

Getting to know the new Silverstone Circuit

You might think there's nothing left to learn about Silverstone. After all, the Northamptonshire airfield played host to the first Formula 1 World Championship event back in 1950.

But thanks to the long-term F1 contract secured by Silverstone and the BRDC back in the autumn of 2009, the spiritual home of British motorsport has undergone something of a facelift since the last time we went racing.

While the corners will be the ones you remember, the drivers will whiz past them all in the wrong order, thanks to the new pitlane and start/finish straight built to accommodate the impressive Wing paddock complex. But the on-track modifications were largely in place for the 2010 race, so there's no need to worry that you won't recognise your favourite corners when the weekend rolls around.

One thing that hasn't changed is the high speed corners for which Silverstone is known. They can change the layout, but they can't alter the basic circuit characteristics. Silverstone is one of the fastest tracks on the calendar, which is one of the reasons it's so popular with fans and drivers alike.

Mercedes have done their usual trick of releasing an in-depth analysis of the weekend's race track, and this week's piece is very illuminating. "The [Silverstone] circuit includes eight corners that are taken at over 250kph and just two below 100kph," they assert. "In complete contrast, Monaco has eight corners below 100kph and none above 250kph.

"Using FIA numbering, the fastest corner on the circuit is Turn 2, known as Farm Curve, on the new section of the circuit – but this is more a flat-out sweep than a proper corner. The quickest true corner is Turn 1, Abbey, the flat-out right-hander after the new pit complex. This requires a small confidence lift, but no braking, and is taken at approximately 290kph."

According to Mercedes, "drivers experience a peak g-force of 4.8G, and over 4G for 1.3 seconds, while the car experiences a peak vertical force, including car mass, of 22kN – equivalent to 2.2 tonnes. This means the car generates 2.5 times its weight in downforce in the corner. With the new corner numbering, Copse Corner is Turn 9, while the Becketts complex accounts for Turns 10 to 14, and Stowe is Turn 15. This section of the circuit is 1.88 km long (32 percent of the lap distance) and negotiated at an average speed of 272kph – in around 25 seconds. The lowest speed of the car during this sequence is 195kph."

The detail from the Brackley-based team is little short of exhaustive: "On the technical front, [the Becketts] sequence rewards both downforce and an agile change of direction: the cars experience an average vertical force of 21 kN (equivalent to 2.1 tonnes). The drivers barely touch the brakes through here: there is gentle braking before Turn 12, and a little more (but only 35 percent of maximum) before turn 13.

"The section of track from Turns 7 to 16 is 3.2 km long, equivalent to 54 percent of the lap distance. It takes around 41s to negotiate, at an average speed of 250kph. The other half of the circuit, from Vale to Luffield, including the new Arena Loop, is 2.7km long (46 percent of lap distance). This is completed in around 48s, at an average speed of 199kph. In other words, the section between Luffield and Vale is some 25 percent faster than the other half of the circuit."

If that's not an impressive level of detail, I don't know what is. Things to watch out for in more general terms – other than the highly-anticipated off-throttle blown diffuser ban – include high levels of fuel consumption, struggles to get the brakes up to working temperatures, set-up choices that lead to lower overall levels of downforce, and heavy tyre wear.

The FIA's decision to ban off-throttle blown diffusers from Silverstone onwards means that there's not much sense in predicting form this weekend based on performances at earlier races. The teams have all been busy asserting that their car will not be affected by the rule clarification – or that, at minimum, their car will be less affected than their competitors' – but at the moment such statements are all hot air.

Or cold air. Whichever gives your car more downforce. Both have been banned by Charlie Whiting.

All of the teams have been working hard to negate any effect the lack of off-throttle blown diffusers will have on their cars, and Silverstone will show us which garage is filled with the most ingenious engineering brains.

There is a chance that Red Bull's dominance will come to an end, and that the season will be rebooted this weekend, but it's just as likely that the RB7 will dominate the 2011 British Grand Prix in much the same way as it did the 2009 and 2010 races. After all, Silverstone is a track that rewards aerodynamic efficiency, and Red Bull are a team known for... you guessed it... aerodynamic efficiency.

Renault's James Allison is confident that the R30 is better-protected than most; the technical director explained the double-whammy downforce loss that is likely to result from the ban.

"The loss for each blown floor car will come from two separate effects," Allison explained. "How much downforce will be lost and, in addition, how much will the loss of this downforce upset the balance of the car. All blown floor cars will lose downforce under braking as a result of these new restrictions. Some teams will lose more and some teams less; it is hard to know exactly what relative loss LRGP will suffer.

“However, it is possible that we will suffer less on the balance shift side of the equation because our forward exit exhausts produce their effect quite near the middle of the car,” he continued. “This means that as the exhaust blow waxes and wanes, it does not really disturb the aero-balance of the car too much. With a rearward blower, the downforce from the exhaust is all generated at the rear axle. As the new rules reduce the blowing effect on corner entry much more than corner exit, it is possible that the rearward blowers will tend to suffer more nervousness under braking and more understeer on exit as a result of the new restrictions.”

Thanks to 2011's DRS and rapidly degrading Pirelli rubber, the assumption is that we will see high levels of overtaking at Silverstone. While overtaking has never been easy at the former airfield, historically the British Grand Prix has tended not to be a procession. This year, the drivers are anticipating even more action than usual, with Lotus drivers Jarno Trulli and Heikki Kovalainen particularly up for the challenge.

“There are a few obvious changes [to Silverstone] this time around,” Trulli said. “We have the Pirelli tyres which have made our strategic decisions critical all season, and with the probable performance differential between the soft and the hard tyres I think qualifying could be pretty tight. Managing the degradation of both compounds will be important all weekend, and if there is a big gap in lap times between them that could play into our hands – we’ll see. The effect of DRS will also create more overtaking on Sunday than we’ve had for a long time, so hopefully we can take advantage of that and keep taking the battle to the cars ahead.”

“Overtaking was always pretty tricky at Silverstone but the way the tyres are behaving this year and with DRS I think we’ll see a busy race, particularly with the compounds Pirelli are bringing,” Kovalainen added.

Even Monaco stepped up to the plate and gave us two hours of action, leaving Valencia the only inherently dull track on the F1 calendar.

So what are Pirelli expecting from the British Grand Prix? According to motorsport director Paul Hembery, “Silverstone always produces some exciting races and there’s a fantastic atmosphere to the whole event, which is why they call it the ‘home of British motorsport’. Our tyre nomination for this race will give the teams the durability they need to cope with the demands of the circuit, thanks to the hard tyre, and also the speed with which they can demonstrate their pure performance, with the soft tyre. How they use that combination will of course be the basis of the strategy: the teams that feel they have a significant performance advantage might choose to do a series of sprints on the PZero Yellow soft tyre, whereas other teams could conclude that they might be better off staying out for longer on the PZero Silver hard tyre.

“The choice of strategy will naturally have an effect on qualifying as well as the race,” he continued, “so on Saturday we should already have a clear idea about what the teams are doing. Whichever tactic the teams choose – whether it’s multi-stopping or longer endurance runs – they should all end up fairly close together by the end of the race, which has been one of the most intriguing elements of Formula 1 so far this year. But of course it’s very hard to make accurate predictions, as Silverstone is one of the many circuits that we have never tested on. In Britain it can rain at any given moment too, which obviously throws all forms of strategy out of the window.”

Changes to the Northamptonshire racetrack between 2010 and 2011 were fairly extensive, thanks in no small part to the relocation of the grid. Last week, the Silverstone Circuit office produced a list of all the changes and additions. The biggest difference is that the more acute Abbey has gone from being a curve to being a corner, and has become Turn 1; as a consequence, the race will see drivers taking familiar corners in the ‘wrong’ order.

As the 2011 British Grand Prix will see the debut of the revised track – with all new pit/paddock complex and start/finish line – there are no records to recount. This weekend’s fastest lap will become the benchmark of the future.

While the corners will be taken in a different order to the one we’re all used to, the length of the track is identical to the 2010 race, meaning that Fernando Alonso’s fastest lap of 1.30.874s – set at an average speed of 233.375kph – should be fairly representative of this year’s times, allowing for differences in the tyres between this year and last.

Assuming it goes full distance, the British Grand Prix will run for 52 clockwise laps of 5.891km apiece, giving a total race distance of 306.227 kilometres.

Of the current grid, Mark Webber is the only man to have won on the longer Silverstone circuit, while Sebastian Vettel is the only man to have scored pole. But there are more winners, pole sitters, and fastest lap holders on the current grid when you take the more familiar configuration into account.

Since 2000, the date of the last set of revisions (minor, but still...) to the circuit’s layout, there have been 10 winners at Silverstone. Of those ten men, half are still racing today: Mark Webber (2010), Sebastian Vettel (2009), Lewis Hamilton (2008), Fernando Alonso (2006), and Michael Schumacher (2002, 2004).

In the same period, six current drivers have claimed pole: Sebastian Vettel (2009, 2010), Heikki Kovalainen (2008), Lewis Hamilton (2007), Fernando Alonso (2005, 2006), Rubens Barrichello (2000, 2003), and Michael Schumacher (2001).

Only four of the men still racing in F1 have claimed a 21st century fastest lap at Silverstone: Fernando Alonso (2006, 2010), Sebastian Vettel (2009), Michael Schumacher (2004), and Rubens Barrichello (2002, 2003).

F1 Silverstone Blog - Thursday press conference at Silverstone

It was a pretty standard drivers press conference on Thursday afternoon in Silverstone, with Rubens Barrichello (Williams), Jenson Button (McLaren), Paul di Resta (Force India), Lewis Hamilton (McLaren), and Daniel Ricciardo (HRT) in attendance.

It must be pretty intimidating to face the glare of the F1 media for the first time in your career, but Ricciardo handled himself with aplomb, giving team-suitable answers to questions both silly and tough.

The general feeling I got from the drivers – all of whom were looking forward to the weekend’s racing action – was one of complete and utter

exhaustion. They were all far too professional to say anything that wasn't keen and eager, but their faces told a different story.

As the home grand prix for the majority of teams on the grid, Silverstone means a lot of advance publicity in the form of media appearances, one-on-one driver interviews, charity fund-raisers, stunts, and photoshoots. For any driver employed by a British team, there is very little time to sleep between Valencia and Silverstone. Add last weekend's Goodwood Festival of Speed into the mix, and it only gets worse.

I asked the rookie driver a question that elicited an odd gasp of horror from the five drivers present. "Daniel, in the run-up to this Grand Prix, Colin [Kolles] has made some comments about the car not really suiting the track. Are you concerned that your F1 debut might not really happen this weekend, due to the 107 per cent rule?"

His reply was textbook.

"Oh," Ricciardo replied. "I haven't thought about that at all. I hope I'm more than capable of qualifying in that percentage. I don't fear it will be a problem. It's my first time in the car and I do expect it will be different to what I've driven before. I don't expect it to be the Red Bull that I drove in Abu Dhabi for the junior tests. Tonio's done a good job this year and he's qualified all the time so if he's able to qualify then I hope I can too. It hasn't even crossed my mind."

Answering a question about his aims for the weekend, the young Australian said "it is a huge opportunity to get a chance to race in Formula 1. It is something I have dreamed of since I was a boy. For the race I think the first aim is to try to finish and just get the miles under my belt and the experience at this level of my career. That's the most important thing. Never done a race this long so physically and mentally to find out where I am, I think that is going to be good. If I can try and be competitive compared to Tonio, he is very experienced, and I am sure I can learn something from him so we will see how I go."

Grand prix veteran Barrichello was asked to pass on his advice to the rookie driver facing his first F1 weekend as a racing driver.

"Well, I think that first of all you have to see what your car's like and obviously it will be very different to the one you were driving, by the looks of it," the Brazilian driver said. "So just pace yourself because there's a lot of high speed here. Knowing the circuit a lot, get a good balance, the tyres are going to degrade a lot. Just have fun, forget you're doing Formula 1, just do the same as you've done in the other races."

Once Ricciardo's debut grilling was out of the way, the general line of questioning focussed on the rule changes for the Silverstone race, particularly the off-throttle diffuser ban.

"I think they have made a reasonable difference," Hamilton said. "When you take away the engine modes we have been using before it will be different for the likes of Ferrari and for the Renault engines particularly, I think, as they use it slightly different than us. Whether or not they are hampered more than us, who will know. But I think the team have done a great job with trying to understand and get on top of things and to recover elsewhere, through set-up and through other bits, through updates we have coming. So I really, really hope that we are at least as good as them if not better. In terms of driving style and all that, I think we have had a good chance to be on the simulator again to do a good job there."

His teammate agreed.

"There is always a chance," Button said. "Whether it is a big enough one I don't know. I think if you look at the last race you'd say the Red Bull was very strong and we were quite a long way behind them. But we have updates for this race, which hopefully will help us and also we have the difference in the blown diffuser this race and the electronics. That might help us more than the other teams. I don't know, it might not. That's something we just have to see when we get out on the circuit. But I think the important thing is that we have done a lot of preparation work for this race with the new components and also running with the new blown diffuser system. It's about preparation for this race. This is a pretty tough circuit to get out onto with the new package so preparation is key and I think we have prepared very well and hopefully that will show tomorrow when we get out there."

The drivers were then asked if they had any safety concerns in light of the rule change.

"I think that the answers can be different from driver to driver because in my car there wasn't such a difference in the high speed, to be honest," Barrichello said. "The difference was more in the braking area through the low speed so like Lewis said, there's going to be a lot of set-up adjustments with the new parts on the car, you're going to be looking for adjustment. Formula 1 moves on very very fast. You cannot just say 'yeah, you have lost like half a second' and that's it. You're going to find something better by the end of the weekend, you've probably got to the level - if you've done a really good job that you didn't even lose anything, so I suspect it's the same for everyone on that part."

Button was more concerned with the potential loss of pace.

"I think that the top teams will lose quite a bit, because we've had this for a little while now so you start designing the car around the systems that you have in place," the British driver said. "It's going to be a reasonably big hit and you'll feel it everywhere: high, low speed, not so much on power but it's more under braking and high speed corners. I think the biggest problem will be is that braking and exit will be very different in corners to the feeling of the car, could be changing a lot, so that's probably the thing that you need to get used to. Safety? No. It's just like us driving in a slower car, with less downforce. There's no safety issues. We feel the circuit, we feel the car. When it's wet we have to drive the car slower because it's easier to go off because there's less grip. There's no safety issues, no."

The drivers were then asked to weigh in on the possibility of Vettel's current run of victories being a return to the years of Schumacher/Ferrari dominance.

"I think it's different," said Barrichello, Schumacher's teammate through much of the era of the Red Baron. "I think that you have different tyres that you have to manage. We went through a period where the Ferrari car was fantastic and we didn't have to worry about the tyres so I think that placed us in good hands which was good for the show, is good for everything. Even though you have a Red Bull car, you're still going to have to be looking after the tyres. If any car is following Sebastian and he makes a mistake, with the DRS now you are able to overtake so I think the changes are better

for the show in that respect. I think Sebastian has been doing a fantastic job to keep on winning but I think these days it's actually tougher and he cannot sleep."

"I think Rubens answered it well," Hamilton said. "I don't think so. I think it's a different time, rules are changing all the time. They've clearly established that they're a strong team but you have lots of other strong teams and it even looks like people like Renault is getting stronger this year. You've got Mercedes who are there or thereabouts. You've even got Williams, the updates, the changes that they're going to have over the next couple of years. You never know if they're going to be back up there with us, which I think will be great for the sport. I don't think it will be the same situation. I think there was a lot more to it in the Schumacher days. I don't even bother going into that."

"I don't know," Button replied. "It's difficult to compare. They're extremely quick and they have the reliability. Last year they were quick but they didn't have the reliability, so obviously they've taken a step forward. They're very strong in many areas so it's tough to beat them but we've beaten them twice, it's not as much as we'd like to beat them but they are beatable and I think Michael won 13 races or something at the start of one year, so we are just going to hope that doesn't happen but I think we are close. We are close to them. It's not like they have a massive, massive advantage like one and a half or two seconds or something."

Di Resta spoke about his progress thus far in his debut season.

"I think it was very positive at the beginning," the Scottish driver said. "There have been some definite highs and lows but I think, standing from the outside, you can generally be quite pleased with it. The good thing is I seem to be relatively competitive to my team-mate. We are going forward and hopefully I can just build upon that. But at the end of the year this is a difficult step and certainly the more tracks you go to, all the tracks have been new to me. I haven't raced on any of them. This one isn't going to be any different and these guys have a lot of experience and I respect that. I have watched them over the years and hopefully you can just be in the mix to be competitive against them.

"You're always learning as a racing driver," he continued. "I think the biggest thing is confidence in Formula 1 and building it the right way, probably starting a bit on the safe side at the beginning of the weekend and building your way up, and that's what I've tried to do, to have that approach. I felt that's the most solid way to go forward. In terms of driving, obviously it's a bit different to what I was recently used to, the DTM car, now in an open-wheeled car but it's good fun and all I can say is that I'm well on to put in the hard work, to be in a Formula 1 car."

Finally, Hamilton gave his assessment of the new track configuration.

"I think there will be more opportunity for overtaking, I think that was the plan," he said. "I think turn one and two are fairly straightforward, flat out, but before you go through Copse, everyone would then get in single file, flat out through the next sector. Now it's quite quick through turns one and two but you have an opportunity, it's very wide into turn three so it's probably going to be relatively easy to be able to follow through turns one and two and then have an opportunity into turn three, I think. I think it will be great for the racing and for the start."

F1 Silverstone Blog - F1 at Silverstone

There's only one conclusion anyone wants to draw from the morning's running at Silverstone: which teams have been most and least affected by the off-throttle blown diffuser ban. Unfortunately, the rain made it impossible to draw any definitive conclusions.

Sure, Mark Webber was the fastest man by around half a second. That doesn't look great for a more even qualifying session on Saturday afternoon.

But there was an odd mix of tyre strategies at play this morning. Over at McLaren, Lewis Hamilton was conducting aero tests on the slicks on a very damp track. The rest of the pack spent their time testing out the traditional inters and some new trial compounds from Pirelli.

Webber's pace-setting lap came towards the end of the session, when conditions on track had improved. Running began on a damp circuit, and the plumes of spray were fun to watch from the comfort of the media cafe (the only area in the press centre where journos and photographers can see the track...). Mid-way through the session, the drizzle began to reassert itself, and after brief showers, the final thirty minutes of F1 saw lap times fall as grip levels improved.

The only real incident of note came when Kamui Kobayashi spun his car on the pit straight, briefly took to the air, and lost assorted bits of bodywork. Were it not for his wheel tethers, there might have been more flying car parts, but as spectacular-looking crashes go, the Sauber driver's was really quite sedate.

Once the chequered flag fell, Mark Webber brought his car to what Red Bull later called a "precautionary" stop on track. With no confirmation of the cause, rumours are flying that the RB7's temperamental KERS device is acting up once more.

F1 timings (unofficial)

1. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.46.603s [19 laps]
2. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.47.263s [20 laps]
3. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.47.347s [23 laps]
4. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.47.422s [22 laps]
5. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.47.562s [13 laps]
6. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.47.758s [23 laps]
7. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.48.161s [16 laps]
8. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.48.549s [21 laps]
9. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.48.598s [19 laps]

10. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.48.678s [22 laps]
 11. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.48.730s [18 laps]
 12. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.48.778s [18 laps]
 13. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.48.794s [21 laps]
 14. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.48.809s [17 laps]
 15. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.48.841s [23 laps]
 16. Nick Heidfeld (Renault) 1.48.941s [20 laps]
 17. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.49.603s [15 laps]
 18. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.50.133s [17 laps]
 19. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) 1.50.222s [14 laps]
 20. Karun Chandhok (Lotus) 1.51.119s [17 laps]
 21. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.52.470s [17 laps]
 22. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT) 1.53.143s [20 laps]
 23. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin) 1.53.469s [26 laps]
 24. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT) 1.54.334s [24 laps]
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F1 Silverstone Blog - FP2 at Silverstone

As your intrepid reporter left the Ferrari motorhome stuffed full of antipasti, the heavens began to open over the Silverstone paddock.

It was as though the menacing clouds overhead knew that we were mere moments from the roar of engines filling the Northamptonshire countryside. The fans, who had been enjoying a cloudy but warmish day, raised their umbrellas as one and settled in to watch a whole lot of nothing.

It took all of seven minutes for the pitlane to decide that track conditions were too dangerous to complete much running, and talk in the media centre turned to FP3 in Suzuka last year, when only two drivers set timed laps, and qualifying was postponed till Sunday morning in very tempestuous conditions. Sure, it's not quite that bad outside, but there's nothing we like more than a good moan. It's good for the soul.

But while the press corps were all warm and snug inside their window-less box, the watching fans were getting wetter and wetter. While it's a shame for those who have shelled out their hard-earned cash for a day at the races, Silverstone is not a grand prix known for its tropical conditions.

The real shame in the lack of running is the effect it is likely to have on every team in the paddock, thanks to the FIA's decision to clarify rules on off-throttle blown diffusers, officially banning the device from Silverstone onwards.

Obviously it's no good running in dangerous conditions just for the sake of it. And in light of the weather reports that predict a dry race on Sunday, there's not much the teams can learn about the truckloads of new parts they've brought along to trial in free practice.

But in these days of no in-season testing, and a significant rule clarification that will affect the majority of the cars on Sunday's grid, it was imperative that the teams got in as much running as possible in the three sessions available to them. The problem with the off-throttle blown diffuser is that teams have now been playing with the concept for long enough that it is integral to the design of a number of cars.

It's not just a matter of stripping off an illegal front wing and finding a new one with similar gains. Rather, teams are looking to compensate for the loss of speed while also trying to ensure that the reduced downforce doesn't affect the overall balance and handling of the car. As no one knows exactly how their car will respond, they needed to get as much data as possible on handling before turning their attention to set-up choices and the pile of new parts sitting menacingly in the corner.

With forty minutes remaining of the afternoon practice session, Jaime Alguersuari was the first man to brave the puddles and set a timed lap. Joining him on track were Toro Rosso teammate Sebastien Buemi and Force India's Adrian Sutil.

In the final half hour of the afternoon, running got underway at last. But given the ever-changing conditions on the drying track, lap times were variable and hardly representative of overall performance. There were some impressive laps from Regenmeister Michael Schumacher, bringing back memories of past wet races and – more immediately – the German driver's upturn in form we saw in Montreal only four weeks ago.

Fastest when the chequered flag fell was Ferrari driver Felipe Massa, although given the bizarre half-wet, half-dry track that drivers were faced with as the session drew to a close, it's impossible to say whether any fast or slow performances this afternoon will mean anything when the weekend ends with Silverstone's legendary party.

FP2 timings (unofficial)

1. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.49.967s [9 laps]
2. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.50.744s [16 laps]
3. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.51.395s [16 laps]
4. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.51.438s [6 laps]
5. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.51.518s [6 laps]
6. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.51.738s [18 laps]
7. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.51.781s [7 laps]
8. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.51.992s [13 laps]
9. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.52.169s [12 laps]
10. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.52.189s [21 laps]
11. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.52.198s [9 laps]
12. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.52.325s [12 laps]

13. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) 1.52.578s [16 laps]
 14. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.52.587s [6 laps]
 15. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.52.869s [8 laps]
 16. Nick Heidfeld (Renault) 1.54.023s [8 laps]
 17. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.54.274s [16 laps]
 18. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.54.545s [4 laps]
 19. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin) 1.54.714s [13 laps]
 20. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.55.155s [8 laps]
 21. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) 1.55.155s [12 laps]
 22. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.55.549s [10 laps]
 23. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT) 1.55.828s [10 laps]
 24. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT) 1.56.037s [6 laps]
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F1 Silverstone Blog - Friday press conference at Silverstone

Gentlemen, pick up your handbags, walk twenty paces apart, and let the battle commence! Friday's press conference at Silverstone – featuring senior team personnel John Booth (Virgin), Tony Fernandes (Team Lotus), Christian Horner (Red Bull), Martin Whitmarsh (McLaren), and Frank Williams (Williams) – was more dramatic than anything that happened on track.

Normally I would edit the transcript into a conversation, but the chat was so complex that to do so would just mean that you'd get lost reading it, and I'd get lost editing it.

Just add your own mental pictures of the body language – it looked close to a punch-up at certain points – and prepare to chortle.

Q: Tony, a big weekend in that you are showing the colours of General Electric, which is a major sponsor on the car, and also Caterham as well. Tell us what sort of effect that is going to have on the team having that support.

Tony FERNANDES: Well, it is always useful to have a little bit of money. General Electric has been more than just on the sponsorship side obviously. They will do a lot on the technology side, so it has been a welcome addition to the team. Also, with Caterham, one of the principal reasons GE got involved was because of the car side and the production side in terms of electric cars and some of the things we are doing on the Caterham cars. It has been a fantastic symbiotic relationship we have put together. A big day for us.

Q. Where do you believe this will lead in future, in terms of looking towards next year?

TF: What do you mean?

Q. Well can this bring you into, certainly, the midfield?

TF: Well, this year was always about trying to stay 10th and become a column one team. We are inching away slowly. I think by now we have all the facilities that we require. It's the first time that we have got a full CFD cluster. We have got now a fantastic facility with Williams, our second wind tunnel. So, by September, we will really be able to utilise much more wind tunnel time than we have ever had. We are in a position now to really start developing next year's car from as much of a level playing field with other teams than we have ever had. We will have to see, but it is our best shot. We always said two years, try and be 10th and then build from that.

Q. And of course you are both going to be running the same engine in the future, with Williams also having the Renault engine.

TF: Yep, the three of us here. Could be four if Martin's changing.

Q. The Williams tie-up. Is that a year or so? How long is it for or is it quite a long-term arrangement?

TF: It is for two years but we hope to use it for a long time. I learnt a lot from Frank and hopefully we can continue that relationship for a long, long time.

Q. John, similarly, you have recently announced a tie-up with McLaren. Just give us the details of that?

John BOOTH: Yes, obviously very excited to have a technical partnership with McLaren. It is a wonderful opportunity to tap into years and years of experience and knowledge and give us a real leg up as we look to develop our 2012 car.

Q. How many people can you envisage actually working from McLaren, working with your team?

JB: I don't think that is very clear at the moment. The deal was only finalised seven days ago. Although it is in operation as of now, I think it is an ongoing process working towards next year's car.

Q. And you have also bought the Formula 1 business of WRT. What was the thinking behind that?

JB: Well, Marussia became a stakeholder in Virgin Racing six months ago. They have led an overview of the team over those six months and we needed to take decisive steps to move forward. It was evident from the start of this year we weren't moving forward as quickly as we wanted to. In fact, arguably not at all performance wise, so we had to take steps to ensure the future of the team and put us on a positive footing. That's the result. We need to take control of our own destiny and we now have our own design team working on the car for next year.

Q. I have seen the classified adds in Autosport this week. It is a double page of recruitment almost, but how quickly can you put it together?

JB: The base of the team is together. We are carrying people forward with us from our existing programme. We have some fantastic people that have been with us from day one and we are carrying the majority of those forward with us and we are just adding as we go along. The process is underway for next year. Design has started, it's a good way down the line. It is just a matter of adding and building to that design team now.

Q. Christian, today very mixed weather conditions. How much did you learn, particularly about the diffuser effect or lack of off-throttle diffuser effect?

Christian HORNER: In reality very little with the way the weather has been. It's been a typically English summer's day where we seem to have three seasons in one day. We have run on the inters. We nearly got to the slicks, didn't quite and then it seems that every other category has had a run on the dry tyres apart from Formula 1. But we have learnt a bit about the pit-lane, tried out the new garage. Turned up and thought we were in John's garage, not ours. It has been a restrictive day in terms of what we managed to learn on track.

Q. Are you happy being that end of the pit-lane?

CH: I was quite surprised, as I thought we were going to be up this end of the pit-lane. There is some nice grass up here and so on, but all the garages are the same size at the end of the day. But we are down the other end, which probably isn't great for the spectators as they are not going to see many Red Bull or McLaren pit-stops this weekend, but there you go.

Q. But you could be in the position that you are in the pits and a column of cars come past you as happened in the GT race and there is nothing you can do?

CH: I don't know about that. We will have to see. It's a short pit-lane here, which adds another element to the race. Obviously the entry is a bit tight, so that is going to be interesting for the drivers. It's a very fast run-in to the pit-lane, and obviously if it is wet on the way out we have seen a few cars down at our end of the pit-lane having a few moments on the way out. But I am sure it will be fine. But you have to say, other than being the wrong end of the pit-lane it is a great facility.

Q. Fernando Alonso has been quoted as saying he is going to wait for Sebastian Vettel to make mistakes, which will give him a chance in the championship.

CH: I think at the end of the day we are focused on our own performance. Sebastian has had an unbelievable first half of the year. In reality, I think he is 14 points off the maximum score, so he has not made too many mistakes so far. He has driven impeccably well and deserves to be in that position.

Q. So it could be a long wait?

CH: You know it's a long season. We are not quite at the half-way stage. Eleven races to go. As we all know, with 25 points for a win now, leads can quickly diminish but it's obviously a very useful lead. We hope we can be competitive in the upcoming races.

Q. Martin, to go back to that pit-lane choice. How does that pan out? Who decides which end you are going to be?

Martin WHITMARSH: I am not sure who decides that. I think it is a shame, as Christian mentioned, that we are slightly subterranean where we are. I don't think it materially really affects us but clearly those in the grandstand cannot see pit-stops, which is a bit of a shame. But I have got to say that we can all turn up with opinions, but it is an incredible facility and I am sure a lot of people have put a massive amount of effort to be ready here this weekend, so for us to turn up and be critical I think would be the wrong thing to do. We have got to congratulate the BRDC and Silverstone for a fantastic set of facilities.

Q. Just going back also to the diffuser effect. How much did you learn today?

MW: Well we learnt half-way through the session that Christian hadn't lost as much as we expected as obviously the rules are slightly fluid and appear to change by the hour at the moment, so we are still learning is the answer.

Q. Is that what the conversation with Stefano (Domenicali) was about?

MW: Yeah, I think, again, it is not a criticism of Red Bull. They have got to try to get the best they can out of the situation. I think we were all a little bit surprised when it appeared from whatever we'd been told that the regulations changed half-way through P1 and I am sure that put many teams this weekend a little bit on the back foot, so we are trying to cope with that at the moment.

Q. Can you explain in what way they have changed?

MW: Well, I think the expectation is that when you are off the throttle the engine throttles would be closed but there has been a negotiation and as I understand Renault's throttles are 50 per cent open under braking and I think that is probably not what most of us expected coming into this event. That's been a little bit of a revelation that we gathered during the course of the sessions today and we are trying to understand what we have to do.

Q. Like your own lobbying?

MW: Well, like our own lobbying, I am just trying to understand. Again in fairness to Red Bull, their view is as I understand, but Christian can answer better than I can that this is a reliability issue and they need to blow air through their engines for reliability purposes. I am not familiar with that particular precedent, presumably Charlie (Whiting) is.

Q. Christian, can we just get an answer on this?

CH: I mean Martin's interpretation is interesting. My understanding is that Mercedes are firing on over-run. There has been a series of technical directives that have happened since Valencia and the latest technical directive is quite clear in that engines that have been run in previous configurations the FIA would take into account on an equitable basis. Mercedes argued that they're over-running that they currently do was permitted, which was granted I believe on certain handling characteristics that if offered on a historical basis, and Renault is no different to that. Renault is in a situation as an engine supplier, not just to Red Bull but to two other teams as well, where again precedents have been set in 2009 and 2010. That data has been openly available to the FIA and the primary purpose of opening the throttle and, for want of a better word, cold-blowing as it has become known has been because of two purposes. The primary purpose being the blip on the down-shift and the second being a reliability issue. I think there was an expectation that coming here obviously a lot of focus has been placed on Red Bull. Do Red Bull have a silver bullet in their car? We don't but at the same time we expect the FIA to regulate in a fair and proper manner and that's exactly what they have done in this case. They are the only ones with all the facts. They are the only ones with the data. They have looked at it. They have listened to Mercedes case and allowed Mercedes certain parameters. They have looked at Renault's case and they have allowed Renault certain parameters based on an historical content, if you like, on what is a very, very complex subject that perhaps would have been better dealt with at the end of the season when the exhausts move to a completely different location which will remove an awful lot of the emotion that seems to surround this topic. I think the FIA have responded in a right and correct and equitable manner as all the engines aren't the same. They operate in different ways. They have different control codes. They are the only ones that are privy to all that information.

Q. Frank, I am sure you are very excited with the tie-up with Renault and the return of Renault to Williams for next year.

Frank WILLIAMS: More concerned in a way than excited, as I think they might be disappointed they are not going to get back what they last knew

10 years ago. We are not quite as top a team as we were then but having that said it's a wonderful opportunity for us to regain our momentum.

Q. Is that what it needed? Did it need the presence of an established engine builder, for example, if you wanted to put it that way, you have had a lot of data over the last many years?

FW: Well, it is different to a company like Cosworth, who sell engines. That's their job. They are very good engines by the way. With ours we have never had a failure. But when you are allied with a manufacturer they have a certain number of facilities available to a team such as ours that we can't afford for ourselves. Some of those little facilities make a big difference. A tenth here and a tenth there and that's what we hope will happen.

Q. In fact, you are allied with a lot of manufacturers as there is Porsche as well, Jaguar and also Team Lotus on the racing side. Is that just part of Williams Grand Prix Engineering?

FW: That's just commercial matters in other parts of the company.

Q. And that contributes to the overall budget to keep Williams Grand Prix Engineering?

FW: Exactly that, yes.

Q. Is that an exciting and hugely beneficial thing for Williams?

FW: It is a lot of hard work for a small gain but we need the gain and any Team Principal would tell you he'd give anything to find a couple of tenths of a second between now and the end of lunchtime.

Q. And thoughts on the drivers for next year? Rubens (Barrichello) says he wants to stay with the team for next year.

FW: Well, I can't say anything about our drivers until we have made up our own minds. Rubens is very highly regarded and is truly a treasure trove of information and experience and that's something that will not be thrown away lightly.

Q. Has he done all you expected of him this season?

FW: Yes, I think he has. I think if we had given him a better car he would have been very close to the front, if not at the front. He is a superb driver.

Q. (Mike Doodson - Honorary) This question is for Christian and Martin as you have different engine suppliers. There are some mischievous scare stories in circulation about the noise the new engines will or will not make in 2014. What do you hear from your engine suppliers about this? Are the engines likely to be so anemic as we hear that the fans will be repelled?

CH: Martin.

MW: No, I don't think they will. I think clearly there has been a lot of discussion about the future of engines and I think it is healthy now for Formula 1 to point forward to 2014 having all parties agreed to the new regulations. I think there was some care, clearly, to increase the number of cylinders, to increase the RPM, to stipulate a single turbo and all of those measures were about enhancing the sound. Everyone is aware and we have made sure that the engineers that are developing these regulations are aware that the very visceral engine notes are very important to Formula 1. They are important to us. We all still love the sound of Formula 1 engines. They still send tingles down most of our spines. I think we will continue to work hard with the engineers and manufacturers to make sure that we have got great sounding engines in 2014.

CH: I agree with everything that Martin said. I think Formula 1 actually ended up making the right decision. The V6 is a far better engine to install into a Formula 1 car. It should sound good. I think there was some concern about the straightforward engine but I think all the engine manufacturers have got together and agreed on this with the Commercial Rights Holder and then passed it through the various channels to get it approved. I think it is the right move and hopefully they will sound great.

Q. (Mc Greevey - CSMA Magazine) If I can direct this question at Sir Frank and Christian. What are the major challenges facing F1 in the future?

FW: The demise, which will certainly take place, of Mr (Bernie) Ecclestone, that's my opinion.

CH: I think that will be a huge challenge but hopefully that will be in another 80 years at the rate Bernie is currently going. I think Formula 1 is in good health at the moment. I think the racing has been fantastic this year. I think the best advertisement has been the racing itself, despite the fact that we have had a driver that has been dominant every single grand prix so far this year, has been pretty exciting. I think the regulation changes that have been introduced this season have proved successful but inevitably there will be challenges ahead but I think it is a bright future at the moment. I don't think there is anything that any of us should be fearful of. (Inaudible follow-up)

CH: Whenever you change technology it costs money, so I think stability is crucial and stability of technical regulations is crucial. One of our biggest cost drivers are technical regulations so moving forward, working with the various stakeholders in Formula 1, we need to ensure that we continue to keep costs under control.

Q. (Marc Surer - Sky TV) I have a question for Martin: you tried the new wing on Lewis's car this morning and on both cars this afternoon. Did you get the correct data in the conditions today to decide which one you're going to use?

MW: Inevitably in these conditions the data gets a little bit compromised. You're not going as quickly as you'd like. Various pressure tappings that you put on the wings and around the wing don't function if it's too wet but we got reasonable data and the engineers are going through that. I think we've got enough information; whether it's a quick enough wing, that's another story but I think it's doing what we thought it would.

Q. (Andrea Cremonesi - La Gazzetta dello Sport) Question for Martin as president of FOTA: today we lost a lot of action on the track because there are just eight sets of wet tyres. Are you discussing with the FIA to change the rules, to have more sets of wet tyres?

MW: In fact this weekend we had already spoken to Pirelli and the FIA about our concerns about such a weekend. We've got an extra set of intermediate tyres here this weekend that have to be given back. Had that rule change and the tyres not been available, then I think we would all agree that there would be very little running. So we've made one step better. I think the engineers and the drivers would always like as many tyres as possible and we'll keep pressing to have more tyres available but it has in fact improved this weekend, otherwise I think we would have had a very quiet couple of sessions.

Q. (Andrea Cremonesi - La Gazzetta dello Sport) Christian, we heard some criticism of the pit lane exit from your drivers, could you confirm that? What is the problem exactly?

CH: For sure, if it's conditions like today, if the speed limit goes up to 100km/h I think it could be a tricky down there. Yeah, it's part of the track, at the end of the day it's the same for all teams and all drivers but I think they probably need to have a look at whether we -- because the pit lane tapers as

well – whether we remain with 100km/h or whether it would actually be better to look at a 60km/h speed limit.

Q. (Ya'acov Zalel – Hege) In the past there was a strong link between technology of racing cars and road cars. In today's cars, there is very little influence or technology from Formula 1 into road cars. Do you think it's a problem, or the current situation is OK?

MW: We've just been talking about the new engine regulations. I think that if you look into the automotive field at the moment – increasingly downsized engines, turbocharged engines, hybrid, kinetic energy recovery – those are all very relevant areas and that's one of the drivers behind the rule changes that we're now implementing. I think that it's important that there is some transfer, some linkage, some relevance to what we're doing. Formula 1 is increasingly about efficiency, fuel efficiency, use of resources and I think that – perhaps belatedly – we're putting quite a lot of effort there now. I think we ought to be hoping, in the coming years, that we will become more attractive to the automotive companies and more come in. I think the automotive industry has gone through an unprecedented recession, it's been tough. It's been tough in Formula 1. We've survived. As Christian said, we've had some great races and we've been trying to improve our show, improve our governance, work together more effectively and I think that some of the rule changes that are being implemented now increase the relevance to the automotive sector. There was a problem in that not too many road cars were revving at 18/19,000rpm, unfortunately, and that's why we've had to come down a little, but it's a balance because at the end of the day we're a show, we're a sport, we're a spectacle, we're a technical contest. There's a degree of purity that's necessary in Formula 1 that those of us who have been engineers in the sport have enjoyed and indulged ourselves in for many years but we've got to have that balance. We can have our fun but it's actually got to be seen as relevant fun.

FW: I think Martin has explained the real situation. I think manufacturers do have a place but Formula 1 will carry on without them. Their value to us, of course, is the supply of engines; they supply the engines for what they can learn from the use of those engines under very high stress conditions. I think our particular formula works quite well and the chain of events that one party depends on the other but whether manufacturers are dominant within the sport or not... teams like us will always fight them anyway so whatever is the status quo, we're happy to go along with it.

CH: I think Formula 1 foremost and utmost needs to produce good races, needs to produce a good show. It needs to be a technological challenge and it's finding that balance that people turn on the TV or come to the races because they want to see man and machine at the limit, wheel-to-wheel racing which is something that we've really embraced for the last couple of years. As far as the technology is concerned, I think it is interesting, there are some relevant areas to the automotive sector. In our own case, we've obviously started a partnership with Nissan Infiniti, looking at certain hybrid technologies as the technical regulations become clearer for 2014. Obviously for Renault there is relevance to their road car sector but I think beyond that has to be the quality of the racing. I think Formula 1, to a degree, is also a form of escapism, that people are coming here to hear loud cars, fast cars and, as I say, the drivers and machinery on the ragged edge, on the limit and that's what makes Formula 1 the spectacle that it's been over the last fifty years.

Q. (Andy Benson – BBC Sport) Martin and Christian, the original ruling on the off-throttle blown diffusers was 10 per cent for everybody. Now Renault are being allowed 50 per cent throttle. Mercedes, I assume, aren't but they are being allowed some fuelling on the overrun so how can we be sure we're watching a level playing field, and is this the end of the matter this weekend?

CH: I think, as you clearly say, first of all there was a technical directive which effectively turned it all off. That was obviously with reticence by the manufacturers and it has been very much a manufacture issue. Certain teams were then allowed to have fired overrun, to fuel their overrun, of which there are also, obviously, secondary benefits through the exhaust plumes and thrusts that that creates but that was permitted. Obviously Renault presented their position to the FIA, and let's not forget that this is an extraordinarily complex matter, to demonstrate that precedent is there that, for purposes of throttle blip and reliability, that cold air blowing open throttle was a necessary part of the operation of their engine, otherwise it would cause serious issues. It would be unfair to allow fire overrun and not allow the same parameters for another engine manufacturer. I think it's a very, very difficult job for the FIA to pick their way through this and I think all credit to them, they've looked to try and be as fair, balanced and equitable as they decreed that they would be through the technical directive, to come up with the solutions that they have. We're not totally happy with the solution that we have, that's for sure. I'm sure Martin isn't with his and I'm sure there are a lot of conspiracies in the paddock that these are the reasons why Red Bull is performing or McLaren is performing, or some cars aren't performing. That's just circumstantial at the end of the day. The fundamentals are that the engine manufacturers have been treated in a fair and equitable manner.

MW: I'm sure people set out to do that. I think there have been about six technical directives on the subject so far and it's moved around and when the goalposts are moving partway through a practice session, then I think it makes it quite difficult. I think that with the benefit of hindsight, it would have been better to make changes at year end, which I think Christian would agree. I think that to do this and to do it in a fairly cloudy and ambiguous and changing way inevitably, in a competitive environment, every team feels that it's been hard done by. At the moment, I think potentially a lot of teams will end up making the argument to cold blow. Renault have been in that domain for some time, other teams haven't and don't have that experience but we're talking about a very substantial performance benefit here...

CH: Why is it any more of a performance benefit than fired overrun? At the end of the day, Renault is allowed to fired overrun for reliability purposes. If you can operate your engine in the same way as the Renault, then you are welcome to do it. The secondary effect... I think it is wrong to suggest that there is a benefit beyond that.

MW: No, but clearly if you've got, under braking, your throttles are open 50 per cent then it's a reasonable benefit. There's a lot of gas going through and I imagine that all engines will end up doing that, which I think isn't what was envisaged when it was said we're going to stop engine blowing.

CH: Where is the difference between firing on overrun and creating... so Mercedes engines aren't firing on overrun?

MW: They've been constrained. As you know...

CH: As have Renault.

MW: ...so I think, providing the constraints are the same for everyone, but I think that it is clearly, the fact that we are having this discussion, it's messy and I think the intention people believed was that we were going to stop exhaust blowing when the driver didn't have his foot on the throttle. I think that was the simple concept but that concept has been deflected and therefore it hasn't been clear and the fact that these things were only coming out during the course of today is fairly extraordinary. But nonetheless, I'm sure we will remain calm and pick our way through, but I think it's probably better to make changes to the regulations between seasons, not in-season and also make changes to regulations that are clear and unambiguous. I think, at the moment, a lot of people are clearly getting emotional about the situation and I can understand why: it's frustrating for the engineers not to know what it is that we're allowed to do, because these changes... by cold blowing you're getting 30, 40 points of extra rear downforce in braking and that's quite an attractive thing, so if you can do it, then you're going to try to do it, aren't you?

CH: But you also get that from... Let's not make any mistake here, that firing on overrun, the thrust that that generates through the exhaust creates a bigger effect, so let's just be absolutely clear on that.

MW: And that's why it's been largely contained, and a lot of those strategies, as you know, are not permissible now. At least, it wasn't when I came in here. Maybe it's emerged as I've been sat here that maybe we can do it. Maybe you know more about it than I do, Christian.

CH: I don't know. I read the technical directive that said four-cylinder fired overrun was permissible for certain competitors and that, I think, includes

your engine. As far as we understood, before Renault were allowed their parameters, obviously there was a significant advantage going to any Mercedes-powered team. As you can see, it's a massively complex subject. I think the one thing that Martin and I will agree on is that it should have been addressed at the end of the year, but unfortunately, here we are.

TF: I've been focusing on these two in front of me. Could I just say something on that, as someone who is very new to the sport, in that I think it's a little bit of a shambles that we're having these kind of discussions, I think you don't have that in many other sports. The rules should be very clear, everyone should understand them and they should be pretty black and white. It costs the sport a lot of money. I think that one of the dangers of the sport is changing the interpretations, it's really got to be black and white and I think it can be. If you look at GP2, it's very clear. I run a GP2 team, we don't have these kind of situations. Of course Formula 1 is technologically advanced and you need all that sort of thing but I think the regulators of the sport need to make things clear so we don't have this 10 per cent blowing, 50 per cent blowing, hot, cold, in between etc, and teams and engineers have clarity. Even over the last few months we've heard of all the controversy in football but the rules in football are clear, it's black and white, it's easy for the spectators to understand and I think that's a really big challenge for the sport because a man in the stand - I don't understand anything that these two have just said, God knows about all the spectators over there, so that's just something I wanted to add, as someone relatively new to the sport. I think it needs to be simpler, and I don't think it makes a huge amount of difference to the people who are watching it.

Q. (Heikki Kulta - Turun Sanomat) Tony, have you been thinking of who will drive your cars next year and if you have, when are we able to hear of your decision?

TF: No, we haven't, it's still very early days. It depends whether we have hot, cold, how our drivers react to it, but I echo what Frank said, it's early days for us to decide where the drivers are next year.

Q. (Nick Westby - Yorkshire Post) Martin, the link-up to Virgin Racing, what benefits does that bring to McLaren?

MW: (Laughter) I think you're aware that McLaren is a group of companies now and we have an electronics business which, I'm glad to say, all of the teams in Formula 1 are customers, as are all the teams in IRL, as now are all the teams in NASCAR. We have a company called McLaren Applied Technologies which is working with some teams to help them and develop them, and I think it's early days. As John said, they've now acquired some assets and some people and our business McLaren Applied Technology will try and accelerate them up a learning curve to make sure that they've got a competitive car next year. Exactly how we do that is something that's got to be resolved, it's fairly fluid as we look at what resources, what capability, what knowledge that they have and obviously we've got a range of experience and facilities within our group that we hope will bring benefit to Virgin.

Q. (Andrew Frankl - Forza) Frank, do you miss Max Mosley, especially at times like this?

FW: Sorry, my hearing is damaged after 30 or 40 years. Life goes on. Max - I happened to see him yesterday, actually, he came by at the office, clever as ever, sharp as ever, a little more genial at last. Retirement, in a way, is doing him some good. I think he was an outstanding administrator and leader of the FIA - I didn't say Formula 1, I said the FIA.

Q. (Niki Takeda - Formula PA) Tony, following on what you have said, you mentioned that the rules have to be black and white so how do you propose in your opinion to remove all the different shades of grey in this sport?

TF: I'm the last person (to ask) because I don't understand half of them, but I think there are enough smart people in this business to make the sport easier to understand the rules and I have proposed it at the last FOTA meeting and I think there are some suggestions being put forward at the TRWG in terms of the terms of reference. I'm coming in as someone who is an outsider and saying how I look at it and making some suggestions. I think there are lots of smart people in there who can make it an easier and more black and white sport and I think that's what I put forward to FOTA last week because I think it is... This blown diffuser, I think it should be at the end of the season. I've always said that. If you're going to make a rule change like that, where teams have invested, it should be at the end of the season and now you're getting things being changed in practice sessions. I think this kind of greyness needs to be taken out. It has, in many other motor sports, where it is black and white, and I think it would be good for Formula 1. I don't know how to do it but there are enough people in there who do know and I think there should be less energy spent on so much of the rules and the engineering ways of getting around the rules and they should just be black and white, so you know this is what you can do as opposed to... we spend so much time trying to find ways to circumvent the rules. It should be very clear, and I think it can be done, because it is done in 99 per cent of other sports.

JB: The other point to make there is that I think it's much better to address these problems in private, so that we don't add too much confusion for the spectators. A bit of in-house housekeeping before it goes public would be helpful, I think.

Q. (Byron Young - The Daily Mirror) Putting aside the technological gobbledy-gook that most of us didn't understand just now, am I right in thinking that what you're saying basically Martin, is that you believe that Renault-powered cars have a technical advantage - Red Bull have a technical advantage - and Christian is saying No, they don't?

MW: I don't know whether they've got a technical advantage or not. All I'm saying is that we've evolved into quite a complex set of guidelines as to what's permissible. We've done everything against what Tony's suggested i.e. what was not exactly black and white but what was reasonably clear and what was being exploited has become a whole heck of a lot greyer and subject to negotiation which probably wasn't appropriate and I think that again, everyone here agrees, having clear rules that aren't unambiguous and are changed after good consent and between seasons is the right thing to do.

CH: I agree with Martin. I think that at the end of the day, we don't want to be disadvantaged. We think it's unfair to have been excessively penalised through a technical directive that was released just after Valencia, that has been addressed in an equitable manner and I think that inevitably McLaren or Mercedes will think that they're losing out to Renault and Red Bull. Red Bull feels exactly the same, that the way that they operate their engine offers an advantage. It's something that we're just not going to agree on but I think that that's where the role of the regulator is, to balance this and on what is a very complex subject, they've done their best to do it. I think that as Charlie will probably admit, it would have been best to deal with this at the end of the year, because it is tantamount to a rule change and when you enter the championship at the beginning of the year and you design your car around it - and let's not forget that there's other teams that have significantly designed their cars around this set of regulations - for them to suddenly change halfway through the year is cost, it's time, it's effort, it's money and it's confusing. It's confusing to you, it's confusing to the fans and it's confusing to Formula 1. So that's where we are. I think hopefully we can now draw a line under it and move on. It's probably not the last you're going to hear about blown exhausts or whatever else is blown these days but hopefully we can now move on.

The good news is, it's dry outside. The bad news is that the paddock has been thrown into chaos by some back-and-forth rule changes, protests, and high level meetings with key paddock officials.

Decisions are currently being made every time I blink, so the current explanation may well be out of date before the chequered flag falls on the final practice session of the British Grand Prix weekend.

According to reports currently doing the round of the press room – but not yet backed up by an official statement from the FIA – teams have been informed that the off-throttle blown diffuser regulations have now reverted to Thursday morning's specification. And what was that specification, I hear you ask? Teams can run with 10 percent of their throttle open while under braking.

The paddock was thrown into chaos with the news, which the Renault-powered teams see as unfairly disadvantaging them while benefitting the Mercedes-powered teams. The Mercedes engine has used a 10 percent open throttle since the engine regulations were first frozen; without it there are risks of crank case failures caused by pressure build-up.

Earlier in the weekend, the FIA decided to grant a concession on the off-throttle regulations to the Renault-powered teams. The argument was that the Renault-engine would not be reliable under braking unless the cars could run with 50 percent throttle while braking, as it was necessary to protect the exhaust valves.

That concession has since been withdrawn, and earlier this morning Martin Whitmarsh, Stefano Domenicali, Christian Horner, and Adrian Newey were all seen visiting Charlie Whiting to discuss the latest technical directive. Late last night in the paddock, girlracer spotted Whitmarsh and Ross Brawn huddling under umbrellas, discussing engine regulations.

Speaking in the senior team officials press conference on Friday evening, Horner said "There was a technical directive which effectively turned it all off. That was obviously with reticence by the manufacturers and it has been very much a manufacture issue. Certain teams were then allowed to have fired overrun, to fuel their overrun, of which there are also, obviously, secondary benefits through the exhaust plumes and thrusts that that creates but that was permitted. It would be unfair to allow fire overrun and not allow the same parameters for another engine manufacturer. I think it's a very, very difficult job for the FIA to pick their way through this and I think all credit to them, they've looked to try and be as fair, balanced and equitable as they decreed that they would be through the technical directive, to come up with the solutions that they have."

For anyone wishing to learn more about the off-throttle engine regulations and the 10 percent exemption, the best resource is [Scarbs' F1 blog](#), which explains the most complex F1 technical issues in language we mere mortals can understand.

Anyway, that's a lot of talk about rules and regulations without even mentioning the action out on track.

Despite the lack of running resulting from yesterday's mini monsoon, teams were pretty relaxed when it came to getting out on track and setting timed laps this morning. Installation laps complete, it took about ten minutes before the first timed lap appeared on the board. But by the time the session was half run, it was business as usual for the boys, who spent the subsequent half hour trading places on the timing sheets.

Based on the general lap times on offer this morning, it looks as though the option tyre is worth around 1.5s a lap on the primes. That, of course, is only relevant if we have a dry (or dryish, as we had brief speckles of rain in FP3) race on Sunday.

One thing for the teams to worry about – in addition to their off-throttle compliance, getting lost in the new paddock, and accidentally lining up on the old grid as a force of habit – is getting the set-up right this afternoon.

Current predictions are for a dry race on Sunday, but the clouds gathering over Silverstone are looking increasingly threatening, and a wet qualifying session is a distinct possibility. So teams have to decide – do they run a dry set-up this afternoon, and risk compromising their grid position while saving tyres for tomorrow's race, or do they run a wet set-up today, qualifying well at the likely expense of higher tyre wear and slow speeds tomorrow?

And that's that. The timings for FP3 can be found below – Red Bull were first and third – but the real action on offer at Silverstone this morning happened far away from the pit lane. Race control was the place to be...

FP3 timings (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.31.40s [17 laps]
2. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.31.46s [20 laps]
3. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.31.82s [12 laps]
4. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.32.16s [20 laps]
5. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.32.49s [20 laps]
6. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.32.95s [18 laps]
7. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.33.01s [20 laps]
8. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.33.04s [23 laps]
9. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.33.26s [21 laps]
10. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.33.42s [22 laps]
11. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.33.55s [11 laps]
12. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.33.66s [22 laps]
13. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.33.84s [16 laps]
14. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.33.90s [21 laps]
15. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.34.04s [22 laps]
16. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.34.32s [20 laps]
17. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.34.79s [20 laps]
18. Nick Heidfeld (Renault) 1.34.82s [21 laps]

19. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) 1.35.225s [21 laps]
 20. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) 1.36.905s [21 laps]
 21. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.37.614s [18 laps]
 22. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin) 1.38.068s [20 laps]
 23. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT) 1.38.289s [19 laps]
 24. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT) 1.38.568s [17 laps]
-

F1 Silverstone Blog - Q1 at Silverstone

What to make of Q1 at Silverstone? God only knows.

Lunch in the paddock was a matter of running around between Red Bull and race control, trying to establish which concessions had been made, to whom, and why.

The latest news states that Red Bull have agreed to run at a disadvantage – or what the team perceive to be a disadvantage, anyway – with the proviso that a fairer ruling will be implemented in time for the next race in Germany.

So will Red Bull's alleged disadvantage lead to a shake-up in qualifying? Current indicators say no – Red Bull were first and third in FP3, while Sebastian Vettel is top of the timesheets as I type, with Mark Webber in P4.

While the real action in Q1 tends to be at the back of the pack – the interest being primarily in the dropout zone – Fernando Alonso caused a brief moment of drama around the half-way mark when he decided to take his Ferrari for an off-road tour, presumably trying it out for size as a rally car. There was no damage to man or machine, but his tyres were not in peak condition after their trip across gravel and lawn.

With the session half finished, the dropout zone is comprised of both drivers from HRT, Toro Rosso, and Virgin, plus Jarno Trulli.

And at six minutes left, the heavens opened, scotching decent laps for any of the men out on softs, including dropout zone candidate Jaime Alguersuari. The field returned to the pits, and only those men at serious risk of dropping out in the next few minutes have opted to do further running.

It's looking a bit monsoony outside now... Everyone is hiding in the garages, and reports say that the rain is due to stop in five minutes. It's a bit late for Q1, but Q2 could yet take place on a drying track.

The 107 percent time was set at 1.39.156s, meaning that all challengers have qualified for Sunday's race.

Dropout zone

18. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso)
 19. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso)
 20. Timo Glock (Virgin)
 21. Jarno Trulli (Lotus)
 22. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin)
 23. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT)
 24. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT)
-

F1 Silverstone Blog - Q2 at Silverstone

Rain stopped play somewhat earlier than planned in Q1, leaving the two Toro Rossos high and dry (low and wet, maybe?) in the dropout zone as Heikki Kovalainen secured a slot in Q2 for Team Lotus.

The rain stopped in the break between the two sessions, and the track quickly started to dry out. The wet-dry conditions saw the bulk of drivers lapping on inters, as some corners were dry and others soaking. Tough conditions for the drivers to string together an ideal lap.

There was an ever-changing set of drivers at the top end of the timesheets as different strategies came into play – Sutil, Maldonado, and Barrichello were three of the men not usually seen at the top of the standings who had their moment in P1.

By the time the session was half run, the track had dried out enough for a move to softs. Those who were brave enough to give the softs an initial test lapped over a second faster than their contemporaries on the inters, and the pitlane was filled with drivers swapping rubber with one eye on the timesheets.

One of the highlights of the session was a brief moment in P4 for Lotus driver Heikki Kovalainen, whose well-timed switch to softs saw him one of the first men to cross the finish line before the competition completed their initial laps on the option compound and pushed the Finn back down into the dropout zone.

In the final moments of the session, the dropout zone was comprised of Kovalainen, Nick Heidfeld, Adrian Sutil, Rubens Barrichello, Jenson Button, Michael Schumacher, and Vitaly Petrov.

But it all changes in the final moments, and the seven men not running again this afternoon are Sutil, Perez, Schumacher, Petrov, Barrichello, Heidfeld, and Kovalainen.

Dropout zone

11. Adrian Sutil (Force India)
12. Sergio Perez (Sauber)
13. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes)
14. Vitaly Petrov (Renault)
15. Rubens Barrichello (Williams)
16. Nick Heidfeld (Renault)
17. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus)

F1 Silverstone Blog - Q3 at Silverstone

As the last ten men standing readied themselves for the final qualifying session of the British Grand Prix weekend, a very menacing black cloud drew up over the paddock.

And no, that's not a euphemism for any form of drama or behind the scenes politicking. There was an actual cloud, presumably filled with enough rainwater to scupper everyone's hopes of a dry end to qualies.

It's the final countdown. It looks dry outside, but I could be wrong - there aren't any windows in the media centre, and it can be hard to spot light rain from the TV feed.

The general sense in the press room is that Red Bull are not going to struggle to claim yet another pole position.

McLaren have been struggling all weekend, while the Ferraris are gaining on the Red Bulls at speeds that would even impress Adrian Newey. Jenson Button is currently well ahead of teammate Lewis Hamilton; the latter is currently the slowest driver to have completed a timed lap in Q3.

But the smart money is on a straight fight between the Red Bulls, with a bit of a challenge from Fernando Alonso.

Given the short session and tight competition, the track has been flooded with cars ever since the pitlane opened. Instead of the usual dropped runs we've become accustomed to in Q3, all ten drivers were out on track when the heavens opened once more.

There's no point abandoning a run on slicks when there's not enough time to reshoe, set and outlap, and start a flier before the chequered flag falls, so it's highly likely that Hamilton - who has run incredibly well in the wet at Silverstone before, not least in 2008 - will start Sunday's race from P10.

Kamui Kobayashi was setting better sector times in the Sauber than Hamilton was able to manage in the McLaren. Red Bull might feel disadvantaged by the clarifications to the off-throttle rules that came into effect this weekend, but with a provisional front row lock-out for the team, I don't think anyone is sobbing into their Cornflakes for the boys from Milton Keynes.

Provisional grid

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

F1 Silverstone Blog - Saturday press conference at Silverstone

Starring in Saturday's post-qualifying press conference were pole sitter Mark Webber (Red Bull), Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull), and Fernando Alonso (Ferrari). No matter what happened, it would have been hard for them to top Friday's spectacular display from the team principals.

All three men were asked to give their opinions of the revised Silverstone layout: this weekend has seen the drivers get to grips with a new pit/paddock complex, and a new startline.

"In a way, it's a different circuit," Vettel said. "Traditionally, I think you were used to starting a lap and then you had a massive corner straight away into Copse and then the first sector – after that it was... you know, to get your head straight again. Now it's different, now you have a quick corner initially but then a rather slow start into the lap and it just feels wrong when you arrive at Copse and it's halfway round the lap, so you exit onto the Hangar Straight, then after the fast section and your lap is nearly over. In the end, you get used to it I guess but I think there was a lot of tradition on the old layout, the old track. I really liked it. I still like it because I think the character is still there but of course you give away some parts to get some new bits."

Webber was pleased to give his opinion on the changes. "I think it's a good question, actually, because it has changed and Seb explains it well," he said, "but Copse, Becketts, the first sector was very, very quick, not too dissimilar to Suzuka but at Suzuka you have a bit more of a tighter corner in turn two but the flow is different, but turn three here you obviously have heavy braking not long after the start. It's a different track on the first lap but that's it."

"For me it changes nothing," Alonso said: "very similar to last year. Only the start will maybe change a little bit. Instead of having the first corner flat out, now we will have the first two corners and then heavy braking, so we will have different lines there, probably more action so it will be better for the show."

Talk of the tweaks to the circuit layout turned to a discussion of overtaking opportunities led by Vettel.

"I think overtaking is not easy around here," he said. "Never has been. There is one DRS zone. We will see whether that works or not. I think it is really tricky. It is not an easy job to get things right because distance based on one track, then it is too easy on the other track, it doesn't really help. I think we will know a lot more after we have raced and take that experience into next year, which will help but for this year every circuit is different. The corners before the DRS zone are very decisive so we will see. I think we will see some overtaking, definitely more than last year or in the last years."

While the Ferrari driver had a better qualifying result a month ago, Fernando Alonso said that his P3 grid slot in Silverstone is his most satisfying Saturday result of the season.

"I think I was second in Canada but this third feels much better because we are only one tenth off pole position," he said. "This is completely new for us this year and a little bit of a good surprise because you normally bring new parts to the races, you always test them on Fridays and then you see which ones are working, which ones need more time before you put them on the car but it seems that this weekend everything we put on the car seems to have worked OK and we've got some downforce back. Especially here at Silverstone, with these high speed corners, being one tenth off Red Bull is fantastic news for us so far this weekend. But we are only happy if, on Sunday, we score points and this is only Saturday. We have a good grid position but tomorrow is when we have to deliver."

"I think we are definitely closer [to the Red Bulls] than ever," Alonso continued, "usually being one second behind and sometimes finishing second or third in the race is a little bit closer to Red Bull as in Turkey where we finished third, but we fought with Mark until the end. Last race we finished second, also fighting with the Red Bulls. As I said, having been seven or eight tenths off the pace in qualifying so today when we are a little bit quicker, I'm sure that tomorrow we can put some more pressure on them."

Alonso admitted that there was a chance the Ferrari could struggle on the hard tyres, which caused problems in Barcelona.

"That's something we need to find out tomorrow," he said. "Obviously we haven't had enough laps in dry conditions: yesterday none and today only I think five or six laps so no real reference at the moment, but what we felt in free practice three and first qualifying was a very good feeling with hard tyres this weekend, so we are quite confident that tomorrow we will not have the problems that we had in Barcelona, where we lost a complete lap in the last forty laps of the race. Maybe we still prefer the soft tyres but with the hard – fingers crossed – that we have no problems tomorrow."

One thing the drivers didn't want to talk about – mostly because they were sick of it – was the seemingly-endless off-throttle blown diffuser saga.

"I think the team has handled it pretty well," Webber said. "Seb and I have concentrated on the driving, otherwise it gets very, very boring. But it is not new for our team. Adjustable front ride height controllers, front wings, whatever. Every year we have a new thing to talk about. This last few weeks it has been about this. Let's hope everyone can find a common ground. It is incredibly boring also for the fans. I think they cannot understand 0.1 per cent of what's going on. Even for us it is sometimes difficult, so let's get on with the racing. Keep the rules as simple as possible from the start of the year maybe and go from there. But from my perspective for tomorrow I am in great shape. I have prepared well and ready to challenge for the win for sure."

Alonso also weighed in.

"About the exhaust and diffuser and all this talk," he said, "we repeat a hundred times: we all lose performance with the new rules and we all lose more or less the same performance, maybe from three tenths to five tenths but I don't think that one team can lose 1.5s, one team can lose a tenth. This is not possible so I guess because we are third and fourth now means that the whole team did a very good job, bringing the new parts here and we are more competitive, not because of the thing."

But with Red Bull locking out the front row, it looks as though it will take more than a clarification of the rulebook to stop the Milton Keynes team from running away with the championship.

Webber was the first man to voice his thoughts: "We are not looking to reply to anything. What has to be re-iterated is that the last three years our team has virtually turned up very, very early and left very, very late. Every team in this pit-lane works hard but our team works incredibly hard as

well. We worked with the RB5, RB6, RB7, whatever, to concentrate on that and that's what we have done for the last few years. What is happening in the last few months is not what we've done in the last few months, it's years of hard work to put ourselves in this position technically. It is a subject at the moment that is topical, which we have had each year, but not maybe as heavy as this one, and we have seen today that we are still going okay. But irrespective of lap times it is all about interpretation of rules and regulations and principles and how you go forward as competing under the right guidelines. Whether we are pole or 10th the team will still continue to have its stance on what they think is correct so it is not a comeback what we did today at all.

"I think we are still very, very, very good but the red cars might have done a little bit, to come closer today so the rest of the competition – if you look at just today, not tomorrow, but just today – we look like we're still performing at a very, very high level," Webber continued. "Ferrari haven't been slow today so there might be a bit of form card starting to build for the future, but we obviously need more events to see if that's possible, but it's completely fair for you to ask that. Normally we are here – Barcelona, Silverstone, whatever – then you expect us to be down the road but we are, on most people. Obviously these guys (Ferrari) are a bit closer. The cars are very sensitive to lap time at the moment, the tyres, all that sort of stuff, and it wasn't a normal preparation for qualifying in some ways so let's see how we are in the next two events to see if your question is right."

"As Mark said, in the end, we can't let go, we have to keep on pushing," Vettel added. "That's what the other teams do to catch up and that's what we have to do to maintain our position, otherwise it will change. Sure it varies from circuit to circuit but we have to keep on working hard."

The session's light relief came via Webber, on the TV unilaterals.

Q. Mark, which side is pole and are you quite happy whichever side it is? Is it on the left side?

MW: Definitely on the left. If it's not, we will change it tonight.

F1 Silverstone Blog - The British Grand Prix as it happened

It was bright and sunny at Silverstone this morning, but over the lunch break the heavens cracked open a bit and began to drizzle.

The drivers reported back from the formation lap to say that half the track was wet and half way dry. As a result, inters are the tyres of choice for all of the men on this afternoon's grid.

Sergio Perez had something of a moment with a Pirelli trackside sign on the way to the grid: the Sauber driver shed kilos of carbon fibre and there were concerns he might be required to start the race from the pitlane. But the team fixed their rookie's car in time for a normal start.

And they're off!

Vettel jumped Webber at the start, and Alonso immediately put the pressure on the Australian driver. Button got a good start, and split the Ferraris, while Hamilton moved up from P10 to P7 before the first lap was half run.

At the end of the first lap, the order was Vettel, Webber, Alonso, Button, Massa, Hamilton, di Resta, Kobayashi, Schumacher, and Maldonado.

But the Red Bulls are doing their usual trick of pulling away a decent lead on the competition, but the chasing pack isn't too far behind.

In the background, Hamilton passed his teammate for P5, while Kovalainen got into some trouble I didn't see on screen that has led to a very early pit stop for the Finn. According to Tony Fernandes, Kovalainen's race was ended by a gearbox failure.

By lap 4, and Hamilton was giving the British fans something to watch after a poor qualifying session. He was 0.9s behind Massa and going for a pass when he ran very wide at Turn 6 and took a trip across the run-off area. The British driver managed to hold P5, thanks to a sizeable gap to his teammate behind.

Lap 5, and the top ten is comprised of Vettel, Webber, Alonso, Massa, Hamilton, Button, di Resta, Kobayashi, Schumacher, and Sutil. Unlike Valencia two weeks ago, we are seeing constant changes in order thanks to – gasp! – overtaking on track.

Vettel has 4.6s on Webber in P2, while the rest of the pack follows in gaps of between 1.5s and 2.5s.

Despite the damp conditions on track, DRS has been enabled. Race control have obviously decided that damp isn't quite dangerous enough to make the drag reduction system a safety concern.

By lap 8, track conditions were improving enough that an early move to slicks looked likely to be a tactical advantage for the first driver brave enough to make the switch. That man will not be Hamilton, who has been asked by his team to preserve his wet tyres as much as possible.

Vettel is on fire this afternoon, pulling out an average 1s per lap on his teammate in the same car.

Following a collision with Schumacher, Kobayashi span and recovered at Turn 6 on lap 9, but managed to hold his position. Schumacher lost his front wing and staggered to the pits, while the Japanese driver stayed out on track. One lap later, and the stewards have announced an investigation into the incident.

Further up the grid, Alonso is beginning to look menacing in Webber's wing mirrors just as Hamilton begins to close up on Massa.

Lap 10, and Heidfeld is the first man to hit the pits for new rubber. The German driver returned to the track in P12, his tyres shod in the soft slicks,

Hamilton is now so close to the back end of Massa's car that a passing attempt is inevitable in the next few laps.

Button and Kobayashi head for the pits; Button has a wing change as well as a tyre swap. It prompts an exodus to the pits, thanks in no small part to Schumacher's fastest lap set on new tyres. The pitlane now looks more like your local supermarket carpark on a Sunday afternoon, what with all the traffic.

Lap 15, and Button passes Massa for P5.

Schumacher has been issued with a 10s stop/go penalty for causing the collision with Kobayashi.

Hamilton sets the fastest lap, and manages to pass Alonso in the process.

And while we've been watching Hamilton chase down Alonso, Webber has halved the gap to Vettel in front. The two Red Bull drivers are now split by 1.2s. There is a 5.7s gap back to Hamilton in P3, and Alonso is 0.9s behind that in P4.

Alonso is lined up for a DRS-powered pass, but Hamilton spends much of lap 18 keeping the Ferrari driver firmly in his wing mirrors while reducing the gap to Webber by over a second.

By lap 19, Liuzzi, Ricciardo, and D'Ambrosio have all been lapped.

There's drama in the middle of the pack, as Alguersuari and Heidfeld prepare for a battle. The Toro Rosso driver is closing fast on the Renault.

Vettel pulls out another second on Webber with a fastest lap, as Hamilton closes on the Australian driver from behind. The top three men are currently split by 7.3s, with Alonso 1.6s behind.

Kobayashi has been issued with a 10 second stop/go penalty for unsafe pitstop release.

Webber goes purple, but despite setting the fastest lap of the race he is unable to eat into Vettel's lead. Hamilton is hanging on in P3, while extending the gap to Alonso.

A flurry of fastest laps ensues, with Alonso retaining the temporary crown on lap 22. But despite his improved pace, he is unable to get close enough to Hamilton to get the DRS advantage. Meanwhile, Hamilton is reducing the gap to Webber with every lap.

I typed too soon. Alonso has reduced the gap to 0.8s, putting Hamilton squarely in the frame for a pass. The Ferrari is chasing down the McLaren along the straights, but Hamilton has been getting a better line out of the corners.

Webber has asked for more front wing at his next stop, which implies we'll see the Australian making the traditional stop for TimTams in the middle of the race. Or tyres. I don't think TimTams would give much of a lap time advantage.

And Alonso makes it past Hamilton on lap 24, slipping past in the DRS zone.

Hamilton pits from P4 at the end of lap 25, and returns to the track in P6, just behind his teammate. The British driver is currently on the soft compound, and should be good for a series of fastest laps.

Force India have a pitstop traffic jam, with a slow stop for di Resta as Sutil lines up for his own stop. Di Resta was at risk of being lapped in the pits when the team forgot to get his tyres ready, but managed to sneak back out on track in P16.

Hamilton's stop has triggered the second round of pitstops for the top ten, pushing the British driver up the grid. Only Alonso and Vettel are out on track and ahead of him.

Vettel pits from P1 on lap 28, promoting Alonso to the lead. But Alonso pits with him, and Ferrari get the faster stop, pushing the championship leader down into P3.

And while that was going on, we had a bit of chaos in the middle of the pack, with Buemi stopped out on track without a tyre, thanks to a collision with di Resta.

With the second round of stops now complete, the top ten is Alonso, Hamilton, Vettel, Webber, Button, Massa, Rosberg, Perez, Heidfeld, and Alguersuari. Alonso and Hamilton are split by 0.8s, while Vettel is 1.9s further back. Webber is 1.3s behind his teammate, while while Button is 4.3s further back on track.

Both Red Bull and McLaren are unconcerned about Alonso at the moment; the Ferrari hard on its tyres and both teams are anticipating extra stops for the prancing horse.

Lap 31, and Vettel is closing in on Hamilton. The German driver has reduced the gap to 0.5s, making the Brit vulnerable in the DRS zone. Vettel's tyres are fresher than Hamilton's, but there's not much in it...

Every lap that Vettel and Hamilton spend fighting each other plays into Alonso's hands at the head of the pack – the Spanish driver is pulling out a not inconsiderable lead on the pair, and is now 5.2s ahead of Hamilton.

One lap later, and Alonso's now 6.8s clear at the front.

Vettel and Webber are both charging on Hamilton, and Webber runs wide, narrowly escaping a penalty for running off track. But one tyre was within the track markings, so it's all okay for now.

Hamilton is dramatically slower than Alonso ahead and the Red Bulls behind. If it carries on like this, Hamilton will have won the race for Ferrari.

Lap 38, and the order at the top is: Alonso, Hamilton, Vettel, Webber, Button, Massa, Rosberg, Perez, Sutil, Petrov. There are 15 laps remaining of the race, and it's not clear whether or not we're likely to see another round of pit stops.

Vettel heads for the pits on lap 37 after a quick dance with Hamilton that saw the Brit hold position. The pit stop crew tweaked the front wing and swapped him for another set of soft tyres. Because the race started in wet conditions, drivers are not required to run both dry compounds during the race.

The German driver emerged in P6; on the next lap Hamilton pitted and came out looking at Vettel's exhaust. The last fifteen laps are sure to see some serious battles between the Red Bulls, Ferraris, and McLarens, all of who are running in close order. At least, they will be once Alonso pits for his final set of fresh rubber.

Webber pits a lap later, going from an inherited P2 to P6.

We're now looking at a top ten of Alonso, Button, Massa, Vettel, Hamilton, Webber, Rosberg, Perez, Sutil, and Petrov. At least, we were.

Vettel has passed Massa, while Button has pitted. And the McLaren driver has completely stuffed it on the pit exit, thanks to a disappearing front right wheel. Oops. Naughty lollipop man. The mechanic was reaching for the wheelgun, and hadn't indicated he was ready with his wheel.

After that bit of chaos, lap 41 shows Alonso leading from Vettel, Hamilton, Massa, Webber, Button, Rosberg, Perez, Sutil, and Heidfeld. Button will slide down the order as other cars pass him on track.

Massa pits on lap 42, going from P4 to P5. Webber is promoted to P4, where the team expect him to race Hamilton. The British driver has been asked to save more fuel to get to the end of the race, making the Australian's job somewhat easier.

Lap 44 and the action at the front is tense but unchanging. At the back of the pack, HRT rookie Ricciardo has been lapped twice, joining Liuzzi, D'Ambrosio, and Glock in the twice-lapped club. Not bad given his lack of inexperience and uncompetitive machinery, but the Australian driver is 52.1s down on his teammate.

Red Bull and McLaren are using the team radios to play a series of ever more complex mind games. The real action between the two teams is likely to come in the closing laps, when everyone goes hell for leather on the last dregs of their rubber.

Webber takes Hamilton going into Luffield on lap 46, and the podium looks certain to have a pair of Red Bulls and a Prancing Horse.

Five laps remaining, and there's no change to report at the front. Webber is now back on the podium, but has dropped two places since the start. Fellow Australian Ricciardo has climbed from P24 to P19, thanks to retirements, but is currently 58.9s down on teammate Tonio Liuzzi, and has been lapped three times.

Barring catastrophic last-minute engine failure, the victory is Alonso's - Vettel is 20s behind and there are four laps to go. Even the RB7 isn't quite that fast.

By lap 50, Ricciardo was 72.5s down on Liuzzi. The cameras didn't show the cause of the significant drop in pace, but something must have happened to slow him down.

Lap 51, and Webber is closing on Vettel. The Australian is comfortably inside the DRS zone, and Vettel's tyres are completely shot, but Webber's not able to make a move happen, nevermind stick. Time for take two on the final lap, and Vettel is pulling away from his teammate before being reeled in.

Alonso is racing on his own at the head of the pack, and will take the chequered flag in P1.

Vettel and Webber are drawing ever closer to each other, but the TV director can't keep his eye on the battle. Horner comes on the radio and tells the pair to maintain the gap; the Red Bull drivers cross the line nearly as one.

But the real action on the final lap came in a piece of genuine wheel-to-wheel racing with Massa and Hamilton, who were less touching than they were making out. Watch for an announcement for the stewards any second now...

Alonso ends Red Bull's dominance of the Silverstone Circuit, and becomes the first non-McLaren driver to beat the pair this season.

British Grand Prix results (unofficial)

1. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1h 28m 41.194s
2. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) + 16.511s
3. Mark Webber (Red Bull) +16.947s
4. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) + 28.986s
5. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) + 29.010s
6. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) + 1.00.665s
7. Sergio Perez (Sauber) + 1.05.590s
8. Nick Heidfeld (Renault) + 1.15.542s
9. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) + 1.17.912s
10. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) + 1.19.108s
11. Adrian Sutil (Force India) + 1.19.712s

12. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) + 1.20.600s
13. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) + 1 Lap
14. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) + 1 Lap
15. Paul di Resta (Force India) + 1 Lap
16. Timo Glock (Virgin) + 2 Laps
17. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin) + 2 Laps
18. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT) + 2 Laps
19. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT) + 3 Laps

Jenson Button (McLaren) RET
Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso) RET
Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) RET
Jarno Trulli (Lotus) RET
Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) RET

Drivers' standings

1. Sebastian Vettel – 204 pts
2. Mark Webber – 124 pts
3. Fernando Alonso – 112 pts
4. Lewis Hamilton – 109 pts
5. Jenson Button – 109 pts
6. Felipe Massa – 52 pts
7. Nico Rosberg – 40 pts
8. Nick Heidfeld – 34 pts
9. Vitaly Petrov – 31 pts
10. Michael Schumacher – 28 pts
11. Kamui Kobayashi – 25 pts
12. Adrian Sutil – 10 pts
13. Jaime Alguersuari – 9 pts
14. Sergio Perez – 8pts
15. Sebastien Buemi – 8 pts
16. Rubens Barrichello – 4 pts
17. Paul di Resta – 2 pts
18. Pedro de la Rosa – 0 pts
19. Jarno Trulli – 0 pts
20. Tonio Liuzzi – 0 pts
21. Jerome D'Ambrosio – 0 pts
22. Heikki Kovalainen – 0 pts
23. Pastor Maldonado – 0 pts
24. Timo Glock – 0 pts
25. Narain Karthikeyan – 0 pts
26. Daniel Ricciardo – 0 pts

Constructors' standings

1. Red Bull Racing – 328 pts
2. McLaren – 218 pts
3. Ferrari – 164 pts
4. Mercedes – 68 pts
5. Renault – 65 pts
6. Sauber – 33 pts
7. Toro Rosso – 17 pts
8. Force India – 12 pts
9. Williams – 4 pts
10. Lotus – 0 pts
11. HRT – 0 pts
12. Virgin – 0 pts

F1 Silverstone Blog – Sunday press conference at Silverstone

Present at the post-race press conference in Silverstone on Sunday were race winner Fernando Alonso (Ferrari), P2 Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull), and P3 Mark Webber (Red Bull). The three men were grilled on team orders, legal this year, F1 internecine war in 2010.

Alonso's first win since Korea 2010 saw the Spanish driver the centre of media attention, with questions ranging from anniversary victories to a mid-season Ferrari resurgence not dissimilar to the one we saw last season.

The Spanish driver's Silverstone victory fell on the 60th anniversary of the Scuderia's first win.

"It obviously means a lot for all the guys, the people working for Ferrari who are the sons or daughters of the guys that were here 60 years ago,"

Alonso said. "They are working in the factory, with the same mentality, with the same passion for racing that is in Ferrari's DNA – of all the workers

there. For me, as I said to the team on the radio, I feel very proud of them, of this recovery, always fighting to win races. In spite of a difficult start to the year, (they) never give up, they keep working, they keep showing the Ferrari brand and the Italian flag on the rear wing everywhere we go, very proudly. So, for me, it's special to race for this team and to give them the maximum capacity and my maximum abilities to give them a good result. This is teamwork and I'm very happy for them."

Asked where he would place his team relative to Red Bull, the Ferrari driver replied: "Obviously it's difficult to say. We need to analyse the race a little bit better – sectors etc – but I think we were between one and 1.5s behind Red Bull, especially in qualifying four races ago. In Barcelona, I think I was 1.2s and Felipe 1.6s or something like that, so the average was there and here, with similar characteristics, high-speed corners, exactly the same tyres, the soft and the hard, we were much closer so definitely an improvement. Here, for whatever reason, we were quick in sector two all weekend which is the high-speed sector, so maybe that means we have recovered a lot in that part and now we need to concentrate a little bit more on our strongest point that it was the slow speed corners where we need to make improvements."

Alonso had been predicting a mid-season turnaround for the past few rounds, warning fans and the media against calling the championship too early.

"What I've been saying over the last couple of races is that for sure the team has been improving a lot – there was one part of the championship in which we put new parts on the car and they were not quicker so the wind tunnel was not telling us the truth, so we lost a little bit of ground there in the first couple of races with upgrades on the car," he said.

"Then it seems in the last three or four races every new part on the car is working fine, so they are steps forward for us and very good news, not just for this year but also for next year's development. We are very happy with this and it seems that here we brought quite a big aero update and everything is working fine. Both Felipe and me feel much happier with the car. It's something that in the last three or four races we were feeling and I was saying."

Before the race, there had been concerns Ferrari would have difficulty getting up to speed on the harder tyre, but the issue became moot when a wet start negated the two-compound rule. Alonso was asked whether he thought a dry race with a run on hards would have affected the outcome.

"Yes, that's a good point," he said. "After the first couple of laps with the intermediates, we didn't need to use the hard tyres any more so we chose to do the whole dry race with the best performing tyre, which was the soft on this occasion, so there's a question mark how the car would have performed with the hard tyre. In FP3 and Q1, we were very, very competitive with the hard, so we approached the race with no problems and no doubts as we had in Barcelona. There was a big problem but here we were convinced that we were OK with hard tyres but obviously it was just a thought. And without Hamilton keeping Sebastian behind, obviously the race was a little bit different, for sure. We had to push more to open the gap. With Lewis there, the race was a little bit more comfortable for us and we could drop the revs a little bit and take a bit more care of the engine, the tyres and things like that."

Surprising no one, the off-throttle blown diffuser ban and its effects was a popular topic of conversation.

Asked how much he thought the ban had affected the action on track, Alonso replied: "For me, nothing. I don't think it's a big factor. We saw one McLaren fighting for the podium until the last moment. We saw Red Bull, Ferrari for the other positions on the podium and, as we saw 15 days ago in Valencia, I was second. I didn't see any Force India or any Sauber or anything fighting for victory because the rules changed. It was more or less the same."

"I think it's hard to measure for us," Sebastian Vettel said: "firstly from a data point of view and also from a feeling point of view, because this is a different track compared to the tracks we've been to previously. To really find out, you have to test one thing against another, so on-off. But I think, as Fernando said, it didn't make a massive difference in terms of driving, driving style. I didn't have to change anything so I think the influence wasn't huge. Sure you can see a little loss here and there but, as I said, it's not changing the driving."

The controversy of the day was the Red Bull team orders issue which – while entirely legal – was not widely popular. The questions and answers concerning the team's radio messages to Webber, asking the Australian to hold position, have been copied in full below.

Q. Mark, Christian Horner has said that you should be fine with the team orders at the end and if you and Seb had raced until the end you would both have ended up in the fence. Do you agree with that? Was it the right call? Does this mean realistically that you are out of this championship?

MW: I am not fine with it. No. That's the answer to that. If Fernando retires on the last lap we are battling for the victory so I was fine until the end. Of course I ignored the team as I want to try and get another place. Seb was doing his best and I was doing my best. I don't want to crash with anyone, but that was it. I tried to do my best with the amount of conversation I had. One-way conversation obviously as I wasn't talking too much back. There was a lot of traffic coming to me, but I was still trying to do my best to pass the guy in front.

Q. Do you remember roughly how many messages you had?

MW: Probably four or five.

Q. Mark, after last year's win here, you came out with a classic quote: 'not bad for a number two driver.' I was wondering, after today's comment from the team: 'maintain your position' on the last lap, do you feel like a number two driver again today?

MW: Not really. I just want to race to the end, so with four or five laps to the end, they started to chat to me about holding my position. Of course, they want the points, but I also need to try and get some more points as well.

Q. Seb, what did you think at the moment when Mark tried to overtake you?

SV: What do I think? I tried to stay ahead. Obviously, we were racing each other. I don't think there's anything wrong with that. Sure, from a team point of view, if you have the cars quite isolated in second and third, the first car is away, the fourth car is pretty far away as well, so from the team's point of view, there's no point in racing and trying to do something stupid because the points for the team are the same, the difference between second and third is not massive, but naturally we try to race. What can I say? I was trying to defend my position which I did. I was struggling, Mark was faster. And then there was the chequered flag.

Q. Seb, isn't this a sham? You're the World Champion, you're supposed to be best driver in the world and Red Bull are reduced to begging on the radio to make your team-mate slow down, so he doesn't overtake you, suggesting the results aren't really what we've seen. How do we know you're a worthy champion?

SV: I finished second, I think. As I said earlier: Mark tried to pass me; I could stay ahead. Clearly you could see he was quicker at that stage. If I wasn't racing, I would just wave him past. Sure, the last thing you want is to do something bad for the team. If it would be the other way round, there's no point - of course, I would like to overtake Mark at that stage but there's no point trying to do something stupid, especially from a team point of view, so I don't see why there is a big fuss really.

Q. But this is motor racing, it's about beating a guy on the track, not the team deciding who wins what.

SV: I think we were racing, it was not a scheduled 'I move right, you move left, I move left, you move right, I brake here, you brake there.' As Mark said, he stayed flat out and tried to race me, as hard as he could, didn't find his way past. To me, at this stage it's quite amusing.

Q. Mark, you were one of the few drivers who actually defended Fernando Alonso last year, saying that it was normal that there were team orders. Have you changed your mind about that or was your track behaviour the answer to my question?

MW: No, I stick by what I said last year. Obviously, they had one guy trying to stay in the championship fight - Fernando. Felipe was not having the season that he's having this year. He's doing a bit better job. Fernando was much, much quicker, it was in the middle of a grand prix and he (Massa) released him, so this is pretty straightforward stuff.

F1 Silverstone Blog - Analysing the British Grand Prix

The combination wet-dry conditions we saw for much of the early phase of Sunday's race were a strategic challenge for the teams. Getting the move from inters to slicks right - or wrong - made the difference between success and failure at the British Grand Prix.

Of course, it was ever thus - you only need to look back to Jenson Button's win at Albert Park in 2009 to show just how a well-timed compound switch can make the difference between victory and despair.

But the inters to slicks switch has to happen at some point, and the early adopters don't always make the gains they should. In the case of Silverstone, Mercedes driver Michael Schumacher was the first man on slicks; his series of fastest laps got the rest of the pitlane thinking.

While Schumacher triggered a pit stop frenzy, he was unable to benefit from his demonstrated pace, thanks in no small part to a 10-second stop/go penalty he was asked to serve for causing the lap 9 collision with Sauber driver Kamui Kobayashi that prompted the return to the pits for a change of rubber and nosecone.

And besides - the weather had a far more interesting role to play in the outcome of the British Grand Prix than standard tyre strategies in the rain.

The live timing screens in the media centre display messages from race control, and just before 1pm on Sunday afternoon that message read 'race will start in wet conditions'. All 24 drivers lined up on the grid with their cars shod in Pirelli's intermediate compound, and the brains on the Ferrari pit wall could hardly contain their glee.

There were two known facts for the prancing horses last weekend: first, the 150° Italia was looking a lot faster than it had in two or three races, and both cars had qualified well; second, given the problems the team had experienced in Barcelona, it was a safe assumption that the red cars would struggle on the hard tyre, much as they had done in Spain.

But with a wet race and a grid of men on inters, there was absolutely no need for either eventual race winner Fernando Alonso or teammate Felipe Massa to pit for the prime tyre.

The weather forecast showed that conditions would improve as the afternoon progressed, so all the Scuderia had to do was get through the opening phase on inters, spend the rest of the race on softs, and hope that their skilled drivers would make the most of the opportunity to race in conditions favourable to their car.

Alonso did it in spades.

Despite Alonso's victory, however, a Formula 1 race is never about the efforts of a single driver.

In the aftermath of Sunday's race, I got a text message from a friend asking why the FIA had decided to launch 'Take Your Child to Work Day' in the Silverstone pit lane. While the comment was a little bit harsh, much of the outcome of the British Grand Prix was shaped by errors in the pits.

Sebastian Vettel almost certainly lost the race as a result of an error in his second stop - he and Alonso were racing in the pits, and a slow release for the Red Bull driver saw Vettel spend a significant chunk of the race stuck behind the slower McLaren of Lewis Hamilton, who is not the sort of driver who will let a rival past on track if there's anything he can do to prevent it.

While Vettel was (presumably) cursing the sight of the McLaren's rear wing, Alonso was merrily pulling away into the distance, opening up a lead that was unassailable by the time the Red Bull driver was in a position to challenge the Ferrari.

But the biggest 'oops' moment in the pits was probably McLaren's three-wheeled stop for tricycle racer Button. The British driver was knocked out of his home grand prix by an over-enthusiastic lollipop man, who hadn't quite spotted that the front right wheelman was still reaching for his wheelgun.

A close second for the title of 'at home pit stop snafu' came courtesy of Force India. Paul di Resta pitted for the team, as requested, and arrived in the box to discover that the team hadn't actually got his tyres ready, costing the young Scot valuable time.

Of course, the one thing we all thought we'd be analysing was the effect of the off-throttle blown diffuser ban. Except it didn't really happen. At least, it did happen - a bit - after a lot of to-ing and fro-ing, and has since been chucked out with baby and bathwater for future grands prix. And there's not much point in trying to analyse a one-race anomaly unlikely to affect the rest of the season.

So what did we learn from the British Grand Prix that will be useful going forwards? It looks as though we now have three teams capable of challenging each other on race pace, and there's no such thing as too much pit stop practice.

Bring on the Green Hell...
