, and Jerome D'Ambrosio. Hanging on the edge and not entirely safe are Bruno Senna, Jaime Alguersuari, and Sebastien Buemi.

There are two minutes to go before Q1 comes to an end, and all the frontrunners are sensibly tucked up in their garages waiting for Q2. There has been no change to the dropout zone or the 107 percent time.

No drivers have failed to set a time within the required 107 percent.

Petrov has just saved himself from the dropout zone and put his teammate in it. Senna is still out on track and has the chance to save himself, although the chequered flag has now fallen.

Senna returns the favour, saving himself to the detriment of Petrov. pwned by the n00b, I think is the phrase we're looking for there.

Tonio Liuzzi has a five-place grid penalty hanging over his head from the Lap 1 collision at Monza two weeks ago, and will be starting Sunday's race in last place. But seeing as he qualified in last place...

Dropout zone

18. Vitaly Petrov (Renault)
19. Heikki Kovalainen (Team Lotus)
20. Jarno Trulli (Team Lotus)
21. Timo Glock (Virgin)
22. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin)
23. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT)
24. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT)

F1 Singapore Blog – Q2 in Singapore

Lewis Hamilton is the first man out of the pits in Q2, sporting Pirelli's soft tyre compound. The McLaren driver will discover that environmental conditions are just what they were moments ago – air 30 degrees, track 31 degrees.

Of course, it's only been a few minutes since the drivers were last lapping the Marina Bay Circuit.

Ferrari look as though they might be a little nervous at the moment, as star driver Fernando Alonso left the pits shod in supersofts for his initial Q2 run. The team shouldn't have anything to worry about based on their performance so far this weekend, but there's no harm in being cautious. Unless that caution costs you precious fresh race rubber, that is.

Scratch that – Mark Webber has also left the pits on supersofts, and we all know Red Bull don't ever have to worry about anything.

The session is red flagged five minutes in when Kamui Kobayashi's Sauber hit the wall after an aerial trip through the bumpy chicane at Turn 10. The Japanese driver was up and walking within moments, and appears to be unharmed.

Only nine drivers had set times before the red flags came out – Sebastian Vettel is in the usual P1, with Jenson Button, Mark Webber, Fernando Alonso, Lewis Hamilton, Paul di Resta, Adrian Sutil, Rubens Barrichello, and Pastor Maldonado behind.

Those who went out on the supersofts might well be regretting it now. They look to be safely through to Q3, but have wasted good rubber as the odds are they'll need to use another fresh set should the restarted session get competitive.

The marshals were able to get the track clear in very short order, and the red flags lasted for a mere five minutes before the pitlane reopened for business.

Felipe Massa, Michael Schumacher, and Nico Rosberg all hit the track as quickly as they can; none of the three have posted a time in this session.

With less than five minutes remaining, the not necessarily representative dropout zone is comprised of Barrichello, Maldonado, Kobayashi, Perez, Alguersuari, Senna, and Buemi.

But it looks pretty representative – over the past four minutes, the names have remained the same although the order has changed.

And so it remains. The Saubers are bookending both Williams drivers, both Toro Rossos, and Senna's Renault.

Dropout zone

11. Sergio Perez (Sauber)
12. Rubens Barrichello (Williams)
13. Pastor Maldonado (Williams)
14. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso)
15. Bruno Senna (Renault)
16. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso)
17. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)

F1 Singapore Blog – Q3 in Singapore

This time it's Jenson Button's turn to lead the run out of the pits, with the two Ferraris close on his tail.

Environmental conditions have remained consistent all night, with track temperatures holding at 31 degrees to the air's 30 degrees.

The Mercedes and Force India pairs remain in the pits, with the other six drivers out on track. Traffic is unlikely to be much of an issue at this point in proceedings.

But as I typed, Lewis Hamilton and Felipe Massa nearly came together. A collision was avoided, and it looked to be a simple case of too much car in too little track space.

Button takes provisional pole, Alonso crosses the line in P3, and then Hamilton snatches provisional pole from his teammate before Vettel does his usual trick of reminding everyone that the number one slot is his and his alone. By nearly half a second.

We're currently looking at a provisional front few rows of Vettel, Hamilton, Button, Webber, and Alonso. The five are the only men to have set times so far.

Mercedes appear to be gambling on a single run, while Force India might choose not to run at all. That would lead to an instant 10-place grid drop if I were in charge – choosing not to run isn't fair to the fans who have paid a lot of money to watch a qualifying session.

Not being able to run is – obviously – another matter entirely, and one that can't be avoided.

Massa aborted his first run after making an error, and is one of five competitors yet to set a timed lap in this session.

Force India obviously have no intention of running either driver, as they're still in the pits with only seconds remaining of Q3.

The chequered flag has fallen, and Michael Schumacher has joined the Force Indias in not setting a time. Poor show. Literally.

Oh, and Vettel held on to pole. What a shock that was.

Provisional grid

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull)
2. Mark Webber (Red Bull)
3. Jenson Button (McLaren)
4. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren)
5. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari)
6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari)
7. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes)
8. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes)
9. Adrian Sutil (Force India)
10. Paul di Resta (Force India)
11. Sergio Perez (Sauber)
12. Rubens Barrichello (Williams)
13. Pastor Maldonado (Williams)
14. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso)
15. Bruno Senna (Renault)
16. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso)
17. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
18. Vitaly Petrov (Renault)
19. Heikki Kovalainen (Team Lotus)
20. Jarno Trulli (Team Lotus)
21. Timo Glock (Virgin)
22. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin)
23. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT)
24. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT)

F1 Singapore Blog – Saturday press conference in Singapore

The post-qualifying press conference in Singapore saw Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull), Mark Webber (Red Bull), and Jenson Button (McLaren) face the glare of the media spotlight.

After a slightly more challenging weekend than he's used to Vettel was pleased to be on pole following the team's efforts to improve his car overnight.

"The target is always to improve the car overnight," Vettel said. "I was fairly happy with the car yesterday and we didn't do that much. I think the steps we did were a step forward. Not massive but probably what we needed to keep that cushion, so all in all I was very happy on the prime tyre and the soft tyre as well.

"This morning was a bit scrappy as I had a lot of traffic and didn't get the lap together but this afternoon the first run on option was a confirmation that also on the super soft tyres we can do it so reasonably confident for tomorrow. As I said it is going to be a long race and it is not just about speed, it is also about control, managing the tyres. At this stage I think it is a bit unclear what is the fastest way but we will find out tomorrow."

Button was asked who had the advantage, him or teammate Lewis Hamilton, given that the latter had extra tyres and was only one spot further back on the grid.

"I don't know really," he replied. "I haven't really thought about it. All I know is that for me the lap was good. Both my laps. If I had put both of them together it would have been good but it is very difficult around here as you struggle to get all three sectors together because either the tyres aren't warm enough at the start of the lap or they are overheating at the end. Or maybe that is just our problem. It is very, very tricky and something I have been fighting all day.

"Obviously I didn't get much running yesterday after facing a barrier at the end of the session yesterday, so I am pleased to be in the top three. It is a good position for the race tomorrow but it is also something I have no experience of, as I didn't do any high-fuel running, so it is going to be a challenge."

Button's weekend appeared to be hampered by the reduced running he saw in practice, but the British driver was in the fight for pole and doesn't expect too many difficulties tomorrow. One concern is his lack of longer runs that could inform on tyre degradation, while another was overheating tyres. He addressed the latter concern.

"From the comments that I've just made, not over one lap but hopefully on a long run," he said. "I haven't run with high fuel yet. Obviously the race is pretty tough on the tyres here, there's a lot of sliding, so you do get a lot of surface temperature on the tyres, so you've got to be careful of that. But we know it's not going to be easy and I think you can see the performance of cars really shows up here, and the gaps between teams is massive, if you head back to the cars that are starting outside the top ten. I think it's easier the more downforce you've got because the less sliding you have, and the less tyre temp you've got, so it's pretty simple really. And we're a little bit behind these guys."

Given that issues with the kerbs have been one of the weekend's hot topics, there was remarkably little said about them in the press conference. Only Webber commented.

"I think they did the best job they could [with the kerbs]," the Australian driver said.

"Obviously it was a new situation from previous years. The kerbs started to lift up, unfortunately we learnt that at a bad time before P1 yesterday so I think they've stuck them down as hard as they can, the ones they've decided to keep down there, really super-glued them to the track as much as possible. Charlie [Whiting] says it may be difficult for them to get them back up but in terms of line, the track is fine."

Tonight, Webber was more concerned with race strategy than he was with the kerbs that have now been fixed. There are still big question marks around the durability of the supersofts the bulk of drivers are starting on.

"There are a few balls in the air for sure," he said. "We aren't overly sure how constant the tyres are going to be. For sure they are going to drop off but we don't now when. It is like most races to be honest. In these sort of conditions we saw in Valencia, in Budapest, a few races - obviously Budapest was wet at the start. With the exception of I suppose Monza and some of the other races where the tyres, like in Spa, you see they are going to be pretty stable. Here we have had a decent build up on Friday. Long runs. Most teams had a good look at it, but let's see. There are two compounds that are definitely going to be used tomorrow to their extreme."

Naturally, talk turned to the championship. Button and Webber were asked whether they'd be able to prevent Vettel from taking the crown on Sunday.

"I think that even if he doesn't start the next six races it's still going to be pretty difficult for us to beat him," Button admitted. "When the lights go out, you don't think about the championship, when you're 100-plus points back. You go for a win, and that's exactly what I'm going to try and do tomorrow."

Webber was in full agreement.

"The same, mate," he said. "The championship is... for all the great work Seb did at the start of the year, this is the situation we're in. We know the championship's been pretty boring for that reason but the racing has been awesome, the racing this year has been great and I think we're going to have some great races before the year's out. Tomorrow will hopefully be another good one and I'm planning to go forward if I can at some stage in the race, which is one more position, so got to keep him honest as long as we can."

Yet again, Vettel was asked whether he thought he was going to better or equal Nigel Mansell's 1992 run of 14 poles in a season. Yet again, he answered modestly.

"No, I think it was pretty exceptional," he said. "I think it was 1992 Nigel had that incredible year. We are not doing too bad this year, but I think it is wrong to start thinking about those things. We have got a long race ahead of us tomorrow. That's where we usually score points, not in qualifying, so the focus is on the race tomorrow. But I think it shows that really every single race is another step for us and we try to focus on the moment. I think it is the most important. To get all out every single time sounds easy. We have to keep on doing what we are doing, but it is not so easy to do it every weekend. As I said tomorrow is the race and that's where the focus is. I still believe that Nigel's record is exceptional."

And finally, given that the season has seen a significant number of race weekends without timed laps in Q3 from all ten challengers - tyre preservation being more important than grid position in such a strong field - the drivers were asked what they thought of the suggestion that the FIA impose penalties on those who chose not to run when they had a car capable of doing so. The exchange has been copied in full below.

Q: Given that 'the show' has been a bit of a buzzword in F1 over the last few years, people are complaining about the lack of running that we've seen from some teams - obviously not any of you - in Q3. How do you feel about proposals that the FIA implement automatic grid-drop penalties for those who chose not to run in any qualifying session?

SV: I don't know. I think the last three cars didn't run, as far as I saw. Obviously for those guys the main challenge is getting to Q3 and by the time they find themselves in Q3 they haven't got much tyres left so I think that's the real problem. I think that generally if we had more tyres across the weekend, we would run more. It's the same on Friday, in a way. Time is limited as well. I don't know. I think we've had these rules for quite a while now. Obviously we might have the occasional race like here where people decide not to run because they want to save their tyres for the race, but I don't think it's the case every Saturday.

MW: Yeah, the show, which you spoke about, is generally for the teams on Sunday, so they want to save their tyres. Basically, if we were all flush with tyres, the guys would be out there and getting the experience, getting the laps in, having exposure for their own partners as well. It's not just that they just don't want to be in the garage because they haven't got any fuel: it's because they are doing it for a reason, for Sunday. I think the question is completely fair but I think the penalty is not... it's not fair to penalise people who are looking to try to have a good performance on Sunday.

JB: Yup. Totally agree. You can't penalise people for not running unless there's a regulation change. Until there's a regulation change it's always going to be like this, especially on a street circuit, and I think you will never see the quick cars doing it. The top six cars are always going to fight it out for P1 but it's the cars, as Mark said, that have just got into Q3. It probably pays to save tyres for the race, as we've seen on many occasions this year. A few guys have come from halfway down the field or even further back with all fresh sets of tyres. Mark did it in China, I've done it before and Michael's done it before. It's the way the regulations are and we're going to try everything we can to do the best we can on a Sunday afternoon – or evening.

F1 Singapore Blog – The Singapore Grand Prix as it happened

It's hot, it's dark, and it's very very loud. But it's better than the best nightclub you've ever been to – welcome to the Marina Bay Circuit, where the Singapore Grand Prix is about to get underway.

As the drivers lined up on the grid in preparation for the evening's action, the track temperature was 34 degrees and the air temperature 31 degrees.

Lewis Hamilton is at a disadvantage this evening, following the FIA's decision to prohibit a replacement set of supersoft tyres after his qualifying puncture. The McLaren driver now has only two sets to get him through the race.

And they're off!

No terrible starts from anyone, but a bit of squeezing between Webber and Button. No first corner carnage either, which is no bad thing.

Hamilton's already dropped back to P7, while Button is up in P2. Current top ten – we're still on lap 1 – is Vettel, Button, Alonso, Webber, Massa, Rosberg, Hamilton, Schumacher, Sutil, di Resta.

By lap 2 we'd seen two lots of brief waved yellows, but no TV coverage showing us what caused them. Presumably just minor bits of debris, as no one's pitted for new parts.

Vettel already has a 2.5s lead on Button in P2, meaning he's safe from DRS attacks once race control announce the device has been enabled.

Ricciardo pitted on lap 2, and his stop has been a very long one. Maybe the HRT driver was the man behind those waved yellows?

Lap 3, and Vettel's pulled out another second, putting him 3.5s in the lead. DRS is now enabled, and unless the Red Bull crew mess up a pitstop, or Vettel does something silly, we're unlikely to see the defending world champion lose this one.

More waved yellows, this time in sector six, although there's no telling who or why. The section of track in question has now been declared clear.

By lap 4, Vettel is up to his usual trick of pulling out a second a lap on the men behind. At this rate, he'll finish the race half an hour before anyone else does.

Schumacher got past Hamilton at some point, but Hamilton reclaimed the spot on lap 4 – he's not sitting through another Monza, staring at the back end of the MGP W02.

Hamilton is currently on a charge, with Rosberg the next man to fall prey to the McLaren. The 2008 champion has now reclaimed two of the four places he's lost since the lights went out, with Massa next in his sights and around 4s ahead on track.

By lap 6, Vettel had a 7s lead on Button. By the end of lap 7, it was up to 9.1s. We're around 10 percent in to this race and it's already a foregone conclusion. Shame Robert Kubica isn't here to shake things up in the style of his mind-blowing performance last year.

By lap 9, it was clear that the only real action to be found was further down the pack, as drivers competed for a place in the points, or on the podium, depending on what their car allowed.

Lap 11, and Webber got past Alonso for P3. Hamilton has reduced the gap to Massa to 0.7s.

There's a bit of drama in this chasing pack – Alonso has pitted for fresh rubber, but Massa and Hamilton are close on Webber's tail, only 2.4s and 2.8s behind respectively.

There's drama on track as Timo Glock retires, stopping his car on track.

Hamilton and Massa pit together under yellow flags on lap 12; Massa returns in P8 with Hamilton just behind on P10, but the McLaren driver wasn't having any of it. The Brit got past the Brazilian, but broke his front wing in the process. Massa's tyre is trashed, and another pit stop is required.

While that was going on, seemingly half the grid pitted. Webber followed from P3, and returned to the rack in P6.

The current top ten – on lap 13 – is Vettel, Button, Webber, di Resta, Perez, Alonso, Hamilton, Rosberg, Barrichello, Kobayashi.

The Hamilton-Massa incident is under investigation by the stewards.

Hamilton waited till the end of lap 14 before coming in for a new wing, presumably to avoid losing yet more time when he is issued with an inevitable drive-through penalty for trying to make the race more exciting.

And there it is – a drive-through for Hamilton announced on lap 16 and completed in the next pass of the pits. With not much rubber to his name, it's unlikely that we'll see a John Watson-esque charge from the back.

Lap 19 and Alonso charges past di Resta for P3. The Scottish driver is slightly out of position on a different strategy to the rest of the field, and the Ferrari man had much fresher rubber to chase with. Webber is next to try and pass the Force India driver, while Alonso builds up whatever lead he can.

Lap 20 and di Resta pits for the first time this race, going from P3 to P8.

The current top ten are: Vettel, Button, Alonso, Webber, Rosberg, Schumacher, Sutil, di Resta, Perez, Maldonado.

Lap 22 and Hamilton does his best to carve his way up the field, passing Kobayashi with relative ease for P14. Next up? Buemi.

Up front, Vettel has logged the fastest lap and is nearly 15s ahead of Button in P2. Only alien abduction can ruin this race for him now.

Alonso and Webber are in a close-fought battle for P3, separated by that vital DRS-allowing one second.

By lap 23, Hamilton had made it past Buemi and was closing on his old nemesis – Massa. This will be fun to watch...

Apparently Trulli and Alguersuari had an off-camera collision that led to a puncture for the Team Lotus driver.

Lap 25 and Hamilton gets past Massa in a much cleaner move than anyone was expecting. Massa retreats to the pits with his tail between his legs, and Hamilton looks up the track to Barrichello in P11, only three seconds ahead and hampered by the Williams he's driving.

Alguersuari is issued with a drive-through for causing a collision with Trulli.

Meanwhile, Hamilton passes Barrichello with ease. Pastor Maldonado pitted from P10, promoting the McLaren driver into the points.

Schumacher, 14s ahead of Hamilton in P9, has just posted the fastest lap of the race.

Lap 28 and the top ten is Vettel, Button, Webber, Alonso, di Resta, Sutil, Perez, Rosberg, Schumacher, Hamilton.

Vettel has more than 20 seconds on Button, who is a further 20 seconds ahead of Webber. This is just silly, quite frankly. Alonso, in P4, is 65.8s down on Vettel. Madness.

Lap 30, and Rosberg passes Perez for P7.

A nanosecond later, and Schumacher's race comes to a messy end thanks to a flip off the rear end of Perez' Sauber that brings out the Safety Car. Thank goodness for that – we might see some action at the front, instead of just in the middle.

Oh – that thank goodness was for the Safety Car, not for Schumacher's accident. No one wants to cheer a crash.

The traditional run for the pits has begun, led by Webber, who has handed P3 to Alonso in exchange for some fresh rubber to catch him with once the Safety Car is recalled to the pits.

Sutil, Perez, Rosberg, D'Ambrosio, Senna, Ricciardo, Hamilton, di Resta, and Vettel all pit. In fact, they all pit, pretty much.

Lap 31 and the order behind the Safety Car is: Vettel, Button, Alonso, Webber, di Resta, Sutil, Rosberg, Perez, Hamilton, Barrichello, Buemi, Maldonado, Kobayashi, Massa, Petrov, Alguersuari, Kovalainen, D'Ambrosio, Senna, Trulli, Liuzzi, Ricciardo.

Lap 33 and the FIA announce the Safety Car will be in at the end of this lap, meaning racing can restart in earnest on lap 34.

No drama at the restart, despite press room bets on where the crashes would be.

Webber slips neatly past Alonso, catching the Spanish driver seemingly half asleep.

We're not even half way through the first post-SC lap, and Vettel's already got 4s on Button in P2. What kind of machine is he? The boy should be checked for wires, as that's just not natural.

Hamilton gets past Perez for P8, and is slowly working his way up through the field from a post-penalty low point of P20. Massa is in P10, behind Perez.

By lap 36, Vettel-bot has pulled out a 10s lead on the competition. In two laps. TWO LAPS.

Lap 37, and Hamilton gets past Sutil for P7 in a neat pass that saw the Brit stake a claim to the inside line. Sutil left enough room, and there was no drama for anyone.

A pass on Rosberg sees Hamilton up in P6 and closing in on di Resta only 0.3s ahead in P5. And he does it. By lap 40, the McLaren driver has fought his way back up from P20, although he needs to find 20 seconds to challenge for the podium.

Race control have announced a drive-through penalty for Kobayashi for ignoring blue flags. Meanwhile, the Perez-Rosberg incident is under investigation by the stewards.

On lap 44, the stewards announce no further action in the Perez-Rosberg incident.

Vettel is still miles ahead, to the point that he's already started qualifying for Suzuka.

The stewards are going to keep us all busy after the racing, following the announcement that the Perez-Schumacher accident will be investigated post-race. What on earth could Perez possibly be blamed for? And how could you punish Schumacher when his race is already finished? Excessive intervention from the stewards this weekend, methinks.

Lap 48 and Webber pits from P3, promoting Alonso to the position. That shows confidence, but the Australian driver has been passing like a demon today, and fresh tyres never hurt a man on a charge.

Webber comes out behind Hamilton and uses his fresh tyres to nip past quickly on lap 49.

Button then pits from P2, and returns to the track in P3. Next to pit is Hamilton, who comes in from P5 and emerges in P9. Vettel then pits from the future, and gets back on track still in P1 after a hairy moment in the pitlane with Kovalainen.

Alonso pits from P2 and emerges in P4.

The top ten is now made up of: Vettel, Button, Weber, Alonso, di Resta, Rosberg, Sutil, Perez, Hamilton, and Barrichello. Button is a mere 9.5s behind Vettel, and setting fastest laps.

Hamilton passes Perez and Sutil, and is in P7 by lap 52. Rosberg is up next, and gets passed easily, also on lap 52.

In the meantime, Trulli appears to have retired from the race, given that he's stopped on track at Turn 9.

The Kovalainen unsafe release that could have taken out race leader Vettel will be investigated by the stewards once the chequered flag has fallen.

Lap 54 and Hamilton makes it past di Resta for P5. Yet again, he's 12.4s down on Alonso in P4.

But within a single lap that gap has been reduced to 9.6s as the Ferrari begins to slow.

Button is also on a charge, and currently sitting 8.6s down on Vettel with six laps remaining. If anyone can keep the championship alive tonight, it's Button.

The gap between P1 and P2 is now down to 6.5s with four laps remaining.

Three laps remaining and 3.7s split Button and Vettel. Could this be another Montreal, where the McLaren driver snatches victory off the Red Bull in the dying seconds?

Not if that ridiculous bit of traffic was anything to go by. Way to ruin our only chance of drama, Williams – you just cost Button 2s.

Any sign of intervention from the overactive stewards? Nah, course not.

Alguersuari is out of the race after he ran into the wall at Turn 18. But there's no need for a Safety Car, just waved yellows.

We're on the last lap, and Vettel has taken it – thanks in no small part to the two Williams drivers, who thought their battle for no points was more important than the race win.

Way to screw up what could have been a nail-biting finish. Instead, with a crushing sense of inevitability, Sebastian Vettel takes the chequered flag and the race win. Crucially, however, the championship is still mathematically alive.

Vettel crowned in Suzuka? You can pretty much bet on it.

Singapore Grand Prix results (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull)
2. Jenson Button (McLaren)
3. Mark Webber (Red Bull)
4. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari)
5. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren)
6. Paul di Resta (Force India)
7. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes)
8. Adrian Sutil (Force India)
9. Felipe Massa (Ferrari)
10. Sergio Perez (Sauber)
11. Pastor Maldonado (Williams)
12. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso)
13. Rubens Barrichello (Williams)

14. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
15. Bruno Senna (Renault)
16. Heikki Kovalainen (Team Lotus)
17. Vitaly Petrov (Renault)
18. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin)
19. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT)
20. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT)
21. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso)

Jarno Trulli (Team Lotus) RET
Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) RET
Timo Glock (Virgin) RET

F1 Singapore Blog – Sunday press conference in Singapore

Another race, another win for Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) who needs only a single point in the next five races to secure the 2011 drivers' crown. Joining him in the post-race press conference were Jenson Button (McLaren) and Mark Webber (Red Bull).

"I am very, very pleased with the result," Vettel said. "The car was fantastic all the way through. I think when we had to push we could pull away quite easily and pull a gap, which helped us. The safety car came out. It didn't really fit to our plan as we had a big gap. I think about 30 seconds and 30 laps to go but, nevertheless, I had a very good restart.

"I was a bit lucky there were some backmarkers between me and Jenson and I was able to get back into the rhythm straight away, pull a huge gap and I was quite happy as towards the end with the traffic it is quite busy around here," he continued. "There isn't much space and if you catch the traffic on the wrong place on the circuit you lose quite some time. In the last lap I faced five cars, quite a large group, but there was plenty of room. Not that big margin when I crossed the line but I was in control when Jenson was going into the last lap.

"All in all fantastic result," Vettel concluded. "I really love the track. I love the challenge. It is one of the longest races, I think it is the longest so great. The car was fantastic. Engine-wise everything was great. Renault, again, did a very good job so we were in a comfortable position for most of the race which is pretty handy around here as it is quite a big challenge to put the sectors together, not only in qualifying but also the race so, as I said, the pace was good and I am very pleased. For the Championship, it looks like we have another chance at the next race."

It was a fantastic display from Vettel, who pulled out a 2.5 second lead on the opposition in the first lap.

"All in all the car was great from start to finish and I was able to pull away," the race winner explained. "Had a little bit of help from the backmarkers. But had nice smooth race at the front. I didn't have to face any cars. I used DRS only if I had to pass the lapped cars.

"We were in a luxury position today. The speed was phenomenal. The car I had, every time I had to push and I wanted to push there was so much more lap time in it. I think we were going at stages more than a second quicker than the cars behind which makes it a lot of fun.

"At the end with quite a lot of traffic, if you take some time and wait until there really opens a gap to avoid any misunderstanding you might sacrifice a couple of seconds easily," Vettel added. "That allowed Jenson to come closer plus the fact that he felt quite comfortable at the end of the race but as I said not much we could have done better tonight so all in all it is great. It means a lot to me as I really like this track. It is one of the hardest challenges we face all year so to come out of that a winner is a great result for us."

Button's chance at the win was frustrated by some battling backmarkers who cost the McLaren driver 2s on a lap where he was closing in on Vettel.

"I can understand it is difficult to move over here," the British driver said. "Most people were fighting out there but a bit of respect to the cars that are lapping them. They are lapping them for a reason because they are quicker and they fighting for a higher position.

"There were some frustrating moments in the race. One was Kamui. I sat behind him for a lap. Couldn't get past and he finally moved over and the two Williams were fighting between themselves. The thing is when it gets to the last lap and people see they are being lapped so they are pushing hard and they race each other but forget there are other cars trying to overtake."

But according to Vettel, Button wasn't closing as rapidly as it appeared on screen.

"I think [the end of the race] was under control, in a way," he said. "Obviously when we come up on traffic, I get it first. I have to slow down, have to take my time, it depends where you catch the traffic and how much time you lose. And then Jenson has to face the same problem once I'm through the traffic. I found myself going into the last lap with five seconds, which was more or less the gap we had before so I think there was enough room.

"Obviously I took it easy with the traffic because you never know how these guys are going to react," the defending champion continued. "They are fighting for position themselves, here and there a blue flag could have helped out there which wasn't there all the time, but I think you just need to be aware.

"Coming around the last corner on the last lap, I probably lifted off a bit too early so 1.7 seconds was obviously still enough, but I think we had it fairly under control and turned the engine down, the car down towards the end of the race, felt reasonably comfortable. Obviously it's difficult to know if Jenson... it looked like he was flat out but in his position he has nothing to lose so he might as well go for it, but with the laps we had, I think we were in control."

The defining moments of Webber's race were in his battles with Fernando Alonso.

"[The battles] are enjoyable but I am not keen to sign up for them all the time as it means I am with him when I probably should not be. But, again, difficult start for me trying to get away. We need to continue to work on this. Clearly it makes my race more difficult.

"I think it ultimately cost me a place today but having said that Jenson put a very good last stint together," the Australian driver continued. "That would have been a good battle with us if I'd have had track position with him if we had went away in grid position. But, ultimately, we all got pretty much what we deserved today. It was pretty clear that I had to clear Fernando at some stage in the race as Ferrari kept covering me at the stops.

"The DRS wasn't really working so we needed to do it around the stops. Fernando is not in his first grand prix so he knows where to put the car and it was a good battle, but by the time I got past Seb and Jenson were gone. I enjoyed the restart a bit or before on the harder tyre, the prime, and then we went for the softs. Then he had traffic. I think everyone had a little bit of that and the momentum went out of that last set."

Button and Webber were then asked about their hopes for the next race in Suzuka.

"[My prospects are] better than here," Webber said. "I enjoy Suzuka, it's a great track. Korea was pretty good for me until it rained. There are some good venues coming up. All the drivers like driving at Suzuka, so looking forward to going there, mate, it's a great track, as is India. I've had a good look on the simulator as well. We've got some challenging venues coming up and some that I hope I can get my teeth into and continue in this way, but slightly further down the road on Sunday afternoon, pulling everything together and having a slightly better finish to the year if possible. We're placed to do it, we've just got to execute it."

Button was less positive about the team's prospects, but admitted to being pleased with the McLaren's pace around Marina Bay.

"For the last couple of races we thought we were on a par and we could really race them well, especially this race," Button said. "We've been off the pace compared to the Red Bulls. I think this circuit really shows a good car, not just the Red Bull but also our car. The McLaren showed our pace compared to the rest of the field. We were lapping cars after seven laps or something, it's unbelievable, the difference down the field in terms of pace.

"This is one of those quite unusual circuits, so I'm hoping that at the next five we will be a lot closer in pace or even on the pace of the Red Bulls," he continued. "Suzuka is always a tough one. Red Bull's always quick in high speed corners, but then again, we were pretty good in Spa so we're going to hope that we're going to have a good car. Our car in high speed corners is much better than it used to be. We've really improved that. Braking is very good with this car. Our straightline speed is much better than it used to be, so we're moving in the right direction and I think we can give these guys a challenge. I hope so."

Given that the championship now hangs on a single point scored over five races, Vettel was asked how confident he was that the title was now his.

"I feel capable but I still have to do it," he said. "Obviously with the races that we've had so far, it should not be a big problem but it's over when it's over and not before. Statistically the chances are on our side but generally in sports there have been a lot of stories written, and this one also has to wait to be closed first."

Finally, Vettel was asked about his seemingly endless string of race wins. The exchange has been copied verbatim below.

Q. Sebastian, that was the first time that you led from start to finish. Does that give you some kind of perfection when you lead every lap. Also, it didn't take long to beat Kimi [Raikkonen] in terms of victories; will you overtake Mika [Hakkinen] as quickly? He's the next one.

SV: I don't know how many wins Kimi has and Mika?

Q. Eighteen for Kimi and 20 for Mika.

MW: Hopefully he has a few races to get him. He's not retiring at the end of the year. Mika's in trouble.

SV: I didn't know that other races we had... obviously it depends on when you pit, when the others pit but good to hear (that's it's the first time that I had led from lights to flag.) At the end of the race, I'm always a bit tempted to go for fastest lap. I get told off, 'don't even dare to think about it.' Jenson said I had no chance, I'm not sure, but yeah, I think the main thing is to win the race. It doesn't matter where you start or where you have been in between or on your journey. As you finish first, there are a lot of reasons to be happy. Most of the time, it's confirmation that you did a better job than the rest so I'm very pleased with that. For the Finns, it's not really my objective but it's incredible news in a way, because obviously everyone knows drivers like Kimi and Mika, especially in Finland I guess. Within the German drivers, the German record is far, far away. Still a long way to go but I'm very happy at the moment. The team is doing a great job, I'm feeling very comfortable with the team, with the car. Everything seems to work and we are on top of our game. I think there is no secret. It's just that everyone is able to rely on the other one and together we are pulling in the same direction, in one direction. I think it's very enjoyable at the moment. The car is obviously fantastic and most of the time we have a good Sunday afternoon or Sunday evenings.

Analysing the Singapore Grand Prix

Beautiful doesn't necessarily mean interesting.

That applies to people, to cities, and to races, and the Singapore and Monaco grands prix are a case in point. Both are visually stunning spectacles, set against a beautiful backdrop, that persistently fail to deliver top-class racing.

Everything else about Singapore - from its citizens to its subways - is top class. But the racing? Well, let's just say that without an intervention from Nelson Piquet Jr or a masterclass in street circuit overtaking from Robert Kubica, racing at Marina Bay can be somewhat stale.

And so it proved to be again this year.

Sure, we saw some stunning manoeuvres, not least Mark Webber's two passes on Fernando Alonso.

Lewis Hamilton delivered another impressive performance when - following a drive-through penalty that saw the British driver emerge from the pits in P20 - he fought his way up through the field to an eventual P5 finish.

And yes, Hamilton's stunning drive only came about as the consequence of the driver's own error, but does it really matter why we saw him climb 15 places? The drive itself was a thing of beauty, and showed yet again just how well the often-criticised driver can perform under pressure.

Paul di Resta was another driver to impress in Marina Bay. The Force India man was on a different tyre strategy to his opponents, and the rookie drove with aplomb to extend the life of his tyres for an eventual P6 finish.

But several sweet drives do not a stunning race make.

For all that there was action in the rest of the field, Sebastian Vettel humiliated the competition when he pulled out a 2.5s lead over the course of the first lap. With a margin like that, all of F1's added extras become irrelevant. The DRS is completely castrated, varying tyre strategies matter not a jot, and no amount of added downforce or bravery in late braking is going to lead to a challenge at the front.

The only chance for a change at the lead comes via mechanical failure or driver error, and that's not the best way to ensure thrills on a Sunday.

So Vettel won the race in his inimitable style, as has become par for the course this year. The Red Bull driver should have been challenged by the Safety Car that came out on lap 30, a the combination of a good restart and the fortuitous presence of train-driving Jarno Trulli behind him meant that even the compressed crowd couldn't challenge the current champion.

The race was won by half distance, despite the best efforts of a chasing Jenson Button.

Button - whose performances have been improving race by race throughout the season - was another man to deliver a stunning drive in Marina Bay.

But the possible fight to the finish that we all thought was scuppered by the duelling Williams' of Rubens Barrichello and Pastor Maldonado, who were fighting tooth and nail for a pointless (in every sense of the word) finish, wouldn't have happened anyway.

At least, not according to Vettel in the post-race press conference.

"We were in a luxury position today," the Red Bull driver said. "The speed was phenomenal. The car I had, every time I had to push and I wanted to push there was so much more lap time in it. I think we were going at stages more than a second quicker than the cars behind which makes it a lot of fun.

"At the end with quite a lot of traffic, if you take some time and wait until there really opens a gap to avoid any misunderstanding you might sacrifice a couple of seconds easily. That allowed Jenson to come closer plus the fact that he felt quite comfortable at the end of the race but as I said not much we could have done better tonight so all in all it is great."

It is great, if you're Sebastian Vettel and need only one point in five races to secure the drivers' title for the second year running. For the rest of us? It'd be nice to see a bit more variety at the front.

That being said, the inevitability of a Vettel win has meant that the midfield cars so often ignored by the TV cameras are now getting the bulk of the coverage. Wonder what that will do to sponsorship rates?
