

F1 Japanese Grand Prix – Thursday press conference

The FIA came up trumps with the Thursday press conference in Suzuka, lining up all of the drivers who have been central to the past week's stories – with the notable exception of Michael Schumacher.

Present were Jenson Button (McLaren), Paul di Resta (Force India), Lewis Hamilton (McLaren), Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber), Felipe Massa (Ferrari), and Sergio Perez (Sauber).

Paul, first of all, you're coming here off the back of your best-ever result in Singapore, your hopes for this race.

Paul DI RESTA: I suppose to lead off where we finished in Singapore. It was obviously a great result, I think, given Monza qualifying and then taking the penalty, having a reasonable race but then going to Singapore and doing a bit better. Certainly it was a very strong fourth towards the latter stages of the race. A lot of points needed, obviously, to try to catch the Saubers, y'know, and thankfully they didn't score. But this will be a testing track for us and we know it's going to be a lot of hard work to try to achieve some good points for us.

Kamui, obviously the home favourite: is that a distraction or an encouragement for you when you come here to Suzuka?

Kamui KOBAYASHI: I think it's more an encouragement, that means it's great to be here, back to Suzuka, which is a really great circuit and my favourite as well. And definitely our car could be competitive here as well. After Singapore, which is a little bit difficult circuit for us, back to Suzuka which is our best track, I think it will be great. Really, there will be a big amount of power from a lot of fans and the Japanese people at the race.

Felipe, on pole and a second place here in the past. What are your hopes for this weekend?

Felipe MASSA: Similar result to what you just said! The track is really fantastic here, it's a great place, very challenging to drive here, y'know? One of the best tracks, so, looking forward for a good result at the end, a good race for us.

Lewis, you had success at Fuji but third place here, a podium obviously, in 2009. What are your thoughts about coming to this race?

Lewis HAMILTON: I generally love coming here, the whole trip's been fantastic so far and the track is one of the best in the world. It's one that I haven't won at before but we've got a car that I think can win – so let's hope it's a better weekend.

Sergio, 17th on the grid to eighth place last year, which is a pretty good drive and an interesting tyre strategy as well. Kamui says it's a circuit that really suits the car, what are your hopes?

Sergio PÉREZ: Yes, I think it's a really good circuit for our car. Last year we didn't have such a good car as this year and still we managed to come from the back of the grid – we had a failure, a problem in qualifying in Q1, so we start really from 17th and managed to do a good race, a good strategy as you just said, so I'm looking forward a lot of fight for the victory here. I think we've got a very strong car at this circuit.

Jenson, 12 out of 12 races you've finished here. That's a pretty good record, you've never retired, never had to walk home. Last year's winner as well, what are your expectations?

Jenson BUTTON: Well obviously I've got a little penalty which doesn't help, especially around here because it's not the easiest place to overtake – but I'm really excited. I think this is one of the most special races on the calendar for all of us. We love – well I personally love – driving this circuit, it's a real challenge and a circuit you love to win on. Especially with the crowd here, the spectators are very supportive of us all so it's a special place to win. A good result is something I'm obviously looking for. The win is more difficult than it would have been without the penalty but it's still definitely a possibility and we're doing everything we can to make it possible.

Lewis, if I could just ask you about your move to Mercedes, given the results of the two teams over the years, do you feel there's a bit of a risk in going to that team?

LH: No. I'm not really here to talk about that this weekend. I'm here to talk about trying to win this World Championship still. So we've got six races ahead in a great team that I've had a great, an incredible journey with and I'm working on trying to finish that on a high.

Sergio, just recently we asked you if you were talking to other top teams and you said 'no'. If that was the case, how quickly did this whole thing come about?

SP: No, there has been some talks before but I didn't want to give too much information about my opportunities, my options. So the question doesn't come that often because if I say at that time 'yes', then I will be full of questions. So it's better to... I wanted to keep it in low profile, focussing always in my team, giving my hundred per cent to my team that I'm very thankfully they give me this opportunity. We have six races with a strong car to go and I want to leave on a very high from this team.

Lewis, what was the thing that made you change the team where you've grown up through your career? Was it just challenge or...?

LH: To be honest, I had a big press conference or meeting with the Brits the other day, so the story is already out and I've already spoken about that stuff. Like I said, I'm here to focus on this weekend.

Jenson, among the six drivers here, you are the only one not involved in these moves. How do you judge, from your point of view, what's happened and what might happen next year?

JB: It's nice to be the one not in that position – it normally is me. We all move about. That's the way Formula One is. You're either trying to find a

better possibility, a better team that you think can give you an opportunity to win races or you're looking for another challenge. There's always going to be people moving around in Formula One. It's the same with team personnel: it's not just the drivers. It just seems that it's all come at once.

If I could ask the three drivers on the back row: the three drivers in front of you are all sorted for next year. What's your individual position for next year? Could you just let us know, one by one, what's happening?

DIR: Nothing at the moment. Our team's policy is always not to talk about driver contracts and there's not much more I can say. Things have progressed quite a lot since Singapore and I'm sure the reactions to that will obviously be sorted soon.

KK: Same as Paul. I have no idea. I think we still have six races left to race and Suzuka for me is pretty important, so I just try to focus and think later. These two drivers are the first movement (in the driver market) so this is quite exciting for the rest of the time.

FM: Nothing at the moment but I'm pretty confident things will be OK.

A question for Felipe: with Sergio signed for McLaren, that's one of your rumoured replacements at Ferrari out of the picture. Does that give you additional confidence that your contract will be renewed for next year?

FM: Well, I think maybe. I don't know. As I said, I'm pretty confident things are going in the right direction. Also, I think Sergio is doing a good job this year and he showed his performance and I'm happy that he can sign for a big team as well. But anyway, I need to concentrate on doing the best and that's the way it is.

Sergio, was Ferrari ever an issue for you? Were you talking to them?

SP: Yeah, we were talking to them but it was never an option. I've been talking with them because I was part of the academy. I have a good contact with them and good communication, but obviously the place I got is the best place I can be and I'm so, so happy and thankful also for them (Ferrari) because at the time they helped me a lot to come into Formula One, but now I'm moving forward and I want to thank McLaren for taking me on board and trusting in me.

Lewis or Jenson: what's the best piece of advice you could give to the new McLaren driver in the middle there, for next season?

JB: I don't really think Sergio needs any advice. He's let his driving do the talking and he's had some very good performances over the last couple of years and that's the reason he's got the drive he has at the moment and why he's got the drive he has next year.

LH: He'll be fine.

Sergio, when Luca di Montezemolo said some weeks that you were not yet mature enough for a big team, had you already made an agreement with McLaren?

SP: No. Not yet.

Felipe, you had a good race in Singapore and perhaps your expectations of staying at Ferrari increased. Do you think that another strong race here would be enough to secure your place for next season, or will we still have to wait a little while?

FM: Let's concentrate on having a good result and then we will see. As I said, things are not signed so it's better not to talk so much and concentrate on the job. We're going in the right direction so let's hope we can have a good race here, a good race in Korea and a good end to the championship. That's very important for me, for the team, for everybody.

Lewis, this is obviously the first race since your move was confirmed. Have you spoken to your mechanics at all since you've been in Suzuka, talking through your reasons. I could imagine that they might have been quite disappointed that you are leaving.

LH: I haven't... I've been to see them but no, I haven't spoken about things. It's business as usual which, here this weekend, is focusing on trying to win. That's how professional they are and vice versa.

Lewis, you may have covered this with the Brits (British press), but we weren't privy to be there. In life, when you make a big decision, many of us, once it's made, you can relax because good, bad or indifferent, it's done so do you feel calmer now, that the decision is made?

LH: Absolutely, yeah, I feel fantastic. Very very happy and excited and grateful that I can now just focus on these next six races. I know there's a lot of work ahead of me. I know I'm leaving a very very good car for this guy (Perez) to step into...

SP: Thank you.

LH: Yeah. Trust me, it will be a good car next year as well, I know. I know exactly what's going on next year with your car.

Sergio, you just said that Ferrari was never an option. What did you mean, exactly, that it was never an option - for you or why it was never an option for Ferrari? Why?

SP: It was never actually with them... if they wanted me or no, they wanted me to go... it was never actually, basically... it was difficult for them, Ferrari, to make that decision. I think they are happy with Felipe. He's a very good driver, a proven driver as well. I'm not a proven driver, I'm not a guarantee as Felipe is so probably that's why I was never an option for them. The opportunity for me never came so I never saw them as an option for me.

Jenson, can you talk about the special relationship that you have with Japan and the things you did last week?

JB: Ah, yes. Obviously I was working with a Japanese team for many years. The biggest connection is obviously my girlfriend, Jessie. And yeah, I love the country, I love the culture, I love the people, I love the food. Last week, last Thursday, yes, I was in Japan, I've been in Japan all week, and I headed up to the Sendai region and visited what used to be a town very close to Natori. It's where the tsunami hit. So basically (I was) still raising awareness for what happened last year and also for what is still on-going here in Japan, especially in that region and the difficulties that they still have. So it was a very emotional day but I think a very good day, and hopefully we can help the people that have suffered from the disaster, the people who don't have homes at the moment, so that was the main reason for doing it. Also in the afternoon I went to a local kart circuit, a place called Sugo. It's got a big history of motor sport. I think it's the place where Michael Schumacher raced in an F3000 car, I think the only race he did in an F3000 car. And then I watched 15 or 16 kids driving around the local kart circuit there, all people who were affected by the tsunami in that region, which is a really good experience, to see them in the different categories of karting. It's such a pure sport, karting, it's just pure driving and that's why I think we all still love it so much. Hopefully, one day we will see one of those kids on the Formula One grid, because there's a lot of talent here in Japan and it would be nice to hopefully help one of those kids one day.

Another question for you, Lewis: when you were working your way up through the ranks, Michael Schumacher was the man to

beat. Now you're replacing him. Can you tell us what that feels like for a driver: are they big racing boots to fill, is it an ego boost to replace the legend? What's it like inside your head in that context?

LH: I don't see myself as replacing Michael. I don't think anyone can replace Michael, he's a legend in the sport, has achieved so much already. I feel privileged to have been in Formula One in the time where... I watched him winning all his World Championships at home in my living room so to have been on the track with him in 2006 and then for him to come back and for me to get to race with him has been a real privilege so I hope that one day, I can achieve some of the things he has done.

Paul, we know that your name has also been close to Ferrari for next year. Would a year at Ferrari be something that you would agree to do or, looking at your career, are you looking for something longer term with another team?

DIR: I've always said, coming through my career and into Formula One, the important thing is winning races and winning championships, and whenever the opportunity is given, that's the position I want to be in but just now, obviously, with Force India, my mentality is different and results like we got in Singapore are big. That's the position I'm in. I've got six races up and coming to try and maximise, to do a job under the contract that I'm in.

Kamui, you definitely need a good result here this weekend, so are you a bit nervous and how is Suzuka different from the last two years, from the mental point of view?

KK: I don't feel so much pressure, quite relaxed, so many people around me want to be close but I'm just here for racing. In comparison to the last two years, we've got more experience. In 2010, I came to Suzuka... I drove only one race in Suzuka (before) so I didn't have so much experience actually other than now, but now it's my third time in Suzuka and I have more experience, and I definitely have the confidence to do well this weekend.

Kamui, with Michael leaving Mercedes, he's been linked with a seat at Sauber next year. If you were both to be at Sauber next year, would you welcome the chance to work with Michael?

KK: It's difficult to say. I don't think that's realistic. I can definitely work (with him) but I don't know, we have to ask Michael. I don't know if he really wants to come to Sauber. This is a different story. Easy to make a really difficult connection, but I don't think he really wants to come to Sauber.

I just wanted to ask Sergio his thoughts on moving to McLaren and filling Lewis Hamilton's seat there. That's fairly big shoes to fill: is he confident that he can fill them adequately?

SP: Well, of course, I rate Lewis as one of the fastest drivers on the grid, so it won't be easy at all. I know I have very big shoes to fill so it will be difficult but I will give everything I can, I will work as hard as possible to give the best result and to win championships with this great team.

And can I get your opinion please on your new teammate, Jenson Button, who is an equally tough competitor?

SP: Yeah, of course, it will be great to have a very good champion. He's a World Champion and it will be a pleasure to work with him together, to reach the same target for the team which is winning and make the best car possible, so I'm looking forward to working together with the whole team and so motivated, enthusiastic to start working with my new team, but first, as I say, I want to finish the next six races on a very high for my team and give everything I can for my team that gave me the opportunity to become a Formula One driver.

Surely the expectation from the word go has got to be to win races, hasn't it?

SP: Of course. I think with McLaren there is no other option. You have to win every race, you have a car that you can win every race. It's a guarantee. McLaren is always a guarantee, so I have to work very hard. I have to give everything to my team and I'm ready to do that, once I have finished this season.

What were you thinking when Montezemolo was saying about you that you are too young, not mature enough for such a team?

SP: Yeah. Of course I respect... he's a person that I respect a lot. Maybe to drive for Ferrari you need more experience. I think he has his arguments, it's better you ask him what he meant by that. Maybe I'm too young to join a team like Ferrari. I don't know. I feel ready to drive for a top team and to fight for the championship. If this answers your question.

F1 Japanese Grand Prix – F1 report

It was a relatively quiet practice session that opened the Japanese Grand Prix weekend at the much loved Suzuka Circuit.

The only incident of note came about thanks to Nico Rosberg, who stopped his car on track shortly before the end of the session thanks to an oil pressure alarm that triggered a precautionary engine shutdown.

Otherwise, the drivers were remarkably well behaved around one of the F1 calendar's most challenging circuits. Numerous men ran wide at Turn 1, while the exit of Spoon proved to be something of a challenge, but mistakes were punished by a brief foray into the run-off areas, and not damage to the car.

The morning was spent making the most of the bright sunshine – a rarity on Fridays this season – and testing upgrades and Suzuka-specific components. Despite this testing, however, there was not as much flo-viz paint in evidence as we've become accustomed to seeing.

While little should be read into the times set on a Friday morning, it was clear that the McLarens were not lacking for pace: Jenson Button was the fastest man on track, with soon to depart teammate Lewis Hamilton hot on his heels.

Red Bull were up in the mix, thanks to Mark Webber's P3-worthy performance, while both Mercedes drivers rounded out the top five.

Neither Lotus nor Ferrari were showing much in the way of pace, but testing and longer runs with new components will have affected their overall speed.

F1 times (unofficial)

1. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.34.507s [20 laps]
 2. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.34.740s [26 laps]
 3. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.34.856s [24 laps]
 4. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.35.039s [18 laps]
 5. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.35.122s [20 laps]
 6. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.35.199s [27 laps]
 7. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.35.283s [24 laps]
 8. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.35.299s [18 laps]
 9. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.35.474s [22 laps]
 10. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.35.478s [24 laps]
 11. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.35.484s [26 laps]
 12. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.35.584s [24 laps]
 13. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1.35.691s [22 laps]
 14. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1.35.724s [21 laps]
 15. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.36.123s [19 laps]
 16. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.36.222s [25 laps]
 17. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.36.366s [23 laps]
 18. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1.36.389s [24 laps]
 19. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.37.716s [17 laps]
 20. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.38.295s [23 laps]
 21. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.38.616s [25 laps]
 22. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.39.043s [25 laps]
 23. Giedo van der Garde (Caterham) 1.39.374s [22 laps]
 24. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.39.688s [19 laps]
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F1 Japanese Grand Prix – FP2 report

After a calm and quiet morning in Suzuka, FP2 was somewhat more chaotic.

Only a few short minutes into the session, Paul di Resta parked his Force India in the barriers at the exit of Spoon. The Scottish driver was uninjured, but the incident brought out the red flags and his car was heavily damaged. Di Resta was unable to return to the track before the session drew to a close.

Spoon was the scene of an identical incident for Michael Schumacher at the end of the session; the Mercedes driver brought out the yellows when he smacked his MGPO3 into the tyre barriers with around ten minutes remaining.

Numerous drivers ran wide across the gravel, with Felipe Massa making a particular point of destroying his tyres in the process. Kamui Kobayashi was another man to make full use of both gravel and track over the course of the afternoon.

The final moment of drama came when Vitaly Petrov lost the rear wing off his Caterham as the chequered flag was falling. The Russian was driving along the straight when his wing sheared off; the loss of downforce sent Petrov backwards across the gravel at Turn 1.

Not all of the incidents were crash related; however – Kimi Raikkonen suffered KERS issues very early on, with the team calling their man into the pits as they were concerned the faulty unit posed a danger. Raikkonen spent much of the session in the pits while the team rectified the problem (the rubber gloves were out in force), but was able to return to the track for a few quick laps before the chequered flag fell.

Mark Webber topped the timesheets for Red Bull; in second place and two-tenths behind was Lewis Hamilton.

FP2 times (unofficial)

1. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.32.493s [34 laps]
2. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.32.707s [32 laps]
3. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.32.836s [37 laps]
4. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.32.987s [30 laps]
5. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.33.093s [28 laps]
6. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1.33.107s [35 laps]
7. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.33.349s [22 laps]
8. Bruno Senna (Williams) 1.33.499s [35 laps]
9. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.33.614s [32 laps]
10. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.33.750s [13 laps]
11. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.33.866s [19 laps]
12. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.33.903s [36 laps]
13. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.33.983s [33 laps]
14. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1.34.291s [12 laps]
15. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.34.300s [33 laps]
16. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.34.863s [32 laps]
17. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.35.080s [34 laps]
18. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1.35.711s [41 laps]
19. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.35.870s [37 laps]
20. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.36.194s [32 laps]

21. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.36.636s [28 laps]
 22. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.37.342s [30 laps]
 23. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.37.701s [35 laps]
 24. Paul di Resta (Force India) NO TIME SET [2 laps]
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F1 Japanese Grand Prix – Friday press conference

With the driver market now on the move, 2013 line-ups were a key topic at the senior team personnel press conference in Suzuka.

Present were John Booth (Marussia), Ross Brawn (Mercedes), Stefano Domenicali (Ferrari), Monisha Kaltenborn (Sauber), Kim Spearman (Cosworth), and Martin Whitmarsh (McLaren).

John, the excellent result from Singapore means the team is currently 10th in the Constructors' Championship? What does that mean to a team, its people and what does it mean in terms of finance as well?

John BOOTH: As far as the finance is concerned it's a little unclear at the moment as the Concorde expires at the end of the year so we don't really know where we are with that at the moment. But certainly it was a great lift for the whole team. There are only 12 places there and 10th place takes some earning. These Formula One cars just don't break down anymore. You have to earn every position. We had a small celebration afterwards, as you do, but we do realise that we still have a mountain to climb. It's a small step. It's the right direction but it's not where we want to be; we want to be a bit further.

You've recently announced Max Chilton as your third or reserve driver. What are your plans for him and what are your plans for Charles Pic, who has done a good job for the team this year?

JB: We're in discussions with Charles. He's done an outstanding job, as you say. He's had a wonderful rookie year. We're in talks with his management and we'd love to keep him for 2013. He's done a great job, particularly in getting quite close to Timo in race situations; I think he's done a really good job there. Max is part of our young driver programme and has been for a couple of years. He's part of the natural progression and maybe we'll give him a Friday morning before the end of the year.

Monisha, first of all, you've lost Sergio but is Esteban Gutierrez almost an instant replacement for him?

Monisha KALTENBORN: Well, as we've been saying before, we will announce our driver line-up for next year in due course and we're not in a hurry in doing that.

Stefano DOMENICALI: We will do the same!

MK: We still have to sort things out. Regarding Esteban, he's been with the team a long time, and this goes back to Formula BMW times, and whatever we do with him, and he's been our reserve and test driver for the past two years, is something totally independent from Sergio's leaving and we don't really want to mix them together. We'll announce whatever we have to in due course.

In terms of performances over the last few races, they've been a bit up and down but there have been some very promising performances as well. Is there a certain frustration within the team that those performances haven't led to the results they should have?

MK: Of course there is, because we have been seeing that the car is a very competitive car and when you don't get the results you expect because of situations which you have no chance to change, you're just in there without any fault of your own, it is a bit frustrating but more important is that we still continue to believe in this car, which is also the basis for next year's car. So we just take it race by race and we hope it will turn out better next time.

Kim, can you tell us where Cosworth is at the moment, in terms of 2012 and 2013?

Kim SPEARMAN: For 2012, obviously we turn our attention to the next six races and helping out teams to do the best they can. Trying to consolidate John's team's situation in 10th place in the Constructors' (Championship). As you've probably read they've re-signed and partnered with us for 2013 when they'll use a KERS-enabled package, which we hope will bring yet another step up in pace for them. We're very excited about that. And we're still in negotiation with HRT.

And in terms of 2014, new engine; what are the plans?

KS: Love to do it. If we can find a commercially sustainable way to provide a competitive platform for some potential customers, we'd like to do that. We are in useful negotiations with customers and hopefully we'll find a way to be in. We've been in business for 54 years, much of it in Formula One. We've got passionate people back at Cosworth who want to stay in Formula One and we'd like to get there.

Has anything started on paper?

KS: Oh yes. We've been working on the engine for 18 months.

Martin, very interesting, your driver line-up for next year; they're two drivers who are known to be very easy on tyres. What effect will that have on the team and the car?

Martin WHITMARSH: I don't think it will have a distinct effect. I just think we will be working hard to make the car as quick as we can and of course as kind to the tyres as we can. It's not easy but obviously if you have a well-balanced car with plenty of downforce then typically they're kinder on the tyres but I don't think the driver line-up will influence that, we'll be doing the best job we can in that regard.

Drivers always say they're always learning. Where is Sergio Pérez on that learning curve, in comparison with Lewis Hamilton?

MW: In fact, Sergio's about the same age now as Lewis was when he started in Formula One, so he's some way further down the learning curve, which of course makes it intriguing and exciting to see what we can do and how he can develop. So I think it's going to be a very interesting spring as we work together, and of course the goal is to have him in a condition where he can go into that first race with the potential to win it.

Do you think it weakens the team at all in comparison with the current situation?

MW: Well, I think the current driver line-up is a very strong driver line-up and we'll see next year just how strong Sergio can be and we'll whether it's weakened us or not. But I think whatever happens, we've got a super experienced guy in Jenson and we've got an exciting, fresh young talent in Sergio so we're looking forward to it.

Stefano, you've already denied that you're going to tell us who your drivers are going to be next year, so a very easy question for you: do you know who's going to drive for you next year?

Stefano DOMENICALI: I should.

You should know? Do you?

I think to go ahead with this kind of speculation I don't think it's so relevant or interesting. As we said: very soon we will tell you what is the situation and up until the moment I have news on that I will stay quiet. Also because I would start to be very boring in giving the same answer to the same question.

In terms of the wind tunnel, interesting news there. What can be done to the wind tunnel in the short term? Is there a problem with it, do you think? What is the problem with the wind tunnel at the moment?

SD: I think for sure our structure is not the best one in that respect, it is quite old, so as always – and I think it's happened to all of us – for sure in different situations, we're trying to improve the quality of the tools that we have. And this is something that we are trying to do mainly to improve the correlation issue that we had and this is the plan: that we should be able to do in the next season.

So, when will it be open again?

First of all it's still open and we're working in our wind tunnel. As you know we are using another facility and in the next couple of weeks we will define what is the problem to be more specific than that, in order to see what's really the time we have to spend by shutting it down and trying to improve the things that are not at the maximum level at the moment.

Ross, obviously new driver, what sort of promises did you make to him? Obviously all drivers want a winning car, what sort of promises did you have to make in terms of your team, the team which will be building next year's car?

Ross BRAUN: I'm not sure you'd describe them as promises but we set out the path that the team is on, what we're trying to do, the people we have in place to try and achieve that, the facilities we've built up over the last couple of years and, as you do with any driver, you present that vision and the objectives you have for the next few years and that's what we did.

What sort of pressure are you under from a driver like Lewis, but also from the board as well?

RB: I think all of us here are under substantial pressure but a lot of it is pressure you generate yourself because you want to take part in a very competitive sport. I think none of us have handcuffs holding us to this business, we do it because we enjoy it and it's our ambition to succeed in this business, so there is pressure at every level. There's pressure at John's [Booth] level, he's trying to achieve tenth place, a massive task; we're trying to go forward. Most of that pressure for me personally is the pressure from within, not the pressure from a driver or the pressure from a board.

Martin, did you feel betrayed by Lewis' decision?

MW: No.

Question for Stefano, you mentioned there's been a correlation issue with your wind tunnel, how has that affect the development of this year's car so far?

SD: I think that... well, I'm sure that is happening also to other things. I've seen above all in the second part of the season when we were trying to bring new updates on the car, that not all the updates were working on the track. So, we start to investigate a little bit better and we've found that was this issue, that going into the deep analysis of the reason, we understood, we considered it was coming from the tool that is... not obsolete but not really up to the speed of the new technologies that are available on the market. So, that was the reason why we are thinking to do that, to make sure that at the least the percentage of the things that we bring at the track is higher than what we have now.

Monisha, you have three or four Mexican sponsors, without Sergio can you keep them? What's the prospect for next season?

MK: Well, to start with, the prospect for next season is good. We are very confident we will be around, for hopefully more years. As for the sponsors, we know that Telmex, that is Mr [Carlos] Slim Domit has also publically stated that his project with Sauber, regarding the Escuderia Telmex, is a long-term project, so it will not be affected by Sergio's leaving the team.

Are the other sponsors linked to that project, or are they separate with Sergio?

MK: It's a natural link there, obviously, because they are from the same country, but it is not just all that simple that because one driver leaves us all these sponsors will leave. It doesn't necessarily have to mean that.

Question to Monisha, we saw that you wanted to try Robin Frijns for the rookie test – can you confirm the information?

MK: We have not as yet announced our drivers for the Young Driver days – we will also do that very shortly.

Martin, yesterday when we sat here, Lewis joked to Sergio that he knows exactly what's going on with Sergio's car for next year. To what extent is that true, and how much of a concern is it for McLaren?

MW: No, I think Lewis has been part of the team for a long time, I think he knows the people and what we're trying to do but I don't think there's any great secrets in that, so I don't think it's a concern. I think if I was pursuing intellectual property from other teams, I'd probably go for engineers not drivers. But I think again, Lewis is respectful of the team and what it's doing, and I think he knows we're doing to do everything we can in the remaining six races to try and win, and try and win some championships and I think the best way to do that is to work together, be open and carry on as you ordinarily would.

Stefano, Fernando has said in the last few races that he's waiting for Ferrari to counter-attack and not always be on the defensive. Looking also at the problem you have with wind tunnel, how can you guarantee that you're going to be able to give him the things he needs to attack and not always defend and wait for what the others are doing? Is there a plan with that? Have you discussed it?

SD: The plan is to try to push as much as we can, bring new developments every race but it isn't easy. So the guarantee is the effect on the effort on

the team to work very hard. More than that is just pure words, and that doesn't help the situation. So, for sure, I think the situation in the championship is very clear: if you are not able to improve the car then it is more difficult to fight for the championship because we cannot rely on the problem of the others. That's the fact but it doesn't mean that we will not push as hard as possible. But is a consideration that we cannot rely only on being third, fourth, whatever it is, we need to make sure that at least we win a race and then we will see what will be the situation with the others.

Martin, among Lewis's other comments was the possibility of him going back to McLaren in the future. I don't know when the last McLaren driver was who came back to McLaren after leaving but is that possible? Would you say that's a possibility in the future?

MW: Yes, certainly, yes, I think it is. But I think he's joining a strong team in Mercedes, I don't think he'll be coming back any time soon. I'm sure they've got a good contract and they will want to work with him. I don't think Lewis's intention is to hop from team to team on an annual basis. I'm sure that's not Ross's intention either but never say never, as they say, and we'll see what happens in the future. Again, people want to talk about it a lot, obviously, and we're trying to focus on doing the job that we're here to do, but I think the relationship between the team and Lewis is a good one. I think it's a respectful relationship between Mercedes and McLaren as well. We're out there competing and we don't have a problem with anything that's happened, with Lewis's decision or anything else. In the future, I don't think it will be in the very near term but who knows?

Question to the engine suppliers: you have, from the sound of it, V6 engine designs, on the test bench or on the CAD system. Are you looking at full energy recovery systems or are you outsourcing those?

SD: Yes, as we are doing this now in the current situation, so developing our system together with our suppliers and this is part of the challenge of the 2014 powertrain project, to confirm the fact that we are already on full boost in our department, to make sure that we are ready in proper time for this new huge challenge, because for us, it means that we had to start and to update all the infrastructure, to make sure that these new engines and this new system are ready to run, first in the facility and then we need to be ready with a new engine, trying to find the customers for the future and trying to make sure that we are competitive, because one of the things for 2014 is the fact that for all of us, both from the chassis point of view, due to the regulations and also for the engine and powertrain regulations point of view, we are starting from target references that are purely - how can I say? - self-made without having any kind of information or relation with the other competitors. So it will be an incredible task, at least for us which is a small team in terms of dimension to make sure that we are able, both, as I said, from the chassis project but also from the engine, to match strong teams like Mercedes, like Renault and all the other teams that are working very hard already on this new 2014 project.

RB: This past couple of seasons we've done our own energy recovery system in-house. We felt we wanted to take that under our control and so the battery technology is bought in but most of the other technology is developed within Mercedes and we will plan to continue to do so for 2014.

KS: Yeah, we'll be developing a bespoke Cosworth system with an outsource supplier and by necessity, different chassis will need variants of that, so we will be doing our own with somebody else, if you like.

Ross, were you surprised by the announcement of the retirement of Michael Schumacher yesterday, or was it something that you suspected for a few weeks or months? And for all of you, would you give your opinion about his retirement, which is a big loss for F1?

RB: We've had a lot of discussions with Michael over the past months, six weeks or so and whilst Michael hadn't made his decision in those early discussions, he came to that conclusion in the past few days. In many ways, it's a sad moment, when someone of the calibre and achievements of Michael stops racing but he's happy with that decision, he's at peace with that decision, and I think that's the important thing. He's happy with the decision that he's made and I think we've all got to have huge respect for him making that decision. I think Formula One will be losing someone very important, especially as this second time that Michael came back he had a slightly different approach and I think I saw many fans who were perhaps not quite so enthusiastic during Michael's first era coming back and really supporting him. When he got a podium in Valencia, it was nice to see how much support he had from the paddock. But he's done a very very good job for us and we've repeated many times that if we'd provided him with a better car then he would have won races. There are some races where he was certainly quick enough to win - this year alone, Monaco - so it's the passing of an era and one which is hard to imagine anyone repeating the achievements that he's managed in his driving career.

SD: What I can add to what Ross has just said is that I think Michael has showed that he is still a very very fast driver. He's a seven time World Champion but he's still one of the top drivers in the field and as a friend of his, I'm very happy for the decision that he takes because I think that in his experience he's come to this conclusion because I think that considering the situation it's the best for him. We all wish - not only from my personal side, but from all the Ferrari family - the best for his future. He's still young, so he will do a lot of things for sure.

MW: Firstly, I'm not as qualified as the two gentlemen on my left (Domenicali and Brawn) who know him much better than I do, but his achievements are difficult to imagine, certainly in our lifetime, being improved on so inevitably it's a loss. He's a name, a brand within the sport, his achievements have been great whatever he does. I personally think this year has been his strongest since he returned and as Ross said, with a bit more luck he could have won some races this year, but clearly it's his decision and it's a loss to the sport but I guess any great athlete has to decide when it's time to go.

KS: He's obviously one of the greats and I'm sure he will be a fantastic ambassador both for Mercedes and the sport going forwards. I think we'll still see him around a lot.

MK: Michael Schumacher is by far the most successful driver in Formula One's history, and when he returned to the sport, it was undoubtedly good for Formula One and his leaving now will for sure be a loss for the sport.

JB: I've only been fortunate enough to experience Michael's last few years in Formula One but I think he's been a wonderful ambassador. Obviously his performances speak for themselves. The way he handles himself in the paddock, particularly in adversity, he is the absolute professional and a real example to young drivers.

Martin, Lewis told us in Tokyo that there was nothing you could have put on the table that would have kept him at McLaren at the end of the day, although maybe a £100m cheque would have done it. But he seems to have been lured by the attraction of what Mercedes can offer him in 2014 when engine changes are made. Is it frustrating for you that you couldn't hang on to him with something concrete, and do you feel that you will be at a disadvantage in 2014?

MW: Not just 2013. Lewis is a great driver and Mercedes, I'm sure, are very happy to have him and therefore losing a driver like that is something that, as a team principal, you don't set out to do. But if you tell me that there's nothing we could have put on the table which would have kept him then it makes me feel a whole lot better. Lewis made a decision, I respect that and believe me, we're working very closely and very hard together to see if we can win these remaining races and that's what we're focused on. Looking forward to 2013/2014, then we've got a fantastic partnership with Mercedes Benz and we're going to be heading into both of those seasons trying to win.

Ross, do you feel that you will have an advantage?

RB: Well, our agreement with McLaren is to supply engines to the same specification. None of us really know how it's going to be in 2014 in terms of

engine performance, engine reliability. There won't be huge differences. We have a one team policy, a one team principle. Our staff at Brixworth and Brackley work together as one entity and that does bring them closer than can be achieved with a customer, but McLaren are an extremely professional customer. Our ambition is to have the best engine in 2014 as is Stefano's and McLaren will have that engine as well.

Stefano, you have to try to win at least a race in these last six races Today, Ferrari seems to be struggling a little bit compared to McLaren and Red Bull. How do you see things this weekend?

SD: As always on Fridays it's very difficult to have a clear picture because you never know what the others are doing. For sure we know what we've done. It's a little bit too premature to see, after today, that we will struggle this weekend. For sure what we have seen is that as normal we have competitors that are very strong but this is nothing new. This is the picture just one hour after the end of free practice two, so we need to analyse, try to understand what the others were doing. So I don't want to say anything that will be different tomorrow so I'm a little bit cautious.

Stefano, one of the possible views on the McLaren/Perez deal is that Ferrari lost a talented young driver since Perez was from the academy, so what does the team have to say about it, what's your view on that?

SD: Nothing. I mean he had this opportunity, and I think that what we wish to him is the best for his future. I think that he received this offer or he discussed this offer with a very important team and I think that first of all we didn't have any right to block him or to say something in that respect, because he was a driver who is working for the Sauber team. As I said, I think that Ferrari gave him a bit of experience by helping him in understanding something and that's the way it is. We need to accept that and we will see. We are working with other young drivers that we hope we will be able to bring in our team as they will be considered ready, so that's what I can say.

Could I just ask Monisha whether any talks were held with Michael Schumacher about him potentially driving for you in the future?

MK: We were never in negotiations with him.

Ross, Michael mentioned yesterday that he has plenty of options what to do with his future. Is one of those options for him to be retained within your team in a different role?

RB: We've not discussed that. It's not something that we've explored yet. Michael's got huge experience and everyone's got massive respect for him. It's not possible to say. I think Michael's going to spend a few months just reflecting on - let's say - this new opportunity he has and I'm sure he will think very seriously about whatever he'll do, he will do extremely professionally and effectively, but at the moment, no idea what that will be.

F1 Japanese Grand Prix – FP3 report

Anti-roll bars. It's all about anti-roll bars. At least, it was for two of the men out on track in Suzuka for the final practice session of the Japanese Grand Prix weekend.

Kimi Raikkonen spent much of the session trying to determine just what it was that was affecting the handling of his Lotus before determining that the problem appeared to be caused by a lack of correlation between forward and rear anti-roll bar stiffness. The team changed the Finn's forward bar, and the E20's handling improved marginally, but Raikkonen continued to struggle with balance, saying "the front is very heavy and the rear is very poor".

The next man to wonder whether his anti-roll bar was causing problems was Lewis Hamilton. The McLaren driver radioed his team mid-way through the session to complain that his car was very different to the balanced beast he had been driving on Friday. "I want to put the car back to what it was yesterday," Hamilton said. "I want to disconnect the front roll bar."

In terms of incidents, the bulk of drama on track was about near misses, not hits – both Hamilton and Jenson Button found themselves affected by their closing speed and proximity to traffic on late fast laps, with the former narrowly avoiding a collision with the Marussia of Charles Pic and the latter losing time thanks to a slower Michael Schumacher ahead.

The major incident of the morning came about courtesy of Nico Hulkenberg, who smashed into the barriers at Degner 2, bringing a premature end to his morning and scuppering the Force India mechanics' chance of a lunch break. Hulkenberg was uninjured, but lost valuable track time.

While Hulkenberg's crash was very similar to teammate Paul di Resta's Friday crash, it was not the only case of teammate copying on the incident front – Caterham's Heikki Kovalainen repeated Vitaly Petrov's Friday feat of losing bodywork while driving calmly along the main straight. The Finn was luckier than his Russian colleague, however – not only did the rear wing assembly remain on the car, but the car itself remained on the track.

The fastest drivers by some margin were the Red Bull pair, which could well mean a predictable qualifying session this afternoon.

FP3 times (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.32.136s [17 laps]
2. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.32.371s [20 laps]
3. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.32.824s [13 laps]
4. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.32.918s [23 laps]
5. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.32.920s [19 laps]
6. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.32.924s [15 laps]
7. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1.33.008s [21 laps]
8. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.33.025s [16 laps]
9. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.33.094s [17 laps]
10. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.33.160s [16 laps]
11. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.33.184s [14 laps]
12. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1.33.224s [15 laps]

13. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.33.569s [14 laps]
 14. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.33.722s [18 laps]
 15. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.33.899s [23 laps]
 16. Bruno Senna (Williams) 1.33.984s [19 laps]
 17. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.34.023s [19 laps]
 18. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.34.369s [11 laps]
 19. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1.35.568s [19 laps]
 20. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.36.355s [18 laps]
 21. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.36.389s [11 laps]
 22. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.36.517s [18 laps]
 23. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.36.649s [12 laps]
 24. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.36.875s [16 laps]
-

F1 Japanese Grand Prix – Q1 report

As qualifying got underway at Japan's Suzuka Circuit, Nico Hulkenberg's participation was still a matter of debate following the Force India driver's FP3 crash.

Teammate Paul di Resta was the first man to put a time on the board, doing his best to make up for any problems in the other car. But as the session reached its midpoint, Hulkenberg was seen climbing into the cockpit while his mechanics continued the rebuild around him – would the German make it out on track in time to set a timed lap?

Another driver apparently having problems was Pastor Maldonado – the team were seen urgently trying to fix an unidentified issue that had half the team's engineers clustered around the Venezuelan's cockpit.

Sergio Perez ran slightly wide at Turn 7, taking two trips across grass and gravel and ruining his tyres in the process.

Fastest man on track at the halfway point was Ferrari's Felipe Massa, who set a benchmark time of 1m32.946s. Down at the bottom of the timesheets were Sebastian Vettel, Maldonado, Michael Schumacher, and Hulkenberg, none of whom had times on the board. Of the three, only Vettel was out on track.

With Schumacher and Hulkenberg yet to run at all, the dropout zone was officially comprised of Timo Glock, Charles Pic, and Narain Karthikeyan, although Heikki Kovalainen, Vitaly Petrov, and Pedro de la Rosa will all fall in once timed laps are completed by those capable.

Vettel's first timed lap saw the Red Bull driver go fastest by a margin of three-tenths, while Schumacher and Maldonado are out on track. With just over five minutes remaining, they were joined by Hulkenberg at long last.

Maldonado's first timed lap was P2-worthy, despite running wide at the final chicane, and the Williams appears to have a lot more pace than Bruno Senna has been able to display this afternoon.

Schumacher's first timed lap was a terrible 1m47.347s, fifteen seconds slower than the time set by Vettel. Given that the Mercedes driver is carrying a ten-place grid penalty into this race, he can't afford to qualify badly. But his second timed lap was only four seconds faster – Schumacher is currently well outside the 107 percent time of 1m38.597s...

Hulkenberg more than made up for lost time with his first effort, a 1m32.828s that was briefly good enough for P2, but far from the dangers of the dropout zone.

And on his last chance lap, Schumacher scraped into Q2, knocking Senna out in the process.

Dropout zone

18. Bruno Senna (Williams)
 19. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham)
 20. Timo Glock (Marussia)
 21. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT)
 22. Charles Pic (Marussia)
 23. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham)
 24. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT)
-

F1 Japanese Grand Prix – Q2 report

At the end of Q1, Bruno Senna could be heard complaining on the radio that he had been blocked by Jean-Eric Vergne. The Williams driver was knocked out in that session, while the Toro Rosso driver went through, and the matter has been referred to the stewards for consideration.

Progress from Q1 to Q2 was largely about the softer tyre compound, with only five drivers making it though on the Pirelli primes. This second session is likely to see all of the remaining contenders head out on softs.

There was a brief moment of tension for Paul di Resta, who was suffering handling issues and traffic problems all at once. The Scottish driver

managed to avoid getting himself into any trouble, but the tension was clear on the radio, when he berated Force India for giving him a car that was 'all over the place'.

By the time the session was half run, times were on the board from all barring Schumacher, who was sitting in the pits and not looking ready to move.

At the top of the timesheets, it was a Red Bull and McLaren affair; the four drivers from the two teams occupied the top four slots on the standings, with Sebastian Vettel in P1 with a 1m31.501s. The gap between Vettel and Jenson Button in P2 was less dramatic than the margins we saw in FP3; the two men were covered by a not insurmountable two-tenths.

Fewer than five minutes remaining, and Schumacher is still in the pits, showing no sign of movement. The rest of the provisional dropout zone is comprised of Nico Hulkenberg, Pastor Maldonado, Nico Rosberg, Paul di Resta, Daniel Ricciardo, and Jean-Eric Vergne.

Schumacher started his first timed lap with a little under three minutes remaining, giving the Mercedes driver two chances to make it into Q3. A good performance from Schumacher will see Kimi Raikkonen and Sergio Perez at risk of dropping out, but given that his first two sectors were fifteen seconds off the pace, that seems unlikely.

In the final few minutes it's all change with new times on the board, and the dropout zone has a very different cast of characters.

Dropout zone

11. Felipe Massa (Ferrari)
12. Paul di Resta (Force India)
13. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes)
14. Pastor Maldonado (Williams)
15. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes)
16. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso)
17. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso)

F1 Japanese Grand Prix – Q3 report

Hometown hero (sort of, but it's awesomely alliterative) Kamui Kobayashi has made it through to the final stage of qualifying for the Japanese Grand Prix.

It's unlikely that anyone other than Sebastian Vettel will be on pole this afternoon; the Red Bull driver has had a comfortable margin in every session thus far, and was blisteringly quick in the final practice session this morning.

But McLaren are doing their best, with Jenson Button particularly keen to score pole position, as the British driver will be moving back five places on the grid following an unscheduled gearbox change.

Vettel was comfortably fastest when the first round of timed laps went up on the board: a 1m30.839s saw the Red Bull driver two-tenths clear of Mark Webber in P2, and four-tenths faster than Button, but the team radioed the reigning world champion to ask that he find an extra tenth in sector one.

For Fernando Alonso, Nico Hulkenberg, and the Sauber pair it was a one-run session, tyre preservation being more important when the performance gap on a single lap is as great as it stands at present.

Kimi Raikkonen brought a premature end to the session, in a way. The chequered flag had fallen, but with all ten drivers out on track the Flying Finn brought out the yellows when he ran wide at Spoon, beaching himself in the kitty litter and preventing his competitors – including his teammate – from improving their times in that sector.

Lewis Hamilton and Romain Grosjean were the two big victims of Raikkonen's error.

Vettel ended the afternoon comfortably on pole, sharing the front row with his teammate.

Provisional grid

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull)
2. Mark Webber (Red Bull)
3. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
4. Romain Grosjean (Lotus)
5. Sergio Perez (Sauber)
6. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari)
7. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus)
8. Jenson Button (McLaren)*
9. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren)
10. Felipe Massa (Ferrari)
11. Paul di Resta (Force India)
12. Pastor Maldonado (Williams)
13. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes)

14. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso)
15. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India)**
16. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso)
17. Bruno Senna (Williams)
18. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham)
19. Timo Glock (Marussia)
20. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT)
21. Charles Pic (Marussia)
22. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham)
23. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes)***
24. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT)

* Jenson Button qualified in P3, but will start from P8 thanks to an unscheduled gearbox change.

** Nico Hulkenberg qualified in P10, but will start from P15 thanks to an unscheduled gearbox change.

*** Michael Schumacher qualified in P13, but will start from P23 thanks to a ten-place grid penalty incurred when he crashed into Jean-Eric Vergne in Singapore.

F1 Japanese Grand Prix – Saturday press conference

The post-qualifying press conference in Suzuka took place against the backdrop of a sea of penalties – both potential and existing – that means the three men present on Saturday afternoon will not be the first three men on Sunday's grid.

Present were Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull), Mark Webber (Red Bull), and Jenson Button (McLaren).

Sebastian, your fourth consecutive pole here, you must love this place.

Sebastian VETTEL: Yeah, it's not bad. I'm very, very happy with today's result, I think we had a very, very smooth qualifying session, nearly perfect, so we couldn't really ask for more. The car felt fantastic from the start. We didn't really have the best start to the weekend: yesterday morning I wasn't very happy but then we seemed to get it better every time we go out, so very pleased with the result, very happy, the car feels fantastic around here and I was able to pick up a little bit overnight and it came together nicely and now obviously we hope for a very good race tomorrow.

It's the 50th anniversary for Suzuka and it's a circuit that everyone seems to adore driving around. What's the best part of the circuit?

SV: I think you have to say the first sector, up the Esses, obviously we don't have that kind of combination in Formula One elsewhere. I think it's unique. I think this place in general is quite special with all the fans around the track. When I was walking into the garage you can obviously see Turn One, Two, Three and the grandstands mostly and you see a lot of people. It's just, for us, nice to see the excitement people have for Formula One and the support we get. I think they are very crazy – in a positive way – so it's nice coming here and wonderful to drive the circuit. The rest of the track is very enjoyable: The Degners and then Spoon is very special: you always lose the car a little bit, just when you come off. The lap I had in qualifying in the end was just right in those places, so I was very happy.

Mark, great result for the team, Red Bull Racing, you seem to have made real progress.

Mark WEBBER: Yeah, it's been a good weekend for us so far. Seb and I had a clean run in Q3 when it mattered at the start there. And two pretty big laps from both of us. Obviously Seb got me a bit, so that was a good lap from him. But to be this much further up for us, obviously we've had a rough run with qualifying of late, particularly my side with penalties and bits and bobs. It just makes the race much more difficult: you have to start doing wacky strategies and stuff like that. So, I am happy to be on the front row and looking forward to a good result tomorrow. Like you say, for the team it's just a great tonic for them, at this point in the championship to have the cars towards the front again.

Jenson, third in qualifying but obviously with a five-place grid penalty.

Jenson BUTTON: That hurts a little bit. Today was good. This morning in practice I wasn't that happy but we made some good improvements for qualifying. For me both laps I did in Q3 were good. I was happy with the laps, really enjoyed driving around here, it's always great with low fuel and new tyres – new soft tyres. It was a lot of fun but we're just not quick enough. I wouldn't know what to put my finger on, where that four-tenths is. A good qualifying for us, just a pity we're starting back in eighth. This place is such a nice place to fight for a win: it's going to be very difficult for me tomorrow but never say never. There's always possibilities and I think we'll have a good race car also.

So Sebastian, I guess one of the main factors tomorrow is going to be all about tyres, have you got enough sets left? New tyres, new softs?

SV: Yeah, obviously we didn't finish the run in Q3, so saved a little bit there, saved a lap, didn't push to the end. Before that we had a very smooth session in qualifying in general. We saved as many tyres as we can and I think we have a pretty good car, the balance felt very good in qualifying so I was very happy with the laps I had every time and yeah, all in all I think we should have a good race car as well tomorrow. I think we were able to improve the car from yesterday to today which also helps us on the long run and with tyre consumption. But you never know until you find out. I think we've seen a lot of races this year where probably we expected something, and people expected something, other teams had expectations but the last ten laps everything turned around. We have to stay focussed and see what we get from start to finish.

I guess you were OK in traffic, because particularly in Q1 a lot of people were complaining.

SV: I was very lucky, I saw a couple of incidents on the screen but I think we found a good gap, and I needed only one lap, which obviously helps. So that was good – it doesn't always go that way. So, it was helping to save tyres, I'm not sure if we're going to use that one again – but still it's good to get through without any trouble.

Mark, on that last lap, did you have yellow flags at Spoon?

MW: Yeah, I had to back-off for the lights and the flags. There was no car there when I got there, so it was very, very close. Obviously JB was behind

me and I saw he was still committed to his lap with the DRS etc., so obviously the lights were just cleared for him. Would have been nice to have a look at the last chicane, would have liked to have got that a little bit better. I was down a sniff into Spoon but... the hairpin was tricky for us today, trying to get the hairpin a little bit better would have been nice but in general the first sector was very strong, and for both of us to have a strong car here, when it really mattered, to put ourselves right towards the front of the grid, on the front row, is something we're really, really happy with. We can really race from there and have a good grand prix tomorrow.

Jenson, is it a bit worrying, the progress they've made?

JB: I think we expected them to be quick. Their race pace especially has been quick over the last few races. Qualifying hasn't gone their way and Seb looked really quick in Singapore but it wasn't there, it didn't seem, at the end. But their pace is very good here. The balance for me felt great, I felt really happy with the car but I just... that was it. Y'know, I felt I got everything out of it on both laps but still quite a long way off these two but a long way in front of everyone else. So, third place would have been nice to start the race because I think with this race you really don't know what's going to happen with tyre strategies and degradation and what-have-you. A lot of people are struggling with blistering. But I'm starting down in eighth: it's not the easiest place to start from. But I still think we can really race well from there. There's an unusual group of cars in front. So hopefully we can not just get good points - you never know, maybe we can still challenge these two.

Question to Seb and Mark: do you have any explanation why you succeed so well in Suzuka?

MW: In years gone by, I think we've had cars that have really enjoyed this type of venue, whether RB5 a little bit, RB6 especially was very strong. We had a very tough Grand Prix with Fernando that year - Seb and I, the three of us, a good race in 2010. JB was quick last year, there was a tight field last year but in general Silverstone, Suzuka, these type of circuits, you just have to look at Adrian's (Newey's) record on some of these tracks. You go back to the Williamses with Mansell, Hakkinen, McLarens blah blah blah. He's always been strong on these type of tracks, so that's good for us but it's always challenging, and we've had to work like hell to get the car in the window where we would like it and now, this weekend, it seems pretty good so we would be very very disappointed if we weren't competitive here because, as you say, it should be a track where we can charge for very good results. I think, basically, to answer your question it's in the DNA of our car, it's in the DNA of the philosophy of our car. That's it.

SV: As Mark said, we worked very hard to get it to where it is now. I think we were struggling this year at the beginning of the year in places, in corners where usually, traditionally, we were competitive, so we didn't really know what to expect here this weekend but sector one seemed very competitive for both of us all weekend so I think that's an indication whether the car is happy around here or not. I'm happy we are back to our shape that we had over the last couple of years around here.

Michael Schumacher has announced his retirement; could I have your thoughts please?

SV: I think it's a loss for Formula One. It's a shame, obviously, I think it was good fun to have him around, race against him and joke with him, so I think I will miss that but obviously you can understand his decision and, as I said, we will miss him, but obviously wish him all the best for his future, and hope we still have him around somehow in some function.

MW: I think it's pretty obvious that there were two different careers: one phenomenal one and then in the next one the car, everything together didn't get close to what he did in the past, and that's how sensitive Formula One can be. He knows that, he took a new challenge on - which you have to take your hat off to - because he didn't want to be back at home just doing the groceries, and he was also very hungry to challenge himself again. We saw some flash points of what he's capable of, but he also knows himself, he's seen some flash points which is the right time for him to stop, so move on.

JB: Yes, wonderfully put by both parties. I think the last three years, we've all been wondering and watching to see what happened to his second career and it wasn't like the first one, but I think it just shows and proves how amazing the first one was because he hasn't done badly. It is a loss for the sport, having a seven time World Champion and someone that's achieved more than anyone else and will for a very long time leaving the sport. He feels that it's the right time to leave, and good luck to him.

Sebastian, now there are only two people in front of you for the number of pole positions: Michael and Ayrton Senna. Do you think you can catch them?

SV: As Jenson just said, I think Michael has a lot of the records that will probably stay there forever. You don't really jump into the car thinking about those sort of things. Obviously, when you end up here and end up with people telling you some things it's nice for all of us but it's not the number one motivation that makes you jump into the car. I enjoy what I do a lot and on tracks like this, as Jenson said, on soft tyres, low fuel, you really feel what the cars can achieve and I think our job becomes very very special and unique in the world. That's what I enjoy most. Obviously if you're successful then it feeds on itself. I think they are quite a long way ahead as well, so we will see. We have to work, obviously, focus step by step, and not think about those kind of things.

F1 Japanese Grand Prix – Race report

Q: When is a Sebastian Vettel lights-to-flag win not a snorefest?

A: When the Red Bull driver finds himself at the head of a chaotic 53 laps that force the title fight into an all-out competition that will make the last quarter of the season a nail-biting conclusion to a thrilling world championship.

While Vettel may have raced the Suzuka Circuit in his traditional style, powering away from a clean start to open up an ever-increasing gap, behind the Red Bull driver all was chaos. The run into the first corner shook up the drivers' standings, and the podium was a euphoric celebration starring unlikely faces.

Make no mistake - the 2012 Japanese Grand Prix was far more than the sum of its parts.

Two things defined Sunday's drama in Suzuka: the events of the first and second corners, and the durability of Pirelli's rubber. Vettel was not alone in making a clean getaway when the lights went out. Kamui Kobayashi more than made up for his Spa disappointment by powering past Mark Webber heading into Turn 1, and claiming P2 for his own. Another man to make an excellent getaway was Felipe Massa; the Ferrari driver shot off like a rocket, going from P10 to P4 over the course of the first lap.

They were the lucky ones. For some, the start became the end, with Nico Rosberg and Fernando Alonso both out between Turns 1 and 2, the result of a

series of accidents and near-misses that brought out the Safety Car for a brief run at the head of the pack.

Establishing just what had happened off the start was not the work of moments. Championship leader Alonso was out, but had he run wide and spun of his own accord, or was the incident triggered by a puncture caused by brief contact with Lotus' Kimi Raikkonen. Replays confirmed it was the latter.

While Alonso's early departure from the race was a tragedy for the Spanish racer, it was excellent for the championship. The Ferrari driver has been consistent all season, picking up points and winning races while his championship rivals have been throwing away opportunity after opportunity. But with no points to bring home from Suzuka, Alonso is now only four points ahead of Vettel in the drivers' standings, and it's all still to play for in the final five races.

The Raikkonen-Alonso incident was far from the only moment of drama on the opening lap. Bruno Senna collided with Rosberg, ending the Mercedes' driver's race before it had begun in earnest. And in the middle of the carnage, Romain Grosjean – with only one race under his belt since that dangerous driving ban – managed to hit Mark Webber, sending the Australian limping to the pits at the end of the first lap.

Once the racing had settled back down after the lap 3 restart, the Japanese Grand Prix took on something of a processional air. With first Kamui Kobayashi and then Felipe Massa not so hot on his heels, Vettel spent the race holding a steady gap to the men behind before extending it for his own amusement as the chequered flag approached, causing more than a few grey hairs on the Red Bull pitwall in the process.

In the closing stages, the level of tension on track and in the grandstands ratcheted up several notches, as honorary Japanese racer Jenson Button took advantage of his marginally fresher rubber to close in on Japanese racer Kobayashi.

Button began chipping away at the Sauber driver's lead lap by lap, a tenth at a time, until it looked as though the McLaren driver might snatch away Kobayashi's maiden podium on the last lap of the race. While Kobayashi stayed ahead of his rival, it was a close-run thing: the two men crossed the finish line a mere 0.560s apart.

While there were 24 men in Sunday's race, many of whom have not been mentioned in this report, the Japanese Grand Prix was the tale of the three men who finished on the podium, and those whose races were finished – or destroyed – on the opening lap. Those other fifty tours of the circuit? Fifty shades of Vettel showing us just why 2011 put the pah! in parade.

Japanese Grand Prix results (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1h 28m56.242s
2. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) + 20.639s
3. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) + 24.538s
4. Jenson Button (McLaren) + 25.098s
5. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) + 46.490s
6. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) + 50.424s
7. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) + 51.159s
8. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) + 52.364s
9. Mark Webber (Red Bull) + 54.675s
10. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) + 1m06.919s
11. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) + 1m07.769s
12. Paul di Resta (Force India) + 1m23.460s
13. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) + 1m28.645s
14. Bruno Senna (Williams) + 1m28.709s
15. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) + 1 lap
16. Timo Glock (Marussia) + 1 lap
17. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) + 1 lap
18. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) + 1 lap

Romain Grosjean (Lotus) RET
Charles Pic (Marussia) RET
Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) RET
Sergio Perez (Sauber) RET
Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) RET
Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) RET

F1 Japanese Grand Prix – Sunday press conference

It was a highly emotional press conference that followed the Japanese Grand Prix, with the race winner blinking back tears of joy, flanked by one man whose last podium visit was two years earlier and one podium virgin.

Present were Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull), Felipe Massa (Ferrari), and Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber).

Sebastian, yesterday pole position, today winner but you pushed very hard until the last laps. Did you know Fernando was not racing again?

Sebastian VETTEL: I saw the safety car at the beginning. I think first of all we had a very good start which was very important because I think right behind me there was a little bit of a crash and I saw a Ferrari was out. I wasn't sure, halfway through the race when I was looking at the tower to see where the others are, I saw the car that was still racing was Felipe, so I was assuming Fernando was not racing any more. First of all I would like to

thank everyone. The atmosphere here every weekend is unbelievable, we leave the hotel, we get so much support from all of you, the grandstands are full when we go down the main straight, nearly every single corner is full of people and it really makes our job very, very special. Thanks for all of that, domo arigato, and... unfortunately that's all of my Japanese. I'll try to pick up some words for next year. Thank you very, very much. Thanks to the team, thanks to Renault, all the guys have pushed so hard the last couple of months and I said on the radio, when you're dreaming at night, you dream about being able to race a car like that. The balance was fantastic, and I was enjoying every lap. That's why, I think we were has such a big gap to the guys behind – so I'm very, very happy.

Felipe, we cannot say the race or the podium of your life... but almost. Two years without a podium, now you're back. How do you feel about that?

Felipe MASSA: I think it's fantastic. To come here in Japan, starting tenth, which I was very happy with the car since the practice and then qualifying was not so good. I'm sure I was able to start in the top five so I was tenth. I was able to do a very good start, very clever on the first corner with the accident and everything that happened, and then the pace was very good from the car. Since the beginning of the race the pace was really good. I was behind Jenson and I was quicker than him, when he stopped to do the pitstop I was straight away half a second quicker per lap, so then I was able to push hard and overtake Jenson but also Kamui which was very quick in the front as well. So, for sure the race was much better than I expected. We did a good job, unfortunately Fernando is not here, fighting for the Championship as well, but I am very happy with my race and let's keep pushing hard to be on the podium now, more than two years but every race now.

Kamui, you can also speak in Japanese as well today, congratulations, the first podium of your life on your home racing track. Tell us about that.

Kamui KOBAYASHI: English or Japanese? I think first of all, thank you very much for everyone. Everybody know this is my first podium, in Japan this is fantastic and unbelievable you know?

Sebastian, that looked like a near-perfect race – a near perfect weekend in fact.

SV: Yeah, as I just said, it's unbelievable. Since yesterday in qualifying, nothing I think could be better. You come across these kinds of races or weekends very, very rarely. Unbelievable. We had a very good start, obviously it was important as Mark was running into trouble at Turn One and Two, I didn't see what happened behind him. I saw I had a better start than him and Kamui was probably already past Mark before the first corner, I was focusing on my car and to get through the first couple of corners. But, yeah, obviously very quickly saw the safety car boards. Wasn't sure what happened. When we came around the first time, surprisingly there was nothing there, so I think the marshals probably did a very good job cleaning up the track. I don't know how many cars were involved but obviously, yeah, it was crucial to not be in that kind of pack. And after that I had a very, very good race car. It was behaving very well, so yeah, it's very difficult to describe why. We didn't have major upgrades for this race. I think it was just the fact of the car suiting to the track, finding the right setup on Friday and then toward Saturday it was just coming together. The balance was there and it was just working. I think we had a fantastic race and I said to the guys, when you have a dream about how your race car should be, that's exactly what you're wishing for, so I'm very, very happy and very proud of the team. They stayed very calm all the race. The pitstops obviously we had a big gap so we had a bit of luxury to the guys behind to drop some time – but they seemed very focused. Also, inside the car I tried not to drop too much time, because obviously with the sun coming down, the sun was quite low in the end and there's a couple of tricky corners, especially Turn Eight, entrance of 13 where we've seen cars spinning over the weekend. And it's very easy to get carried away and think about the corner after the present corner: you start to think ahead and lose the focus and do a little mistake. I tried to stay in the moment and until the end it was fantastic because I had a car where I could control the race and I could push as hard as I wanted to and take care of the tyres, so – not to make this too long – all in all it was... fantastic.

It seems extraordinary that it's only your third win and yet it brings you right into championship contention.

SV: I'm very careful on this obviously, in terms of championships this race was a big step and it helped us but we see how quickly things can change. Look at the last... I don't know how many races there were since the summer break but four or five; we had a DNF in Monza, if you look last year we had only one race where we didn't finish, so obviously this year is entirely different for everyone. It seems that we are more on the limit, trying to find a step in the right direction, and that's true for everyone, so it's much closer: every weekend can be different and instead of then having a bad weekend and still finishing fourth or fifth, you might then be only tenth, because of guys like Sauber and Kamui, Sergio and other guys – the Lotus is very strong this year – so they all keep scoring consistently but obviously one of us at some point has to park and watch the race from the outside, which is not nice and something you don't hope for. That is why I say I want to be very careful because it's still a long way ahead and there's a lot of things that can happen. I think it was important for us, obviously we did have some pace this weekend and important for us to make use of that.

Felipe, obviously the start was very important for you, you picked up a lot of places there. Tell us what you saw at the start and how you picked up those places?

FM: First of all I think my start was very good, I was able to overtake Lewis and then I get to corner one, I saw that Fernando and Kimi went a little bit outside... not outside of the track but very wide after corner one and then I pull inside both, so I was able to overtake both, and then after I saw Mark spinning around, I think a car push him, which I don't remember very well but I think a car touch him and it push him and he's spinning in front of me. Then I saw a space and I was able to go on the throttle and take this space and even take the KERS as it was another two cars going out of the corner a little bit slower. I was able to overtake these two cars by using the KERS and going before on the throttle. I think the start was a little bit complicated in corner one but I think we did a perfect job with all these things happening. After that, I was behind Jenson and Kamui, and Jenson was not so quick, so anyway, it was very important. It's very difficult to overtake in this track, so as soon as they stop I prefer to stay out just to see. And then I improve half a second straight away and a little bit more in the next lap and I think they were a little bit in traffic, so I managed to pass both and then the pace was very good on the hard as well. So, very consistent, very good. Actually, the pace was very good since the whole weekend – unfortunately I couldn't do a very good qualifying yesterday but y'know I think I was very happy with the car all weekend and very nice to be on the podium again after a little bit of time. Hopefully this is just the beginning of many podiums now in front.

How much of a relief is it to be on the podium?

FM: Ah, it's nice! It's like a relief, y'know? It was great, and a great race anyway, able to push hard from the beginning to the end and show that we are here to fight for victory and for pole and not just to fight for a few points.

Kamui, how much did you enjoy being on that podium at home?

KK: Well, it was a fantastic race. We really working hard to get the podium, and you know my team mate has a couple of podiums already but myself, I had a couple of chance in qualifying, I mean I had good position to start, but always I never had luck. I mean we struggle at the start. But this time, maybe it's good to start third, it's no front row but the feeling was good because we had a long run on Friday and that was, I think pretty good pace

and we had good confidence for the rest of the week. So, I think, when I gained position to second after the start, I was pretty sure to be on the podium. But then some point I think we really struggle a lot to hold Jenson. Especially the last stint was really tough because I change quite early for hard compound tyres but I think Jenson change, I think, a couple of laps later and I think that's what's really challenging for us. But if we want to hold Jenson we have to do it. And finally we need to manage tyres, I mean in the last couple of laps. It was within one second and really challenging for us - but I think finally we finish in the points, on the podium and that's fantastic. Especially in front of my home grand prix, my first podium, that's... y'know... amazing. Before the race I was joking: a couple of times I have a chance to get podium but I have bad luck and I couldn't get it. But maybe I get this race in podium, maybe it's something in destiny, y'know? So I'm very happy for the fans. There's so many people supporting us. When we look there is so much crowd around the circuit and that's amazing. Really, thanks to all the fans. I think we need to keep going for the future.

Felipe, you had a great day and Fernando was unlucky but the question is, do you believe that the pace of the Ferrari is enough to match Red Bull now?

FM: Well, let's say not on this track. I think that on this track Sebastian has incredible pace compared to all the other cars. We saw that in qualifying and in the race it was the same. Anyway, I think it changes from track to track. Maybe this was a track where they were stronger during the whole championship. I think we need to wait and see track to track. We need to keep pushing very hard, we need to work very hard in the factory too to bring the right pieces for the car as well and try. Nothing is finished for Fernando. He did many many good races until now. What happened today was not nice for him but these things happen in the championship. It's important that we push hard and concentrate on the next race. He's still leading the championship and that's important.

Felipe, this was also a pretty important race for you and your future, also for you Kamui. Do think that this podium, for both of you, will help you to secure your seats at Ferrari and Sauber respectively for next season? Yesterday you said that this could be your last Suzuka. Is that true?

FM: I think so.

KK: Yeah, I think so too.

FM: So, we think so.

KK: We think so together, you know? We will have a good meeting tonight, to speak with our managers.

Soon?

FM: Yeah. I think so!

KK: I think so.

Sebastian, your first title was won by you chasing; the second was you being chased. What is your view on what might be the third one?

SV: I don't know. I can answer your question when I'm fortunate enough to win for the third time. Whether that's this year or not I don't know. Like I said, I'm very careful. I think we had a long journey so far, and it's been a tough year. Still there are many races to go so today I don't want to talk about the championship. I know I finished in front of everyone today, I won the race, so I know that I scored more points than anybody else today but you don't know what happens next weekend. I think we have a very tough remainder of the season with a very new calendar for all of us, with a lot of back-to-back races. Basically next week Korea, then two races, one in India and Abu Dhabi, and then obviously America and Sao Paulo. I think there's still a long way to go and as I said, we have to focus on every single race and try to do our best and then we will see whether it's good enough. The target is to do our maximum in those five races, then we calculate our points. If it's enough, I think it's fantastic. If it's not then it's not the fault of these five or six races that we will do at the end.

Kamui-san, in the closing laps, Jenson was catching you and the podium was getting closer too and your many fans were cheering you. Would you please explain how you were feeling in that situation?

KK: Well, it was a difficult moment. I think my tyre situation was quite tough. We spent more than 20 laps on them, especially in the last three laps my rear tyres were really getting bad. Of course, I needed to push, I could not slow down to save the tyres. Whatever I had, like oversteer, I had to really push. In the end, into the last lap, I was pretty sure I could hold Jenson because normally, I think, after the main straight, there is no chance to overtake on this track. Apart from that, I think getting on the podium but I was focusing on every lap because if I missed one corner, we could easily have lost my position so I think it was a good challenge for myself. And I think Jenson was pretty fast in the last stint. Finally, we survived and let's say it was a great job from the team, because they gave us great advice while I was driving, and I was pretty sure to hold him and I was very happy. Every fan was shaking their hands at me, especially on the last lap so it was fantastic.

Sebastian, since you first started in F1 you've been breaking record after record. Today you equalled Fangio on wins, you now have 25 percent victories from your race starts. Do you find these constant statistics - the reminders of these statistics - from the press a pressure at all or do you just forget about them and get on with the racing?

SV: No, I think they're very special. Obviously I'm not aware of those kind of numbers but I think that's a special thing about Formula One. We had great drivers in the past, great champions and great characters, and I think for all of us... when I said earlier the last time I was with Kamui on the podium it was probably in Formula Three and both of us had a dream for Formula One but at the same time, you know you are a young guy, you are racing in Formula Three, you know it's only one or two steps away but then it's so far away still. There's only a handful of us, 24 drivers in Formula One. I think first of all you feel extremely fortunate and proud to be one of them and to race a Formula One car, stand on the grid, winning a race, driving for championships. At the time we were racing in Formula Three this was so far away. Obviously I knew these kind of guys, when you talk about records. When I was young I was following Formula One and Michael most of the time. But you never dreamed... imagined yourself being one of those guys and breaking any kind of record, even if it's just having the best start or something silly which would already make you extremely proud. I think it's an honour and as I said yesterday already, a circuit like this, where you really get to feel what the cars can do... unfortunately it's impossible to explain to you how it feels, so it's only something we share amongst ourselves and I think it's something we should not forget at any stage, and it's something very very special. I think it's one of the best jobs you can have in the world in my - in our - point of view, but then to be successful it obviously starts to feed on itself and makes it very very enjoyable.

Sebastian, how important has qualifying been for you? You look at earlier on in the European season you've sometimes struggled to get even close to the front row. Now you've really been doing the job in qualifying. How key is that in the championship run-in, and also do you feel that this is finished business after this time last year when you were made to be conservative and not win for the championship?

SV: I think it's very important... at the beginning of the season I think there was a little bit of a trend of saying that qualifying was not that important

this year because the races were very upside down. Some of the races changed completely in the last ten laps, but I think it still shows how important it is, to be well positioned after Saturday's qualifying for Sunday's race. If you then take an average of 15 races or whatever we've had so far and you see how important qualifying is still, I think it was important for us to make a step forward on Saturday. Still, I think it's very easy this year to not have the perfect Saturday afternoon - I experienced it last time two weeks ago in Singapore, how quickly it can change. I had a very good car, I was happy and everything seemed to work as per plan in Q1 and Q2. Then you arrive in Q3 and you don't understand why you can't go quicker. This morning I read an article about Felipe, or Felipe did an interview and I think he experienced the same thing yesterday. We do so many new sets of tyres, so many qualifying and it's then difficult to say OK, I didn't get the grip on that run and it just didn't come together and that's why I was lacking the speed... because you always want an explanation, you want to find the reason why you weren't quick enough. It seems this year that cars are obviously much closer together and the window seems much narrower this year, to make the tyres work. You especially feel that in qualifying so that's why things can change quickly. You might get a messy qualifying even after a brilliant start and then it might compromise your whole weekend, so that's how quickly it can change.

Sebastian, at the end of the race, they said to you to be careful and in spite of it you set the fastest lap. Are you sure that nothing could happen, and secondly did you race with the double DRS today?

SV: Well, today in the race I wasn't really using DRS, so it didn't really matter. Fortunately I didn't have to use it. I think we've made improvements over the last couple of races. As I said earlier, qualifying was a bit our weakness and has seemed a little bit better in the last races. At the end, I obviously wasn't trying to take any unnecessary risks. I was trying to control the gap to Felipe. I think last year I was sometimes in a similar situation with a gap of five or six seconds and trying to control the race too much and it got very close towards the end of the race, so I didn't want to lift at any stage. As I mentioned earlier, I didn't want to lose the focus and concentration and in the end, obviously I thought to myself maybe it's not the smartest thing but as I said, I wasn't trying to do something stupid but you don't get to race a car like that too often in your life, where you feel in control and the car is balanced and you're just very happy with what the car does, and how it behaves, so I was able to put some reasonably quick lap times in at the end.

Felipe, was this the hardest one of the last six races for Ferrari on paper and what do you really have to do, where do have to concentrate the most to try to come back?

FM: Are you talking hard for Ferrari or hard for me? Well, I would say our car was competitive here, not compared with the Red Bulls, but I think we had very good pace in the race. We had very good pace in practice as well. When I did a long run on Friday I was one of the quickest guys on the track, so I think the car was good here. I'm sure Fernando would have done a good job today. But anyway, we need to improve, we need to bring more new pieces, we need to push in that direction, to improve the car. Just going back to the qualifying, I didn't have a good qualifying. Actually, I had a very good qualifying until the second set in Q2. Before that, I was always in the top five, top seven and I couldn't use the tyres. As Sebastian said, sometimes you have that opportunity and you cannot use it, and I didn't have any grip on the front tyres, and I think that was the biggest problem for my qualifying. I'm sure that starting in the top five would have been as the race was today, because I was fourth after corner three. Starting at the front is very important. The race is easier, you can control your tyres better and use the pace in a better direction. For sure, qualifying is very important.

Kamui, at the restart after the safety car, you had a pretty big gap in front of you, between Sebastian and you. What was the situation for you?

KK: Actually I was stuck in gear. It was holding in first gear, it was already on the rev limiter and I couldn't shift up to second and I need to brake, so I was really surprised. Anyway, I couldn't fight with Sebastian. I didn't mind, I couldn't hold my position. He started pretty early, before, quite far away to the safety car line, so I had enough to recover. But it was a bit of a surprise.
