

Getting to know Istanbul Park

Should we be getting to know Istanbul, or saying goodbye to it? The Turkish Grand Prix's place on the F1 calendar is no longer assured, but it appears to be in a stronger position than it was last week.

While the Istanbul Park Circuit is popular among drivers, the local community has not switched on to Formula 1 despite the proliferation of expensive cars on show in the streets of Istanbul. The emerging middle class has money for their own cars, but are not yet interested in watching top-tier racing. Trackside streets are empty, and some journalists joke that the circuit will soon be reclaimed by the local goat population.

From a racing perspective, the lack of local support for the race is a shame. The anti-clockwise track is probably the best Hermann Tilke has ever designed, and makes the most of the regional topography, with undulations and elevation changes to factor in before you even consider the triple-apex Turn 8 and the lap-opening corkscrew sequence.

While the Turkish Grand Prix is normally run in the dry - Lewis Hamilton joked that he didn't think it rained in Istanbul - this weekend is shaping up to be a wet one. Should rain fall throughout the weekend, past form will be out the window as the teams learn to contend with Pirelli's extreme wet tyres at a track they normally think of as baking.

But wet weather could also bring an advantage. Should Sunday's race remain dry after a largely wet weekend, the teams will have a wider choice of unused dry tyres for the grand prix itself. Hamilton and Mark Webber have shown the gains possible from an extra set of fresh rubber, and every lap will count at Istanbul Park, which is known for its tyre-munching tendencies.

Add to that the fact that the teams are still learning about the Pirelli compounds and we should be in for an exciting weekend in Turkey. In dry weather, the cornering loads on offer at Istanbul Park will chew up the rubber, but a wet race will see extreme stresses on a seemingly tiny selection of tyres on offer. F1's tyre supplier went into more detail in their race preview, which looks at the track from a tyre's point of view.

"There are some areas of heavy deceleration such as the first corner, where the cars change down from seventh to third gear," the release read. "This can cause a lock-up of the front-left tyre due to the unusual camber and lead the flat spotting; a problem that can be reduced or eliminated with an increased grip offered by the soft tyre option. Next up is the most technical section of the track - turns three to six - which consists of a technical sequence of curves where the driver needs to maximise speed by sticking closely to the ideal racing line.

"Half way through the lap there is the legendary turn eight," it continues, "reputed as one of the most technical of the entire World Championship with three apexes and an entry speed of nearly 260kph. During this flat-out corner, the cars and tyres experience lateral acceleration of 4.6 G as well as vertical load of 950 kilograms. The higher grip of the soft tyre improves directional precision and driving safety. After a short straight the cars reduce speed by 150 mph into a chicane with sharp but opposing corners (turns nine and 10) before another straight where the full power of the engine is unleashed once more, prioritising traction. Turn 11 is taken flat-out at 300kph, the speed and downforce increasing the turn angle of the tyre, which also tends to lift its outside edge. The final corner calls for precision steering with progressive acceleration in order to avoid wheelspin, which increases wear, heading back onto the main straight."

The final factor the teams have to contend with this weekend is physical stress: as the first anti-clockwise circuit on the 2011 calendar, Istanbul Park forces drivers to endure extreme levels of G-force in corners while also straining the left-side of their neck, not the favoured right.

Engines do not get an easy ride of it in Turkey. According to Cosworth, "Istanbul Park is one of the most complicated circuits on the Formula One calendar with a varied mix of high, medium and low-speed sections which puts engines through a tough workout. The vagaries of the track require effective power delivery from the bottom end of the rev range right up to peak power output. The multi-apex Turn 8 remains a stiff challenge for drivers and demands a consistent response from the engine at high-speed. Good traction is critical upon the exit of Turn 12 to negotiate the slow final section of the lap. The track's location at 125m above sea level and with almost 46m of elevation change over the lap exacerbates the demands placed on the engine."

The current configuration of the Istanbul Park Circuit has been in use since the race's debut in 2005, and measures 5.338km. Presuming it runs for the full distance, the race will last for 58 laps, bringing the total distance run to 309.396 kilometres.

The group of past Istanbul Park winners currently racing in F1 is a tiny one: Lewis Hamilton (2010), Jenson Button (2009), and Felipe Massa (2006, 2007, 2008).

And the group of previous pole sitters is just as small: Mark Webber (2010), Sebastian Vettel (2009), and Felipe Massa (2006, 2007, 2008). Fastest laps at Istanbul Park have been claimed by Vitaly Petrov (2010), Jenson Button (2009), and Michael Schumacher (2006).

The current lap record at Istanbul Park is Juan Pablo Montoya's 2005 time of 1.24.770s, set at an average speed of 226.693kph.

F1 Sofa Blog – Thursday press conference in Istanbul

It was a chatty Thursday in Istanbul after the three-week post-China break.

Present at the drivers' press conference were Timo Glock (Virgin), Lewis Hamilton (McLaren), Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus), Felipe Massa (Ferrari), Vitaly Petrov (Renault), and Adrian Sutil (Force India).

Progress was the word of the day, especially in light of the long (ish) break between China and Turkey.

"I am not happy with the car at the moment, that's the main point," Glock said. "I think aerodynamically we are not where we should be. We have got a good update for here. The numbers are looking good and we have to see if that turns it around on the track. Simulator and all that stuff went okay in the last week and I think the parts are not looking that bad but, as I said, it counts on track and we have to see what we can do here."

Massa is looking forward to improved pace from the Scuderia as he aims to capitalise on his Shanghai success. "We have been working so hard," he said, "especially during this break, which was slightly longer than normal to understand everything and I hope we understand things a little bit more compared to the last race and compared to the first, second and third race. I hope we have an interesting step that we can feel in the car especially in qualifying as qualifying we were struggling so much in the first races. In the race we always get a good pace compared to the qualifying and I hope we get better in the qualifying and we keep good pace in the race so we can fight with Red Bull which was very strong. We see. Everybody is working very hard to improve the car. It is always difficult to say how the new parts will be, but I hope we understand so many important things that makes the car stronger and we will see here, especially with this weather, as we don't know how it is going to be as well."

According to Sutil, Force India's 2011 season will begin in earnest this weekend. "I think it should come now once we have started the European season really," he said. "For this race we have a little update. We don't know if we can run it but it is all to the direction for the next step, the big step, of upgrade package we introduce in Barcelona or Monaco. Here, we have a different front wing on. We will try it on Friday and let's see how it works, but, looking to the development, it is looking good. We expected to be not that strong in the first few races but we are not doing bad, always close to the top 10 or in the top 10. As a team we scored four points. That's not so bad and hopefully now our season will start."

Kovalainen said "the target has to be to join the midfield and to be ahead of the established teams that are directly ahead of us. That's what we are working on. Still, in certain conditions, especially in qualifying, the gap is still not small enough. We are still on our own land if you like. But in some other conditions, in warmer conditions, et cetera, we have already got close a couple of times and hopefully the upgrades that we are bringing to the next few races will be bigger than the direct competition ahead of us. That's what we have got to be targeting as a team and I think we can do it."

With the season now well underway, the drivers were asked to opine on the success – or lack thereof! – of the DRS.

"I think we are moving in the right direction with the rear wing," Petrov said: "it's more exciting to watch racing and good for us, even in the last race I had so many overtaking manoeuvres. I think we are moving in the right way because with the DRS system, with this 700 [metre] straight or something, I think at every race this line will be shorter because at the moment it's too easy to overtake. Sometimes it's harder, it depends. I think the FIA will move this line so it's a little bit shorter, so the car won't just stay behind and overtake the car in front easier. I think it's more exciting when you go in to the corner together and you can still fight under braking. I think it's interesting. I think in the last race there were seventy-something overtakings. I think it's good, no?"

Sutil chimed in: "I think it's a little bit easier in some places but it's still the same in others. Australia, I think, was a good example. I thought it would be easier to overtake but you just couldn't get close enough in the last corner and nothing really happened. And the same in China, I would say. The straight was a bit longer but also the activation point was a bit later and I was in the middle of the pack and on almost every lap in the first stint I had the chance to activate my rear wing but I couldn't manage to pass. It was just not enough. It's helpful but it's not too easy. That's why I think it's still OK."

"I think Barcelona will be the first real test," Kovalainen said, "in order to make a fair comment. In the past, we've also had long straights in Sepang and China and you've always been able to overtake in those places and maybe the wing is helping a little bit but let's wait and see when we go to Barcelona, where we never overtake, so let's see if we overtake a few more times now. It will be a fair judgement. Someone said to me that we've had 148 overtaking moves in the first three races, which is not bad."

Of all the drivers, Massa was probably the most positive. "I don't think it's just the wing which makes overtaking possible," he said. "Easier or not easier, it's everything, together with the tyre degradation and everything; how the cars use the tyres; how the strategy works as well. I think it's better for you guys. How many years have I heard people saying 'the good thing was the past, when Senna, Piquet, Mansell... it was really fun to see all these drivers race. They knew how to do it: Villeneuve, Arnoux.' It's true. It was also different cars as well and I even heard some things like after China: 'ah, now Formula 1 is back to how it was before'. It's important to see you guys happy as well, and I think for the fans it's what we care about. If they are happy and the drivers are happy as well, we will carry on like that."

Petrov gave us an insight into team strategy discussions. "It's good to have the fastest car, but you can see what Lewis did last race," he said. "He just destroyed all of us because of the tactics, so this year... For example, last year we discussed tactics for about 20 minutes and this year we spend around 50 minutes with the team, deciding what to do and what strategy to use, because the team has to react like this. Sometimes you wait just one lap more and you're out of position. I think this year it's more exciting, you need to think during the race, the drivers need to talk to the team, explaining how the tyres are, that you need to come in, or what is going on. Things like this. It's trickier this year and more exciting maybe."

A hefty chunk of the press conference was given over to Hamilton, who gave what was initially perceived to be a gloomy answer concerning his prospects for the weekend.

"Of course you can come from the last race and be very excited and confident going into the next race, but I don't have particularly high hopes," he said. "I generally don't like to expect too much as then, obviously, if it doesn't work out, then it is a big comedown from that. But I would prefer to arrive here cautious. We may not be the quickest this weekend, which is definitely possible, but if we are then that will be fantastic and we will do what we can to win. In the last race we didn't win because we had the fastest car. We won because we generally out-drove and out-did them with

strategy. Our car was the next quickest, but I hope we have closed the gap. But you never know again who has improved their car more than others so fingers crossed our upgrade is good enough but we will see tomorrow.”

Pressed further, the British driver elaborated.

“I was referring to this weekend,” he said, “just because we have had that break and everyone is making a step forward. You have to assume everyone is making a step forward. We had a good half-a-second that we needed to jump to catch the Red Bull. Whether we will have that half-a-second we will have to wait and see, but we have to assume that whatever we bring they will have brought the same or similar. But for the rest of the season, of course, we are on top of our game and we are pushing as hard as we can to win more races. I think it was a great boost for us the last race and to then have that couple of weeks break was fantastic from our guys so I was happy I was able to do that for them.

“In terms of my own performance and my driving I am confident that I can get in the car and do the same job that I did in the last race, but race-by-race you learn and people learn from other peoples’ experiences through strategy how to control their tyres and everyone is improving constantly. And just because it is such a big break. In this kind of break, generally we have gone back to Barcelona in the past and everyone has brought quite a big upgrade, so you have to expect that it is the same this weekend. Even though we won the last race, we were still slightly trailing behind the Red Bulls in pure pace, but you have to also be cautious of the fact that others like Ferrari, Renault and Mercedes have also made the step. Perhaps closer to us or past us, you never know. I am just not getting all excited, just looking forward to getting in the car and doing the best job we can this weekend to score some points. I am confident with what is coming over the next few races that hopefully it will put us in better shape,” Hamilton concluded.

Comment of the day belongs to Glock, who was talking about Mark Webber’s China strategy. “I’ve started behind [Webber] a couple of times now, but I’ve never managed to be on the podium this year and last year so I will have to talk to Mark and ask him what he did different to me,” he said. “I think it was quite interesting to see how good the car is, he had a good strategy as well, lots of good overtaking manoeuvres so he had everything right but as I said, I have to find a way to make that happen as well.”

Finally, the drivers were asked whether they missed Robert Kubica’s presence in the paddock. I have copied the exchange in full below.

Q. Question to all of you except Heikki who has already answered: when you go around the paddock, do you notice the absence of Robert Kubica and do you miss him as a friend and a personality in Formula 1?

TG: Yeah, definitely. I have known him for a couple of years now. I spent a complete year with him at BMW and just a couple of days ago we sent messages back and forth. He’s a special guy and I think everyone is missing him. He’s a very good racer and it’s a shame that he’s not here, but I just hope that he recovers as quickly as possible and will be back in the paddock again.

AS: He’s a great character and I’ve known him for a long time as well. It’s always very disappointing and shocking to hear that something like this can happen. It shows that motor sport is still dangerous. At the same time, I think he was very lucky to be alive, so we wish him all the best ... I wish him all the best and he should definitely come back here. He absolutely deserved to be in Formula 1, he proved that many times and he’s a really good racer.

VP: When I came to Renault at the same time as Robert, I didn’t know him before but with him, the team was loose, like one family, because he always tried to push the team, to wake up, to explain what to do. He was also a positive guy, he knew exactly what to do and all the guys in the team believed in him and he was always funny and very, very quick. What we saw last year, he was one of the best drivers. So we all miss him. We know he just left hospital; now he has a long time to recover, so we all support him and we are waiting for him. I hope that this year we can see him in the paddock, just to say hello.

FM: I’ve known him since he was racing Formula Renault. I moved from Renault to Formula 3000 and he was starting in Formula Renault so I’ve known him a long time already and he’s a great driver, a very friendly guy, a very nice guy and an incredible talent, for sure. We miss him, for sure, fighting with him on the track. He was always very strong, a very good driver. The way he drives and the way he works, the way he believes, so I really hope he’s back here to do what he likes to do which is racing and just to see him in the paddock to have fun together as well.

LH: I think everyone – all the drivers – have paid a compliment to him and fair dos to that; I second what they’ve all said, really. I’ve known him since I was about 13. We raced together, as soon as I got to Italy, so I’ve known him quite a long time and we generally came up through the ranks together, so perhaps I’ve known him a little bit longer than some others but I think that as we got to Formula 1, known him perhaps a little bit less because you have less time for that kind of thing, but obviously he’s a great talent in the sport and he definitely deserves to be here so I hope that he has a very, very fast recovery and no doubt he has the right people behind him to help him recover in the best way. And knowing him, and how competitive he is, he will be doing everything he can to get back on the scene, so I look forward to welcoming him back, the same as everyone else.

F1 Sofa Blog – F1 in Istanbul

The first practice session of the Turkish Grand Prix weekend belonged to Ferrari driver Fernando Alonso, who set the fastest time on a wet morning.

It was a bizarre start to the weekend’s proceedings, as Sebastian Vettel brought out the red flags with a Turn 8 crash and McLaren drivers Lewis Hamilton and Jenson Button occupied the bottom of the timesheets. Hamilton didn’t complete a timed lap, while Button was the only man not to break through the 2 minute barrier.

Tyre strategy is now more important than ever, with teams choosing to go for reduced running in practice sessions in order to conserve as many fresh sets of tyres as possible for Sunday’s race. Mark Webber’s stunning Chinese performance – which saw the Australian driver charge from the back of the grid to the podium – was the catalyst for the change in approach.

Friday morning was the first chance many of the teams have had to experience some real running on the wet tyre compounds; there was one day of seriously wet running at the end of the Barcelona winter tests, but few of the teams were trackside that day.

Mercedes drivers Nico Rosberg and Michael Schumacher finished the morning just behind Alonso, and the German team are confident that the improved pace they showed in China was a turnaround, not a fluke.

Nick Heidfeld and Vitaly Petrov were just behind the Mercedes pair in P4 and P5; Renault have shown impressive pace so far this season, and the rain

did not seem to affect the car's performance.

But times themselves mean very little in practice, as the combination of different programmes means that you're not comparing like with like. Throw in some rain to spice up the action, and it's impossible to use this morning's results to get a real picture of likely performance this weekend. While the rain is expected to continue throughout the day, current forecasts predict dry weather during both qualifying and the race.

In the second half of the session the rain fell harder, and drivers were complaining of worsening conditions on track; Rosberg reported that the car was aquaplaning at turns 2 and 11. Turn 11 seemed to present the most problems, with Vettel, Schumacher, Felipe Massa, Timo Glock, and Sebastien Buemi all running wide.

F1 timings (unofficial)

1. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.38.670s [13 laps]
2. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.40.072s [14 laps]
3. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.40.132s [18 laps]
4. Nick Heidfeld (Renault) 1.40.338s [9 laps]
5. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.40.401s [10 laps]
6. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.40.421s [16 laps]
7. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.40.697s [14 laps]
8. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.41.094s [18 laps]
9. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.41.178s [22 laps]
10. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.41.347s [16 laps]
11. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.42.564s [5 laps]
12. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.42.597s [7 laps]
13. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.43.525s [11 laps]
14. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.43.913s [5 laps]
15. Karun Chandhok (Lotus) 1.43.986s [6 laps]
16. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT) 1.44.787s [20 laps]
17. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.44.954s [4 laps]
18. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.45.183s [15 laps]
19. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin) 1.45.237s [11 laps]
20. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.48.461s [8 laps]
21. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) 1.51.676s [6 laps]
22. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.55.791s [13 laps]
23. Jenson Button (McLaren) 2.00.666s [4 laps]
24. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) NO TIME SET [1 lap]

F1 Sofa Blog – FP2 in Istanbul

Friday's second practice session saw drier conditions at Istanbul Park, where Jenson Button topped the timesheets for McLaren.

After a morning that saw the McLaren pair complete very limited running in soaking conditions, both drivers were towards the top of the pack, with P3 Lewis Hamilton finishing six-tenths down on his teammate.

Mercedes showed that this morning's promising pace was more than just a flash in the pan, with Nico Rosberg less than a tenth behind Button and Michael Schumacher in P4, only 0.03s slower than Hamilton.

The battle for pace was a McLaren vs Mercedes affair. Although Felipe Massa briefly topped the timesheets for Ferrari, he was quickly dethroned by Rosberg and finished the afternoon in P6, behind Mark Webber.

Fernando Alonso's car suffered a hydraulics problem that kept the Spaniard in the garage for much of the afternoon session. When he made it onto the track, a Turn 6 spin appeared to knock his confidence, and Alonso ended up in P11.

There were no major problems on track this afternoon. Pastor Maldonado flirted with the barriers after running wide in the legendary Turn 8, and Schumacher had a brief hair-raising moment at Turn 11 after a brief dice with Adrian Sutil, but running was essentially smooth for all concerned.

Virgin seemed to be struggling this afternoon, and it was only in the closing moments of the session that Timo Glock and Jerome D'Ambrosio were able to set times that put them ahead of the HRT pair. Glock said in Thursday's press conference that the team's difficulty was down to aerodynamic issues, and the Turkish circuit is one that highlights any deficiencies in that area.

Provided that the rest of the weekend remains dry, this afternoon's session could be a reasonable indicator of mid-field pace. The Toro Rossos, Force Indias, and Saubers were sandwiched together between P8 and P14, with only out-of-place Fernando Alonso and Nick Heidfeld among them. The laptime split between the group was roughly a second, and it is that pack which will be fighting for the final place in Q3 come Saturday afternoon.

Following his Turn 8 crash towards the end of F1, Sebastian Vettel was unable to complete any running this afternoon.

FP2 timings (unofficial)

1. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.26.456s [26 laps]
2. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.26.521s [29 laps]

3. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.27.033s [31 laps]
 4. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.27.063s [21 laps]
 5. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.27.149s [31 laps]
 6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.27.340s [37 laps]
 7. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.27.517s [37 laps]
 8. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.27.725s [37 laps]
 9. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.27.844s [32 laps]
 10. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.28.052s [37 laps]
 11. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.28.069s [27 laps]
 12. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.28.153s [36 laps]
 13. Nick Heidfeld (Renault) 1.28.475s [35 laps]
 14. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.28.765s [32 laps]
 15. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.28.828s [19 laps]
 16. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.28.946s [20 laps]
 17. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) 1.29.409s [39 laps]
 18. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.29.637s [27 laps]
 19. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) 1.30.281s [37 laps]
 20. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin) 1.31.035s [28 laps]
 21. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.31.221s [22 laps]
 22. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.31.320s [29 laps]
 23. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT) 1.31.989s [30 laps]
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F1 Sofa Blog – Components, upgrades, and aero packages in Istanbul

After a three-week break you might be thinking that the teams will be unveiling so many new parts they might as well run new parts. You'd be wrong.

While the bulk of teams are running minor upgrades this weekend, the real preparation is for the next few races. Friday practice at Istanbul Park saw the majority of teams test new components that are unlikely to be races this weekend.

These days, the lack of testing means that new packages tend to be evolutions, not revolutions. Components are fine-tuned over the course of two or three race weekends before making their Sunday debuts to ensure that all is working for maximum possible gain when it counts.

McLaren team principal Martin Whitmarsh affirmed that his team would be using FP1 and FP2 to evaluate possible new pieces for the MP4-26. "For this race, we'll be evaluating a number of small modifications – which include some aerodynamic refinements to the bodywork – during Friday practice," he said.

Ferrari have gone for a sizeable new package in Turkey. The Scuderia will be running with new front and rear wings, and new brake ducts. But Fernando Alonso has warned the tifosi against expecting miracles this weekend. "We know that the new parts we have here will improve the car compared to China: it should be worth a couple of tenths per lap but it is not a revolutionary change," the Spanish driver said.

Like Whitmarsh, Sauber technical director James Key is using Friday to test components for future races. "We will have some more test items to run on Friday – some of them aerodynamic and some of them mechanical – which we hope to introduce to the car pretty soon," he said.

Over at Force India, Vijay Mallya explains that the team are also using the practice session for longer-term evaluation of upgrades. "We have some promising aerodynamic upgrades in the pipeline, which should make a significant difference to the performance of the car in the coming races," the team owner said.

Williams have had a troublesome start to the season, to say the least, but technical director Sam Michael is pressing ahead with his mission to get the British team back in the points. The Grove-based outfit will be bringing a host of upgrades to the European races, starting with Istanbul. "The package for Turkey will include new brake ducts, revised front wing and rear wings, plus some other secondary items. Combined, these components should give the FW33 a decent step-up in performance," Michael said. "Our objective is to get the car into the points as soon as possible."

Virgin are bucking the trend, with so many upgrades that their car is jokingly being referred to as the B-spec. "The extent of our upgrade package for the start of the European season is significant to say the least," said team principal John Booth. "Aerodynamically it's a new direction for us and we're hopeful that it will help us start to turn the corner, although with such a major step it may take us some time to tune it to the racetrack. Jerome will not have the benefit of the full upgrade package until Spain but he will get a taste of some of the elements this weekend."

With Virgin currently struggling for pace, HRT have the opportunity to break ahead in the constructors' standings. And if the British team's raft of new components fail to do the trick, Hispania are there with upgrades of their own. According to team principal Colin Kolles, the team "have aerodynamic and mechanical updates for this race and I think that, if the data is confirmed on track, we should be able to beat our closest rivals."

Lotus have not brought upgrades to Turkey, but have a major package planned for Barcelona in two weeks' time.

Renault and Mercedes have confirmed that they will be bringing new components to Istanbul, but have not elaborated further. Toro Rosso have gone slightly further, claiming major updates, but haven't gone in to any more detail.

Red Bull have been completely tight-lipped about upgrades this weekend.

F1 Sofa Blog – Friday press conference in Istanbul

Senior team personnel lined up to face the media on Friday afternoon in Istanbul. Present were Robert Fernley (Force India), Mike Gascoyne (Lotus), Norbert Haug (Mercedes), Christian Horner (Red Bull), Franz Tost (Toro Rosso), and Martin Whitmarsh (McLaren).

Unsurprisingly, Christian Horner was asked to explain Sebastian Vettel's F1 crash.

"It was a shame," Horner said. "It was just one of those things that we, as a team, were keen to have a look at the inter. As Sebastian went out the rain increased slightly, he got a little bit high on the exit of Turn 8 on to the kerb, just put a wheel on that astroturf that has claimed a few victims today and he was just unlucky. Unfortunately it did quite a lot of damage so rather than rush and cobble together the car for FP2 we decided it was important to rebuild the car carefully in preparation for tomorrow. It was one of those things. It did quite an extensive amount of damage. He must have hit just about every corner on the car so it has given the boys plenty of work to do this evening."

Martin Whitmarsh was asked about McLaren's decision to limit their track time this morning.

"We took the decision this morning that we were not going to have enough time to do everything we wanted, so that was a shame," he said. "I think we have learnt a fair bit this afternoon. The forecast for the rest of the weekend is that there is a fair chance of rain, certainly on Sunday, and we don't have many intermediate or wet tyres available to the teams so we took a view that we weren't going to learn much, we couldn't do our development programme.

"You can easily have an accident and what happened to Sebastian, let's be honest, could have happened to any of us," Whitmarsh added. "As it happens we did an install lap and we were going to just do a launch in the end. That's all we intended. In the end we didn't quite manage to do that with Lewis anyway so it was a fairly quiet morning, as you say. This afternoon was pretty busy, but there is a limit to what you can do as you have to do some long runs on heavy fuel, on the tyres you think you might start the race with."

The development race is as important as Sunday's on-track action, and after a three-week break there are high hopes for new components and improved performances.

"I think the key thing," Robert Fernley said, "is the race between races effectively. Force India isn't standing still. There is no question that we lost direction in the last quarter of 2010 and we had to take stock of where we were, where the issues were and we had to understand what those problems were. I think we identified them over the winter. We are running an evolved 2010 package at the moment, which is trying to correct some of those areas. Today we ran and evaluated the new front end of our aero package and hopefully in Spain and Monaco we will launch what we believe to be the 2011 package or the evolved one, whichever way you want to look at it. That will come out and hopefully it will keep us in line or slightly ahead of our competitors."

Norbert Haug sees progress at Mercedes. "We are learning," he said. "It is getting better and better. We certainly underperformed in the first three races. We don't need to repeat that as I think that is well known. Hopefully we can stabilise on China or comparable to China. That would be the plan, to be among third and fourth position and then go forward from there. Every position you want to gain in that region gets tougher and tougher step by step, that's for sure, but the direction is the right one I would say."

Franz Tost is confident that Toro Rosso are not far from the points at the moment. "It looks like we are close to the points," he said: "at least today during the free practice we showed a good performance and I am convinced that we can finish the qualifying tomorrow close to the 10th position, maybe we are in Q3, we will see. But both drivers as well as the team are showing a good performance and therefore I think we can be once more within the points."

Following on from recent news that Sky is interested in buying Formula 1, Martin Whitmarsh was asked about FOTA's stance on pay-per-view grands prix on television.

"I think it's clear that the business model of all the teams relies on free-to-air," the FOTA chairman said. "We're selling a large, broad, media exposure. That's the business model and I'm sure that that's the business model of all the Formula 1 teams will require going forward."

A question about what teams want from the future of Formula 1 got nearly everyone talking.

Mike Gascoyne highlighted the importance of environmental relevance and balanced costs. "I think that it's important for Formula 1 to develop," he said: "to look at issues like green issues but you've got to make sure that it's kept in perspective, that costs don't go up, that we do put on a good show and also that we've got a formula where the independent teams and smaller teams can be competitive, and I think we've gone that route with FOTA. We need to go further down that route, but any changes that we bring in have got to bear in mind that Formula 1 will put on a good show when it has lots of competitive teams and we've got to make sure that we keep that."

Franz Tost was also concerned with costs emerging from future technical changes to the cars. "It's important," he said, "that from 2013 onwards, the new drivetrain is coming, that the price for the new drivetrain is not too high for the private teams, that we find a consensus like it was with the FOTA teams before, which was quite an important job done by FOTA, that we got a good consensus, and that we are racing in countries who can afford Formula 1, that we can save our structure and our income, and that we increase the show. I think that the last races – especially Shanghai – were quite an interesting race, an exciting race and that we can continue to go on in this direction."

Christian Horner talked about the ongoing evolution of Formula 1 as a sport. "I think Formula 1 is a fantastic show, it's a fantastic sport," he said. "I think we are all fortunate to be involved in the sport. I think that in the last couple of years the way the sport has continued to evolve, I think the racing on track has been fantastic. The competition has been good and one senses that the buzz about the sport, the interest in the sport has grown, has continued to grow, and you can see that through the television audiences, and in many cases circuit attendance, that we've even seen in the early races. I don't think that we've got there by accident. I think that collectively, the commercial rights holder and the FIA have done a good job to get us to exactly where we are and the teams and the drivers are a key part of that."

"I think that for Formula 1 to continue to grow and move forwards is crucial," Horner concluded. "I think stability is also very important. At the end of the day, it's about the show that we put on. It's about entertaining the crowds, entertaining the fans and the spectators, and that it is man and machine at the limit and that's what Formula 1 should certainly continue to be. It's important to have a balance of independent teams and manufacturers and I think at the moment we've got that balance right. I think costs have dramatically come down so an independent team such as Red Bull has been able to run at the front and win. I think that's certainly healthy for the sport and I think we're well set for the future."

Martin Whitmarsh wants to see a continuation of recent levels of cooperation between the teams. "From a different angle, I think that for the last 20 years, perhaps we, collectively, have not managed the sport as well as we can. There's been in-fighting, there's a competitive spirit in Formula 1 that sometimes has been quite damaging. I think the first thing is that we've had a relatively brief era now but we've had an era of unprecedented cooperation between the teams and I think that's been fantastic and trying to get co-operation between the very large teams and the smaller teams has necessitated compromise on both sides, and I think that's been a fantastic effort and I think the teams have collectively worked much better together."

"We've had some great championships, we've had comparative lack of the paddock polemics, which I think we were all getting bored of, and I think we're focusing on some great racing, a great championship last year and hopefully we will have another one this year," Whitmarsh continued. "We have to work together with the commercial rights holder, with the governing body and establish that partnership that we can really promote the sport. I think that we've now gone some way to look at improving the show. We now have to tell people about it. We have to promote and I think, again, that needs all of us to work together. I'm not pointing fingers at anyone. We're all part of it. All of us, the six of us here have all been part of Formula 1 for some time so we're part of the historic problem; we've got to be part of the future and how it can be better. I think there is, now, an environment of people realizing that we've got to work together. We shouldn't be complacent, we've had some fantastic championships. As Christian said, there is an increasing buzz about the sport but we shouldn't be satisfied with where we are; we have to improve the show, we have to improve the promotion, we have to improve the co-operation, we have to make sure it's sustainable. There are still teams that are vulnerable so we've got to make sure that this is a sport that is affordable for all of the teams. We shouldn't lose any of the teams that we've got if we can possibly help it."

Finally, Tost faced an amusing series of questions about Daniel Ricciardo's future with Toro Rosso, which I have copied in full below.

Q: Franz, we have seen you running Daniel Ricciardo on all the Fridays so far. Is he being groomed for next year? What is the situation for him?
FT: The situation is that he is driving for Toro Rosso the first practice on Friday. He should learn the team, all the race tracks, to work together with the engineers, get a little bit of knowledge about the press work, about the marketing and this should be the preparation for him to race for Toro Rosso in 2012.

Q: No plans for before then?
FT: No, currently not.

Q: You have two drivers?
FT: We have two drivers, yes.

F1 Sofa Blog – FP3 in Istanbul

Sebastian Vettel made it all look a little too easy as he topped the timesheets in Turkey this morning having sat out much of Friday's running following an accident.

But 'Baby Schumi' was under pressure from the original Schumi, who crossed the line only 0.001s down on the world champion's pace-setting time. Vettel's Red Bull teammate Mark Webber was four-tenths down on the German pair, while Nico Rosberg rounded out the top four and made it a Red Bull-Mercedes affair.

The final practice session at Istanbul Park was remarkably incident-free: Jaime Alguersuari was responsible for a minor moment of drama when he spun his STR6 at Turn 4, but car and driver emerged from the incident unscathed.

As tends to be the case in FP3, the teams waited until the closing minutes of the session to send their drivers out on the softer tyre for a pseudo-qualifying runs. Timekeeping goes into overdrive as every crossing of the line leads to changes on the leaderboards, and it's often a matter of timing – not outright pace – that determines who will be top of the pack when the chequered flag falls.

It looked briefly as though Mercedes might hang on to top honours, but Vettel edged out Michael Schumacher by one-thousandth of a second with only one minute remaining of the session.

The top ten was comprised of nine of the drivers from the five big teams, with only Nick Heidfeld out of place for Renault in P14. Heidfeld's teammate Vitaly Petrov ended FP3 in P7 on the timesheets, sandwiched between McLaren drivers Jenson Button and Lewis Hamilton in fifth and sixth place, and Ferrari drivers Fernando Alonso and Felipe Massa in eighth and ninth. Towards the end of the session, Alonso reported that he was having trouble with his gearbox, which appeared to be stuck in sixth gear.

Sebastian Buemi rounded out the top ten. If he is able to maintain that position throughout this afternoon's qualifying sessions, he will be performing entirely as predicted by Toro Rosso team principal Franz Tost predicted in Friday's senior team personnel press conference. Tost said that anything higher than P9 or P10 was essentially out of reach for his drivers, but that he expected them to be challenging for a place in Q3.

Incidentally, if this session were Q1, not FP3, the 107 percent time would have been 1.32.059s, meaning that HRT driver Narain Karthikeyan would have qualified by the skin of his teeth. The Indian driver ended the morning's running with 0.05s in hand over the theoretical cut-off time.

FP3 timings (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.26.037s [17 laps]
 2. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.26.038s [17 laps]
 3. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.26.404s [16 laps]
 4. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.26.420s [19 laps]
 5. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.26.578s [17 laps]
 6. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.26.726s [14 laps]
 7. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.26.755s [20 laps]
 8. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.26.819s [12 laps]
 9. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.26.883s [12 laps]
 10. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.27.080s [16 laps]
 11. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.27.121s [20 laps]
 12. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.27.255s [18 laps]
 13. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.27.318s [19 laps]
 14. Nick Heidfeld (Renault) 1.27.379s [17 laps]
 15. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.27.528s [19 laps]
 16. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.27.644s [18 laps]
 17. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.27.724s [15 laps]
 18. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.27.976s [19 laps]
 19. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) 1.28.911s [15 laps]
 20. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) 1.29.697s [17 laps]
 21. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin) 1.31.097s [25 laps]
 22. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.31.175s [19 laps]
 23. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT) 1.31.375s [19 laps]
 24. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.32.009s [15 laps]
-

F1 Sofa Blog – Q1 in Istanbul

There was a lot of action between FP3 and Q1, especially in the Ferrari garage.

Felipe Massa's car has been fitted with a new engine for qualifying, while Fernando Alonso's car has been rebuilt after a thorough examination. But whatever the Scuderia are doing to their cars, it will take a major upset to see one or both of their drivers out in Q1.

A likely drop-out in this session is Lotus driver Jarno Trulli, who is currently experiencing problems with his drag reduction system. If Lotus are going to see a driver through to Q2, they will need to have the DRS in full working order.

Virgin had high hopes going in to the weekend, but their package of upgrades was not as effective as hoped. Speaking to Germany's Sky, Timo Glock explained. "Some of the updates worked, some didn't," he said. "The parts that would have brought most of the time didn't [work]. We tried [the exhaust blown diffuser] yesterday and it didn't work as it should have. There were some things becoming too hot, so we've had to go back a bit."

Sauber driver Kamui Kobayashi suffers an early disappointment. The first man out on track saw his engine cut out minutes into Q1, and the likelihood of the dropout zone being comprised of the Japanese driver and the six men from 2010's new teams is high.

The only silver lining to Kobayashi's cloud is the fact that the Sauber driver now has a lot of fresh rubber to use in tomorrow's race. We could be in for another exciting drive from the back as the Japanese driver shows off his legendary overtaking skills to pull a Webber.

Dropout zone

18. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus)
 19. Jarno Trulli (Lotus)
 20. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin)
 21. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT)
 22. Timo Glock (Virgin)
 23. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT)
 24. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
-

F1 Sofa Blog – Q2 in Istanbul

The good news from Q1 is that everyone qualified for Sunday's race. The bad news – for Sauber, at least – is that Kamui Kobayashi was knocked out in the first session after his engine cut out following a fuel pump failure.

With Q2 underway, the battle is on between pace and strategy. Following Mark Webber's Shanghai surprise, there is a strong argument for teams choosing to preserve tyres in qualifying in order to have the best possible advantage for Sunday's race.

The balance is knowing when to do a run on soft tyres, and when to preserve the rubber. It's an equation that currently lacks a definitive answer.

The initial Q2 runs were mainly done on the harder tyre compound, and there's a brief respite for the men in the pits as the analysts try to decide whether or not a run on the soft will be necessary to ensure a place in Q3.

Renault and Ferrari have elected to do their final runs on the softer compound, leaving them one less set for the race. Force India driver Paul di Resta is gambling on a single flying lap at the end of the session; the Scottish rookie was still in the garage with three minutes remaining of the session.

Michael Schumacher is currently running well, and looks almost assured of a place in Q3 for the first time this season. Mercedes improved their qualifying and race pace in China, and have been strong throughout this weekend's practice sessions, so it would be a huge blow for the team to see one of their men go out ahead of schedule.

In the final minutes of Q2, it's softs all around as the drivers charge around Istanbul Park in the hunt for a slot in the coveted top ten.

There's a slight improvement from Williams this afternoon. Both men were knocked out in Q2, but the pair will start higher up the grid than has been typical so far this season. The Grove team managed to outpace the Sauber of Sergio Perez and both Toro Rossos, and sandwiched the two Force India drivers. It's a definite improvement for Williams, but a disappointing result for Force India and Toro Rosso, both of whom had high hopes for this weekend.

The top ten is going to be a five-team affair, with the drivers from Red Bull, McLaren, Renault, Mercedes, and Ferrari battling it out for position.

Dropout zone

11. Rubens Barrichello (Williams)
 12. Adrian Sutil (Force India)
 13. Paul di Resta (Force India)
 14. Pastor Maldonado (Williams)
 15. Sergio Perez (Sauber)
 16. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso)
 17. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso)
-

F1 Sofa Blog – Q3 in Istanbul

The big five are battling for the top ten in the final qualifying session of the Turkish Grand Prix weekend.

Ferrari saved two new sets of soft tyres for Fernando Alonso's final qualifying run; the Scuderia were fastest here on Friday morning but have not been able to match that pace in subsequent sessions. After a disappointing start to the season, the Italian team are looking to repeat last year's turnaround, which saw a dramatic upturn in performance once the teams returned to Europe.

McLaren driver Jenson Button will be joining Alonso on a two-lap Q3 strategy, but there is no confirmation yet as to the other drivers' tactics this afternoon.

With the session nearly half run, the battle at the top of the timesheets seems to be between Mark Webber, Sebastian Vettel, and Fernando Alonso, with Lewis Hamilton close behind. But the smart money is on Vettel – while the others have spent moments at the top of the timesheets, Vettel is able to dethrone any challenger with a single flying lap.

There has been no movement at all from Michael Schumacher, Nico Rosberg, Felipe Massa, or Nick Heidfeld; the five men are all banking on a single lap in which to set their qualifying time.

Hamilton heads out of the pits for his second run; the British driver will need to improve on his last lap by at least seven-tenths of a second if he wants to beat Vettel to pole. But Vettel appears to be content with his 1.25.049s, and is sitting pretty in the garage. The opportunity to beat him is there, but teammate Webber is the man best placed to do the business. At least, he would be if the Red Bull strategists hadn't decided to save tyres in Q3 and place their faith in the current lap times.

Button is said to be struggling for balance this afternoon, and so is unlikely to be challenging for a spot on the front row.

And in the final moments of the session it's all change below the Red Bull pair as the one-lap challengers cross the line. Nico Rosberg pushes Hamilton down into P4, Alonso secures P5, and Schumacher crosses the line in P8.

The afternoon could not have gone better for Red Bull – not only have they locked out the front row, but they managed to do so while conserving a set of soft tyres for Sunday and pressuring the opposition into wasting rubber.

Provisional grid

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull)
2. Mark Webber (Red Bull)
3. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes)
4. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren)
5. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari)
6. Jenson Button (McLaren)
7. Vitaly Petrov (Renault)
8. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes)
9. Nick Heidfeld (Renault)
10. Felipe Massa (Ferrari)
11. Rubens Barrichello (Williams)

12. Adrian Sutil (Force India)
13. Paul di Resta (Force India)
14. Pastor Maldonado (Williams)
15. Sergio Perez (Sauber)
16. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso)
17. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso)
18. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus)
19. Jarno Trulli (Lotus)
20. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT)
21. Timo Glock (Virgin)
22. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT)
23. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
24. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin)*

*The stewards issued Jerome D'Ambrosio with a five-place grid penalty on Friday evening, when it was determined that he failed to slow down in the yellow flag zone following Pastor Maldonado's FP2 spin. The Virgin driver would have qualified in P20.

F1 Sofa Blog – The post-qualifying analysis

It was a tactical masterstroke from Red Bull in Istanbul on Saturday afternoon as the team managed to lock out the front row, conserve fresh tyres for Sunday's race, and pressure the opposition into wasting rubber.

With a front row lock-out, all the Red Bull pair need to do is get a clean start and stay out of trouble on track. The downforce on the RB7 is so intense that the wheels may as well be coated in superglue – that car can corner at unholy speeds, and given a clear run and no drama it could be a 1-2 finish for Red Bull. The question is, which man will be on the top step of the podium?

The Chinese Grand Prix weekend saw an upturn in performance from Mercedes, and based on Nico Rosberg's P3 grid position at Istanbul Park the team appear to have capitalised on their progress over the three-week break. It was a different story for Michael Schumacher; although the German legend made it into Q3 for the first time this season his best lap was nearly 1.1s slower than that of his teammate.

Both Rosberg and Schumacher made the same strategy decision as the Red Bull pair and gambled on a single-lap run in Q3.

The top three drivers will all go into Sunday's race with an extra set of rubber in hand, and the outcome is likely to affect qualifying for much of the season. If the one-run, extra rubber strategy proves to be more advantageous on a Sunday than overall qualifying position, the first half of Q3 will be nothing but empty track.

McLaren saw their worst qualifying result of the season on Saturday afternoon, which says a lot about their strong weekends thus far. Lewis Hamilton was beaten to P3 by O.22s, while Jenson Button managed P6 despite complaining of balance issues with his car. Both Button and Hamilton elected to do two runs in Q3, and so will not be entering the race with extra rubber in hand.

Another disadvantage affecting Hamilton is the presence of Rosberg alongside him on the grid. The McLaren and the Mercedes share an engine and a KERS unit, so it will be difficult for the British driver to overtake Rosberg on the straights should the opportunity arise. There are opportunities to overtake in Turkey, and the MP4-26's race pace is such that both McLaren drivers should be able to make up places with the right combination of strategy and balls to the wall racing.

While Ferrari do not yet have a car capable of fighting at the front, it is becoming more competitive. In the hands of Fernando Alonso, a competitive car can be a very dangerous thing. A slight disadvantage for the Spanish driver will be his relative lack of rubber compared with a number of his front-running competitors, but that disadvantage sees him in the same position as Hamilton and Button. If the 150° Italia isn't yet ready to take points off the Red Bulls, the McLarens will certainly do.

Both Renault drivers will be starting on the clean side of the grid tomorrow, with Vitaly Petrov in P7 and Nick Heidfeld in P9. Petrov has the immediate advantage off the start, but Heidfeld will be playing the long game in Sunday's race. The German driver elected to run a one-lap strategy in Q3, giving him extra rubber with which to pull off a late charge during the race itself. The Renault has proved to be fast and capable of overtaking in the hands of both drivers, and it is highly likely that both Heidfeld and Petrov will improve on their grid positions.

There is a clear division among the top ten between those who are saving rubber and those who went for broke in qualifying. On the saving rubber side are Vettel, Webber, Rosberg, Schumacher, and Heidfeld. On the other are Hamilton, Button, Alonso, and Petrov. Massa aborted his only Q3 run to save rubber for Sunday when he realised he was not on course for a good time.

While Williams didn't make it in to Q3 this weekend, Rubens Barrichello qualified in P11, putting the team within reach of their first points of the season. As the first man with a free tyre choice on Sunday, the Brazilian driver is in a strong position to leapfrog drivers in the pits. If he can get some clear track after the first round of pit stops and still has some rubber on his tyres, Barrichello could stake a definitive claim on some points.

Pastor Maldonado managed P14 with a broken KERS device, which isn't as strong a position, but Saturday showed an improvement in Williams' overall performance, and could herald an end to their disastrous start to the season.

Force India could be one to watch, as Paul di Resta elected to do a single lap in qualifying so as to have more tyres for the race. Teammate Adrian Sutil did two runs, and only managed to out-qualify the Scot by a single place. With an extra set of rubber in hand, the advantage should belong to di Resta.

There were mutterings that Sauber driver Kamui Kobayashi might not be allowed to start Sunday's race, as he suffered car failure at the beginning of

Q1 thanks to a fuel leak. But the stewards took the decision that the Japanese driver's practice times showed he was capable of race pace, and Kobayashi will be starting from the back of the grid with an extensive selection of fresh rubber. Expect to see a lot of overtaking from him during the grand prix – with any luck, it could be a repeat of Webber's masterful China charge.

While Sauber technical director James Key and driver Sergio Perez were disappointed with Saturday's outcome, both expect a stronger performance in Sunday's race. Perez dropped out in Q2, but the team had hoped to be challenging for a slot in Q3. Given that the C30 is light on its tyres, a dry race should see both drivers significantly improve on their qualifying positions.

Toro Rosso saw a significant drop in performance between practice and qualifying on Saturday, and the team were unable to find an explanation. Both Jaime Alguersuari and Sebastien Buemi had grip and balance issues during qualifying, and were unable to make it out of Q2. Buemi opted to do two runs in Q2 while his teammate completed only one, consequently Alguersuari has the advantage of an extra set of fresh tyres for the race.

It was an excellent day for Lotus, despite both drivers dropping out in Q1. The gap to Toro Rosso is now down to half a second, and the Norfolk team are finally in position to battle with the midfield. There were signs of fights to come at the Chinese Grand Prix, when Heikki Kovalainen managed to pass a Williams and a Sauber on merit, but with their improved single lap speed and decent race pace, the main thing holding Lotus back at the moment is their lack of KERS. While the cost, extra weight, and reliability issues can be a serious disadvantage, Lotus are now at a stage where they would see real benefit from KERS in qualifying and off the start.

The DRS on Jarno Trulli's car wasn't working during qualifying, but the Italian driver should be in a good position to join his teammate in causing a bit of trouble for Toro Rosso.

HRT qualified towards the back of the grid, but will not be starting from the back row of the Turkish Grand Prix. Kobayashi's accident and Jerome D'Ambrosio's penalty mean that Narain Karthikeyan will start from P22, while Tonio Liuzzi will be in front of his teammate in P20.

It is HRT's best qualifying result of the season, and team principal Colin Kolles is confident that his drivers will be able to fight for position in Sunday's race. "Tomorrow we're hoping for a nice race in which we can fight with others to finish in a good position," he said.

Virgin were expecting progress this weekend; the British team have brought a significant package of updates to Istanbul and hoped to be keeping pace with Lotus. Instead, they struggled to stay ahead of HRT. With the new components largely removed, Timo Glock found it hard to match his teammate for speed and overall control. Earlier this weekend, the German driver complained that the car's problems came from an aerodynamic imbalance, and it is unlikely there will have been much improvement since. It will be a challenging race for Glock.

In his post-qualifying commentary, Pirelli motorsport director Paul Hembery said talked about likely pit stop strategies. "In terms of tyre wear here," he said, "the front-right tyre is the limiting factor, but we've already seen teams completing up to 20 laps here with this tyre, so we're confident that this shouldn't be an issue. We're expecting dry weather, which means that we should see about three pit stops, but different teams are likely to try different things."

Three pit stops from the majority of teams should lead to a number of changes at the front of the pack, the likes of which we saw in China. But high levels of wear could play into the hands of the Sauber drivers, as their car is acknowledged by Pirelli to be the kindest to its rubber. Of course, there are other masters of tyre preservation on track, and the brains on the pit wall will be kept busy trying to work out the optimum strategies for their men on the track.

F1 Sofa Blog – Saturday press conference in Istanbul

You'd think that by now, the media would have run out of questions to ask Sebastian Vettel. You'd be wrong.

The Turkish Grand Prix pole sitter joined Red Bull teammate Mark Webber and Mercedes driver Nico Rosberg for the post-qualifying press conference at Istanbul Park. The key topics of conversation were tyres, qualifying strategy, and Vettel's blistering pace.

"Seb did a great job today," Webber said of his teammate. "We know he's running good pace on Saturday afternoons, so he's done a good job. Yes, I would have liked to have been a bit closer but we know these cars are very complex and you need everything right to get the laps done so in the end I was happy with what I did, the team did a great job and it's the ultimate result for the team. It would be nice to get pole but we're on the front row. Seb did a good job, deserved pole and here we go, see how we go tomorrow. It's the first lock-out we've had of the front row so we'll try and have a smooth day tomorrow and that will be nice."

All of the three top qualifiers elected to gamble on a single run this afternoon.

"We made the decision on Thursday," Vettel said. "What do you expect? Of course we talk about it before qualifying. We talk about what can happen and so on, but you never know. You go into qualifying, you don't know before, especially this morning, how quick the others will be, how much fuel they had on board, you know what you do yourself but surely we have seen in the last race and other races that this year the racing has changed and it's important to handle your tyre situation. Obviously for both of us, after the first run, we had the feeling OK, we might be safe – might be – but you never know. You play that game until that day arrives when maybe you are wrong, and other people prove you wrong. In the end, you never know. If it works you are the hero, if it doesn't, then you are not."

"I think we did the right thing, obviously," Vettel continued. "By doing [a single run], you never know what can happen. Firstly, you can make a mistake. Obviously, when you drive on the limit, you can always have a wobble here and there and then the lap is not 100 per cent clean. If you do it at the end of the session, then you have no second chance, plus you have the risk of somebody spinning, somebody else making a mistake, causing a yellow flag, maybe a red flag which we even had sometimes last year. So there are pros and cons, obviously, but as I said, we had a good Q1 and Q2 especially so we were confident and both Mark and myself could save a set (of tyres) so that was good."

"We spoke about it before the session," Webber added. "As Seb said, it's nice to do it earlier than later. I think even Nico ran once, a few teams ran once in Q3. It just depends where you put it. Obviously if you make a mistake, late, you can't go again. If you make a mistake earlier then you can maybe go again, so maybe other teams will look at this strategy in the future. Who knows? It's not rocket science. There are enough clever people up and down the pit lane to have a look at it. We know it's going to be a tough grand prix so everyone's... so it's a long race, we'll do our best, see what happens with the tyres and go from there.

"Turns out we were in the best grid positions we could get," the Australian concluded. "Obviously other way round here and there but generally the team did a great job so now we are in the best shape we can be in terms of grid positions and in terms of tyres. You cannot get through with any less tyres than that unless you are running scrubbed tyres all day but you are not going to qualify anywhere, so good decision from the team."

"I think strategy-wise we are very strong," Rosberg said. "Another positive is that I have a new (set of) option left for tomorrow because I didn't use it in Q3, so that's going to help me a lot in the race, for sure, so I'm confident that we can have a really good race. How good it's going to be we shall have to wait and see."

Webber thinks that the tyres saved will come in handy during tomorrow's race, partly as a result of the load-heavy Turn 8.

"The tyres get destroyed through there," the Australian driver said. "There's a few corners on the track where the tyres are having a hard time and that's normal, so it will probably be evident in the grand prix, how many stops we make, certainly more than two and less than six. We'll have a few pit stops, I'm sure."

Vettel was asked for his opinion on the likelihood of a China repeat, filled with overtakes and on-track action.

"We will have to wait and see," the world champion said. "But surely I think the races we have had this year have been quite nice to watch. Obviously we were all busy but once we got the chance to see the race I think we were amazed by how much action there was, overtaking et cetera. I think here is a different place to Shanghai, to China, as probably the corner that determines whether you can stall the wing or not - Turn 9/10 - is a bit more tricky to get rather than Turn 11/12 in China so we will see. I think it will be a tough race, managing the tyres. We will see how many stops we will end up with. I just hope and keep my fingers crossed that we will have radio communication all the way as it is quite useful when your tyres start to go off to talk to your team about what to do and where you are. I am confident. We have a good car so I felt happy today. Hopefully we don't get too much of the action and we just hope that all the action for the spectators is behind us so we will see. But it will be a difficult one."

Nico Rosberg explained that Mercedes recent upturn in performance is not down to a plethora of new components on the car.

"To be honest, we haven't changed that much on the car in the last few races," the Mercedes driver said. "We're just getting the most out of what we had, because we just went a bit wrong at the beginning of the season, and a lot of things are just coming together and making it work. That's why I'm also looking forward to what's going to come now, once we get some more upgrades and everything is looking more and more positive. There's not one reason, it's just a lot of things coming together where we weren't working the car well, and now getting the most out of it. One area is even mechanical, very simple things where we went in the wrong direction so we moved back in another direction with the springs and bars. For example, even that area definitely gave us a chunk of lap time. Confused ourselves a little bit."

The German driver was very pleased with his qualifying result, and joked confidently about the race to come.

"I'm going to have a stunning start because I'm going to be on the clean side of the grid," Rosberg said. "I'm going to go straight past Mark and then we will see!

Finally, Vettel was asked whether he thought he could beat Ayrton Senna's 22-year-old record of eight successive pole positions.

"I think Ayrton was a master in qualifying," Vettel said. "I don't know. I go race by race, you know. In the end, there are so many good guys and so many incredible records. I think the more you start talking about [them] the smaller your chances become, so I prefer to not to talk about it."

F1 Sofa Blog – The Turkish Grand Prix as it happened

It's a dry hot day in Turkey as 23 drivers line up on the grid.

The missing man is Virgin's Timo Glock, who has been sidelined by gearbox issues. Mechanics are doing their utmost to get the German's car working in time for the warm-up lap, but there is a strong chance Glock will start the day's race from the pitlane, if he starts at all.

The smart money this weekend is on Red Bull securing a 1-2 finish, with Nico Rosberg behind them on the podium. The three fastest men from Saturday all have an extra set of tyres over those behind, and barring any unforeseen drama it is likely that the combination of track position and fresh rubber will keep Sebastian Vettel, Mark Webber, and Rosberg at the head of the pack.

Of course, anything can happen on track, and the next 58 laps will do a better job of making winners and losers than my predictions ever could.

The formation lap is underway, and with no major incidents - remember Lucas di Grassi in Suzuka last year? - the drivers return to the grid.

And the lights are on. And they're off!

Rosberg passes Webber going in to the first corner, and Hamilton loses position to teammate Button. Before the end of the first lap Hamilton is down to P6, with Alonso up in P4 and Button in P5. Vettel still leads, with Rosberg in P2, and Webber in P3.

Lap 2, and Massa splits the Renaults. Sergio Perez pits for a new nosecone, after a crash I've not seen yet; the team struggle to fit the new one quickly.

Hamilton is chasing down his teammate in the hunt for position, but the Briton can't risk pushing too hard too early as he has less rubber than the three men most likely to see the Turkish podium.

Schumacher loses his front wing in a brief skirmish with Vitaly Petrov, and has to pit for a new one. Petrov's on the radio complaining about a problem, most likely thanks to his dalliance with the German legend. It's only lap 3, but there is action aplenty before race control announce that the DRS zone has been activated.

At the back of the pack, Kamui Kobayashi made up an impressive five places on the first lap. With any luck, we will see an afternoon of thrilling overtakes from the Japanese driver.

Hamilton is glued to the back end of Button's car, but neither McLaren driver has enough rubber to be able to put on a serious fight for position at this stage in the race. To a certain extent, the two-run-in-Q3 qualifiers have been hamstrung by their opponents' decision to preserve their rubber for the race.

Webber makes it past Rosberg on lap 6, using his DRS to get back into position behind his teammate. Hamilton passes Button on lap 7, using the DRS to get ahead of his teammate in a clean overtake.

Rosberg seems to be having problems; moments after being passed by Webber, Alonso gets past for P3. It's a DRS-powered overtake, but the growing gap between the Mercedes driver and the Red Bulls indicates that the rear wing was not the only factor contributing to the ease of Alonso's pass.

Elsewhere on track, Button repasses Hamilton in another clean, DRS-powered overtake. With the two McLaren teammates glued together, it looks as though much of this race will be a endless position swap between the two drivers as they drift past the DRS-activation zone with every lap.

Bad news for Glock, as Virgin announce that he is officially retired from the race he did not start.

Massa and Hamilton have a pitlane battle for position; the McLaren driver comes out ahead. Webber, Alonso, and Rosberg all pit together, and the order of the top ten is thrown into chaos.

Kobayashi is already up to P5, despite having started at the back of the grid. Some of his movement was artificial, thanks to pit stops, but there's no denying that the Japanese superstar overtaker has been working his magic on track for the benefit of the fans.

Rosberg passes Kobayashi for P5, and moments later Button pits from P2, his first stop of the race. The British driver comes back out in P7, two places behind his teammate.

Sweet moment for Barrichello, who stuffed it up the inside of former teammate Schumacher for a pass.

Hamilton makes it past Rosberg for P4, and has an eight-second gap to Alonso ahead. The three frontrunners – Vettel, Webber, and Alonso – have all pitted for the first time. Overtakes will have to be on track until the next round of stops.

There's a good-looking battle brewing between Massa and Rosberg for P5.

But in the replays, we're treated to Kobayashi and Sutil sliding past Schumacher in a ballsy double-pass that sees some endplates go flying. It's the beginning of a bad run for the Mercedes driver, who is also passed by Maldonado and di Resta.

Hamilton has trimmed two seconds off the gap to Alonso, while Rosberg and Massa are split by milliseconds.

Kobayashi makes it past Barrichello for P11, and is closing on the Toro Rosso of Sebastien Buemi.

Massa and Rosberg are winched tightly together, but the Ferrari driver just doesn't seem able to get past. Rosberg isn't defending extensively, but the pure power of the Mercedes engine seems to be negating any advantage offered by the DRS. For now, anyway.

And on lap 20, Massa finally makes it past, taking Rosberg up the inside before the DRS zone. But Rosberg isn't ceding the place that easily, and takes the spot back.

Hamilton pits for the second time after the team warn him that his tyres are going off – there are particular concerns about his rears in Turn 8 – and rejoins in P10, behind Kobayashi. There could be a fantastic battle to come between F1's two great overtakers.

Massa, Rosberg, and Button are now engaged in a three-way fight. Massa passes Rosberg, and Button tries but the German holds the inside line. But on the final corner, Button gets past Rosberg, taking him on the outside in the approach to the pit straight.

Despite the prevalence of overtakes, this race seems to lack the nail-biting excitement of China. Are we too used to passes already, or is the regular back and forth and changes of position between the same faces giving the racing the artificial feeling some commentators had feared from the start?

Pit stop strategy seems to be ever-evolving, thanks to higher levels of degradation than expected. The minimum looks to be three-stops, with the majority going for four. The race has not yet reached the half way mark, and the second round of stops is already underway.

There is simply too much going on to follow it all with any accuracy. Not that I'm complaining – action is better than a Sunday siesta.

Half way through the race and the frontrunners have all completed two stops. Hamilton is looking to close the gap to Alonso in P3, while Rosberg – who looked on course for a sure podium earlier on – is currently languishing in P8.

Lap 30, and Alonso passes Webber for P2. The Spanish driver makes the most of his DRS along the straight and managed to get ahead of the Red Bull, but Webber is lining himself up for a return attack.

Button is seemingly glued to Massa's rear end, and the pass will be inevitable when it comes. He's safely within the DRS zone, and his Mercedes-powered engine should give the British driver the advantage on the straight.

Heidfeld is warned to look after his tyres and not press for any overtakes; the German driver is in P9 with a three-way battle for position just ahead of him on track.

Hamilton is 17 seconds down on Webber in P3, while Alonso and Webber are split by barely a second. Unless Vettel, Webber, and Alonso all pit while Hamilton still has some play in his tyres, it's unlikely that the British driver will be able to make much of an impact on the top three this afternoon.

But with the range of tyre strategies and high levels of degradation on offer in Istanbul Park, anything could happen in the next 25 laps.

It's a depressing afternoon for Michael Schumacher, who is currently well out of the points and looking to stay there. He has been passed by what feels like the entire grid, and is seemingly unable to put up a spirited defence. If Rosberg's struggles are anything to go by, the Mercedes looks to be having tyre trouble this afternoon.

Speak of the devil, and Rosberg pits for the third time this afternoon, rejoining the track in P11.

Hamilton is having a terrible pit stop. The Briton came in from P4 but the team got the wheelgun stuck and spent what felt like a decade prising it free before releasing their driver into P7. Barring a miracle, that's killed any hope of a podium finish for the 2008 champion.

Massa pitted while McLaren were still struggling with Hamilton; the Brazilian driver had just been passed by Button and opted to pit for new tyres to pep up the fight. He rejoined in P11.

The third round of stops is now officially underway.

The tactic seems to be to run on softs in the early stints, preserving the harder tyre for the end of the race when the track has been properly rubbered in. It's a strategy that looks to be paying dividends for Alonso, who pitted for new rubber and rejoined in P2, with Webber just a whisker behind. There should be a great battle between the two in the final stages of the race, but it is worth bearing in mind that the Australian has the advantage of an extra set of fresh tyres, should he choose to use them.

At the front of the pack it's still Vettel, Alonso, Webber, with only two seconds between Webber and Alonso. Hamilton has been bumped up to P4 by pit stops, but is nearly 30 seconds down on Webber and unlikely to trouble the podium.

Vettel is on hard tyres for his final stint, and should hold the lead till the chequered flag. Again.

With 15 laps to go, it looks like the result of this race is a foregone conclusion, despite the tyres, the DRS, and KERS. Despite the action happening further down the grid, I can't shake the sense that with no lead changes at the front, this one is going to go down as a chaotic yet dull race.

Maldonado has been issued with a drive-through penalty for pitlane speeding, but it is unlikely to have any bearing on the other competitors. More bad news for Williams, though, who have both drivers running out of the points.

Webber pits from P3 for his final stint; the Australian holds his track position and allows Hamilton to reduce the gap. But with the Briton's old tyres, we're unlikely to see much of a battle between the pair.

Alonso pits from P2, and comes out on track in the same spot, albeit with a slightly reduced gap to Webber. With three seconds between them, we could be in for some good closing battles to round off the race.

Hamilton pits from P4, and rejoins in P5, just behind his teammate. Button is unlikely to pit again this race, so we could be in for an internecine fight between the McLaren pair. If Hamilton can preserve his tyres until the closing stages, he will be in a good position to fight Button for P4. The podium is looking out of reach for both men, unless there are crashes or mechanical failures ahead.

Ten laps to go and the order at the front is Vettel, Alonso, Webber, Button, Hamilton, Rosberg, Buemi, Petrov, Heidfeld, and Kobayashi.

Hamilton passes Button with his DRS, but with over half a minute to Webber and only eight laps to go, the podium will require a heroic effort.

Lap 52 sees Webber pass Alonso for P2, kicking off an epic battle for position that sees them chase each other like Itchy and Scratchy. But both men emerge unscathed – for the moment – with the Australian mere tenths ahead on track.

There are six laps to go and eight seconds between Webber and Vettel. Another China charge here could lead to an upset on the podium, with Webber reclaiming the win that was rightfully his a year ago at this circuit.

But the focus moves further down the field, as Massa and Schumacher swap position back and forth until the German runs wide, handing the advantage to his former Ferrari stablemate.

Rosberg passes Button for P5; the German driver is on fresher tyres and uses his DRS to slip past the McLaren driver with ease. The three-stop strategy does not appear to have paid off this afternoon.

With two laps remaining, the podium is all but assured. The gap between Vettel and Webber has remained steady, and while Hamilton is closing the gap to Alonso there's no way he's going to make up a position before the chequered flag falls.

So, yet another Vettel victory, and Ferrari's first podium of 2011. No safety cars, pit stop trouble for loads of drivers, lots of overtaking, but an inevitable race result nonetheless. China did it better.

Last lap, and it's now just a case of crossing the line without coming to any harm. Vettel makes it through in P1, followed by Webber, Alonso, Hamilton, Rosberg, Button, Heidfeld, Petrov, Buemi, and Kobayashi all claiming points.

Race classification (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1h 30m 17.558s
2. Mark Webber (Red Bull) + 23:29:42s
3. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) + 23:29:42s
4. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) + 23:29:42s
5. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) + 23:29:42s
6. Jenson Button (McLaren) + 23:29:42s
7. Nick Heidfeld (Renault) + 23:29:42s
8. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) + 23:29:42s
9. Sébastien Buemi (Toro Rosso) + 23:29:42s
10. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) + 23:29:42s
11. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) + 23:29:42s
12. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) + 23:29:42s
13. Adrian Sutil (Force India) + 1 lap
14. Sergio Pérez (Sauber) + 1 lap
15. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) + 1 lap
16. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) + 1 lap
17. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) + 1 lap
18. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) + 1 lap
19. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) + 2 laps
20. Jérôme D'Ambrosio (Virgin) + 2 laps
21. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) + 3 laps
22. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT) + 5 laps

Paul Di Resta (Force India) RET lap 44

Timo Glock (Virgin) DNS

Drivers' standings

1. Sebastian Vettel – 93 pts
2. Lewis Hamilton – 59 pts
3. Mark Webber – 55 pts
4. Jenson Button – 46 pts
5. Fernando Alonso – 41 pts
6. Felipe Massa – 24 pts
7. Nick Heidfeld – 21 pts
8. Vitaly Petrov – 21 pts
9. Nico Rosberg – 20 pts
10. Kamui Kobayashi – 8 pts
11. Michael Schumacher – 6 pts
12. Sébastien Buemi – 6 pts
13. Adrian Sutil – 2 pts
14. Paul Di Resta – 2 pts
15. Jaime Alguersuari – 0 pts
16. Rubens Barrichello – 0 pts
17. Jarno Trulli – 0 pts
18. Sergio Pérez – 0 pts
19. Jérôme D'Ambrosio – 0 pts
20. Heikki Kovalainen – 0 pts
21. Timo Glock – 0 pts
22. Pastor Maldonado – 0 pts
23. Narain Karthikeyan – 0 pts
24. Tonio Liuzzi – 0 pts

Constructors' standings

1. Red Bull – 148 points
2. McLaren – 105 pts
3. Ferrari – 65 pts
4. Renault – 42 pts
5. Mercedes – 26 pts
6. Sauber – 8 pts
7. Toro Rosso – 6 pts

8. Force India – 4 pts
 9. Lotus – 0 pts
 10. Williams – 0 pts
 11. Virgin – 0 pts
 12. HRT – 0 pts
-

F1 Sofa Blog – Sunday press conference in Istanbul

Pirellis, rubber, and pitwall strategy were all high on the agenda at the final press conference of the Turkish Grand Prix weekend. Present were top three finishers Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull), Mark Webber (Red Bull), and Fernando Alonso (Ferrari).

It is Alonso's first podium of the season, and the next race will be the Asturian's home grand prix. The Ferrari driver was asked whether he thought the Turkish result heralded an upswing in performance from the Scuderia.

"The car definitely feels much better now," Alonso said. "We were more competitive yesterday in qualifying and more competitive today in the race than previous races. As I said yesterday, being in front of Button was a surprise for us, to have one McLaren behind and to be half a minute in front of them today is another surprise, so the car is definitely doing something better than what it did in the first three races. From the driver's points of view, difficult to feel this improvement, you just feel that the car is quicker, more grip overall, but as I said before, this is not enough, we cannot be happy with fifth in qualifying and third in the race, so we are going in the right direction but this is only the first step.

"I think we need to keep working, keep understanding better this car, these tyres, the problems that we may have in the factory," he added. "I think we need to keep in this direction for Barcelona, this improving course that it seems that we start here and this has to be only the first step of our recovery and in Barcelona there is much more to come from us, I'm sure."

The past two races have shown just how critical the tyres can be, with positions won or lost by the condition of one's Pirellis.

"I think that these days tyres make a huge difference," Alonso said. "Even with three or four laps on the tyres you can feel the drop in performance so I think in the middle part of the race, when I overtook Mark, maybe my tyres were in better condition, because I was comfortable at that part of the race. In the last part, I think Mark had a new set of prime tyres and I didn't, and maybe that was enough to make a difference. We also saw cars performing a little bit better with hard tyres, cars performing better with soft tyres as well, so we need to see, try to analyse and anyway, fighting with Red Bull is not easy."

Vettel agreed that tyres were a vital element of 2011 strategy.

"The only thing which I think is a bit tricky – obviously every race is different and it's difficult to produce a tyre that is a two stopper everywhere, because tracks are different but I think the real hard time is really for the spectators in the grandstand," Vettel said. "Sure, if they have a video wall in front of them it's possible for them to follow, but after the first stint, especially when you have pit stops every ten to 15 laps, I think it makes it really difficult for the people coming here to visit and to watch, to follow. Sure, you maybe understand the first five, first ten, but then not everyone is following the leader or the guy in P2, P3. There's also guys from 10 to 24 so it doesn't make it easy for the spectators.

"It's obviously very early to judge, still, because we've only had four races and one race it was possible to one-stop, here it was possible to four-stop so we need to see as we go and wait a couple of races," he concluded.

Whether 2011's tyres lead to confusion or thrills, there's no denying that Pirelli fulfilled their brief when designing the rubber.

"I think it's what people asked for last year," Alonso said. "I think we saw two stops in Canada, people enjoyed that race. People, fans, journalists: everyone was asking for more of a show, for more pit stops, more fun and now we have all of that, so now if people are still not happy, we need to see what they want."

Of course, Vettel's strong lead in the drivers' standings prompted a question or two.

"It is good to get as many points as you can every single race," the world champion said. "But it is a long, long way and we saw how quickly things have changed last year especially with Fernando coming and going and coming and going and in the end it was very, very close. We have to really go step-by-step, see every race on its own and try to maximise our points. But a good start to the season always helps, but it is a long, long way to go. Four out of 19, so you can work out how many points there are still to get so we have to keep focused."

Despite his strong start to the season, Vettel refuses to get complacent.

"It is a long way to go and surely we've had a good start but I think that the day you start to think that you are unbeatable is the day you get beaten, for sure," the young German said. "We all try to win, obviously, and all try to be better than the other guys but I think there's always someone at some point who will teach you a lesson and will give you a very hard time and beat you. We are racing at the highest level. ... You have a lot of guys, Mark and Fernando here, Lewis and Jenson, Nico was very quick yesterday."

Webber was asked to revisit his China drive.

"A lot more people probably enjoyed my China drive than I did, to be honest," the Red Bull driver said. "I think that when you come up against drivers like Fernando and Jenson and Felipe, Nico, these guys, and you catch them at 2.5s a lap, it's nice but it's not very rewarding in terms of how you pass them. These guys have absolutely nothing to fight back with, so it was a podium which of course I took. Of course I had to drive well, consistently on the limit, blah, blah, blah as all the other guys were, but that was the tyres they had."

“Today was a different type of race,” Webber continued. “Of course, I was at the front – in the top few – the whole race and it was again, it was just fighting with Fernando, with just one guy. The race in China was fighting with lots of different guys. I had a new guy on the pit board for the Chinese Grand Prix and it was a very tough race for him to start at, so I think he made a much easier job today. “

Finally, Webber explained why we saw so many multiple phases overtakes at Istanbul Park this afternoon.

“I just think it is the way the circuit is on that last sector there,” the Red Bull driver said. “You try to get into the braking for [Turn] 12 and then the guys can either run round the outside at [Turn] 13 and then you have to try and have the rhythm or the line correct even to open the next lap. That is the reason why it is like that around here.”

F1 Sofa Blog – Analysing the Turkish Grand Prix

While I traditionally use this piece to give a team by team run-down of the previous race, the Turkish Grand Prix was such a complex event that such an article would be novel-length before I'd finished.

Instead, given the importance of the location of the DRS-zone, pre-race strategy, and the high levels of tyre degradation at Istanbul Park, this analysis will concentrate on those common elements that affected the race as a whole.

What set Turkey apart from the other grands prix we've had this season was the application of race strategy from the teams' arrival in the paddock at the start of the weekend. Thanks to the combined Chinese successes of Lewis Hamilton and Mark Webber, tyre strategy started in F1. Teams saw the advantage that could be gained from having extra rubber in the race itself, and both free practice and qualifying were affected as a result.

Writing earlier this week, Jarno Trulli called the Turkish Grand Prix 'the end of qualifying', as the Lotus driver posited that teams would now aim for one-run qualifying sessions with a view to maximizing tyre choice on Sunday. But while that extra rubber in China paid dividends, there was no real evidence to show that a three- or four-stopper had the clear advantage in Turkey.

While Jenson Button was unable to make a three-stop strategy work on Sunday afternoon, Kamui Kobayashi's paid off in spades, as the Japanese driver collected points from a back of the grid start. Race winner Sebastian Vettel would have won on either strategy. The fact that there was no one conclusion to draw on rubber in Istanbul should lead to a greater variety of strategy in Barcelona.

Even so, there is no denying that qualifying is not what it used to be. In recent years, when overtaking was nigh on impossible at certain tracks, grands prix saw first lap carnage as the drivers battled for position, followed by a processional race with a few changes during the pit stops. There was always the odd passing manoeuvre, but nothing even remotely close to the level we've seen in recent races.

The consequence of drivers once again being able to pass on track is two-fold. First, while pole position is never a bad thing to have, it is no longer the be-all and end-all. For mid-field qualifiers, an extra pair of tyres is more valuable on Sunday than a higher starting position. Even the men at the front have the opportunity to push for the lead if they find themselves running on optimum strategy with a new set of tyres, in the manner of Lewis Hamilton in Shanghai.

The second consequence is that we are likely to see far fewer retirements in races this season than we have been used to in recent years. We have already seen a new record set for the most classified finishers in an F1 race, and that is in part due to the relative ease of overtaking. Now that position at the end of the first lap is less decisive in terms of the overall race result, drivers are easing off in the charge to the first corner. Making it through without an incident is more valuable in the long term than smashing your way through to the front.

One thing that the Turkish race proved in spades was that the application of the DRS zone is still a learning process. The FIA have always said that the DRS was not a magic button, and that they would not get it right at every race, and there was a sense that some of the overtakes on offer at Istanbul Park were not the result of real battling.

It would be foolish to complain of too much overtaking after years of complaining of droughts, but as Mark Webber said in the post-race press conference, there is little pride in swooping past a driver of Fernando Alonso's calibre when the opponent is little more than a sitting duck.

“I think that when you come up against drivers like Fernando and Jenson and Felipe, Nico, these guys, and you catch them at 2.5s a lap,” the Australian driver said, “it's nice but it's not very rewarding in terms of how you pass them. These guys have absolutely nothing to fight back with.”
