

F1 United States Grand Prix – Thursday press conference

For the first time since 2007, six Formula One drivers lined up in front of the world – and American – media for the opening press conference of the US Grand Prix.

Present were Fernando Alonso (Ferrari), Pedro de la Rosa (HRT), Lewis Hamilton (McLaren), Sergio Perez (Sauber), Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus), and Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull).

Gentlemen, a question to you all to start with: what are your impressions of the circuit so far; your feelings about being back in America. What it's like to be back here?

Pedro DE LA ROSA: Good morning to everyone. I've just been doing a lap, just walking around. I don't know much apart from this lap, and apart from what I've been able to see from the internet – from the lap Jérôme [D'Ambrosio] did in the Lotus -- and it looks fantastic... a very difficult track, with very big gradient changes and very challenging because most of the corners, the apexes are blind. So let's see tomorrow, but it's one of those tracks that you can say it's going to be difficult and challenging.

Lewis, have you done anything on simulation?

Lewis HAMILTON: Good morning everyone. Yeah, I think everyone's done simulations probably. It's quite an interesting track. It's quite difficult to learn initially but it looks fantastic to drive. I really started to enjoy it once I got used to it, which took perhaps a little bit longer than some of the other circuits to learn but it's going to be very interesting this weekend.

Sergio?

Sergio PEREZ: I haven't done any simulator, we don't have one with Sauber. I've seen some video of the track and I walked the track and it's amazing. I think it will be very enjoyable for all the drivers.

Fernando, have you been around the circuit, done any simulation?

Fernando ALONSO: Yeah, we did some simulator programmes, after Singapore it was that we started. A bit more intense this last week and yesterday I also did two laps on the bicycle. The programme is to do some more this afternoon. So, we are more or less ready. The track seems spectacular, very, very nice. It will be challenging for us drivers and for the engineers as well. I think it will be a good show for everybody and hopefully some good overtakings as well, opportunities around the track. It can be a very good weekend.

Sebastian?

Sebastian VETTEL: We also prepared in the simulator but apart from that I haven't seen much. I will walk the track this afternoon but I think if we have to wait until we get out until we have a judgement on how the circuit feels. So by the looks of it, it looks quite interesting, but you know it's always the feeling you get inside the car that is most important, so I'm looking forward to tomorrow.

Kimi?

Kimi RAIKKONEN: I've only seen the video from when they did the demo run here, but I haven't seen the circuit itself. I will see tomorrow how it goes.

You won't even walk the circuit this afternoon?

KR: I don't know yet. I'll have to see.

After the comment from the last grand prix, it's good to see...

KR: Well, I mean, if I found a golf cart or something.

Some individual questions now. Pedro, there have obviously been some stories around about HRT etc. What can you tell us? What are your own personal plans? What do you know? Maybe you can't tell us anything.

DLR: Well, unfortunately there's not much I can say really. It's a corporate decision, which I'm not involved in. All I can say is, we are here, that there are two grands prix to go and no matter what's going on in the background, we will give it 100 per cent like we've always done. No matter in which position we fight and who we fight against we will do a professional job. We are here to do that and there are two very interesting grands prix left. Hopefully there's some more retirements than in the last few races, even more and we can achieve a good result. But first we have to finish the races and make sure that we do as much as we can on both Friday sessions that are left.

Lewis, obviously winner of the last US Grand Prix which took place on this soil in 2007 from pole position, an interesting comment from your team boss saying that you regret your decision, or you may have regretted your decision to change teams. What's your reply to that?

LH: Yeah, I was a little bit surprised to hear that. It's clearly absolutely not the case. But I've got a great team and I've been with them such a long time. So, I'm sure everyone has emotions within the team but I'm still here giving 100 per cent to them for the last two races. Of course it's quite emotional for me but I'm very, very happy with the decision I've made.

Sergio, do you call this your home grand prix? To what extent is it?

SP: Well, it's the closest one I have ever raced in the last eight, nine years in my life, so I expect to have a lot of support here, many Mexicans coming

because it's quite close to Mexico. I think it will be a great weekend.

Fernando and Sebastian. It's interesting to come to this race with the championship the way it is with this very much a level playing field: a circuit that no-one's ever raced on before. What sort of preparations can you make? What are your feelings? What sort of plans do you have? Has anything changed for you just for this one race?

FA: Nothing really changed in terms of preparation and approach for the weekend. Maximum concentration, maximum effort from everybody in the team. Preparing some new parts that we are bringing every grand prix and hopefully that we can test them tomorrow and have some feedback about that. Try to do our very good, smooth Friday, good test and here, maybe more important than some other circuits, to do a lot of laps, to learn the racing lines, the possibilities and some... maybe tricks... that the circuit can have. And a good Saturday, try to be in the best position possible for the race and 58 or 60 or whatever laps, qualifying laps, Sunday try to score as many points as possible. Exactly the same as every other weekend.

Sebastian, is there any more you can do? I mean you do a huge amount anyway...

SV: Usually you try to prepare as much as you can. It's not the first time we've raced on a completely new circuit. Obviously we had this kind of challenge previous years as well. I think we do what we can. The most important is to get into the rhythm tomorrow and have a good start and go from there.

Kimi, winner of the last grand prix, what has changed in terms of your feeling coming to a grand prix. Has anything changed?

KR: Not really. Of course the team is happy, I'm happy that we finally win but it's a new place, new race again and we try to do the best. I don't expect we suddenly going to start winning or being in front. Probably it's going to be very similar to where we've been in the last races in top five and then go from there and see what happens.

Have they all brought their T-shirts with them?

KR: I don't know, I just arrived here. I don't know yet.

Sebastian, do you remember your first grand prix in America, and what sort of memories do you have?

SV: I remember my first race obviously. I think you can't forget. There are some positives, some negatives. I didn't have the best start, and not the best first corner but then it was quite an interesting race. And obviously a big challenge at the end of the race. I was physically destroyed, I remember that as well. And I knew that I had a lot to do - but I knew as well that's what I want to do in the future. Sitting here 100 races later is quite crazy in a way. I think if the number gives you anything, it's just that you don't realise how quickly time goes by. I think it's always like that when you do something you enjoy a lot. You don't count the days and the months and the years going by. Looking back now it doesn't seem a long time ago but looking on the calendar it's five years ago. So... yeah.

Fernando, what is your memory for your hundredth grand prix?

FA: I don't remember anything. I don't even know where it was.

Question for Pedro, the Spanish media were yesterday reporting that there are concerns within the team that, due to a lack of spare parts, your cars aren't actually going to be safe to run this weekend. Is that media scandal or have those voices, have those concerns been voiced inside the team?

DLR: It's something that I'm not aware of and it's the first news comes from you. All I can say is that we might be modest, we are small and we are what we are - but we are a professional Formula One team and for sure when we start running it's because the car is safe. I'm experienced enough to... y'know, I would never jump into an unsafe car because of parts being too old. So no, the answer is, the car is slow but it's safe.

Sebastian, I was wondering what it would mean to you if, at the end of the week, you have won your third world drivers' [title].

SV: I think it would be incredible. Obviously it has been a very tough season, up and down I think for everyone. Extremely challenging, different to previous years in many ways. I think we learned a lot and did way less mistakes this year. We have a very competitive car, we've had one since the start of the season. Maybe sometimes not good enough to win but still good enough to collect a lot of points. I think that put us in a very strong position and we are able to fight for the championship. Only two races to go, so whatever happens this weekend, before anything happens we have to make sure we get the maximum on Friday, on Saturday, because the points are there to grab on Sunday and not before. But for sure it would mean a lot, and probably difficult now to find the right words.

Fernando, what would it mean to you to do it?

FA: I think we need to wait and see. I think as Sebastian said, now is very difficult to imagine what it can mean or what emotions that you could feel. We'll just concentrate in our job and try to do a good weekend and then fighting in Brazil for the championship, because in my case I cannot do anything here. I can only save this much points and wait for Brazil.

Just one more to Lewis. You'd like to be where those guys are, gunning for your third... how hard is it for you to watch on knowing that you are not involved in that? Maybe you could speak about how much respect you have for these guys and how brilliantly they're each doing as well?

LH: I think it goes without saying that these two are obviously two of the best here. What they've achieved it absolutely incredible and all of us other drivers are trying our hardest to aspire to do the same. They're both incredible professional. Amazing to see how professional they are considering how much pressure there is on the both of them. But they're both World Champions, they handle it no problem. And as for me, it is what it is. Happy just to be here fighting. I've got two last races in my team and just want to do the best job and try and see if we can still fight with them, even though we're not fighting for the championship.

Question for Fernando. Sebastian will have his 100th race this week and you are almost 200 and yet both of you are going for the third championship. Can't believe that 2005, 2006 you already won two and now there is another guy, half the races that you did and will go for the third. How do you feel about that?

FA: Yeah. I think it's normal, it's motorsport. When I won the second championship I was also around this number of races. I start in 2003 in Renault and then in 2006 won the second title. And 2007 fight for the third title until the last race, so similar of what Sebastian is now. It's good, it's sport and everyone has his own career. We saw many examples in Formula One. We saw with all the drivers, with Michael, now after winning seven titles, three years with not very good results. We saw Barrichello for example, was a man who raced more times here in Formula One, he was fighting for Q1 with Williams and fighting for world championship with Brawn GP the following [preceding] year. It's up and down for everybody. I'm proud of my

nearly 200 grand prix, always fighting with all the cars, always winning some grand prix every year and yeah, fighting for the world championship already four or five years. So, it's good and I'm happy.

Sergio, could you quantify emotionally how you're feeling? You started in Guadalajara and now you're not that far away; this track has been erected over the last year. How do you feel emotionally about the evolution of your career and how you're here, so close to home?

SP: I feel very happy to be so close to home. I left Mexico at a very young age. All these guys, they always do a race or two during the year in their own countries and they have done all their careers in their countries. I had to move to their countries to do my own career which means that I left Mexico at a very young age. I think it's the closest that I will race. I will have all my family - even my grandmother is coming here, my friends, all the people who never saw me racing live, they will be here, plus lot of Mexican fans, so it's great. I feel very emotional about this weekend.

Fernando, after the aero tests Ferrari had recently, are you now more or less optimistic?

FA: Same.

To Fernando: as you said, it's not the first time you have fought for the World Championship at the last races. What's different, compared to the past? How have you changed compared to the past?

FA: I'm much more relaxed, much more focused. In 2006, I arrived at the last race fighting with Michael in Brazil. It was quite stressful, quite an intense weekend and not easy to get focused or sleep or things like that because it was a very emotional weekend. The year after, 2007, it was also a very stressful last race, three of us fighting for the World Champion: Lewis, Kimi and me and it was also a stressful weekend and not easy to do things. In 2010, we arrived in Abu Dhabi, again fighting for the World Championship at the last race. I was much more calm there, I was more confident and things in the race, in the weekend were quite good for us and we did more or less - in terms of preparation and approach - it was much more calm and more mature, I felt, in 2010. The race was what it was and we didn't win in the end but feeling-wise we were much more prepared. In these last two races, I feel, as I said before, completely normal. It's good experience. It's the fourth time we have been fighting for the World Championship up to the last race - hopefully - and you really feel the difference, being much more focused, concentrated, trying to do the job and understanding that if you do everything perfectly you have a chance; if you make a mistake you will lose the chance, so let's focus on us.

Fernando, is it an advantage for you that you've never raced here before this weekend, in terms of the fact that you need to take it to the next round, and also, just how confident are you that you are going to make it, and if you are, what gives you that confidence?

FA: I don't think it's an advantage for it to be a new circuit. I think we all will adapt very quickly in first practice and we all have simulators and everything that we use to prepare for the race, so I think that's more or less the same as every other race. Confident? I'm very confident, I trust my team, I trust myself. We are honest with ourselves, we know that we don't have the quickest package out there and we've qualified an average of sixth or seventh this season, so if we see that on Saturday we are sixth or seventh, people will say 'maybe you say bye bye to the title'. No. I think it's our normal position but even with this normal position, we were leading the championship until three races ago and we are ten points behind the leader, so this is not our strong point. Our strong point is to score more points than the others on Sunday and I'm sure we will do this in the next two races.

Lewis and Kimi: if you have a winning package this weekend - if after qualifying you realise you have a chance, what can you do not to disturb the World Championship battle between these two?

LH: Go for it Kimi, I would love to hear what you have to say.

KR: We try to do the best that we can as a team in the race, and wherever we end up, if we take some points out of either of them, that's racing, that's life. We don't try to disturb anything, we're just doing our normal race and see what happens. I'm not looking who is there or if I'm taking points from them or somebody else. We just try to win, if not, score as much as we can.

LH: It was a good answer. Yeah. We have no means to try and get in the way of anyone, but we want to beat them, we're still fighting for position in the championship, even though we're not fighting for the top position so we just have to focus on our job. Kimi did a great job in the last race. I think we were very strong as well, hopefully we will have less reliability issues this weekend and hopefully we can compete right at the front with all these guys.

Question for Kimi, Pedro, Lewis and Sergio: between Sebastian and Fernando, who would be your bet for the championship?

KR: I think whoever scores most points will get it and deserves it. Right now Sebastian is in a bit of a stronger position but we've seen before many times that you have one bad race and things are completely different.

DLR: I think that until Brazil, I'm not prepared to answer this question. I don't know. We'll see.

LH: I don't know really. I think you just put money on both of them. Either way, you have a good chance of winning.

SP: Well, I think after this weekend we will have a better idea, but let's wait until Brazil. Everything can happen.

Sebastian and any other driver, what do you make of the request for drivers to clean up their language a little bit post-race and do you see that as an attempt to appease an American audience that might be a little sensitive to that sort of thing?

SV: I think if you're sensitive you should watch - I don't know - some kids' programme. You have the remote control in your hand, so you can chose. Surely it wasn't intentional at the last race. I think it's a bit unnecessary to create such a big fuss but anyway, if I said some things that weren't appropriate then I apologise but I think there's not a lot I have to do differently to succeed in that regard.

Checo, there have been lots of rumours recently over the past weeks that Esteban Gutierrez will finally be at Sauber; everything indicates that it will be so, but what would it mean to you to have two Mexicans in 2013, especially with someone so close to you, and someone that will be here presently?

SP: It will be good for the country, for us. I think he's a good driver. As you said, there have been a lot of rumours that he will be the driver taking my place at Sauber but at the moment I know as much as you do, so I have no idea as to who is going to come. If he comes, it will be good to have two Mexican drivers after so much time without a driver; now we are finally going to have two on the grid. If it happens I think it's great.

To all but Sebastian: do you feel that a driver getting the championship three times in a row is good for the sport, because fans are basically fearing a repeat of the Schumacher era when it got boring? You just turned the TV on and Schumacher won whatever happened and so they are a bit confused about this. What are your thoughts on this?

DLR: I will start, I will break the ice, iceman. I think that the important thing is really not how many championships one driver (wins) or if he dominates or there's an era related to a team or driver. I think the important thing really is that the championship is decided in the last race and by a

small amount of points. This is the deciding factor, and I think that this year is a great example of a great championship that hopefully is decided in the last race between great drivers, great teams. That's my view. Those championships, like last year, were pretty boring for all except Sebastian. When there is such domination, it's not as good. That's my view.

LH: Yeah, I agree with Pedro. I think to keep the championship title battle right to the last races is for me the most exciting. When I've watched it in the past, when the championship's finished before, there's not really a lot of point watching the last few races. The suspense is not there, so I think we've just got to try - and this year is a good year - to show that hopefully these guys will go to the last race and people will enjoy it.

SP: I think that last year was maybe a bit boring, with Sebastian winning a lot, but this year it has been a great championship and I think the one that wins, it will be a great champion because it will be well deserved and it will be a great championship. It has been a great championship all year, with so many different winners in the beginning, and so many cars fighting for wins. I think it has been a great year, this year.

FA: Yeah, I think it's OK, to arrive to the last race; more interesting.

F1 United States Grand Prix – F1 report

It may be a new circuit, but if Sebastian Vettel's pace in F1 is anything to go by, the Circuit of the Americas will be something of the same old, same old.

Lewis Hamilton was comfortably fastest for the bulk of the morning session, but shortly before the chequered flag fluttered down Vettel pulled off his usual trick of finding a rocket in the back of his car and delivered a lap time to match – one that was 1.4s faster than any of the opposition. And to make matters worse for his rivals, the Red Bull driver did it on the harder tyre compound.

What with this being a new circuit there were all sorts of slides, spins, and undramatic offs as drivers felt their way around, bedding in the green track surface with a fresh coating of Pirelli rubber. Luckily for the hard-working mechanics, there were no incidents that made rebuilds a necessity.

While Vettel and Hamilton were much faster than the rest of the front runners, times were tightly clustered in the mid-field, with many drivers well out of what one would consider to be their realistic position. With the exception of Lotus, F1 at COTA was a comparison of simulator technology, as those teams with the best simulators – McLaren, Ferrari, Red Bull, and Lotus – tended to be faster than the rest. Their drivers approached their early laps with a marked confidence not shown by the opposition.

Further down the pack, the most interesting development came about via Marussia, where Charles Pic – who is either auditioning for a drive with another team or fighting to save his existing seat despite a season of strong performances – comfortably out-paced both Caterhams.

Marussia are now ahead of Caterham in the constructors' standings, despite the fact that the green and gold racers have been comfortably faster since both teams made their debut in 2010, and while we have become accustomed to the sight of Pic beating teammate Timo Glock, seeing him best the Caterhams is an uncommon occurrence.

The Banbury racers have been steadily improving throughout the season with a view to becoming the front running of the backmarkers, and while they have held that position in championship terms since the Singapore race of attrition, this marks the first occasion where Marussia look to be serious opposition for Caterham out on track.

Both HRT cars were miles off the pace, which is hardly surprising. One outcome of the team's cash-flow problem is that they cannot afford to use the same simulation technology as the richer teams. At a new circuit such as this one, that equates to entering F1 totally blind.

F1 times (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.38.125s [30 laps]
 2. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.39.53s [28 laps]
 3. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.40.337s [29 laps]
 4. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.40.528s [29 laps]
 5. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.40.650s [30 laps]
 6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.40.966s [26 laps]
 7. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.41.023s [29 laps]
 8. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.41.036s [28 laps]
 9. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.41.159s [32 laps]
 10. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.41.473s [29 laps]
 11. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.41.783s [29 laps]
 12. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.41.825s [28 laps]
 13. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.41.833s [29 laps]
 14. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1.41.880s [23 laps]
 15. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1.41.998s [27 laps]
 16. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.42.539s [30 laps]
 17. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.42.588s [25 laps]
 18. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.43.288s [23 laps]
 19. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1.43.443s [28 laps]
 20. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.43.522s [23 laps]
 21. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.44.464s [24 laps]
 22. Bruno Senna (Williams) 1.44.548s [29 laps]
 23. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.46.917s [13 laps]
 24. Ma Qing Hua (HRT) 1.48.559s [19 laps]
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F1 United States Grand Prix – FP2 report

For those watching fans turned off by the relatively sedate F1, the second practice session at the Circuit of the Americas involved far more action to write home about.

Lewis Hamilton and Fernando Alonso swapped in and out of the top slot on the time sheets for the bulk of the session, before Sebastian Vettel popped up on fresh tyres and ruined everyone's party, crossing the line 1.4s faster than anyone else was capable of.

Making matters worse for Alonso, who needs a good result here if he is to keep his championship hopes alive going into Interlagos next week, Vettel's seemingly effortless performance came after the Red Bull driver sat out much of the session with a water leak.

Ferrari have finally upped their game on the development front, but the general feeling is that it's too little, too late to make much of an impact. The Scuderia conducted a straight-line aero test last week, and have brought a raft of new parts to Texas for Alonso and teammate Felipe Massa to evaluate. The signs are looking good, but the Red Bull – as ever – is looking better.

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas for the defending world champion, who has taken to the American track like a duck to water – a duck equipped with a car perfectly suited to the fast esses designed to echo the Maggots/Becketts complex at Silverstone.

With the grid still learning their way around this technical and challenging circuit it was hardly surprising to see a seemingly endless stream of spins and offs, with Turn 19 catching out what felt like half the grid. Hamilton found Turn 13 to be a challenge, while both Vitaly Petrov and Timo Glock struggled with the impressive uphill Turn 1.

FP2 times (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.37.718s [17 laps]
2. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.38.475s [36 laps]
3. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.38.483s [35 laps]
4. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.38.748s [31 laps]
5. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.38.786s [32 laps]
6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.39.029s [33 laps]
7. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.39.448s [32 laps]
8. Bruno Senna (Williams) 1.39.531 [38 laps]
9. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.39.653s [36 laps]
10. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.40.115s [30 laps]
11. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1.40.166s [32 laps]
12. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.40.230s [35 laps]
13. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1.40.286s [32 laps]
14. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.40.326s [35 laps]
15. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.40.435s [30 laps]
16. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.40.516s [32 laps]
17. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.40.700s [34 laps]
18. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.41.430s [35 laps]
19. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1.42.476s [38 laps]
20. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.42.652s [33 laps]
21. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.42.846s [38 laps]
22. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.43.538s [38 laps]
23. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.44.453s [16 laps]
24. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.45.114s [20 laps]

F1 United States Grand Prix – Friday press conference

With six serious F1 stakeholders present, the first senior team personnel press conference on US soil in five years focused on the business of breaking such an important market.

Present were Cyril Abiteboul (Caterham), Eric Boullier (Lotus), Stefano Domenicali (Ferrari), Norbert Haug (Mercedes), Christian Horner (Red Bull), and Martin Whitmarsh (McLaren).

A question, first of all, to all of you: your overall impressions of the circuit and the challenge. What have you found? What do you think of it?

Cyril ABITEBOUL: First of all, it's great to be back in the US. It's a great market, a great market for the sport, for motorsport. A great market also for the automotive business. Looking at the track, well, it looks challenging. It looks great in terms of the layout. It looks like, also, it's quite icy, both in the air but also on the track – quite slippery. So it will be interesting. Obviously, it was not easy to do a lot of work today, as we need for the track to stabilise, so that we are able to see the impact of our settings and our change to the set-up and distinguish that from the evolution of the track. Not so tricky but really interesting, truly, from inside and hopefully from outside also.

Norbert, I'll ask you about the market in general, the importance of F1 here later, but just the circuit for the moment and how Mercedes have found it?

Norbert HAUG: Well, I think the circuit is fantastic and congratulations to the organisers, to Bernie. To get this event on the calendar is fantastic. The US is so important for Formula One. A race here belongs to a world championship, a true world championship. We have been here before and

after a five-year break we are back again. The circuit is very, very demanding, very challenging. The track is developing currently, getting better and better, more rubber on the asphalt. But I think it has huge, huge potential. I think it will be televised worldwide of course, like usual, and make a big impact. So, this is a race with enormous potential and kind of a milestone in Formula One's history I would say.

Eric?

Eric BOULLIER: Well, I'll just follow my colleagues. Congratulations to the organiser, the promoter, who put this amazing track in place and constructed it. Thanks for Bernie for bringing us here. Obviously, as everybody says, America is important for everybody. I think it's quite an impressive track with a different, you know, layout. I think we could see today, obviously, the track evolution was huge. The drivers found it challenging, so that's promising for the race.

Martin, the challenges of the circuit in particular? And what is it about Turn 19. Has anyone explained to maybe the front row here what it is about Turn 19 that everyone seems to be going off there?

Martin WHITMARSH: It's an enormously challenging circuit. I think we can all be a little bit repetitive in these responses but again, I think we have to congratulate everyone, Bernie and the organisers, for putting together not only a great circuit with great facilities and also it's great to see how many people were here on a Friday. So we've got to make sure that as Formula One as a whole, we put on a show this weekend; that we reach out over the coming year and we build this into a fantastic event. Clearly, the foundations are here to be able to provide that. I think it's for us now to work as hard as we can to create the interest here. As far as the track is concerned, there are a lot of different corners on this circuit. I think [Hermann] Tilke has brought an assembly of corners from the other circuits he has built and tried everything here. The topography is great and there's something about hills and dips and blind corners that make it very challenging for drivers but also make it look great and spectacular to drive on. But I think today, as has been said, the circuit seemed very shiny. I think it's exacerbated by a reasonably conservative tyre choice here. So, I think we're going to have to work hard, certainly we know we've got to work hard on low fuel; we found it a little bit easier on high fuel, which suggests we weren't working the tyres well enough on low fuel. Some of the corners have got some unusual camber, which just makes it an interesting challenge. I think it's slippery, some interesting cambers on the circuit and some interesting compromises you've got to try and find between the vast variety of corners we have.

Christian, do you think it suits the Red Bulls?

Christian HORNER: Yeah, it's been a good day mainly for us today. Again, it's incredible to see what's been done in the last 18 months. We came here 18 months ago when it really was just a construction site and we ran a car with David Coulthard on just dirt and rubble that existed here. And to see what's happened and how the track's been built and the undulations and the corners, the way it's been incorporated – just hats off to the Circuit of the Americas and to Bernie for convincing them to take up this race and so on. It's a great challenge and a great spectacle and hopefully we can put on a good show for the American fans and public and it will be a race to remember.

Stefano, good for Ferrari?

Stefano DOMENICALI: First of all, just to start in a different way: happy birthday to Christian, he's getting older but with good results. No, I would say that everything has been said. For us, I don't know. We are there. Today, it's difficult to judge the performance because you never know the first day as we said with such a new track. But for me, the most important thing with regard to your question Bob, is that I'm sure it will be a great show for the Americans, because we need that in order to make sure that this is the first day of a long term days when we speak every day about Formula One. For me the most important thing from let's say now, from this weekend onward, is really to make sure that our American friends speak about Formula One every day. In order to build up what is Formula One is all about. I think that being here in this condition, helped by what Martin was saying about the tyres, makes very spectacular situation for everyone to... and I'm sure that will be the case on Sunday.

Thank you very much. Again, to all of you: the importance of a race in America for your sponsors. Perhaps you can talk about that. Different priorities for different people obviously. What does it mean for Caterham and for your sponsors, GE for example?

CA: For Caterham as an automotive company this is crucial. Obviously our current product range is not particularly adapted for the US but it's still important for the future. The US is important because, for instance, car sales, car registrations in the US has picked up at the same level almost from what they were before the crisis. In comparison to what's still happening in Europe, to the slowdown in some other markets like South America, North America and the US in particular is now back to a level where it was before. It is important for automotive companies, which are supporting mainly our show and Formula One in general. For Caterham more specifically, yeah, obviously we've got those links with GE, with Dell, with Intel. We've got a lot of people here. That's important because those companies are used to other sports properties, like Olympics, like basketball, like a lot of things. There are different approaches to sports between the US and Europe but I don't think it's for here to discuss and debate about the merits of the difference, but I think it will be interesting to see how we make a good impression and also make sure that we are sustainable like Stefano was saying just before.

Norbert?

NH: Well for us this is obviously very, very important. It is the biggest market of Mercedes-Benz passenger cars worldwide. We are very successful here and still growing year-by-year. We have a production plant in Tuscaloosa obviously, building 130,00 cars here: M-Class, ML, GL, the R-Class, and C-Class will be built here later on in Tuscaloosa and Arizona, so it's a very, very important... you can say the most important market of course. And we will use that in the future, this event, and we will integrate it, our American colleagues will integrate it into their marketing strategies. That's absolutely perfect and again, thanks for the guys here for having invested in these great facilities and thanks to Bernie to bring America back, thanks to the teams, that we all wanted to go in that direction and I think this is really a very, very important step for Formula One.

Eric?

EB: First from a team point of view, on my shirt you can see I have American companies like Unilever and Microsoft and Avanade and obviously a lot of technical partners as well are coming from America so it's obviously very important for us to be here. I could see yesterday on my way coming here, I met a lot of fans in the airport and I was quite surprised to see all these American fans; they are very hungry to see Formula One, to be close to Formula One and I think all of the figures here are just talking for themselves because it's sold out since a long time. I think a lot of teams here have hospitality, corporate hospitality, full of people – so there is a great interest in Formula One and in this race particularly. I think it's good for Formula One to be back here, yes definitely. Any team here will justify that we need America in Formula One and Formula One needs to be here.

Martin?

MW: I think in summary, the USA is just a huge consumer market and I think you've only got to walk up and down the paddock here, see the names and all the brands that fortunately invest in Formula One and allow us to go Formula One racing. Nearly all of those brands if you look at them, the

USA must be in the top three of their markets around the world. So it's fundamentally important to the brands that invest and fund Formula One. This is really the country of the automobile and we've never come here and done a good enough job to create the interest. We've got a very different product from NASCAR. Obviously NASCAR reaches an exciting finale this weekend, which is an unfortunate coincidence, but I think we've got to work very hard to be as commercially smart as NASCAR and compete. I think we've got a different product, an exciting product and again, we've got to work very, very hard to make sure we sell it in America in a way that we haven't done in the past.

Christian?

CH: It's crucial for Formula One. To be a true world championship you've got to have a race in America. And for the first time ever we've got a circuit that's specifically made to bring out the best and showcase Formula One cars. And I think the circuit that's been built here will do exactly that. Hopefully we can put a great show on for the fans. In some ways it's surprising for us to see how much interest there is in the US, how much knowledge about Formula One, how the town has come alive with Formula One coming into Texas. I think it's a crucial race for Red Bull. America is Red Bull's biggest market and certainly for our partners as well. Infiniti sell more cars here than anywhere else in the world and partners like AT&T... it's an important market for us, it's our biggest-ever race from a hospitality and guest point of view in our short history, so it's a great place to be coming back into the US and hopefully we can have a great race on Sunday.

SD: For us it's the same. It's the biggest market for Ferrari. It's a very important market for our group with the brand of Chrysler and Fiat Cinquecento so it's something that for sure... and as you can see we have a Ferrari Challenge series running during this weekend because we have a lot of clients, a lot of customers and as we all said, it really is imperative to stay here for a long time and to consider it as a starting point for something. We have the duty to, let's say, teach to the American approach on the sport something different, and we need to make sure that with everything, we are able to convince this market, also from the sporting point of view, that Formula One is the future. And that has added to the American sport that are very important, for sure.

I have a question for Stefano and Christian. Obviously this is a great event but we have the championship situation: two races to go, if you can please describe the moods in your respective teams and what prospects you see for the remaining two races.

CH: You want to go first?

SD: I have no problem, on that I should be quicker! For sure we know it is a difficult situation because we are behind but as I said to my people there is nothing to lose apart from doing the best job that we can and at the end of the day we will see where we will land. But we know we have a Sebastian that is very strong with a fantastic car and we need to make sure that we provide to Fernando the best car that we can and doing the best job that we can on the track. We have seen in the past that everything can happen so we need to believe on this up to the end. As we always said, the numbers will be done at the end.

CH: Our approach is to treat this race very much like any other. We've come here to try to get the best out of the weekend. To try to get the best out of ourselves as a team and the championships will then hopefully look after themselves. We've worked hard to get ourselves into a strong position in the Constructors' Championship and obviously Sebastian has done a tremendous job to haul himself back into the Drivers' Championship after the summer break - we were close to 40 points behind Fernando. With 50 points still available in the Drivers' Championship, you can take nothing for granted. We've seen how quickly things can change. We know that Fernando is a formidable competitor and Ferrari as a team. We've just got to focus on ourselves and look to get the best out of our package here this weekend.

Charlie spoke to us yesterday about the prospect of adding points to super licenses instead of or in addition to the existing reprimand system. Could I please have your thoughts on whether you think offences both driving and non-driving should be treated on a points scale.

SD: I don't know what Charlie said yesterday, to be honest.

CH: Charlie said there's going to be points on your license now - is that it? Right, 12 points...

SD: Team principle included...

CH: I've got nine so... Martin, I'm surprised you've still got a license...

MW: I haven't always. I think at the moment you're meant to receive three reprimands and then you get something so I think it's just presumably a further elaboration on that point. Like all things, any penalty system, providing it's administered in a correct, consistent manner then why should we have any problem with it? It's the same for all drivers and the same for all teams.

To all of you: regarding this season, in what way has Sebastian Vettel impressed you the most and do you think that now Sebastian is a better driver than in previous seasons?

CH: Sebastian is a remarkable young man. He's continued to evolve as a driver and as a person. He's never given up this year. He's driven with great determination. It's been a tough year for him and the team, but he's fought hard to get himself back into this championship and he's driven extremely well. It's a halcyon period for Formula One at the moment: there are some formidable drivers on the grid at the moment. Any driver, either Fernando or Sebastian, if they prevail in this year's championship they will be fully deserving of that title. I think he's continued as an individual to evolve. It's only his hundredth Grand Prix this weekend and to have won 26 of those races, to have had more than 30 pole positions, to be a double World Champion at the age of 25 is something quite remarkable. But he carries that extremely well. I think he's a good ambassador for the sport He applies himself in an extremely focused way to the job in hand. That's my summary.

MW: Well again, I think none of us were as qualified as Christian to answer this one really, but I think what you can say is that if you contrast this with last year... then Sebastian had an incredible start to the season and had great momentum and I guess you've got to say that it's impressive how he's come back this year and fought back into the position that he's in. Obviously the team's done a good job as well, but I think it's been a more difficult year for him to get into a championship-winning position than he's experienced before and you've got to give a lot of credit to him and to the team for being able to do that, so he's done a good job. He's learned some more languages as well, hasn't he?

CH: Yes! From the mechanics!

CA: Maybe I can just say a word, because I've lived a part of the season at Renault and as Renault obviously Sebastian is one of our customers.

Obviously there's been a couple of failures that he's had to live with and I think that he's shown - even at the difficult moments - he's shown a great respect for everyone and all the parties involved, and I think that as such he has demonstrated his stature that he's clearly a grown-up.

EB: Just a quick one but that basically as a pure driver he's keeping developing his speed and getting more mature, definitely, more consistent and can bounce back from any difficult situation and take any opportunity so definitely you can see him growing even higher as a World Champion and future World Champion..

I just wondered, Stefano, if you'd like to state the case for Fernando, who's also had a brilliant season, because he's not had the fastest car, so I just thought that in contrast to the Seb stuff it might be nice...?

SD: Well, I think that Fernando this year has, up to now, done an incredible season, maybe the best, up to now, considering above all the starting point

that we had at the beginning of the season with the car. Without maybe something not connected to any kind of his fault, maybe the position in the championship would have been different at this stage. But that's the way it is, so we need to start from that, but for sure, Fernando's season, in terms of maturity, in terms of driving, is really - I would say - incredible and I rate this season so far, honestly, as one of the best of his career, considering the situation that he was in together with the team, at the beginning, above all.

Regardless of what happens in the championship this year, it's really difficult to judge whether Seb or Fernando is the better driver of the two unless they're in the same machinery, I suppose.

SD: We can do a Ferrari challenge because we have all the cars here, but that is part of Formula One. For sure drivers can make the difference but alone cannot really win. It's a matter of teamwork, it's a matter of a good performing car, a reliable car, good teamwork during the race in terms of strategy, good pit stops. It's all about this. This is really the best thing about Formula One I would say.

Martin, why do you think Lewis will regret his move to Mercedes next year?

MW: Well again, as in a lot of journalistic quotes, they're not always wholly accurate and not always completely in context but I think the question I was asked was 'would I or would he regret...' and I said 'well both of us might do,' but again, I don't think any of us can look forward and predict with absolute certainty what's going to happen. At the moment, we're focused on racing the last two races and we'll focus on that, try and do a good job. I'm sure Lewis will do a great job next year driving a Mercedes.

I want to ask any of you about the tyre challenge this weekend. Mr Martin (Whitmarsh) mentioned that the tyre (selection) was probably a conservative choice for this weekend from Pirelli. I wanted to ask how do you compare that with the braking zones, because the braking zones are very hard? I saw many drivers locking up in the braking zones. Is that helpful or not? How are you going to cope with that? And how many stops do you think you will be doing?

EB: On paper, we could say maybe a conservative choice but it's normal for Pirelli as well. It's a new track, new tarmac so no racing before so everything has to be built up. We could see a lot of track evolution over these two days, during the two sessions, so that obviously has to be taken into consideration for the rest of the weekend, especially for qualifying and the race. Actually our engineers are still analysing with Pirelli the wear and the degradation and these kind of parameters, so at the end, I think it's just a choice which was done and we have to deal with it and we cannot complain or do anything.

NH: We have to have an understanding for Pirelli in this case. Of course it's easy to say if you would have brought softer tyres but I think they just didn't have enough data about the circuit so they didn't exactly know how challenging this track would be so they went on the safe side and I think that's understandable.

MW: We probably felt happier about the tyres here than we did when we were in Indianapolis a few years ago, so conservative is not such a bad thing.

Martin, you said earlier that it's a shame that the race this weekend coincides with the NASCAR Sprint Cup finale. On the provisional calendar for next year, it also conflicts with the NASCAR Sprint Cup finale and I was wondering if any of you had plans to object or get the calendar modified so that we actually could break America properly?

MW: Again, I don't know about the others, but we're not involved in setting the calendar. I think it appears to be a bit unfortunate but we're probably (involved in) a different market and I guess it's difficult when you're arranging calendars to always get them... there's always another sporting event in most nations that you try to dodge around. I don't know how significant it is. As I say, this is a new market for us but it's obviously something that occurs. NASCAR draws a huge huge audience, both in attendance and in television so we've given ourselves a bit of a challenge there, I think. I wasn't aware of the clash next year.

Speed are giving the NASCAR finale 30 hours of TV coverage this weekend. I think F1 is getting something like two and a half, so it is a bit of a problem for the dedicated motor sport fan.

CH: I think the major problem is that whatever weekend you stick a Formula One race on there's going to be a NASCAR race. Looking at their calendar, they seem to race every single weekend. Some of us think that 20 races is a lot. I think that those guys are doing a fair bit more.

SD: To be honest I have to say that I didn't know about that. I think that, for sure, in terms of quantity, there's not even a fight because it is impossible to fight in that respect. As I said at the beginning, we take this momentum to speak about Formula One because I don't think it's only a matter of having on one hand the main final and on the other hand one race in America but also it's a matter of growing the attention of Formula One and then maybe in the future, the hope is that if you have on the same day the two different events, we have it the other way around, meaning that we have done a great job in terms of promotion. That should really be our target at the moment.

Formula One has arguably never been more competitive from the front of the grid to the back so driver talent is therefore the most important thing that you're looking for. We know that drivers with financial backing still play a part, certainly in the second half of the grid, the back half of the grid. I wonder if the front three can just give me their view on that and say if that's still an inevitable part of Formula One, despite the need to cut costs and perhaps Cyril could explain how important a driver with financial backing is to one of the smaller teams?

CH: Well, I think that since Formula One started in 1950, there has always been a mixture of drivers that have paid for seats and drivers that have been paid as professionals. The demands and costs of Grand Prix racing have always required that and it's no different today where there's drivers that have perhaps were associated with sponsors but have still had to demonstrate their talent, demonstrate their ability to warrant a place. In a perfect scenario, you'd have the top 24 drivers on the grid that were the most talented 24 drivers in the world in a Formula One event. The reality is that isn't the case and I think that while Formula One is a commercial business and there are commercial pressures, I think you will always have that balance, but I think that what's good to see is that there have been schemes that have been set up to support young drivers who have found their way onto the grid that perhaps were associated with sponsorship but have also had to earn that position.

SD: I agree what Christian said but one point to add: the less chances that we give to drivers to test on the track, the more it's likely that we have drivers than can present themselves to a team with whatever you call it, with money to bring with them, and this is why we are so keen to have some more testing, also for them to make sure that they are able to show to everyone how good they are on the track, on top of how good they are in bringing money to the team.

MW: I think there are some good pay drivers out there at the moment but to my mind, there are probably too many teams that have to rely upon pay drivers and I think that's a little bit sad for the sport and I think it's an indication that we've got too much financial pressure in the sport at the moment. I think you'll always have a few but I think too great a proportion of the grid, in my opinion, has to rely upon that and that just tells us that we've got to work harder to bring costs down in the sport, because it does distort... unfortunately the three teams at the front here certainly have to pay their drivers but I think we need to really improve the financial health of the sport, such that there's a smaller proportion of pay drivers, in my

personal opinion.

CA: The point that Martin was making is very true about the world economics and I think that it's a little bit more complex than that, actually. I don't like the notion of pay driver because I see them more as a commercial element which obviously is crucial when you are at the back of the grid, you don't attract the sort of TV coverage that the other teams attract and that's a reality. We are not complaining. We have to make our way through the grid, up to the (front of) the grid to get more coverage but before that happens, obviously the drivers are as ambassadors, a good commercial vehicle who have a value for any form of sponsors. Just talking in terms of contracts, usually we don't have any drivers who are paying for a seat, actually. It's just that he's introducing some sponsors to us who are helping the team to finance the season and financing their salaries, so actually in reality, there are no paying drivers as such. I don't want to start a polemic but even the best drivers in the world which are in the first row teams, there are some sponsors who are there also because they are there and I don't think you will qualify any of those drivers as pay drivers.

I was talking to Mr Ecclestone yesterday asking about the Mexican Grand Prix and he said that it's hard because Texas has set a new standard. He said that no other country can run a Grand Prix if it has a facility that is less than this one that we see here in Texas. According to the world economic climate I would disagree but I would like to have your opinion on that.

NH: It would be nice if all the Grand Prix race tracks in the future would have a comparable standard to these facilities here, especially the race track is fantastic, the layout is great. It would be nice. I have some doubts whether this standard will be guaranteed for all the race tracks in the future. It does not necessarily need to be the case in my view.

EB: It's not easy to comment on Bernie's ideas, Bernie's comments, but as Norbert just said, it's great for all of us, also for you journalists, to have these kind of facilities, to do all our work in nice conditions, for the mechanics, the engineers and everybody so yes, the standard is good and obviously we would be happy to have the same standard and again, I would be happy to race in Mexico. I've been racing in Mexico in the past and it's a different standard but still we can manage.

MW: Well, I think you've just got to ask the same question this time next week!

CH: I'm lost for words after Martin's totally politically incorrect comments about the Brazilian Grand Prix! I think that there's 20 races and there's a lot of competition for those positions on the calendar. There's new circuits that are coming in in the future; there's Sochi in Russia that's coming in. There's an awful lot of interest and where Bernie does an incredible job, he keeps bringing new venues to the calendar, whether it's Singapore, whether it's Abu Dhabi, whether it's here in Texas. Formula One is now out of balance between Europe and the rest of the world, but it just shows how the world and the markets are emerging. It's very healthy for Formula One to have that competition, to host a venue, because what Formula One does bring to that country, to that state is quite significant.

SD: Well, I think that for sure that Bernie is pushing towards a high standard in all the places that we have to go to. I think it's the correct policy that he has to apply. Then it's a matter of negotiation, a matter to see what is at the end of the day the complete package in terms of the globality of the product that you're going to bring with a new venue, with a new Grand Prix. As I said, it's correct that we always try to be at the top and then it's a matter to see what we can really do but it's important to go in a place where there is a passion for Formula One, there's the money for Formula One, there's the interest, because in that respect, I have to say Bernie always has a good vision to anticipate certain things and we need to make sure that hopefully also in Mexico this will happen very soon.

CA: I think everything has been said. If there is passion, I'm pretty sure there will be passion in Mexico, so why not? I'm not worried about some sort of standard because I think that passion is much more important. Personally, I remember my first race was in Magny Cours. I know it's a race that has been very much criticised by everyone but that's a race where I lived a fantastic moment and people were very enthusiastic there. Same thing with Canada and Montreal. I don't think this is seen as best in class of standard, but again I think this is one of the favourite races of the paddock and I think the public is again playing a big part because of the passion. I think this is what matters and the mix between the standard that Formula One wants to demonstrate, the statement that Formula One wants to make to its sponsors and to the internal feeling and nostalgia and passion that there is must be the right balance.

FI United States Grand Prix – FP3 report

Sebastian Vettel has now topped all three practice sessions at the Circuit of Americas in what could be dubbed a ten-gallon hat trick.

The Red Bull driver has not been lacking for pace all weekend, and while Lewis Hamilton has been able to get close to Vettel in practice, the smart money sees the defending world champion on pole position tomorrow.

There were a few mechanical problems to be dealt with this morning – Jean-Eric Vergne lost significant running time due to broken suspension: at the time of writing it was not yet established whether the fault was down to a materials issue, or if the Frenchman had done the damage himself while riding the kerbs. Kimi Raikkonen is rumoured to have gearbox issues, and may face a five-place grid penalty for an unscheduled gearbox replacement.

By and large, the session was a smooth one, with teams squeezing in as much track time as they could in order to lock down the ideal set-ups that would serve them well throughout qualifying and Sunday's race.

And then there was Sergio Perez, proving once again to the big cheeses at McLaren just how right they were to take a chance on the young Mexican as a suitable replacement for Hamilton.

While the Sauber driver has both pace and a light touch on rubber, his racecraft appears to have worsened since the news of his signing became official, with erratic driving become the norm, not the exception. There is that old motorsports adage that you can make a fast driver sensible but you can't make a sensible driver quick, but there will be a few more grey hairs in Woking as the team try to beat the impetuosity out of the boy.

The Austin edition of Perez the Prattish came about when the Sauber driver nearly drove into Charles Pic, causing both cars to spin. Pic's wing then clipped Perez' Sauber as both men attempted to get their cars facing in the right direction. Both drivers have been called to the stewards, and Perez – who has already received two penalties for similar incidents this season – is likely to receive a penalty.

FP3 times (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1:36.490s [18 laps]

2. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.36.748s [20 laps]
 3. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.37.001s [21 laps]
 4. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.37.180s [21 laps]
 5. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.37.247s [24 laps]
 6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.37.262s [27 laps]
 7. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.37.298s [18 laps]
 8. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.37.415s [20 laps]
 9. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.37.495s [20 laps]
 10. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.37.538s [20 laps]
 11. Bruno Senna (Williams) 1.37.569s [21 laps]
 12. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.37.760s [21 laps]
 13. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1.37.765s [26 laps]
 14. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.37.953s [23 laps]
 15. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.38.547s [23 laps]
 16. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.38.653s [22 laps]
 17. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1.38.753s [11 laps]
 18. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.39.689s [12 laps]
 19. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.40.407s [23 laps]
 20. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.40.753s [19 laps]
 21. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1.41.011s [19 laps]
 22. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.41.466s [19 laps]
 23. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.43.563s [21 laps]
 24. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.44.043s [23 laps]
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F1 United States Grand Prix – Q1 report

As the pitlane opened for the first phase of qualifying at the United States Grand Prix, track temperatures were up to 31 degrees, giving the drivers a much better chance of getting their tyres into the optimal operating window in fairly short order.

It was a difficult lunch break for the Sauber mechanics, who had a tough job getting Sergio Perez' car ready in time after the Mexican ragged his floor in FP3. But their hard work paid off, and Perez was able to leave the pitlane shortly after Q1 began.

As is always the case in Q1, the majority of teams completed their installation laps and early runs on the harder tyre compound; there is little sense in wasting the softer rubber which looks as though it will be the better option for Sunday's race.

There were struggles in the COTA media centre when the TV feed disappeared entirely. When the visuals returned, the lap and sector times disappeared. These elementary mistakes have no place at a facility as high tech as the one in Austin.

It was the Lotus pair who set the pace early on in Q1, when the Red Bulls, McLarens, and Ferraris were still in their respective garages. The early lap times were around two seconds slower than those set in FP3, but times set on exploratory laps count for very little.

Once the Ferraris were out on track it was interesting to see Felipe Massa best his teammate's time two laps running. While there's no denying Massa's talent, the Brazilian driver has spent much of the past two seasons hiding his light under a considerable bushel.

With seven minutes remaining of Q1, all barring Kamui Kobayashi had set times, but the dropout zone was comprised of a surprising mix: Nico Rosberg and Michael Schumacher joined the HRT pair, both Caterhams and Kobayashi.

As the clock approached the five minute mark, Rosberg saved himself and the dropout zone began to take on its more traditional composition, with one notable – if temporary – exception. Timo Glock is currently in P16, ahead of the Toro Rosso of Daniel Ricciardo.

Rosberg continued to hover on the edge of the dropout zone as the clock counted down, while Vitaly Petrov has yet to set a time that would see him qualify within the 107 percent rule.

The Red Bull pair dominated the top end of the timesheets, while Alonso continued to struggle.

The end of the session was ruined for many by a slowing HRT pulling to the side of the track. Narain Karthikeyan stopped for an as yet unknown reason at Turn 2, hampering the efforts of anyone on the verge of beginning a flying lap.

The fight to make it into Q2 was an issue to be settled between Ricciardo and Rosberg, both of whom struggled to match their teammates on pace.

At the end of the day, it was the six usual suspects plus Ricciardo who failed to make it through to Q2.

Dropout zone

18. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso)
19. Timo Glock (Marussia)
20. Charles Pic (Marussia)
21. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham)
22. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham)
23. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT)

F1 United States Grand Prix – Q2 report

For the first time in 2012, both Marussia drivers out-qualified the Caterham pair. Both teams dropped out in Q1, as has become traditional, but it's more good news for the Banbury racers.

The first few minutes of Q2 were relatively quiet both on the track and in the pitlane, with the traditional exodus taking place slightly later than normal. Red Bull continued in their qualifying tradition of waiting for the bulk of the pack to complete their early laps before heading out on track for their own efforts.

By half-way through the session, the track was filled with all seventeen contenders doing their best to find a gap in the traffic. Fernando Alonso came across a slow Michael Schumacher and immediately radioed his team to complain about impeding, but the Ferrari driver has spent qualifying struggling for the pace he showed on Friday.

Sebastian Vettel's first timed effort was only good enough for P10, and the Red Bull driver was pushed down into the dropout zone by his teammate before eventually crossing the line in a more respectable P1, 0.824s faster than previous pacesetter Lewis Hamilton.

With times up on the board from all barring Sergio Perez, the dropout zone was comprised of Bruno Senna, Romain Grosjean, Jean-Eric Vergne, Fernando Alonso, Kamui Kobayashi, and Nico Rosberg. Perez' first timed lap kept the Sauber driver firmly in P17.

At the four-minute mark, Jenson Button – who was edging closer and closer to the dropout zone with every lap set by his rivals – radioed the team to complain of a loss of power. Looks like McLaren's reliability woes aren't quite over...

As the chequered flag approached, Alonso was able to find the pace that had been missing earlier this afternoon, and made it to a temporary P4 before being dropped down by his own teammate.

Vettel's pace was improving with every lap, and the strategists at Ferrari are almost certain to be weeping on the pitwall as they watch Alonso's championship chances slip further and further away.

Button got knocked down into the dropout zone while he was still in the pits: the McLaren driver is currently the highest profile scalp claimed by Q2 thus far.

With all said and done, the dropout zone was comprised of Senna, Button, Paul di Resta, Vergne, Perez, Kobayashi, and Rosberg, while the timesheets were topped by Vettel and Mark Webber, with Felipe Massa performing very well in P3.

Dropout zone

11. Bruno Senna (Williams)
12. Jenson Button (McLaren)
13. Paul di Resta (Force India)
14. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso)
15. Sergio Perez (Sauber)
16. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
17. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes)

F1 United States Grand Prix – Q3 report

With Jenson Button and Nico Rosberg out of contention, Q3 promises to be something of a shake-up. Add to that the fact that Felipe Massa has been faster than teammate – and championship contender – Fernando Alonso, and all the ingredients are in place for a thrilling ten minutes.

But there is a sense of inevitability to the front-row, which looks like it will belong to Red Bull, and to Red Bull alone.

Ferrari were second out of the pits and second with timed laps on the board: Alonso crossed the line in 1m42.411s; five seconds behind him Massa managed a 1.43.786s. Both drivers were comfortably faster than Michael Schumacher, the first man to cross the line in Q3.

The first realistic time on the board came about thanks to Romain Grosjean, who has a five-place grid penalty to contend with for an unscheduled gearbox change. The Frenchman lapped in 1.37.227s, a more than respectable time at the Circuit of the Americas.

But Grosjean was the only driver to do well on his first timed lap – both Lewis Hamilton and Sebastian Vettel struggled to demonstrate the pace they'd shown previously in the session before getting their tyres into the groove with their second efforts.

Hamilton briefly topped the timesheets with a 1.36.209s before being dethroned – inevitably – by Vettel, who managed a 1.35.877s. The one consolation Hamilton has is that he appears to have the march on Mark Webber, who was nearly two-tenths slower.

Massa's early signs of promise this afternoon have come to naught; with just over a minute remaining of qualifying the Paulista was languishing in P10, 1.5s slower than Nico Hulkenberg in P9. But Massa is a fighter, and with his next effort he was chasing at Alonso's heels: the two Ferrari drivers were in P8 and P9, with only Pastor Maldonado behind them.

Hamilton is another man who just won't give up – the McLaren driver is currently in P2 with a 1m35.928s lap under his belt, barely slower than Vettel's benchmark of 1m35.877s. But Vettel improves by a further three-tenths, claiming provisional pole with a 1m35.657s. Hamilton improved, but not by enough.

Massa was another late improver, and will line up two grid slots ahead of Alonso.

Provisional grid

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull)
2. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren)
3. Mark Webber (Red Bull)
4. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus)
5. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes)
6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari)
7. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India)
8. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari)
9. Romain Grosjean (Lotus)*
10. Pastor Maldonado (Williams)
11. Bruno Senna (Williams)
12. Jenson Button (McLaren)
13. Paul di Resta (Force India)
14. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso)
15. Sergio Perez (Sauber)
16. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
17. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes)
18. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso)
19. Timo Glock (Marussia)
20. Charles Pic (Marussia)
21. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham)
22. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham)
23. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT)
24. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT)

* Romain Grosjean has a five-place grid penalty for an unscheduled gearbox change, and will be starting in P9 despite qualifying in P4.

F1 United States Grand Prix – Saturday press conference

It was a short and sweet post-qualifying press conference that took place in Austin on Saturday afternoon, with all questions asked and answered in less than ten minutes.

Present were Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull), Lewis Hamilton (McLaren), and Mark Webber (Red Bull).

Congratulations Sebastian, brand new circuit, you lost 55 minutes yesterday, and yet you absolutely nailed it today.

Sebastian VETTEL: Yeah, I'm very, very pleased with the result obviously. We started off on the right foot I think yesterday. The first practice was very good for us. It was extremely slippery to be honest to start with. Obviously the circuit is brand new, the asphalt is brand new and it takes a while for the track to come in but it's also quite a lot fun to slide around a couple of corners and it just got better throughout. I think you can see the lap times just got quicker. Through qualifying I think we were very happy. In the last section I would have loved to go a little bit quicker. I think I lost a little bit in the first and the last sector. It was a little bit closer than I wanted with Lewis. But overall, fantastic. Obviously, it's very important here to start from the front. We start on the clean side, both of us, so yeah, should be a good race tomorrow.

And your championship rival, down in the ninth place, will probably start eighth. What are your feelings about that?

SV: Yeah, I mean, not much to feel. Obviously we have to look after ourselves and as I said I'm very happy. We had a smooth session, no issues. As you touched on, yesterday afternoon was not ideal: we lost a little bit of time. These things can happen and they might happen again. So you never know and therefore it's the best strategy to keep your head down and try to get the best, which I think was the target in qualifying. As I said I'm very happy with the result but so far nobody has scored any points. I think we have seen at the last race how quickly things can change and even starting at the back does give you opportunities, so we need to wait and see. But for us we focus on our race and tomorrow we have the chance to seal the Constructors' Championship for the team so that's what Mark and I will probably be looking out for.

Lewis, a tremendous lap – so, so close. But what about this first corner tomorrow? You're going to be starting alongside Sebastian, going up the hill into that first corner.

Lewis HAMILTON: I'm not really concerned about the first corner, I'm more concerned about the dirty side of the grid. I did a launch from it earlier on in P3 and it was quite slippery. No, hopefully tomorrow is just about getting a good start. It's so wide in Turn 1, I don't think really much can go wrong there generally... I might be wrong. But obviously I don't want to get in the way of Sebastian's race. However, I do want to win, so I'll try my best to get through cleanly.

Third on the grid for you Mark Webber. At least you'll start on the clean side behind your team-mate. What are your hopes for tomorrow?

Mark WEBBER: I'm pretty happy with qualifying actually. It's a very tricky venue in terms of tyres, circuit conditions, all those type of things together Seb touched on. It's easy to be out of the window here and not be super competitive if you don't get everything together. I was pretty happy

with the last part of Q3. We had to manage a little problem in the car, which in the end I don't think would have cost us a position because the guys obviously were pretty quick and both did very strong lap times. But I'd have liked to have had a little bit more pace but overall I'm happy to be third on the grid. As you say it's certainly up there towards the front and we can have a very, very strong grand prix from there. So, it's a great job from the team. I think Constructors'-wise we've got our eye firmly on that tomorrow, to try and put that to bed and that'll be a huge result for everyone at Milton Keynes and at Renault.

Sebastian, we haven't really seen you going off at Turn 19. Have you been off there?

SV: Yesterday!

How have you been treating it? What is it about Turn 19 that's so difficult and how have you been treating it?

SV: Obviously I tried to stay on the track – it's faster – but it's extremely difficult because obviously you want to carry as much speed as possible into the corner and ideally be as early and aggressive on power as you can. The difficulty, first of all, is that the apex is quite difficult to see, so it's rather easy to overshoot, and then if you are not on the perfect line, there's less grip, you lose the car or if you're a little bit too keen, a little bit too quick on the way in, you tend to lose the rear quite aggressively, and then you have to catch the car in order not to spin. But staying on the track then is quite difficult. I think there are a couple of corners like that on the track. Obviously I think for all of us it was quite a surprise yesterday to start on this track, and it was very, very slippery. It was like driving on ice – and I think the first run would have been quicker on Intermediate tyres, so obviously the asphalt was pretty fresh for all of us. It took a while to come in but I think you see the lap times now just getting quicker and quicker, so the circuit is ramping-up massively.

You lost that 55 minutes yesterday, has that affected more your race preparations than your qualifying preparations?

SV: No, not really, because we were still able to get a decent run on lower fuel and one on high fuelling yesterday afternoon. The boys did a good job to get the car ready in time, just to have enough for two runs, as I said, a short run and a long run, so that was very important, otherwise you are a little bit... not in the dark because Mark had a solid P2, free practice two, but obviously you don't, you can't tick all the boxes you would like for Sunday. But that wasn't the case: if anything I think we missed a little bit out on the short runs where we would have loved to try a couple of things in order to make the car go quicker in qualifying – but I think we can say we were quite competitive and very happy with the result today.

Lewis, tell us about the lap, because it was so close, it was getting very close to Sebastian's.

LH: It was. I was very, very happy with my lap. I saw in Q2 that they were obviously massively quick, I think it was a second or something like that, nine-tenths. I didn't know where I was going to find that, so I thought that the Red Bulls would be in the lead – but I just went into Q3 and pushed as hard as I could, went in really hard and just gave absolutely everything. I seemed to find a little bit more time at the last sector, on the actual lap that I did, it was two laps consecutive. Surprisingly, the second lap was even quicker, even though I'd already just done a fast lap. And on that lap, just I think way on the limit everywhere. A couple of oversteer moments; I think I lost about a tenth at the last corner. The thing is I gained it on the way in and lost it on the exit. That's how racing is – but still really happy to be where...

What about the race tomorrow? You were very competitive obviously in qualifying but what about in the race itself?

LH: That side I don't really know. We did a couple of laps on the longer run. Looking after tyres is going to be quite difficult tomorrow. Obviously it's quite a demanding circuit for tyres with the overheating of the surface of the tyres so I don't know. I hope I can get away well. I hope... going to ask Charlie to clean that side of the grid so the people on that side get an equal start and hope that I can fight Sebastian down to Turn 1. After that it's a difficult circuit to follow, I think, because it's so fast. Position will be everything.

Mark, obviously, as you say, your thoughts are on Red Bull Racing's Constructors' Championship but would you be happy with third?

MW: In the race tomorrow? No. I think we for sure want to move forward. You never know how tomorrow will unfold. Clearly we've put ourselves in a good position to capitalise on a very, strong clean grand prix from myself. If there's any issues in front at any stage, you're there to grab that. I had a pretty good feeling with the car on the long run on Friday actually, so that's good for us. We'll just have a good sleep tonight and have our head down for tomorrow.

And is the strategy, the tyre strategy fairly straightforward?

MW: Reasonably, yes, I would say. But there's a few things that we need to understand during the race tomorrow to see if it is as straightforward as we think.

One is the easiest for overtaking, ten is the most difficult: how do you rate your chances on this track for tomorrow?

SV: I think we will find out tomorrow! It's always difficult because we haven't been here before. If you remember, we went to Abu Dhabi and we thought it was going to be quite easy the first time and it proved wrong. Obviously the last couple of years it has got more exciting, more overtaking. I think it's possible here. Probably the best place is where the DRS zone is, down to Turn 12 but there's a couple of other places as well.

Sebastian, the team of your main competitor started the whole qualifying on scrubbed tyres. Did you ever think about it? It seems to be a mistake if you look at the result.

SV: I don't know. I haven't obviously seen... yeah I have seen the rough result. I know that we are here, so I know the top three but obviously I don't know what was going on for the people behind and what they were doing in terms of tyre strategy. I think the fact that here warm-up is not as straightforward as it usually is made it a bit more difficult for us in terms of first of all getting the lap, finding the lap, the peak performance of the tyre and also it's the same for everyone and then it's usually a bit busy around the track, so I think in terms of traffic it was a bit worse in Q3 than it usually is but I think for us it was pretty straightforward what we wanted to do and what we did, I think you can see.

Question for Seb and Mark: I understand that this is the first weekend or the first race where you are using the new alternators in the race. Do either of you have any reliability concerns?

MW: Good journalism. It's good that you know more than me. I trust the guys, they do whatever they can to make sure that we have the best possibility to have the smoothest Sunday afternoon, irrespective of what parts are on the car, in what area of the car. So I have one hundred per cent trust in them that they're going to do what they can to get us home and they've obviously selected those alternators for a reason and put their best foot forward.

F1 United States Grand Prix - Race report

It should have been a Red Bull walkover. Sebastian Vettel started off the US Grand Prix weekend on a high – the German racer topped not only all three practice sessions, but also the three qualifying sessions. Vettel had pole, and the support of teammate Mark Webber on the row behind.

Both Red Bull drivers had the advantage of starting on the clean side of the grid, with pundits predicting that those in even-numbered grid slots would lose an average of two places off the start.

Making life easier for Vettel in the championship stakes was Fernando Alonso's relatively poor qualifying result, which Ferrari did their best to ameliorate by getting Felipe Massa to take five for the team, sacrificing his strong qualifying performance for a gearbox penalty that would move Alonso up one grid slot and over to the clean side.

As the lights went out, it looked as though Ferrari had made the right tactical decision. Notorious poor starter Webber leapt ahead of P2 man Lewis Hamilton as the 24 cars roared their way up the hill to Turn 1, and Alonso was up to P4 by the end of the first lap.

Hamilton gave chase, and managed to pass Webber on lap 4 before turning up the wick and beginning the slow process of hunting down Vettel, who was pulling away into the distance. Behind the leading pair, Alonso was busy chasing down Webber – with Vettel in the lead, the Spanish driver needed a podium finish if he was to keep the championship battle alive until the Interlagos season finale.

What looked like it was shaping up to be a decent fight between the leading Ferrari and the second Red Bull descended into a farce for the Australian driver, when it became increasingly clear that – yet again – Webber's car was beset with mechanical difficulties. The Australian driver lost KERS, and was told how to fix it over the radio, just as the TV feed showed the Monaco Grand Prix winner slowly pulling off the circuit and stepping out of his car.

In Saturday's post-qualifying press conference, Webber had been asked if the new-spec alternators – which made their in-race debut in Austin, having been tested in practice at other grands prix – made him wary of their reliability.

"I trust the guys," he replied. "They do whatever they can to make sure that we have the best possibility to have the smoothest Sunday afternoon, irrespective of what parts are on the car, in what area of the car. So I have 100 percent trust in them that they're going to do what they can to get us home and they've obviously selected those alternators for a reason and put their best foot forward."

But speaking after the race, which saw him retire on lap 17, Webber admitted that his failure to reach the chequered flag would be causing the team some headaches between Austin and Sao Paulo.

"It was the alternator ultimately in the end," the Red Bull driver explained. "So we lost the batteries on the car, we lost KERS, we lost our gearbox sync. The laps before I retired I was in trouble and we knew it was a long way home from there. It's disappointing to lose a very good result here today for myself and the team, and for sure there are more nerves about our reliability."

With Webber gone and Alonso miles behind in an inherited P3, the United States Grand Prix became a two-horse race. Vettel and Hamilton were the only two drivers on track with the pace and the position to take the chequered flag, and – barring a retirement from either or both men – none of the other drivers were in with a chance.

The RB8 and the MP4-27 danced around the Circuit of the Americas like an accordion being gently squeezed. They pressed together in the corners and pulled apart in the straights with Vettel deftly controlling the gap to the chasing McLaren, keeping Hamilton in sight but just out of the DRS danger zone for much of the race.

But Hamilton kept on pressing, increasing the pressure on almost every lap as he set a succession of fastest laps, even – occasionally – beating Vettel's sector times in the tricky and Red Bull-friendly sector three. Despite the McLaren driver's sterling effort, in his post-race comments Vettel blamed the loss of the lead on traffic, and not on the simple fact that he had been outmanoeuvred in the DRS zone.

"Everything seemed to be in control and here traffic is quite difficult and it didn't work in my favour," the defending world champion said. "Lewis was close enough to open his rear wing. It didn't matter which side I picked.

"I wasn't too happy to send a deep invitation to Lewis going past Karthikeyan and he was right behind in the DRS zone. To do a big defense in one corner is hardly possible and he took that opportunity down the straight. I wasn't happy as before that I had managed the gap to him, and had managed tyres to attack in the last few laps."

Hamilton was more generous in his assessment of the manoeuvre. "To have a battle with Vettel was really special," he said. "It was actually quite tricky. When I finally got close to him, I seemed to be catching him in the first sector, the backmarkers came into play, finally. How many times has it happened to me when I got caught out? It worked out and I knew that was going to be the lap. I turned the engine up to maximise the revs. I went for the inside, but he defended. I went to the outside and he closed the door a bit so I was very lucky."

Elsewhere in the pack the Austin race offered excitements aplenty for the attendant fans.

Romain Grosjean had a nightmare of an afternoon in the opening phase of the race: the Lotus driver lost six places within the first eight laps, having spun like a top at Turn 19 and damaged his tyres in the process. Grosjean was the first man into the pits as a consequence, and the Frenchman did a more than respectable job to fight his way back up through the field to a P7 finish.

Another remarkable performance came about thanks to Massa, who was disadvantaged at the start by his own team – who were thinking tactically of their championship chances, and acted entirely within the rules. The Brazilian racer started on the clean side of the grid, down in P11, and delivered a seemingly effortless drive that saw the Paulista end the race 6.7s behind his teammate, just shy of the podium.

The predicted Turn 1 chaos never materialised, and the Circuit of the Americas saw only two retirements on Sunday afternoon: the aforementioned Webber, and Toro Rosso's Jean-Eric Vergne, who retired two laps before the Australian thanks to broken suspension.

But the big losers on Sunday afternoon were Mercedes, for whom the United States is their biggest market. Michael Schumacher was passed by a seemingly infinite succession of drivers, despite his borderline unsporting efforts to prevent what became 96 minutes of public humiliation. Teammate Nico Rosberg fared little better, with his main achievement in Austin the fact that he set the eighth-fastest lap of the race.

The Silver Arrows were hampered by their poor qualifying positions, but given that the likes of Grosjean, Massa, and Jenson Button were able to work their way through the pack to respectable points-scoring finishes, it was little short of embarrassing to see Mercedes struggle to compete. One has to wonder just how race-winner Hamilton feels about the team he will shortly be calling home...

F1 United States Grand Prix – Sunday press conference

With all and sundry mindful of the approaching print deadlines for all newspapers east of Austin, the post-race press conference was kept deliberately short.

Present were Lewis Hamilton (McLaren), Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull), and Fernando Alonso (Ferrari).

Lewis, I know you really tormented Sebastian for most of the race but you have the resolve and did a fabulous race. What I'm interested in, give me some reaction, your reaction to the circuit. Obviously everything's new, first winner, first time winner and all of that.

Lewis HAMILTON: First time winner, yeah, I'm so happy. The fans have been amazing this weekend, so thank you so much. The warm welcome we've had has been fantastic and I think this is probably one of the best, if not the best grand prix we've had all year. Especially for me and my team, this is so special. It's been a long, long time since I had a win and I'm just so proud, so proud of the work the guys did, so grateful for the support we've had.

Sebastian, obviously you did everything you needed to do to protect your lead in the championship and as usual you were fantastic with your qualifying and so forth. The obvious question again is your reaction to the circuit.

Sebastian VETTEL: Yeah, I mean first of all thank you very much. As Lewis said, it was incredible. Actually I did my first race five years ago, the last time we were racing in the United States, so it's a very nice comeback today, it was my 100th grand prix, and amazing y'know, the amount of people we had all weekend. It's great for us to have so much support, very happy today for the team in particular. We won the Constructors' Championship so, yeah, thanks to all of you, it's been a great year, now we've got another station coming up in Brazil and as you said, in terms of the Championship it's looking a bit better after the race today. Obviously it was a close fight with Lewis, he had one chance and he took it. After that I tried to stay with him and maybe pass him again but he was probably as quick as I was and there wasn't much in between us. All in all, a great race and a great result for us.

Fernando, as usual, you've been brilliant the entire season, fantastic start, as usual again, you've always done your very maximum and here again you've kept this championship fight alive, fighting to the end obviously. The same question to you, how about this circuit? You like it? You enjoy the ride? What's your reaction?

Fernando ALONSO: Yes, as Sebastian said, the circuit was fantastic but the fans were fantastic all weekend. We really enjoyed and we really have to say big thanks to all the fans coming here, all the Americans, the Mexicans and all the South Americans that came also to support us. So the circuit... basically the layout is challenging for us, challenging for the engine as well. As I said we enjoyed racing here thanks to the fans, thanks to the fantastic facilities and I hope we put on a good show for everybody and people will enjoy even more next year.

Lewis, an absolutely fantastic drive and victory in a straight fight with Red Bull Racing and with Sebastian. How much satisfaction does that give you?

LH: A huge amount. It's been a great weekend, to be able to beat Red Bull and Sebastian is definitely a tough challenge but we managed to do it today. I don't know, we weren't so bad in the first stint but it was very difficult to follow and to get past. In trying to do so I locked... my tyres went off. We pitted maybe two laps before Sebastian, so then he came out quite far ahead but traffic really worked out quite well for once. Traffic usually catches me out, so I was glad that it worked slightly in my favour at some points. But yeah, what a great feeling to win the first grand prix here, back in the States, I won the last one here as well, so I'm massively proud.

Where was the Red Bull so strong? Because it did take quite a few DRS efforts before you managed to make it.

LH: It was everywhere, they're pretty strong everywhere. I think it was more so... the first sector is very difficult to follow through Four, Five, Six, Seven, such high speed it's quite difficult to follow through there. The place where he really extended his gap was the exit of Nine. That was really where, in the most important part, where he made over a second gap, so I was struggling to really get... to remain close. As I said with traffic it all worked out really well. He kind of... I knew that lap would be the lap that I would have a chance, so I turned the engine up and got close.

Sebastian you did all you could and you've extended your championship lead. What are your feelings after second place?

SV: I think, as Lewis said, obviously it was close between us, there wasn't much between. I think very quickly we noticed that Lewis is the one we are racing. Obviously, for the rest, I don't know what happened to Mark - he was quite a while in third place. After that, obviously, there was a big gap down to the Ferraris, so yeah, it was clear that we were racing Lewis. Everything seemed to be in control. As Lewis touched on, with traffic it's quite difficult depending where you get it on the track. Surely it didn't work in my favour. Lewis was then close enough, after he tried many times before, to open his rear wing and then down the back straight, it was a bit of an invitation really. It didn't matter which side I would have picked, they were quick enough on the straight and he took the lead fair enough. After that I tried to be as close as I could but, as he said, it was difficult to follow, difficult to get in range. So, bit of a shame to lose first place but as you said I think we did everything we could. Fantastic job for the team today to seal the Constructors' Championship against Ferrari who are now in second. I'm very happy with that and the guys can be, for sure, very proud of themselves. I think we will have a drink tonight, enjoy the time here. All weekend has been incredible, I think, for all of us, for the whole Formula One paddock here. The last race [in the US] obviously, as Lewis said, he won it. It was my first race in Formula One here in the United States and to come

back and get so much support, so many fans... The signing session yesterday was absolutely crazy and full grandstands, so full house. It was really, really nice to race today in front of the crowd.

Fernando, really a fantastic start and then it was just a matter of holding station.

FA: Yes, we know our championship keeps alive maybe thanks to the first laps. We always qualify around seventh or eighth and we finish the first lap in the first three or four positions normally and then after that the race becomes a little easier when that happens, when you are in the leading group, and today we knew that was a good chance, try to overtake people at the first corner, and then the pace on Sunday normally improves so we knew that if we are in the leading group we can more or less keep the pace. Today not possible to keep the pace with these two guys, that they were too far ahead but enough to keep for the guys behind. And then I think this podium, after all the difficulties we went through this weekend is like a victory for us. Losing three points maybe was in no-one's thoughts I think yesterday night or Friday night after seeing the practice, so we are really happy again to have a very good Sunday and score again good points.

Sebastian, your teammate stopped with another alternator problem, you probably heard that over the radio. To what extent is that a concern? It seems to be an unsolved problem.

SV: I don't know what happened to him, so I need to check, obviously. The first info I only get now, so it's hard to comment but in case it was the alternator, it's not good news but I think we've managed the last couple of races pretty well so I'm sure it should be easy to explain, to find the problem. After Monza, I think we learned the lesson and we should be prepared enough for next week.

To all three of you: with what feelings will you go to the last race in Brazil?

LH: For me, it's excitement that we have a good car and hopefully we can try to compete again with these guys. I'm obviously not fighting for the championship. It's maybe more exciting for these guys but for me, I'm just having fun.

SV: I think pretty much the same as Lewis: excited because the car seems to work very well, good enough to fight for a win. We've been very quick in Brazil the last couple of years so plenty to look forward to. On top of that, we increased our lead in the championship today so I think we are in the best possible position.

FA: We will try to go to Brazil with the possibility to fight for the World Championship which is something that we fight for all through the year and we arrived in that fantastic position. Only Sebastian is in a better position than us but we should be proud of ourselves so try to enjoy the Brazil race and do our best, fight all the race and see what is the outcome at the end.

Seb, what were you complaining about when Lewis overtook you?

SV: I think you misunderstood. I wasn't complaining about Lewis, obviously. I wasn't too happy send a nice big invitation to Lewis when I obviously had to go through Karthikeyan and he was basically right behind at the DRS zone: to do a big difference within one corner is hardly possible and then he took that opportunity - fair enough - down the straight and passed me. I tried to defend, I moved to the inside but I knew that he would have so much more speed that he can pick either side, so it didn't really matter what I was doing and after that, I was obviously not too happy, because on all the laps before I tried to manage the gap to him, tried to manage the tyres until the end of the race, to be able to attack towards the last couple of laps. We had, I think, something like 20 laps, 15 laps to go at the time. It was not targeted at Lewis, it was more targeted at the backmarker which, as I said, gave a nice big envelope with an invitation to Lewis.

It was a similar question, actually, but we don't often see you, Sebastian, being very emotional but we heard you being emotional on the radio there. A question about the pressures you're feeling. You've been in this position twice before, is it harder third time around?

SV: I don't think it had anything to do with that in that moment. I was really thinking about the points that could make a difference today or next week or the championship. I wanted to win today. I had a fantastic race, I was very happy, enjoyed the fight with Lewis a lot and obviously through that lost the lead. Equally knew that we can get it back but as it turned out it was extremely difficult. We had the same pace so I think I was probably in the same boat as Lewis, the first half of the race where I was just trying to get close enough to try and get the move done but that didn't happen until the end. I think many times it's difficult for you to judge what's going on because not all the messages get broadcast so we do communicate quite a bit during the race - sometimes calmer, sometimes not so calm so at that moment, obviously, I wasn't too happy to lose the lead.

Lewis, welcome to the United States; you had celebration champagne. Are you going to have a celebration barbecue tonight?

LH: I had a few burgers last night so I was nice and heavy today! I tell you what, I'm so happy to be here. We've had such a great weekend. I actually don't really drink. I had a little bit of champagne, it doesn't really taste that good. Fernando said it was 7-Up or Sprite at the last race, it wasn't the same this time. Tonight, hopefully I can get together with the team tonight. We already did last night but I'm sure we will celebrate tonight.

SV: He said earlier he... and I saw him exchanging phone numbers with the girls on the podium. He said earlier we'll have a good time tonight!

LH: I think it was the other way around actually! He stayed behind. That's why we were late here.

SV: He was first, you know, not just in the race but also picking up the girls.
