

Fl Korean Grand Prix – Thursday press conference

Those who looked at the list of attendees for the opening press conference of the Korean Grand Prix weekend and expected a fight will have found themselves sorely disappointed – it was a very civilised affair.

Present were Fernando Alonso (Ferrari), Romain Grosjean (Lotus) Pastor Maldonado (Williams), Nico Rosberg (Mercedes), Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull), and Mark Webber (Red Bull).

Nico, coming first of all to you. It has been mentioned that this is a better circuit for you than Suzuka. What are your feelings about that?

Nico ROSBERG: Already in the race in Japan things were looking better. Michael put in a consistent pace there. For sure here this track should suit us more. All the conditions, all the circumstances, the long straights and everything. I'm definitely looking forward to it and I'm confident that we can do better again.

The big problem is keeping Sauber at bay in the Constructors' Championship, isn't it?

NR: Personally, I'm looking forward, so I want to try to maximise the points that we can get and I'm convinced we can do (that)... there are still a lot of points to be had in the next few races and that isn't going to be a concern.

So you're quite happy with the way things are going?

NR: Yes.

Romain, there is a new exhaust system on the car. What are you hoping for from that?

Romain GROSJEAN: Hopefully some good performance. We were one of the only teams not to use it so it may help us to go quicker. We know our weakness this year on the car and this may help us to improve quite well.

Obviously you had the problem last weekend and went to see Mark after the race. What did you say and are you quite happy that you've cleared the air?

RG: Yes, Mark came to see me and I completely understand that he was unhappy. The only thing I could say was to apologise and that's what I did. I'm clearly conscious of the risk at the start, I'm working on changing on quite a lot of things but work doesn't come from one day to the other one. There is a process going on. I said I was very sorry. I'm not stupid and I'm conscious of the risk. And hopefully by now it will be a different and I will not make the mistake of focusing on the wrong targets.

And Mark, are you happy with that?

Mark WEBBER: Yeah, absolutely. I went to see Romain, we had a discussion about it and that was that. So, yes.

Pastor, again a team that feels the car is suited to this circuit. Is that your feeling?

Pastor MALDONADO: I hope so! I hope to have a competitive car and a part of that is to be quite competitive in quali. We missed a couple of tenths in the last qualifying in Suzuka and we were out of Quali 3. It was quite a good pace during the race but we are really looking forward here to being in Quali 3 and very competitive. But it's very difficult to know exactly where we'll be.

At the moment your future seems to be undecided. Is it your decision and have you been in contact with other teams apart from Williams?

PM: To be honest I really want to stay with Williams. It's a good team and the team is getting better and better every day. We've been rebuilding everything in the team and I think now it's more compact and the car is looking, as I mentioned before, every day better and better. So good confidence with them but at the moment there is not confirmation. So looking forward to seeing that but otherwise looking forward to remaining in Formula One for sure.

Mark, you've had an unfortunate second half to the season, since your win at the British Grand Prix. This is a circuit that has been up and down for you. You pretty much sealed the championship here for Red Bull Racing when you finished third. Can you get it back? Can you turn things around here?

MW: Yes. That's the goal, mate. As you've said, we've had a few ropery runs of late. Lost of different reasons: a few on my side – not driving well enough – a few on some dodgy strategies, and last weekend was out of my hands. In that case, all of a sudden, three or four or five races with definitely not the points you want. I'm really looking forward to this race. It's... in terms of atmosphere it's not off the charts, we know that, but in terms of the race track, it's not a bad little circuit to drive on so I think the car will go well here.

Fernando, how badly do you need a good result this weekend?

Fernando ALONSO: Well, I think we all need some good points this weekend but it's the same situation for everybody, if not worse, so that's it.

And with five races how much are Ferrari pushing as well?

FA: I think we have been pushing from the first test in the winter, so nothing has changed in the last five races. We just need to keep doing the things we've been doing so far. I think it has nearly been a perfect championship for us at the moment, with good strategies, good starts, good approach to the races. Everything we had in our hands on Sunday we maximised the points. We had one zero in Spa and one zero in Suzuka but things completely

outside of our team, so apart from that we don't need to change too many things.

Of course your rival is Sebastian there, winner here last year and winner of the last two races this year. Does that give you confidence? What is the feeling coming to this race:

Sebastian VETTEL: Of course. We had a good two last races as you mentioned. We obviously come here on a high and we try to produce the momentum to have another very strong result here. We know that this circuit should be quite good for us. Historically we have been competitive here. The two years we have been racing here before I think we always had a very good car, so try again.

It's interesting that people say this circuit suits the car or vice versa, as this seems to be a circuit that has a bit of everything: it has a lot of straights, it has the twisty section at the end, it's got some fast, flowing corners in the middle. Is it just an all-round car that you have?

SV: In the end I think it's the nature of the track that maybe we used to like in the last two years. We should be reasonably competitive but then again, this year I think it has been very unpredictable and you don't know what happens so it could be the case here. We have to try our best to get another strong result. If you look at the layout, for sure you start off with a lot of straights and then you finish off with corners. It looks a little strange compared to other places because usually it's a bit more of a mix. But here you get the straights first and then the corners.

Romain, clearly you have the speed to be a Formula One driver, it's a first time here in Korea, we've got a tricky couple of corners on that first lap, Eric Boullier said it's really down to you now to sort out your situation. Tell me what you're going to do different here this weekend.

RG: Not having any contact on the first lap, that's clearly one of the objectives. I'd say there's work in progress and it takes a bit of time but yeah, it's a cycle as well: things have been going bad, and the more it goes bad... I'm conscious of the risk at the start. The Spa accident was quite impressive and I was the first one to be happy that Fernando had nothing [injured], I'm conscious of the risk: I paid the price as well for my mistake. In the team we spoke quite a lot; they are not happy, I am not happy the way we have been going through the first laps. There is 550 people working at Enstone to give us the best car and if you ruin everything in the first 100m it's not good. I'm conscious of all of that and will try to take as many precautions as possible to go through the first lap - and then normally in the race we are OK.

Fernando, what is Ferrari bringing here as updates, and do you feel confident that you're going to have the speed to fight with Red Bull?

FA: Not many updates, obviously it has been only four days from Suzuka to here so we will try to set up the car as best we can for this race, this layout. But, I remain reasonably confident that we will be competitive. We've been more or less competitive in the last eight, ten races - maybe not the fastest but always in position to fight for podiums etcetera. I think here will be no different.

Fernando, do you believe that Kimi Räikkönen must apologise with you, like Romain with Mark Webber?

FA: No, I think in the start in Suzuka it was very tight in between all of us, that's the problem of starting in the middle of the group: I had Jenson on the right, Kimi on the left and you cannot disappear in those moments. It was an unlucky situation with the front wing of Kimi and my rear tyre. After the puncture I could not start the car on the corner - so it was a mix of things that were not in our part - but y'know, in the last seven, six races, when we were in Suzuka, now five races, one or two have gone wrong, and one or two will go wrong for the others.

Mark, you are sixty points behind the leader of the championship. How is your role now? To help Sebastian or try to recover this gap?

MW: I need to win, so that's my goal, I've come here to push. It was a good little battle between Seb and I in Suzuka, he did a very good job in Q3. We did a very good job, and looking to finish the season as strongly as possible for myself.

Fernando, with only four points advantage, obviously your strategy has to change in the last few races. Are you going to attack more?

FA: I think we've been attacking in all the races. We were fighting in all the races the maximum we can, approaching the races to maximise the points we have available. Sometimes we were on the podium, sometimes we were fourth, sometimes we were fifth and this will not change now. I don't we can over-drive or over-do what is available for us. As I said, now we have lost many points, in the last four races let's say, because at Spa we had a DNF which we had nothing to do with. In Monza we had a Q3 problem and started in tenth, and in Suzuka we had a puncture at the start, in the first corner. All these last four races, in which we lost a lot points, I think are just some unlucky situations. Things normally change, they go up and down. Hopefully our bad run will finish and we will start a run of good runs until the end.

Sebastian, in all your complete seasons in Formula One, we have seen an improvement in terms of results in the second part of the season, after the summer break. Is it just a coincidence, or do you feel that you put all the bits together and feel more confident and improve in the second part of the season?

SV: I have good holidays in the summer, so I should consider doing the same in the winter break! I don't know. As Fernando has said a couple of times now, I think it has been fairly up and down for a lot of us. We have seen this year that there are a lot of cars that can surprise. Look at the race we had in Barcelona for instance, where the Williams was very competitive. Pastor drove a fantastic race and won. In China Nico was very strong and won the race so there's more than one or two cars that are able to win. Of course you need to get everything right for every weekend in order to be competitive but I think it has been the story of the championship. It has been up and down. Same for us, we have good races, bad races. I think the last couple of races were good for us but again, only three races ago we didn't finish the race in Monza. Things can change quickly, so we need to stay focused and concentrated on what we have. Whether there is a trend where we do better in the second half I don't know, but throughout the season we are pushing very hard, trying to get our maximum.

Fernando and Mark, as very keen cyclists and very knowledgeable, I was wondering what you made of the news overnight about Lance Armstrong, who has allegedly been involved in the most systematic, professionalised form of cheating ever, and how much your faith in your beloved sport has been shaken?

MW: Yeah, disappointing. I was a keen cyclist fan through the early 2000s. But slowly, slowly, slowly, over time lost a little bit of passion for the sport. It has been quite obvious, in the last few years, that this was probably going to come, from people on the inside, but the damn wall has now broken and I think that obviously he was the last tree in the forest they wanted to drop down, and a big tree at that. It's good that they're trying to clean the sport up, and even retrospectively, it sends a message to lots of different sports that irrespective of what you've achieved and how you've done it at the time - first of all, it's a good message - the karma, we'll come and get you.

FA: The same. Nothing really to add. Obviously I love cycling, I love bicycles and sure Lance was more than another rider, he was some kind of idol for many people and inspiration for many of us and many media people in the world. It's not easy and I think he will remain an inspiration for many people, whatever happened, whatever the result. Not easy to put together all things.

To Fernando and Sebastian: Lewis seems to downplay his chances in the championship. What's your opinion on that?

FA: I don't know how many points he's behind now. Well, I think it's more difficult (for him) because now there's not only one driver ahead that you need to take some points off. We are now two with more or less the same points ahead and he's behind, so for sure the chances for him are a little bit lower. If we see the form of McLaren and Lewis before Suzuka, there's still plenty of time and plenty of points to do it. I think he still has the possibility...

SV: I think they are still fighting for the championship. I think that is their target, or has to be their target. I think if you look at the races we had after the summer break, so far, I think if you summed them up, in average, I think McLaren was the most competitive car. They are the ones which will be very competitive, no matter where we go, at least that's what the last couple of races showed. I think they still have a very good chance.

To anyone who wants to answer it: we've all heard a lot about how the season is up and down. Psychologically, from a driver's point of view, does that make it easier for you, when you're gearing yourself up, mentally knowing that it could be anyone's weekend, or is it more difficult, knowing that it's more variable, that it's not necessarily about your car, your talent or about that circuit?

NR: Well, for us, in our situation, for example, for me it's an extra motivation, because I come here and I'm not sure that I'm definitely going to be in the same position as in Suzuka. There's a chance that I will be able to be a lot further up and fighting for much better positions, so it's quite a nice thing.

PM: All the races are difficult, not only this year. For sure this year, the championship is more competitive. The strong teams, the medium grip teams get closer and we have more chance to fight for good results, but for sure it's more challenging for us but we are enjoying that.

MW: Not really. I think that as a competitor you want it to be more consistent and obviously achieving nice results. I've enjoyed the racing, to be honest, that's been quite good, but ultimately we like to have the taste of success and that's what we strive for each weekend so I prefer that than the enjoyment of the racing, I suppose. That's the balance we try to strike, but obviously we work hard as a team. We would like to make it more boring if we can, but we've got some tough opposition so that's the name of the game and let's see how the season finishes off.

I'd like to ask anybody who would like to answer it really, but Sauber put out a press release earlier on this morning announcing that Monisha (Kaltenborn) was going to be taking over from Peter (Sauber) as team principal, which will make her the first woman team principal. I know we've got used to seeing Monisha around and being chief executive, but it is quite a breakthrough. Maybe you could comment on this?

MW: Yeah, I think it's great. Why not? There's absolutely no reason why... we have very successful businesswomen around the world so there's absolutely no reason why she cannot run a successful racing team. Some of the qualities that females have in terms of making decisions faster than a room full of men might be a positive thing. I look forward to seeing how she goes.

SV: I don't think her job really changes; I think she was already doing what she's doing now. Obviously I still know some of the guys at Sauber from a couple of years ago, but I think that at this stage they would probably be happier to put out a press release saying that they've found a lot of cash for next year.

F1 Korean Grand Prix – FPI report

Another Friday, another morning of testing new components. Some proved to be effective, while others turned out to be fit for the F1 scrapheap – or another attempt in a future practice session.

The big ticket upgrade in Korea can be seen on the E20 – Lotus have joined the pack in going for a Coandă-style exhaust; the team were the last of the major hold-outs with a traditional exhaust layout, having gone down something of a developmental dead end with their attempts to implement a DRS akin to that first developed by Mercedes.

But the gains available from a Coandă-effect exhaust – which goes some way to replicating the off-throttle blown diffuser effect so popular last year, but in a safer fashion thanks to the slightly cooler gases used, which do not run the risk of cooking a car's rear bodywork – far outstripped the potential on offer with a DRS. As a result, Lotus at long last took the plunge, and debuted their version this morning.

Elsewhere in the pack, Williams were using Valtteri Bottas as something of a test mule, giving the Finnish test driver a new floor and new engine cover to try out over the course of the session before reverting to the original set-up as a baseline for their data-harvesting.

While it was Lewis Hamilton who was fastest when the chequered flag fell to mark the end of FPI, there is little to be gained from reading much into the times set during a practice session. Hamilton was three-tenths faster than Fernando Alonso, and managed to improve his time on a set of 20-lap old tyres, and it is that improvement that is worth noting, not the time itself.

In terms of competitiveness, all the usual suspects were there or thereabouts, while Kimi Raikkonen – who was doing the Coandă evaluation work for Lotus – was slightly slower than his teammate thanks to the need to focus on the task at hand, and not the times on the boards.

All 24 men went out on the soft compound; the supersoft was not seen out on track during the ninety minute session, but should be in use this afternoon.

FPI times (unofficial)

1. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.39.148s [23 laps]
2. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.39.450s [21 laps]
3. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.39.575s [21 laps]
4. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.39.854s [23 laps]
5. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.40.088s [21 laps]

6. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.40.221s [21 laps]
 7. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.40.396s [24 laps]
 8. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1.40.422s [22 laps]
 9. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.40.440s [19 laps]
 10. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.40.480s [21 laps]
 11. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1.40.929s [14 laps]
 12. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.41.048s [25 laps]
 13. Jules Bianchi (Force India) 1.41.140s [21 laps]
 14. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.41.220s [19 laps]
 15. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.41.514s [20 laps]
 16. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.41.596s [23 laps]
 17. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.42.021s [25 laps]
 18. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1.42.027s [23 laps]
 19. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1.42.104s [24 laps]
 20. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.42.175s [13 laps]
 21. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.42.706s [22 laps]
 22. Giedo van der Garde (Caterham) 1.42.820s [19 laps]
 23. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.44.517s [23 laps]
 24. Dani Clos (HRT) 1.45.735s [22 laps]
-

F1 Korean Grand Prix – FP2 report

It was a Red Bull afternoon at the Yeongam Circuit on Friday, with Sebastian Vettel and Mark Webber sitting atop of the timesheets for the majority of the second practice session.

Much like the morning's running, FP2 saw extended test running on a variety of fuel loads as teams did their best to evaluate the ideal compromise set-ups that would work during Saturday's qualifying session yet reap dividends in Sunday's race. After all, there are no points for pole in this sport.

Unlike F1, however, FP2 saw both the Pirelli soft and supersoft compounds in use on the track, with teams evaluating the durability of what logic dictates should be the faster compound on this infrequently used track. But the fact that the Korean circuit is little more than a ghost town from October to October meant that tyres were not performing as would be expected – the times set on the supersoft compound were noticeably slower than those set on the soft during the morning's running.

The dirty track presents problems for more than just the rubber – while there were no incidents of note in the session, numerous drivers found it hard to keep their cars steady if they drifted off the racing line, and those condemned to starting on the dirty side on Sunday will find their getaways to be a particular challenge.

While all and sundry managed to avoid contact with the walls that surround this street circuit without the accompanying city, Sauber's Sergio Perez had something of a rough afternoon thanks to a total loss of power – presumed to be the result of an alternator failure – that cost the Mexican racer an hour's running. Perez drew his car to a halt at Turn 11 approximately half an hour into FP2, and was unable to rejoin the action before the chequered flag fell.

Much has been made of Red Bull's pace this afternoon, and while it is true that Mark Webber and Sebastian Vettel did not struggle to maintain their positions at the top of the timesheets their advantage was not so dominant that it left their rivals weeping on the pit wall. The gap to Jenson Button in P3 was a mere two-tenths, a not insurmountable difference, although there is no mistaking the fact that the Milton Keynes racers have a clear edge over the competition when it comes to the third (and final) sector.

FP2 times (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.38.832s [33 laps]
2. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.38.864s [33 laps]
3. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.39.160s [28 laps]
4. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.39.219s [29 laps]
5. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.39.330s [31 laps]
6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.39.422s [30 laps]
7. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.39.584s [36 laps]
8. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.39.717s [25 laps]
9. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.39.739s [33 laps]
10. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1.39.839s [26 laps]
11. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1.39.957s [28 laps]
12. Bruno Senna (Williams) 1.40.089s [32 laps]
13. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.40.112s [34 laps]
14. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.40.445s [28 laps]
15. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.40.475s [11 laps]
16. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.40.789s [31 laps]
17. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.40.997s [32 laps]
18. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.41.200s [33 laps]
19. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1.41.602s [23 laps]
20. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.42.596s [28 laps]
21. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.43.066s [21 laps]

- 22. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.43.067s [22 laps]
 - 23. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.43.869s [36 laps]
 - 24. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.44.533s [24 laps]
-

F1 Korean Grand Prix – Friday press conference

Despite the presence of a number of big ticket names – and some very interesting revelations – it was a sparsely-attended senior team personnel press conference that took place at Korea's Yeongam Circuit on Friday afternoon.

Present were James Allison (Lotus), Mark Gillan (Williams), David Greenwood (Marussia), Paddy Lowe (McLaren), Adrian Newey (Red Bull), and Pierre Wache (Sauber).

David, you've made progression in 2012, presumably you're hoping to carry that through to 2013. How is work progressing on that car?

David GREENWOOD: I think it's been mentioned many times, the aero rules are quite consistent between 2012 and 2013, so a bit like a few other teams we opted to stay developing this car a little bit longer but now we've firmly switched over to the '13 car and that's going reasonably well. A little bit of layout change required because of the KERS, so it's taken a few wind tunnel sessions to start getting into that with different wheelbases etc., so really that's what the aero guys are focussing on. To mention the KERS, obviously quite bit of installation work going on to there to get that into the car from the design guys. But that's gone reasonably well, the first chassis is in manufacture and the guys are starting to do sample crash tests, so we're in a lot better position than maybe we were last year. So hopefully with doing a bit more of our homework earlier on, we're looking to progress.

You're in the intriguing position of having technical partnerships with two other teams: McLaren and Williams. How does that work and what are the benefits to that?

DG: Starting with the McLaren one, which is the first one we did, with McLaren Applied Technologies, it's going very well. We're pleased with the wind tunnel, we're pleased with the correlation we get to the circuit, which is one of the things that's given us the ability to progress at the back end of this season. Most updates that we've had have done what they should, so that's been very pleasing. The simulator programme is going well, particularly helping Charles with learning circuits. This back end of the year has been perhaps circuits that he's not used to, so that's been a valuable tool for him. Moving on to Williams, we're exceptionally pleased with the support we've had from them on the installation of the KERS. It's been really, really good support from them and it's enabled us to get it into the car relatively easily and all of that work has gone well so far.

Mark, we've seen the Williams good in the first part of the season, then there was a less productive middle part, and now it seems to be coming back again. How do you see the season so far?

Mark GILLAN: In terms of pace, our performance has been improving through the season – we just haven't capitalised on the general pace of the car. We obviously had a high point at the beginning, at Barcelona, and really haven't delivered the points that we should have over the last number of races. Hopefully the last race was a turning point: we didn't qualify as strongly as we were hoping, the race pace was very good but we need – as you always do – to string it all together through the weekend. And that's something that we have to aim to do.

And plans for the rest of this season and maximising the good points of this car for next year?

MG: Last season we basically spent the last six events developing the car for this year and understanding the weaker points on last year's car. This year we're really pushing to the end of the season with development, and balancing the development all the way to the end of the season with 2013 – and obviously very importantly 2014 as well.

Pierre, I guess the burning question is 'can you catch Mercedes?'

Pierre WACHÉ: I don't know. What I know is our car performed well in Suzuka, we had quite a good car. I don't know if for these kind of races we'll be at the same level but I think it will be more challenging for us in qualifying, maybe more in the field – but we can expect good performance for the race.

Can you maintain this car for next year? It's interesting that things have slightly changed on the technical side of the Sauber team.

PW: I think we can maintain and improve what the car is delivering at the moment for the next year. Clearly we follow the same concept in terms of developing the car, make a good basic of the car and try to improve the weakness of the last year's car, like we did this year. And try to do that in the most efficient way. It's what we try to do: to use as less resource as possible but for the maximum performance and be able then to develop the car during the season.

James, everyone's talking about the modifications here, and whether they're working or not. What the general viewpoint?

James ALLISON: Reasonably happy with the way they're working. I think we're at the beginning of a relatively long road with them – they're not straightforward to make work perfectly first go out. But the numbers we're getting from them are good, so yeah, quite pleased.

Romain Grosjean yesterday said you know the weaknesses of this car. What are you able to do about them?

JA: Same as anyone else – you just chip away at them. It's an annoying sport this: you can think you're making progress and then everyone else gives you a wake-up call. But we've got a good team back at the factory and a good team here at the track. We just keeping working away at the things that aren't so good and try to make the things that are good even better. It's always the same job.

Paddy, five races to go and according to the FIA sheet you've used all eight engines. Is that a concern?

Paddy LOWE: No, not at all. We're working exactly to the plan we set out at the beginning of the year. I think, like all the teams, we deploy our engines in what we consider the optimal pattern across the different races. Some circuits are better for power than others, so we happen to have used engine number eight where we thought it was best. Other teams have different solutions. But there's no concern at all, it's all to plan.

You seem to have had a few reliability issues of late. Would that be fair to say?

PL: It hasn't been what we'd like. I think if you look on a historical level it hasn't been that bad but they all came in a bit of a bundle through Italy and Singapore. Very unfortunate for us but actually overall, looking at the season, it hasn't been so terrible.

Adrian, Japan looked so good, is that representative of the circuits for the rest of the season would you say?

Adrian NEWEY: It's very difficult to tell, I think. We've seen swings from race to race, team to team all through the year. That's been one of the hallmarks of the year. You've only got to look at Mercedes performance in China, which looked so dominant, yet they've been less dominant on other races. So I wouldn't like to predict anything on the basis of one race.

Here there are so many different characteristics of this circuit. You look good in the third sector. Is that a sector you concentrate on? Do you concentrate on one sector of a circuit?

AN: No. It's a tale of two tracks here in as much as the first is very long straights. Engine power is important. And then you've got the rest of the lap, which is quite twiddly, so you can get quite big swings between the various sectors.

If I can come back to David Greenwood: the same question for you about eight engines, with Charles Pic. Is that a concern for you?

DG: Yes, I would say so. At the minute that is a concern on where we are with the engines.

So it's not tactical?

DG: Perhaps not in our case.

Mr Newey, do you think it's possible that one of the final five circuits won't suit your car? Is there any chance?

AN: It's wholly possible. Just don't know which ones yet! As I said, I don't know which one yet.

James, you're one of the last teams – if not the last team – to play around with the Coandă effect exhaust. I know you've had it in development for a while. What was it that took so long to get it to the track?

JA: Well, at the point when we were committing to what we were going to start the season with, we had two paths, a Coandă path and what we chose which was a very simple exhaust which was there to optimise power. At the time, the Coandă solution was worth a little bit more theoretically than the power maximising solution but you had to be confident that it was going to deliver all the downforce that it promised, because you could be fairly certain that it was going to deliver all the horsepower loss that the more convoluted exhaust pipe requires. So if the downforce didn't materialise, you knew you were down on the deal, so where we were when we launched our car, that was a relatively finely balanced decision. We launched with the simple thing and then we got under way and have had a reasonably bright season and have been pretty competitive deep into the year. We kept working on the other solution because it was fairly clear that that was where the centre of gravity of opinion in the pit lane was and also because it was a reasonably productive avenue back in the wind tunnel. It got to a point where the gain of the Coandă system was sufficiently far ahead of our previous race system that it was quite clearly something that we ought to look at both for this year and also to make sure we're doing the right thing for next year. That's pretty much the history of it; probably could have committed a bit earlier but then things were going quite well for us on the track as well.

James, are you going to again try your double DRS or are you slowly giving up on that project?

JA: Certainly not giving up on it because there is some goodness in there but that really is tricky – well, we've found it so anyway. So we will keep working on that but you probably won't see it as much on Fridays; we're going to bring it out to play again at the young drivers' test and hopefully make a bit of progress there.

Some drivers mentioned that they could not practise on the simulators for the Korean Grand Prix because the teams didn't have the laser models. Did that happen to all your teams, and secondly, to use an expression that Mark has just used, how does that affect the capitalisation of your cars?

AN: Well, yes, Mark went in the simulator prior to leaving for Singapore, did both Singapore and Korea. Sebastian, to the best of my memory, didn't do Korea. I think, really, the level that Formula One drivers are at – the more experienced ones, certainly – then they don't really need to go in the simulator, if you like, to warm themselves up and remember whether turn one's a lefthander or a righthander. As you started to hint at in the second part of your question, it's more for the engineers to understand what's required at that circuit, but at the same time, everybody has simulation techniques as well. The only difference, really, between simulation and simulator is that one has the driver in the loop, the other is effectively driven by the computer. We're not going in blind, we've had two years of experience at this track so I don't honestly see it as a particularly big factor.

DG: I think, from our perspective, it was a little bit more difficult for Charles to learn Korea versus Japan because of the quality of the track model. That has shown up a little bit this morning. He did say it was harder and definitely in Japan he got more on the pace quicker. It's not ideal but we're all in the same situation, so that's what we use and we get on with it.

MG: I agree. The level of fidelity of the simulator model obviously depends on the quality of the laser scan or whatever other information you can extract from it. What Adrian says is quite true: the more experienced the driver, the less they require the simulator in terms of preparing for the event but for instance, with Valtteri, who has not been round this track before, the simulator is a very important tool, so he maybe spent a little bit more time getting up to speed with the track than he may have done if we had had a very detailed model.

PW: For us, we don't have a simulator so it doesn't change anything for us, compared to other tracks. For sure, in this case the driving time during Friday is very important and also the set-up is defined by simulation before Friday and to leave as much time as possible for a good set-up for the driver, so then he can train on the track.

JA: Neither of our two drivers had been here, and I don't think Kimi had even been round the track but you could see how quickly both of them adapt to it. I think any racing driver worth his salt can very quickly come to terms with the track and I really don't think I can add much more to what Adrian said. The driver-in-the-loop simulator is much more for the engineers than it is for the driver.

PL: Yeah, the same. I think ultimately it just affects the quality of that particular track that you create and it would mean that this wouldn't be a circuit that you would use for very in-depth studies because we don't have that data, but it doesn't actually affect this event particularly for us.

James, will you continue to run the new exhausts tomorrow?

JA: I think so, yeah. We haven't decided yet but it looks like we will.

Is anyone of you brave enough or senior enough to tell us what's on the agenda of the October 23rd meeting in Paris?

PL: Well, we had a meeting in – was it May or June? – yeah, we had a meeting in Monaco in May and I believe there was going to be a second meeting

in August or late July and this is that meeting postponed. It will be to continue the same agenda which is about cost-saving and regulations.

F1 Korean Grand Prix – FP3 report

While there is little sense in reading too much into the times set in practice, there is also no point ignoring a pattern – Red Bull are fast, and it's no fluke.

But it's not all sunshine and roses for the Milton Keynes racers. Sebastian Vettel may have dominated the session with an ominous half-second advantage over the McLaren pair, who ended FP3 in P2 and P3 on the timesheets, teammate Mark Webber was not so lucky. The Australian driver was able to complete seven laps on the soft tyre before being sidelined by engine problems that kept him in the garage for the rest of the hour's running.

Renault Sport F1 experts were on hand to attend to Webber's stricken motor, and while the car was up and running one minute before the chequered flag fell, there was not enough time for the Red Bull driver to complete any form of lap. As a consequence, the Australian will be entering qualifying with minimal track time on the Pirelli supersoft compound under his belt.

After a Friday spent hovering around the middle of the pack, both Lotus drivers demonstrated decent pace this morning. Kimi Raikkonen continues to use the team's new Coandă-effect exhaust, while Romain Grosjean's E20 is equipped with the traditional configuration. The joke doing the rounds is that the Frenchman is not allowed any new toys until he's proven that he can look after the ones he's got...

While Vettel looks to be a shoe-in for pole this afternoon, across the rest of the grid all bets are off. Lap times are tight, with Hamilton in P2 and Paul di Resta in P14 covered by a spread of one second.

Championship leader Fernando Alonso is certain to have a fight on his hands in qualifying; the Ferrari's significant lack of pace in the twisty final sector is but further proof of the Scuderia's current struggles in the wind tunnel. Their lack of downforce is hurting the team, and it shows.

FP3 times (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.37.642s [17 laps]
2. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.38.169s [12 laps]
3. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.38.511s [13 laps]
4. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1.38.582s [16 laps]
5. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1.38.666s [18 laps]
6. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.38.705s [12 laps]
7. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.38.766s [7 laps]
8. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.38.791s [13 laps]
9. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.38.833s [16 laps]
10. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.38.932s [17 laps]
11. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.38.954s [17 laps]
12. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.39.010s [20 laps]
13. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.39.150s [18 laps]
14. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.39.156s [18 laps]
15. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.39.345s [14 laps]
16. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.39.448s [17 laps]
17. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.39.537s [18 laps]
18. Bruno Senna (Williams) 1.39.706s [18 laps]
19. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.41.114s [14 laps]
20. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1.41.437s [19 laps]
21. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.41.684s [16 laps]
22. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.42.062s [15 laps]
23. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.42.845s [15 laps]
24. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.42.882s [14 laps]

F1 Korean Grand Prix – Q1 report

Before qualifying got underway at the Yeongam International Circuit Charles Pic was at something of a disadvantage. The Marussia driver is on his ninth engine of the season, and as a result has been issued with a ten-place grid penalty for tomorrow's race.

It was a slow start to qualifying in Korea, with the session nearly half run before half the pitlane had put times on the board. Heikki Kovalainen took an early advantage by being the first man out on track, but sweet as a Caterham pole would be, the Finnish driver was unable to keep the top slot.

While the watching world – and about seven fans in the grandstands – waited for the qualifying order to start shaking itself out in earnest, HRT's Narain Karthikeyan had something of a moment at Turn 3, spinning wildly off track and into the mile-wide run-off area.

Karthikeyan's wild ride was the result of a brake failure, and it is unlikely the Indian racer will be able to recover before Q1 draws to a close.

Sebastian Vettel and Mark Webber were the last men out of the pitlane; the Red Bull pair are the hot tip for the front row here in Korea, and the team are confident of their pace and feel no need to waste tyres at this early stage.

With times on the board from all barring Karthikeyan, the dropout zone is comprised of the beleaguered HRT driver, teammate Pedro de la Rosa, Charles Pic, Timo Glock, Bruno Senna, Vitaly Petrov, and Heikki Kovalainen.

Three minutes remain of the opening round of qualifying, and Senna is doing his utmost to save himself from relegation. Should the Williams driver manage to make it through to Q2, Sauber's Kamui Kobayashi is the man at risk of dropping out, while Jean-Eric Vergne and Sergio Perez are hovering near the edge.

Senna makes it through to P11, and last week's hometown podium hero needs to push to stay in the running for a decent grid position tomorrow.

Kobayashi is on a fast lap, and saved himself with an impressive P4-worthy time. Vergne and teammate Daniel Ricciardo are now the men to watch: both Toro Rosso drivers are on flyers that could cost Michael Schumacher his spot in Q2.

Ricciardo does the trick, and it's a straight fight between Vergne and Schumacher to avoid relegation. Vergne makes it through to P6, while Schumacher crosses the line in P8. Senna is now back at risk, as are Fernando Alonso and Lewis Hamilton. But Alonso and Senna are both out on track, while Hamilton is in the pits unable to fight for his place.

And Senna is out, joining the six usual suspects in the dropout zone.

Dropout zone

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

* Charles Pic has a ten-place grid penalty for using a ninth engine, and will start Sunday's race from P24.

F1 Korean Grand Prix – Q2 report

With the spread between P1 and P16 covered by a mere second in Q1, the next two rounds of qualifying here in Yeongam promise to provide nail-biting action. Red Bull have the pace, there's no question there, but the others? It's anyone's game.

Despite the close-run battles ahead, however, the first runs in Q2 appear to be taking place on used softs as teams try to establish a baseline before throwing everything at their attempt to make it through to the final round.

While there was little difference in pace between the soft and supersoft compound in Friday's running, FP3 and Q1 have shown that there is a gain of around 0.6s to be made on the softer tyre.

As the session approached its midpoint, with times on the board from the bulk of the pack, Sebastian Vettel topped the timesheets, chased by Fernando Alonso and Lewis Hamilton. Mark Webber was in P4, with Felipe Massa close behind. Only the Mercedes pair had yet to set times, but both men were out on track on flyers.

And with all seventeen men having put times up on the board, the dropout zone was comprised of Pastor Maldonado, Jean-Eric Vergne, Nico Hulkenberg, Daniel Ricciardo, Sergio Perez, Nico Rosberg, and Paul di Resta. Hovering on the edge were Kamui Kobayashi and Kimi Raikkonen.

Just over five minutes remaining, and the bulk of contestants were in the pits, waiting for the optimum moment to head out on track shod in fresher rubber in a last effort to defend their position.

As the clock counted down towards the chequered flag all barring Vettel were out on track. With times as tight as can be, Ricciardo binned it at Turn 16, bringing out the yellows and affecting everyone's last shots at glory.

Jenson Button was the highest profile casualty; the Briton is joined in the dropout zone by Perez, Kobayashi, di Resta, Maldonado, Ricciardo, and Vergne.

Dropout zone

11. Jenson Button (McLaren)
 12. Sergio Perez (Sauber)
 13. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
 14. Paul di Resta (Force India)
 15. Pastor Maldonado (Williams)
 16. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso)
 17. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso)
-

F1 Korean Grand Prix – Q3 report

There was a little bit of chaos at the end of Q2, as Daniel Ricciardo stopped out on track and brought out the yellows just as his colleagues were doing their damndest to make it through to Q3.

Jenson Button didn't improve under yellows, and was knocked out in Q2, while some of his rivals did improve their times – it seems almost certain that the stewards will be doing some investigating once Q3 draws to a close.

Within moments of the pitlane opening for business, all but Nico Hulkenberg were out on track, fighting for position. Pole is almost certainly Sebastian Vettel's – and what a thrilling race the Korean Grand Prix promises to be – but the nine positions behind the Red Bull ace are all up for grabs.

Mercedes look to be up to their occasional trick of doing a Q3 installation lap and then returning to the pits without setting a time. That way the Silver Arrows can save rubber for the race but still line up ahead of whoever chooses not to run at all – usually Force India.

With seven times on the board, Vettel has provisional pole with a 0.3s advantage over Fernando Alonso in P2; Felipe Massa was in P3 before being displaced by Mark Webber. Next in line is Lewis Hamilton, followed by the Lotus pairing of Kimi Raikkonen and Romain Grosjean. The two black knights are running very different set ups this weekend, with the Finn using the Coandă-effect exhaust and the Frenchman sticking to the traditional configuration.

Just under two-and-a-half minutes remaining, and the drivers poured out on track. There was a hairy moment in the pits as Hamilton narrowly avoided running into Schumacher, who had been released from the pits by his team, seemingly unaware of the McLaren already in the pitlane. Yet more for the stewards to think about post-session...

All ten drivers are now out on track, and the dying minutes promise to be closely fought.

Webber and Hamilton are both on flyers: the Australian steals provisional pole from his teammate, while the McLaren man takes provisional P3. Alonso takes P4, while Massa crosses the line in P6. Vettel keeps P2, while Grosjean makes it P7.

Provisional grid

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

* Charles Pic has a ten-place grid penalty for using a ninth engine, and will start Sunday's race from P24.

F1 Korean Grand Prix – Saturday press conference

Since its inception in 2010, the post-qualifying press conference in Korea has seen two teammates plus one other turn up to face the press – Red Bull occupied two slots in 2010, while McLaren did it in 2011.

Present for the 2012 edition were Mark Webber (Red Bull), Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull), and Lewis Hamilton (McLaren).

Mark, congratulations, your first pole of the year.

Mark WEBBER: Yeah, OK, well Monaco was by default but yeah, the first one of track I suppose, nip and tuck with Fernando in Silverstone so, as most qualifying sessions this year have been tight and, yeah, very, very happy to get the job done today, get the pole position. It was as reasonable lap and we did it when it counted obviously. So that's what qualifying's all about, it's been a tricky last few events for me but really happy to start on pole.

Tomorrow's the main day and we're in a good position to get a good result.

Red Bull have been looking so good last weekend but also this weekend all the way through – what's been the secret?

MW: Well, I think off the back of Suzuka we felt that we'd improved the car a bit but you never, ever get ahead of yourself these days. We had a good car in Valencia and then after that it was not that easy for us. We were a bit open to that after Suzuka, coming here knowing that it's not going to be a given, but we have a pretty handy car around here for sure, and I think that the guys have been working very, very hard and there's no question, the hard work's paying off but we focus on ourselves and just keep pushing the lap times down as much as we can – and it's lucky we do because obviously the gap is not that big to Lewis.

Sebastian, what happened on that last lap? You mentioned Massa.

Sebastian VETTEL: Overall I think we can be very happy with the result obviously. We were quite quick in the first qualifying session, quite quick in the second one and then had a good start to Q3. But the last run, I don't want to blame it on Felipe, I thought he was coming in but then on the last sector he was right in front of me so I had to back-off. Not ideal, just starting a timed lap, and just before that to back off but I think nevertheless the second lap wasn't good enough. Lost a little bit today in the middle sector, which seemed to be OK all weekend but yeah, when the circuit ramped up I wasn't able to go with it. Lost a little bit but I think second is a very good position to start from. Obviously around here you never know – you have a long straight, straight away after the start, so it could be interesting tomorrow.

And third on the grid Lewis, first time you've started third, what can you do about these two guys ahead of you?

Lewis HAMILTON: I think it will be very tough to get ahead of them but we've put ourselves in as good a position as we could. It was very tough this weekend, these guys have clearly made quite a big step within the last two races and so we've just got to keep pushing. We're not far off and the race pace for Jenson looked quite good yesterday. I'm just happy I got a clear lap and was able to put it as high up as possible.

Mark, well done, how did you feel about the lap?

MW: Pretty good. We had a few plates spinning, to be honest, with some little background issues that we were managing as best we could on the lap but the lap was very good, apart from Turn 15, I made a mistake there so, yeah, probably got in OK but the exit wasn't great but apart from that it worked well. I think I got 11 and 12 as good as I could get. So, yeah, take the rough with the smooth. I think it was a tight session, I think, for all of us: up and down; scrubbed tyres; new tyres. Fernando did a pretty solid laptime on the scrubbed at some point there. So, yeah, that's just the way it is. With the old Pirellis, things can move around quite a bit.

After this morning's problem, presumably you went pretty blind into qualifying?

MW: Yeah, we didn't get to run anywhere near as much as we would have liked to in P3, so our information on the option was limited. So there was a bit of catch-up going on for sure. After my first run on the option in Q2, I had not the best sector two and three for balance issues and also some other things that Ciaron was working on to get the car to finish the lap better – so that's what we focussed on in Q3. And got the job done.

A little disappointment not to be on pole Sebastian? Although you'll be pleased to hear that no-one's ever won from pole so far.

SV: Yeah, obviously I have good memories from last year with Lewis, when he was on pole. I think we'll see tomorrow that it's a long race. Surely the lap was fine but I should have been a little bit quicker, so yeah, wasn't able in the end to do the final step, especially in the second sector. I think sector one and sector three were fine but yeah, got a little bit mixed-up second sector, so I think if you look at the laptimes in the end it was fairly close, so y'know, I think we're happy with second and a front row for Red Bull Racing. Obviously the car seems to work well, I think in the race we might be even in a little bit better place. Let's see what we can do tomorrow.

Not being on pole, that wasn't part of the plan?

SV: It's difficult to have a plan going into qualifying because you never know what happened. If you catch the yellow flag in the wrong place, etc., we saw last week it can be quite tricky. We've seen this week in Q2 there was some yellow. These things can happen to you all the time so therefore it's impossible to have a certain plan. But surely after the Q1 and Q2 we had where it looked very good, the target was to go on pole – and we missed that by a little bit. I think it was possible to get it but we didn't get it in the end – and it's as simple as that.

Lewis, the biggest worry, as far as I could see, was Q1. You nearly didn't make it – was that a concern?

LH: Definitely. It was quite a shocking session for me: didn't get a lap, did quite a poor job, struggled to get... when the tyres weren't so bad temperature-wise I just had a bit of traffic, locking up. It was very poor. But I'm very lucky that I got through.

We've seen various drivers going off at various parts of the circuit, particularly down at Turn One. Is that still a concern for you? You've been off there a couple of times as well.

LH: I've been off there a lot this weekend yeah. It's like these guys have ABS brakes – when we attack the corners it's very easy to lock-up, so it's quite tricky. We have to try to work around and sometimes you just have to drive with flat-spots. But fortunately my tyres from that lap, I didn't have any lock-ups, so hopefully that will remain the same throughout the race.

And what sort of confidence for the race itself?

LH: Well, I didn't do a long run yesterday, again I had not a great session, particularly in P2 yesterday, but Jenson did a great job and quite a competitive long run, so I hope I'm able to do the same tomorrow.

To the Red Bull drivers: how much has the car changed for you since this summer and how happy are you with it?

MW: Since the August break? Yes, we have been making small developments at each Grand Prix, that's the way it is. If you look at where the car is from Spa, obviously it's a different aero package for Spa and Monza, but to where it is now, the base of the car for sure is probably a decent step but it's always... every Grand Prix, we try to just put little bits on the car to help. At some Grands Prix we don't put anything on, we miss and at the next one we catch up a bit more, and also, you have to bear in mind that it's circuit-specific as well. You have to understand what each track needs and those type of things, so the last two venues have probably been pretty good for us in terms of layout, especially the last one. Yeah, happy drivers are drivers at the front so when you're towards the front it makes you satisfied but we can still improve the car, there are always areas to improve. That's what we've got to keep working on.

Sebastian, you're going to be starting on the dirty side of the grid tomorrow and at this track, it's particularly dirty due to the lack of use. What kind of concerns do you have going into the first corner?

SV: Well, I don't think it's a big disadvantage. Surely I think I would rather be on pole but qualifying is over so we start from second and I don't think it's a big problem. Last year we made a good launch and I think here that you never know what happens. You might as well start third, fourth, fifth and you could end up first by turn four, so you don't know. There's a long straight after the second corner. Obviously I had a tight battle with Lewis last year so these things you have to take them as they come, so it's difficult to know now what's going to happen, but first of all I will focus on the start and then go from there.

Sebastian, coming back to the development: yesterday you had different bodywork than your teammate, why did you change, why did you come back (to the original)? And the second question is that in Italy they are saying that there was a red car in front of you on your last run; is that correct? Did you have a problem with that?

SV: I don't want to blame it on Felipe. I don't like all these discussions; we've had a lot of them lately. These things happen, it's not Felipe's fault at all. I should have known earlier. If anything it was my mistake. I might have lost a little bit but I'm not a fan of blaming anyone or anything for a certain result or not. I was happy with my qualifying, a little bit at the end. The first question was why... because it's faster, that's why I changed it.

Lewis, we saw a problem in the pit lane with your future teammate or Michael, I don't know which to be honest, we couldn't see. What happened exactly?

LH: I didn't have any problems. I was let out of my garage before he was and then they tried to get him ahead of me but he was coming out slowly so I overtook him, because I was already on the speed limit which is 100 and he was doing maybe 20 or 30. But it gained position which is important, position is everything here. If you can get by safely throughout the lap that's very important.

F1 Korean Grand Prix – Sunday press conference

The Korean Grand Prix had shades of 2011 about it, with Red Bull in control from start to finish. The post-race press conference was something of a foregone conclusion.

Present were Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull), Mark Webber (Red Bull), and Fernando Alonso (Ferrari).

Sebastian, you've got to be happy with the way it's gone? Perfect start, perfect race, third straight win, you've got to be happy with the way things are going?

Sebastian VETTEL: Yeah, very pleased, fantastic, I'm very, very happy. I think it was a fantastic race. Obviously the foundation was to have a good start, which I wasn't sure because I was starting on the dirty side but I have to say I had reasonable grip and a very good launch. I think Mark had a little bit of wheel-slip and I was able to get even side-by-side. Even then it wasn't over because it's a long way. When I was up-shifting to seventh gear I could hear Mark coming, he was side-by-side and then I tried to use my KERS to defend and fortunately had a good exit after the third corner, so was able to stay ahead. And after that tried to push. It was quite close in the first stint, Mark was always on my toes but towards the end I felt I had a little bit more left in the tyres and could go a little bit longer. We had two brilliant pitstops. The only mistake I did was once I locked-up the front right quite badly into Turn Three, bit of a mistake from my side but fortunately by then we had quite a cushion to the cars behind and were able to control the gaps in the end. I think we were all a bit worried about the front tyres because we've seen a lot of people locking up wheels and overshooting the apexes. So, really, really happy. I have to thank the boys on this one. The mechanics in the garage because they have been flat-out, arriving here obviously there's not much break from Japan to here, flat-out every night and working very hard on the car. I think we have done another step and that is exactly what we need and hopefully we can carry that momentum through to the next races.

Mark, second place. Pole position was obviously a good start for you – unfortunately on that start you just didn't get off the line – but what was the race like for you? What difficulties did you have, if any?

Mark WEBBER: The start wasn't sensational. I'll have to look into it but yeah, probably the initial getaway wasn't too great but after that it was... everyone wants... it's not the best corner to lead off so I thought, OK, we won't risk too much in the first corner, and then we got a good slipstream off Sebastian but it was just neck-and-neck for us along the back straight. After that I just tried to hang in there as best I could. But then it was just about tyres, looking after the front right. And at the end of each stint it was difficult to keep the front right alive. Yeah, the first two stints were quite tricky for me and then the last stint I was much happier with the balance but it was all too late then. So, good drive for Seb, great day for the team, the guys did a great job. Of course I'm disappointed but I'm happy to get a good result in the other side as well. Thanks to all the fans for coming out today. Cheers.

And Fernando, well the championship battle is on now isn't it? You've led for so long in this championship, you're six points behind – I think you should be happy today because the car was quite competitive. Do you feel that? Do you feel there's more to come from you and Ferrari?

Fernando ALONSO: Yes, definitely. I think we have to be happy with the performance today, we finished third and fourth, just behind Red Bull that at the moment are difficult to beat. So, it was a good day for the team, for Felipe, for me, and I think we also overtook McLaren in the Constructors' Championship, which is something that maybe we didn't expect two or three races ago, so definitely we are moving in the right direction. We just need a little last step to be as competitive as Red Bull and I think it will be a beautiful last four races to the end.

Seb, a last thing from you, obviously you're leading the championship finally, how are these guys, especially Fernando, going to be able to beat you? What are you going to do?

SV: It's tough but that's what it is about. I'm looking forward to the next couple of races. We had a good last couple of races but y'know we've seen the championship is pretty much up and down, a lot of things can happen. What do we do? I think we have to focus on ourselves; we need to have our best possible results and then we go from there. I think at the end of the year if we have enough points there's a lot of people telling us so we don't have to do the mathematics ourselves.

Sebastian, well done. First of all, was it really all about the start, and then tyre management I guess?

SV: Well, we didn't know! It's difficult to say. Obviously now we can say that the start was very important. In my case obviously we started from the dirty side. I think the right side generally we saw last year, usually is a bit better but I had a very good launch and yeah, could see that Mark was struggling a little bit in the first bit of the start and I was able to get side-by-side and obviously then had the inside into Turn One, which was very good for us. But it wasn't over at that stage because there's still a long straight and quite a big headwind all race from Turn Two to Turn Three. I could

hear him coming and obviously he was side-by-side but fortunately I had the inside and after that I focussed on having a very good exit out of Turn Three, which fortunately I had and then I was able to stay ahead. I think it was then that Mark was side-by-side with Fernando, going into Turn Four. It was a perfect start for myself and after that a perfect first stint. I think towards the end I was able to pull away a little bit and open a gap to Mark which helped to stay out a little bit longer and I think after that we had a very good stop, a very strong second stint opening the gap again. Only at the end of the second stint I had a mistake, braking for Three, locking up the right front. I think a lot of people suffered issues with the front today so the last stint I tried to control a little bit more and I had more juice in the tyre until the end. Obviously we had the gap and were controlling that towards the end, but I think once you reach the point where the front tyres are gone, it's sudden death, so there's no point of return. We were talking a lot over the radio, trying to stay on top of the problem and manage the front tyres quite well, which I think we did until the end. Very happy with the result and have to say thanks again to the mechanics, the team, they have been working more than what we should ask them for. Every night, flat out, the whole team and I hope now they get a bit of a break, some sleep finally. But obviously it's a nice reward to finish first and second today for the guys in the garage. Really pleased with the result.

It's the first 1-2 for a team this year, so that's the reward. But obviously Ferrari's going to come back as strong as they can, McLaren too. Have you still got bits in the pipeline, is the motivation still there?

SV: I think the motivation is still there for sure. The guys, I don't know, I could not deal a single night with that lack of sleep and they do it three weeks in a row. So, really impressive and I think we are not lacking motivation. The spirit is perfect in the garage, the atmosphere is great and I think we all want to do our best and to really try and win the race on a Sunday. I think we've been pushing very hard all season: we have tried lots of stuff. Sometimes it was more successful than other times but the most important is today. Obviously whatever happened is history and we have to look forward. Very pleased with the result today. I think we can have a couple of drinks tonight before heading back. It's difficult to predict the next couple of races. As you said, the first 1-2 this year, I think it shows how difficult the season has been for everyone. Ferrari was extremely competitive today, probably more competitive than everyone expected in the race. Both of them, Felipe I think was only a little bit off Fernando, so yeah, quick in the race, we know their car works in all circumstances, so we have to stay on top of our game, focus on ourselves and do what we can.

Mark, exactly what happened at the start there? We could see from Sebastian's... it's almost as if when you moved into second gear it...

MW: Yeah, I think we were chasing the clutch quite a bit after the first launch on the formation lap, and also coming to the back of the grid the boys were asking me to get the move clutch ring quite a bit so the initial launch wasn't good. The first bite just kicked to wheelspin and from then on I knew I could have some issues. It was just a very... mediocre let's say... run to the first corner. Seb got a good one. All wasn't lost, obviously, second corner, getting the slipstream on the back straight I thought it was still possible to do something there. We were side-by-side, I had a tow but when once I pulled out I just hit a brick wall as well, both of us were just... vrrrrmmmmmm... and then everyone just coming up behind as well. So, yeah, and then after that we had to manage the tyres really, look after the... go as quick as you could, looking after the tyres but also trying to keep some pressure on Sebastian. It's the way it is these days: you've got to look after the black things on the corners and yeah, so that's part of it. Mixed emotions for me, it's still a very solid result, I was very, very happy with the lap I did yesterday, could have easily been not on pole but I was through a solid lap and today is a good result but yeah, it's mixed emotions. Second is a big difference to first. I have good points and champagne but it's not what I was after. But for the guys, it's a great result for the team and they've done a very good job in the last two weeks and I've got to congratulate Sebastian on the win.

Fernando, your fourth third place but I'm sure you're looking forward to getting back on top. What sort of effort can you imagine Ferrari making before the next couple of races?

FA: Well see, I think it's a question mark. We didn't bring to the last six or seven races nothing new so we are doing what we can at the moment and we are trying to save points which I think we are doing perfectly every Sunday. Again it was a perfect Sunday for us: good start, good strategy at the right time and in the right moment. Then finishing again on the podium. So, I think it was a very strong Sunday but we hopefully make a little bit of a step in terms of performance and then we can fight for bigger things. But anyway, very, very happy with today's race, very happy with the performance. We saw Sunday again move us a little bit closer to the top guys, and also with the position in the championship. Obviously we lost the lead by six points but if we think how it went for us the last four or five races, with two retirements, nothing to do with the team, no mistakes from the team, not mechanical problems or anything like that, just some people flying over us and things like that. With all these problems, being six points behind leaves open a lot of possibilities for us in the last four races.

You got to within 1.4s of Mark at one point, 1.3s, but similarly, Felipe got to within about the same of you as well. Was that all down to tyre performance?

FA: It depends how much you use your tyres or what the conditions of the tyres in that part of the race. We seem to be a little bit more competitive or less competitive. Or closer or a little bit further than the opponents in terms of distance. Obviously it was nice to try to be within one second here because you can use the DRS on the straight - but we could not have that possibility so we lost a little bit there.

Fernando, as you said, Ferrari is not bringing any new parts. You're still there fighting and staying close to them. How frustrating is it?

FA: Nothing new, nothing new. The last five years of my career has been like this. I'm good, I'm confident, used to this situation. We have normally one set of tyres in Q3, there is not time for mistakes, no time to lock up a tyre or go over a kerb or anything like that on Saturday or on Sunday. We are always on the limit, but we feel comfortable, let's say, like this. We seem to extract the maximum from the car when we are under pressure and as I said, four beautiful races to come with good possibilities for us to fight for the championship, but in the end, I'm sure there will be some circuits where we are a little bit more competitive, and some circuits where we are maybe not competitive enough, but overall, in the last four races, as we said, now we need to score seven points more than Sebastian, that will be extremely tough but we believe we can do it.

Fernando, earlier on this season, before this round of fly-aways, you said that Ferrari's best circuits were going to be Singapore, Japan and Korea. We've obviously finished those. What kind of expectations do you have for competitiveness at the other circuits, apart from Austin?

FA: We will see. It will depend obviously on the updates in the car. I think we will see in India if there are any new parts. If there are, we will need to test them. For sure, the other teams will also bring new parts, maybe more than us, so we need to see which of them are working, which of them are not working and for who they work. I think the performance of the car will depend on that. I think in Singapore and Suzuka and Korea we felt competitive. In Singapore maybe not so much but we were able to be on the podium. In Suzuka we saw Felipe finish in second and here both of us were third and fourth, so overall they have been more or less good races for us apart from the puncture in Suzuka, so in terms of performance I think we are there. Obviously Red Bull have made a step forward and they won three races. They were one and two in qualifying in Suzuka, one and two in

qualifying here, one and two in the race here so it's something that is not in our hands.

Fernando, do you believe that the yellow flag was a key factor in the beginning of the race, nine laps with the yellow flag in the first sector?

FA: I don't think so, I don't think so because I was not within one second of Mark so it was not really a possibility to use the DRS - obviously with the DRS you cannot do it. I think it was maybe a little penalty - or a little bit worse for the guys behind me. I think Lewis, Felipe and Kimi didn't have the possibility to open the DRS because of the yellow flag and I think for Felipe's race it was a little bit easier if he could overtake Hamilton straight away at the beginning, but not for me.

Sebastian, in the last few laps, on the radio we were always hearing the team telling you to be cautious, go slow, there was a problem with the tyres and then you set your fastest lap on the last lap, so what is the truth: was it a big risk?

SV: Obviously you start your stint in the beginning with a little bit more than 20 laps to go, after the last stop. I think you can work that out yourself, you have a lot of kilos in the car. Towards the end it's nearly empty so you go quicker without even trying harder. I think it's the same for everyone, given that you still have the tyres. Obviously we try to look after them during the whole of the last stint, because we've seen in the stint before how sudden the front tyre can lock up and you can lose control of the front tyres, so obviously we didn't want to run into that sort of problem again, especially with pressure from behind so even if you have quite a big gap, when you start to struggle a lot with these tyres, then there is a lot of time lost within a couple of laps - I'm speaking of a couple of seconds per lap, so we didn't know that. As I said, we controlled that very well so we still had some shoes left, tyres were not new but they were not completely worn until the end so I was going a little bit quicker in the last sector so that's why the lap time was pretty similar to what I started with in the beginning of the stint, but calculate the difference of fuel and it's a big difference.

Sebastian, do you also now have a psychological advantage over Fernando, from a technical point of view, as Red Bull seems to be ahead. And secondly, how did the double DRS help you, as you didn't use it in Suzuka?

SV: Well, I didn't use it again today in the race. It was obviously not an option. It's not just one feature on the car that makes you go quicker. I think we tried to work a lot around the car and sometimes you bring some new parts but sometimes you just work on the set-up: you do something smart, you listen to your stomach, you listen to what you see on the data and you act on what you see on the data and everyone is pushing hard. You sometimes might find more with the set-up than you might find with new parts so, as I said, we are pushing very hard but I think if you look at this season, it has been pretty much up and down and it was very good for us in the last couple of races but we also know how little it takes to maybe end up in a different position in the Grand Prix. I think we can take nothing for granted, we have to look after ourselves. Whether we have a mental advantage or not, psychological advantage or not I don't really care. I'm not into those kind of things. As I said, we look after ourselves. There's a lot of things we have to focus on to do a perfect job and that is the target every weekend.

Fernando, you used to say that the weakest point at Ferrari was in qualifying, but Red Bull looked clearly faster than you in the race. Were you expecting that and are you a bit concerned for the next races?

FA: Of course I was expecting that. I think we were not the fastest car in the race in our championship so I didn't come to Korea expecting to be the fastest car on Sunday. We always said that we improve on Sunday compared to Saturday. I think between the two cars, in 15 or 16 races, the other Ferrari was in Q3 six times, ten times not in Q3 so definitely there is not the performance in qualifying which we then see on Sunday, when we normally improve. Yesterday we were P4 and P6 and today we were in P3 and P4, so definitely on Sunday there is always a step forward for us but we never believe or we never thought we were the fastest in the race and today was more or less as expected or better than expected, because we were fighting with Webber all the race which was something we were not able to do in Singapore or in Suzuka.

Mark, if you look at these two guys beside you, do you think that with the 18 points from today, you still have the chance to fight with them for the championship?

MW: Yeah, well it's getting tricky now. I obviously need some bizarre circumstances. It's clearly possible for me to win Grand Prix. You just need to get everything perfect and today I didn't, I paid the price. I can win some races before the year's out but the gap is massive to these two guys. That's the way it is. We have quite a few races and all the points add up at the end of the year. Of course we're all on our game, we all drive pretty well. I only smelt a little bit of tyre smoke off Seb today so I knew that that was unusual for him, but apart from that it was a clean Grand Prix for all of us and that's how it generally goes for us three, when we don't get smashed out by other people. It's difficult but you never, never, never know.
