



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

2011 ABU DHABI GRAND PRIX

POST QUALIFYING PRESS CONFERENCES TRANSCRIPT

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DRIVERS 1 - Sebastian VETTEL (Red Bull)

2 - Lewis HAMILTON (McLaren)

3 - Jenson BUTTON (McLaren)

TV UNILATERALS

Q: Sebastian, you equalled Nigel Mansell's record of 14 poles in a season today, congratulations, but you had to dig pretty deep to get this one?

Sebastian VETTEL: Oh yes, especially after yesterday where to be honest I wasn't very happy with the car and we weren't happy in general as we thought there is more in the car, the performance is there, but we couldn't really get to it. Today, this afternoon, it was already quite a bit better but this place is tricky in many ways. You have the practice on the one hand in day conditions, the sun is up, the track is a little bit hotter, and then in the evening you qualify and you race and the circuit is quite a bit different. The car behaves differently. The tyres come in differently. It is not easy to get that right all the time. Then in qualifying I had a much better feeling especially moving onto the soft tyres. Already in Q2 we looked much better than before. Then the other difficulty around here is to get everything into one lap. It is a long lap. There are a lot of corners, especially the last sector. Once you start to turn into Turn 11 after the second straight it is basically left-right-left-right. Plenty of opportunity to gain time, but also if you take a lot of risk it is very easy to do a little mistake. It is very easy to lose straight away a lot of time. We are not speaking one, two, three hundredths. It is immediately a tenth, tenth-and-a-half. I was not so happy with my first run in Q3, but the second run much happier especially the first two sectors and with that I was buying myself a little bit of a cushion in the last sector which was a bit trickier towards the end of the evening. But all in all just enough to jump ahead of Lewis who has looked very strong all weekend. It is good that in that session, where it matters on Saturday, we were able to be just that little bit quicker than him.

Q: Lewis, as Sebastian said you have really been in control all weekend. Did you think you had done enough there?

Lewis HAMILTON: No, no. It was a good session for me. I think it has been quite a good couple of days to be honest, quite a big improvement for me, I feel, from the last race at least. Yeah, we were quick, the car has been feeling good, but just at the end there that was as fast as I was really able to get out of my lap. It wasn't particularly a great lap, the one in Q2 was much better but that's the way it is and well done to Sebastian, he did a great lap. As always, he is very, very quick but the race is tomorrow, that's the most important day.

Q: Jenson, you put it all together there on your final run. Is this a result a surprise for you and the team today?

Jenson BUTTON: I don't think a surprise, as we know the pace in the car and it was finding

the right balance. I have not felt 100 per cent comfortable this weekend in terms of the balance of the car but we have improved it, we've tried a few different things, and was finally getting there through qualifying. But Q3 was very strange as there was less grip as the circuit was a lot cooler and with the break from Q2 to Q3 the car was acting differently but in some ways it was a good thing for me as I couldn't get enough front end into the car. All weekend I have been struggling with a nervous rear. Finally, when we get into qualifying, I have got massive amounts of understeer so more in the direction I like but in the tight section towards the end of the lap you need a reasonably pointy car but I didn't have that. Not a bad lap, but still, as Lewis said, the car is working well around here. It is not perfect, Seb did a good job and put it on pole, so we will have challenge from behind tomorrow.

Q: Sebastian, clearly you are in a very fierce battle here with the two McLarens. What are you expecting from tomorrow?

SV: Well I think it is going to be a long race, a fun race. As we have seen all weekend McLaren, both Lewis and Jenson, looked very competitive. Very quick on the long runs as well. That's what we expect. They will be very quick in the race. I think we need to see from some people behind, but we have to focus on ourselves first of all, try to get a good start, but then it will be a long fight. A long fight to the chequered flag. Looking forward to the race. I think the car is good, especially with the steps we were able to make after yesterday's practice. So confident and ready I would say.

PRESS CONFERENCE

Q: Sebastian, you seem to come up with the goods every single time. Just where does it come from?

SV: I don't know. There is no box in the car that I open and get it from. To be honest I wouldn't say a surprise. We expected that if we get everything right to be closer than in practice, much closer. McLaren looked very competitive straight away yesterday in particular when I wasn't happy with the car and I wasn't happy with myself. I went off, did a mistake, and it cost us probably a proper long run. But the balance of the car wasn't as good as it could be. I felt there was more in the car and we just had to get to it, so overnight we tried to find out where the problem is. I think this afternoon it was already quite a bit better but then, I think, this is a tricky place as I mentioned with the different conditions. Conditions changing with the sun being up in FP3 this afternoon, the sun going down during qualifying. The circuit changes and the car changes and the behaviour changes. Ideally you would like to change the car, but once qualifying starts you have made your choice and then only thing you can change is yourself. You have to play around and fortunately I felt much better this afternoon and it was only getting better until later on in qualifying. In particular then, in Q2, we were quite close in reach of Lewis and I thought in Q3 if we got everything together, we would have a chance. Surprisingly the circuit did change after the little bit of downtime between Q2 and Q3 and it wasn't getting quicker. It didn't seem at least, particularly the last sector. It is such a long lap, plenty of opportunity but also once you are really pushing to the limit quite possible, quite easy, to maybe ask for a little bit too much and go off slightly. My first run in Q3 I pushed a bit too hard and the second run I was much happier and able to have a very good start into the lap, first two sectors, and with the difficult sector three I was able to have a little bit of a cushion. When I crossed the line I was looking up towards the monitor. I can't read the lap time but I can see if it is yellow or green and green is good and yellow is maybe not so good so that's a good sign but I didn't know if there were people coming behind me. Then I got the call on the radio and I was very pleased.

Q: You have won this race twice before. You have clinched the World Championship here. You have been on pole twice here now as well, it must be one of your favourites mustn't it?

SV: Today yes, yesterday no. As I said it is a tricky place. It is an amazing place. I have a lot of good memories, in particular last year, but the standard here if you look at the

facilities, the place itself, it's incredible. It's a bit like wonderland if we come here with a fantastic circuit, tricky as I said, especially the last sector, so many corners, it is so long and it easy to do a mistake. But once you get into the rhythm around here it is really good fun and you are one unit with the car. The car is doing what you want and you are doing what the car wants, then it is very enjoyable.

Q: Lewis, second on the grid. Must be nice to be on the front row as you've been on the front row both time before. Is there one side better than the other to start from?

LH: Yeah, I was just thinking about that. I am not really quite sure. I think a lot of us once we hit the apex, the exit kerb, we come back across. I am sure the pole side is a little bit cleaner than the left side, but I don't think it will be too big a difference. I am happy with today. To be on the front row and not have any penalties is a blessing for me so I can look forward to tomorrow.

Q: You are pretty close. It is not as though Sebastian has got a massive margin over you in spite of the fact that you felt that was probably all you could get out of the car.

LH: Yeah, I think, as I said, it wasn't a particularly spectacular lap. Neither of them in Q3 were. In the first two qualifying sessions the car was looking really good and then we got to Q2 then I started to feel the car was understeering a little bit and that's really the limitation of the car. Then in the final runs I was pushing as hard as I could, but just wasn't able to improve on my last lap. I think there were bits of time there. As Sebastian said, sometimes you were up, sometimes you were down and there were a couple of small bits of time all over the place but unfortunately I wasn't able to extract that. Nevertheless, I am still happy with the job I did.

Q: Jenson, you were within nine thousandths of a second of...

JB: I've heard that one before! Sorry, I was getting all excited. I said I've heard that one before. Carry on.

Q: Given the hard luck stories and the balance of the car, that must be pleasing to be as close as you are.

JB: Yeah. All weekend I've been reasonably happy with the balance but I still feel that there's more to get from the car but it's just trying to find it, trying to help the rear of the car. I've been struggling with, as I always say, a nervous rear end, and I don't like that. Tried a few things before qualifying and at the start of qualifying, felt a little bit better but during qualifying, I suddenly found myself with massive amounts of understeer, so a completely different car balance than I felt all weekend, so then we had to work on trying to put front end into the car and ran out of all the options, really, in the end. It was pretty good. I'm quite happy with the lap and happy with the improvements we've made. In qualifying there's not so much you can change so we played with everything we could. It was a pretty good lap.

Q: After yesterday, you said that you didn't think DRS was going to help overtaking that much, or it was still going to be very difficult. Is that still your opinion?

JB: Yup. I think it's going to be tough to overtake with DRS. Hopefully, we will have a different story tomorrow in the race. I don't want to finish third. So we will have to see but it does feel short still. Yesterday, I was DRS-ing out of turn seven all the way down to turn eight and I still couldn't overtake anyone. We will see how it goes, but yeah, hopefully there will be possibilities. It's a long, long race. There are a couple of pit stops, which will be important to get right. We really don't know what's going to happen with the tyres but we know more than Seb, obviously.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Dan Knutson – National Speed Sport News) Jenson, with the balance problems you have, are they better or worse on the prime or the option or are they the same on both tyres?

JB: For a long run, it's definitely better on the option tyre, I think. It felt pretty good in terms of grip level for a high-fuel long run, so hopefully we will see that tomorrow.

Q: (Joris Fioriti – Agence France Presse) Jenson and Lewis, congratulations on your outfit, which is very nice. Did you have any thoughts at the beginning of the weekend that you were actually going to be faster than Red Bull, knowing that you were fastest in FP1, FP2 and FP3?

JB: I think we've seen it before. We've been very quick in practice, but basically we're just doing our own thing. We're working through our programme and it's not about being the quickest during the day, it's just the way it seems to happen. We obviously run a different programme to Red Bull. We've seen this before and we expected the Red Bulls to be quick, so yeah, it's always a challenge to beat them and to beat Seb with the consistency they've had this year in qualifying. The race, also, is very difficult, but I feel that we are more competitive and we can challenge more in the race than we can do in qualifying.

Q: (Frederic Ferret – L'Equipe) Question to the two McLaren drivers: what is your plan to prevent Sebastian winning tomorrow? Is there something special you can do?

LH: I think it's about getting a good start, from my side at least. I can't remember if it was last year when we... was it last year when I started second and you [Vettel] started on pole again last year, didn't you? Yeah. And I remember into turn one, I braked early and let him go. I don't plan to do that tomorrow.

JB: Any plans? Yeah, a good start's important but it's more difficult from third than it is from second, so I don't know, we will see. As I said, we've got a pretty good race car, I think. We will see tomorrow if that is true or not but it feels that it's pretty good. It's not all about the start, I don't think.

Q: (Kate Walker – Girl Racer) For those of us who haven't had time behind the wheel in an F1 car, could you talk us through the way the track changes as the night falls and everything gets cooler and the way that affects the handling of the car?

SV: It's a difficult question. We all, surely, feel something... as I said earlier, we would like to change the car in the session, it's not possible, we haven't got the time and we're not allowed to. And then you can be surprised either way so as Jenson described, I think he said he had quite an understeery balance and then finally he found the grip so yeah, the circuit did pick up some grip for the fronts but then I think it's not the same for all the cars. It wasn't really in my case, there wasn't a clear trend, it was just coming together or going away from you. In particular, you can feel when there's a lot of cars running it gets cooler, it seems to get quicker. We saw that from Q1 to Q2, then a little bit of a break, not too many cars running, only ten – I don't know if the last cars did a timed lap – but it does make a difference and the little break, not many cars, again the circuit seems to get a little bit slower and the cars are moving a bit more. It's difficult to highlight a trend, to say OK, the front picks up, the rear picks up. That's the difficulty, it's a bit of everything.

Q: (Michael Schmidt – Auto, Motor und Sport) Sebastian, you couldn't do a long run in Suzuka in Friday practice due to a crash; yesterday you said you missed out a little bit. In Suzuka you were surprised about the behaviour of the tyre in the race; is something similar possible tomorrow?

SV: No, I think I did a long run in Suzuka. I crashed in the first practice didn't I? I crashed on Friday for sure. It seems to be a habit. No, I don't think so, to be honest. Yesterday, as I said, I wasn't happy with the car, I'm much happier today. You see that across the fuel loads, not only on low fuel but also on high fuel, so for the race I think we are in good shape, we have enough experience from previous races, I think. The problem in Suzuka was different. We shouldn't run into the same problem here, I think we were able to learn from that straightway for Korea so we will see. Also, I think the tyres lasted pretty well yesterday. Obviously I didn't have a go on the soft tyre with higher fuel but all the others did and no one seemed to have a real problem. It's interesting to see how many stops we will have tomorrow. I expect something between one and three; everything is possible but the tyres seem to last fairly well.

Q: (Joris Fioriti – Agence France Presse) Sebastien Loeb just won his eighth title in rallying yesterday; what are your thoughts about that and do you think that someone in Formula One could reach that score?

SV: Look at Michael. I think he's an exception and then you look at rallying. Sebastien is another exception, for sure.

LH: He's the best by far.

SV: Yeah. The consistency? You don't need to talk about it. The most important thing is that he's a very nice guy. He's very down to earth and a great, great person. You could probably talk forever about his skills. What the guys do is pretty amazing. Generally, I'm a big fan of rallying. I think we would be overwhelmed by the adrenaline and those guys... for them it obviously becomes normal after a while, but what they do is pretty special. To always then make sure that you are that little bit quicker than the rest, or sometimes much quicker than the rest and for many years be that consistent, very little and very few mistakes says it all.

Q: (Gary Meenaghan – The National) Seb, we heard you being addressed on the team radio as Mr Mansell; is that something that's been discussed within the team this week?

SV: Not really. Discussed by you, discussed by the press but not within the team. I was very happy to get pole because it was difficult. We weren't sure about it or... I was positively surprised when we crossed the line, I think, and the same on the pit wall. Because everyone – not us – talks about it, you are aware of it. He (Mansell) obviously took two races less to achieve the same but still, it's something very special. It's a great feeling, for sure.

Ends