

F1 Monaco Grand Prix – Wednesday press conference

This is it. The race every driver wants to win, and which every fan wants to attend. Kicking off proceedings was the Thursday press conference, which takes place on a Wednesday thanks to the principality's unique scheduling.

Present were Romain Grosjean (Lotus), Lewis Hamilton (McLaren), Pastor Maldonado (Williams), Charles Pic (Marussia), Michael Schumacher (Mercedes), and Mark Webber (Red Bull).

Romain, first of all, tell us about your experience of the Monaco circuit.

Romain GROSJEAN: Well, first of all, different feelings in Monaco: special track: special grand prix. For sure for us is a little bit home because we are close to France, so very happy to race in front of the fans, hopefully a lot of blue, white and red flags in the tribune. But Monaco is a special track, good experience that I won here in GP2 in 2009 and last year I did a really good race starting 26th and finishing P4 but then I've had some crashes as well. Let's see what it gives in a Formula One car – I'm sure even better and we're really looking forward to driving here.

There have been some circuits where you have performed, perhaps, better than others. Is this one where you feel it is going to be good for you?

RG: I like the track, let's see what we can achieve. But you know, Monaco is a little bit different to the other ones: normally if you are good in a fast corner you know that more or less every fast corner you are going to be good – but here it's bumpy, it's in the street, the track is improving a lot during the weekend. There is a lot to learn and it goes really quickly in between the race, so it will be interesting to see how it goes. We are trying to set up the car as good as we can, achieve another strong result for the team and for myself as well and score some good points, and why not more.

I'm sure there's huge support for you in France, and this is probably the best chance France has had of winning this race for many years.

RG: Ha-ha. The last French winner here was '96 with Olivier Panis. It would be nice to have La Marseillaise on Sunday but let's work before that and see what we can achieve. But for sure having a lot of fans is always good support and something quite special when you go around the track and do the drivers' parade.

Pastor, first of all, after Barcelona, what have you been doing, what's happened, the reaction in Venezuela, have you been back to Venezuela? Have you been to Williams? Tell us.

Pastor MALDONADO: Yeah, I've been in the factory at Williams, working with the engineers, with the team, and I passed some very good days with them in the factory. It was a special one because after eight years without winning any races, you can imagine how they take this victory. For sure it's a great feeling to start winning some races. The team is pushing so hard, me too, we have a very good feeling and are looking forward for the next races.

This circuit, again, has been a good one for you. Do you feel you're a bit of a Monaco specialist.

PM: I've been always so quick here, especially in GP2 and World Series as well. Last year I was doing a good job, I was P6 but it's always difficult. This kind of track, you never know for the traffic, for everything. The track is going to change a lot during the weekend and we need to follow the track and we need a very good balance in the car as well and be ready in the right time in the track. So, we'll see. I will do my best, again one more time and we'll see. I believe it is still possible to be competitive here, then we'll see.

Do you feel there is a certain relief having won that first grand prix?

PM: It's really special to win, especially the first one. But for sure it is going to be difficult now. The gaps and the team levels are so close, so anything can make the difference, we need to put everything together to make a step forward, and I need to say that Williams are doing a very good job at the moment, I feel all the people are very motivated, they are pushing so hard – me too – it's a very good feeling in the team and you know, still we need to improve. We are not at 100 per cent at the moment, we are not the best team – but we are not that far, we are there and we need to try to improve every time.

Charles, you've won in GP2 and in World Series here, can you imagine what it is going to be like in a Formula One car? Is it going to be a big difference?

Charles PIC: I think there will be some for sure – but the track stays the same. So it will be my first experience here in F1, this is a very nice track and a little bit special because it's not allowing any mistakes from the drivers, so I think it can be a really interesting weekend, especially for us. It's interesting to see our pace on a type of circuit like that, it is quite different to other circuits – so yeah, we'll have to see.

You had a difficult start to the season: no pre-season testing – or virtually none – how do you think things have gone in the first quarter of the championship?

CP: Good. I think our main aim is trying to improve the car race by race. It's what we make, we still have to work very hard and continue to push like that to try to make it better. On my side I have many things to learn. It was not easy for the first few races without any testing but I made my best and I feel better prepared race after race. We have to continue like this.

Mark, your first podium here, you always remember your first podium I'm sure. Is this a very special circuit for you?

Mark WEBBER: Yes, it has been. I think winning here in F3000, a couple of podiums, obviously the nice victory in 2010, so it's an amazing venue, it's an amazing weekend. It's quite stressful for the mechanics, all the teams, obviously you guys, everybody getting around, it's amazing how we still

manage to hold an event here in such tight confines of the Principality. But it's a great sporting event and one that's very popular for all of us. And, yeah, I'm looking forward to driving the car. It's always great to drive here, so tomorrow we can get on with it.

We've never known a season like this before and I think it's the same for all three of you, it just doesn't seem to be consistent. It's just up and down. Is that a bad thing or a good thing as far as you're concerned?

MW: It depends on who you are. I think for the purist, I think people are taking a little bit of time to get used to it. Obviously, no one's really got any momentum yet in terms of results in teams. But obviously there are a few people that follow the sport that love it like this. It depends who you ask. If you want to have lots and lots of different teams being competitive that's the way it is at the moment, which I don't think is too bad. But let's see. I think ultimately the main teams will still do well at the end of the season.

Michael, sadly you have a five-place grid penalty here. But on the other hand you have been back there before, even further back, three or four years ago [2006]. And you saw what Lewis could do from there two weeks ago. What are your feelings about the race itself coming up?

Michael SCHUMACHER: Well, basically, I think we're going to be in a position to be competitive. As a general track profile I think it's going to suit ourselves. Indeed, I have been coming from the complete back and gone forward to fifth position I think. Let's see from where I finally manage to qualify and start the race and what can be done. It is certainly not ideal, but it is what it is and I look forward to it and I'm going to have some excitement pretty certainly.

You've got a phenomenal record around this track, as you have around most current race tracks, and you have won here more often than anyone else in recent history. How do you get the ultimate performance around here?

MS: Well, I mean Monaco is certainly special and there's something about you and the car that you just have to get every detail together as you have at every track but here it just pays out more. To have the rhythm, the flow, the momentum here... if you've got that it just pays out a much bigger lap time than other tracks because everything is so critical and difficult here.

I was going to ask - is it still the circuit where the driver makes more difference than any other circuit currently?

MS: At the end of the day, that's the case, absolutely.

So you're looking forward to doing that on Sunday?

MS: Definitely.

Lewis, certainly you had a tremendous drive two weeks ago. Did you enjoy it? You said you were going to.

Lewis HAMILTON: Firstly, good afternoon everyone. Yeah, absolutely I was very, very happy with the performance of the team but also my performance in the last race. I was always looking to improve and I felt it was a definite improvement from the grand prix weekend before that.

You've banked at every single race and you're just eight points off the championship lead - if anyone is consistent, you're at least consistently in the points. But is it an inconsistent season?

LH: For us?

Drivers as a whole.

LH: I don't know if it's an inconsistent season... well, potentially yeah, a little bit, because of the tyres. I think the tyres, you sometimes get them in the working range and sometimes you don't. I think a lot of teams are struggling to understand why sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. But that's the challenge we all are faced with. But I think people are enjoying it. I notice people are asking a lot of questions about how there's been five different winners and the fans I've met had said this is a fantastic season regardless, so I hope that continues.

Is there a little frustration that you've been on pole, or fastest so many times and still haven't yet won?

LH: I'm not frustrated, no. This is the way racing goes sometimes. Of course, looking at the qualifying results we've had for the five races, we would have loved to have finished further up and we definitely need to improve to ensure that we stay where we are or we move forwards. Yeah, we've started high up finished a little bit further behind from where we started so we've gone backwards a little bit in most of the races but we're working very hard to make sure that doesn't continue.

Question for Pastor. How difficult has it been to deal with the fire and how difficult has it been to prepare for this grand prix for you and the team?

PM: After the fire we've been working so hard to rebuild everything. The guys did a pretty good job because we are ready to race, with everything we need to get the maximum. And I need to say that the guys have been working full days to have everything ready for this race, so great job for them.

Question for all the drivers. Do you realistically think that on Sunday it will really be six different drivers, and to all except Pastor, do you think you will be the sixth?

MW: Yeah, I think there can be six different winners. Of course, why not? And it would be nice if it's me, yeah. I'm sure all of us are going to say that.

I want everyone except Pastor to rate his personal chance to be this sixth driver - if it's realistic or not.

MS: I'm pretty sure that are quite a few around us that would have the capacity to win this race and yet have not won a race and yes, naturally I think each of us here would be happy to be the one.

LH: I agree with Michael. As he was saying there are some other drivers who have the potential to win races but it's massively tight between quite a lot of teams, so I think it's wide open, so we'll see. Particularly at this race the driver can make more of a difference. A car that doesn't work so well at places like Barcelona could work a bit better here so...

Romain, how do you rate your own personal chances of becoming the sixth driver?

RG: Difficult to say at the moment as we didn't drive on the track yet, but I wish I could be the sixth one.

Charles?

CP: I agree it's more tight this year but we are not yet in a position to fight for this. For us now we have to focus on improving step by step and that's it for the moment.

Pastor, you mentioned that the team has been working flat out to compensate for the fire. Obviously a lot of teams came to Williams's aid with regards to equipment, infrastructure etc, but just how much of an impact will the fire have on the team this weekend, given the loss of all the equipment?

PM: Yeah, for sure it was a frustrating moment for all of us, because we were in the garage at that moment, at that time, and we saw everything. Personally, I was so scared, especially because we were all together, talking with Frank at that time and then yes, I need to thank all the teams who helped us, especially to extinguish the fire. For sure, as I mentioned before, the team has been working flat out to have everything ready for this race. The time wasn't all that big, you know, only one week, one and a half weeks to have everything ready was quite short and yes, I need to thank all the teams who have helped us, even offering extra stuff for this race.

Lewis, I understand that you moved to Monaco recently. How different is it to have a race at home, really close to your home? Maybe Michael can answer this as well, because he used to live here, and Pastor as well.

LH: I love it here. To be able to wake up in your own bed and drive just down the road and be at work is a fantastic feeling. Today is the first experience of that but I'm sure it will make quite a big difference. I loved where I lived before but this is a different place and I seem to be enjoying it a little bit more.

MS: Basically, not only do you feel at home, and as Lewis said, absolutely, but even seeing the build-up of the track, because when you live here you go through the roads and you see it building up, the whole story builds up in your own head and when it finally comes to the excitement to run it, then it's obviously even more special.

PM: I agree with Michael and Lewis. For sure it's really good to be here and to race at the same time. I can sleep a little bit more as well, so it's good.

Michael, in a German newspaper today, Ross Brawn said that the team, Mercedes, is guilty of having put you in trouble – I don't know if I've translated it right from German into English – but I think the meaning is that they did not help you too much with the car, to give you a sufficiently good car. Do you agree with him, do you agree there is something or not?

MS: No. I don't agree with maybe your translation of it, because I think we have quite a good car, quite honestly, because if you think where we're coming from last year, we have made a huge step forward. We have proven that we are able to win races. Yes indeed, I have been a bit on the unlucky side but you see we're a team, we are one big family and we win together and we lose together, it's part of it. It's probably that that he wants to talk about. But no, I don't feel at all disappointed – if anything, the reverse: more motivated because of how much progress we have made and I can see the future progress that we can make and that's what is much more in my focus.

Michael, first of all, I saw you in Le Mans last week for the MotoGP race and you witnessed that Casey Stoner announced that he was retiring from the sport, stating that he was not content with the rules in MotoGP and in the motorcycling world, how the sport has developed. Can you tell me your feelings about that move and draw a parallel with your feelings about how Formula One is evolving in the situation whereby you are not liking it too much?

MS: The first part I can certainly answer, as to what is my feeling, and my feeling is that most of those who have a little bit of involvement were surprised. So was I but then you have to respect that and I don't know his reasons or his detailed reason but he's young enough to have a sabbatical rather than a total stop and we'll see. There's definitely no parallel to me: it's just that each one is very individual, why and for what reason he decides on his retirement. Mine, at the time, had nothing to do with any other reason than I wanted it to because I felt like I was tired, three years ago. That's it.

Lewis and Mark – because Michael expressed himself about it – Mark, you said that the public did enjoy the first five races.

Lewis, you said, regarding the rules and the tyre situation, we are facing the same challenge, but, apart from that, do you enjoy driving within those rules? Can you extract one hundred percent of the car and can you express your talents 100 percent?

MW: The way the races have run in the last few years is different to previous years. In the era where we had pit stops with refuelling, the races were extremely aggressive. Obviously qualifying for the whole race, basically, pushing to make optimum strategies work and make sure that you're hitting the lap times with the weight of the car, with the fuel that you have at the time, so whether you are on a two- or three-stop strategy or whatever. And then we went to no refuelling, so already the phase of the racing changed a little bit, in terms of a little bit of endurance aspect started to come into it, in terms of driving style and pacing yourself a little bit more, probably. And then we had the change with the Pirellis and that's probably been the biggest change in driver technique and style that I can remember, certainly in my career and I've done a few Grands Prix. There are certain races – a huge majority of races – that of course even when you've won – I've won one race on Pirellis – but even when the winners are winning of course they are not driving at 100 percent and that's just the way it is, because you can't. You need to get the car to the end and produce the best lap times that you can for the duration of the race. That's the way it is now. I still enjoy driving a Formula One car, I still love working with the engineers, driving the most amazing tracks against some great opposition. I enjoy that part of it but we always have to change, we always have to evolve as the technical side of the sport changes, and there's always going to be nicer ways to... Personally, I enjoyed the sprint races and the refuelling, probably all of the drivers did, but the racing was not super-exciting. It was more precise, you had to be more precise, you had to be more on the limit and really really feeling the car for the whole two hours, but that's not how it is now. We have a different set of challenges and that's what we've got to do.

LH: I don't really know what else I can say, really. Mark's said it all. I really enjoy the racing that we have now, as I've enjoyed it every year, and every year is a new challenge and I think that's what the rules are there to give us is challenges. It is a little bit different, where we're not pushing 100 percent in the race. There are some points in the race where you can really push but not for very long and perhaps it is more about endurance, as Mark said, to try and make these tyres last, but it is still a challenge to extract the most out of the tyres for a longer period. It still requires skill and technique and finesse to do that stuff so we're still all trying to – speaking for myself – I'm still trying to get that fine touch sorted. But nonetheless, it's still Formula One, it's still fun and there's more overtaking which is what people like to see.

Two questions for Pastor: how does it feel, your new life as a Grand Prix winner? Have you experienced changes in the last two weeks? Do you attract more attention? And secondly, you won here in GP2: do you feel that this track adapts to you, do you dream of doing it again tomorrow in Formula One?

PM: OK, regarding the victory, it doesn't change a thing. I think we need to keep working like that, keep pushing. As I mentioned before, we are not in the best position now against the other teams. We still need to keep improving. We have a lot of work to do. The car is getting more and more competitive every time, me as well. The feeling is really good. The atmosphere in the team is getting higher and higher, especially after the victory and now we need to continue like that, to push and push. And yes, Monaco is a special track for me, it's my favourite one. I've always been very quick here. For sure I will do my best this weekend to get the maximum again. We will be competitive, I'm sure of that, but we will see. This is a typical track. You must put everything together to make the difference and I will try, together with the team, to do our best and then we will see.

Michael it's not been the greatest start to the season, but I wonder if you've already cast your mind forward, if you've decided

whether you might race next year, if you're thinking about it, if you've got the motivation or the energy and despite the seven titles, do you still need to sell yourself to Mercedes or is it only your decision as to whether or not you will drive again next year? MS: No, the decision hasn't really changed. So far we're not focusing on what happens next year or in the future. It's more about what happens right now and the team and myself will get together, so there's no news for you yet, unfortunately. I don't really want to get involved in deep discussion other than what I just said, so let's leave it at that.

Lewis, you mentioned about being happier here in Monaco than you were in Switzerland. Can you give us the reasons why that is, what the differences between the two places are, and secondly, waking up in your own bed this weekend and being happier here, does that make a difference going into the race weekend itself? Could that boost your performance in any way?

LH: When I lived in Switzerland, it was one of the most beautiful countries I'd ever been to. The weather was a little bit like England but more often it was better weather, but just where I was living, I was living away from the city and it was very quiet. It took ages to go out to a restaurant. I couldn't jog down to a restaurant or walk to a restaurant. Here, it's sunny every day which makes a big difference, there are great restaurants a couple of minutes from where I live, there's a gym where I live, there's a pool where I live. Before I used to have to drive half an hour to get to the gym, so things were just less fun there. I'm still in my twenties so I feel like I need to make sure I continue to enjoy them more and since I've been here, I've been much happier. Every day I go running on the track, I run round the track almost every day and it's incredible to run around your favourite circuit every day. I go through the tunnel and I just cannot believe that I'm here. You have to pinch yourself every day, thinking wow, I'm running through the tunnel that the greats like Michael and Ayrton used to race around and now I'm one of those drivers but also living here. There's a lot to it, but it's spectacular. And for the race weekend? I don't know if it's going to make any difference, but it definitely won't harm the weekend, being able to be comfortable in your own environment and surely that can account for something.

F1 Monaco Grand Prix – FPI report

There are FPI reports and FPI reports. This one is less about the action on track and more about the experience of being here in Monaco.

One of the perks of being an F1 journalist – and yes, there are many – is the ability to get a photographer's tabard from the FIA. These tabards give you trackside access, and there's no better place to take advantage than right here.

Every F1 fan knows just how close the barriers are, how the cars snake through the tightly-winding streets of the principality before roaring their way through the tunnel. But until you stand at Piscine, leg touching the barrier, and feel vibrations as the cars pass... Well, you just haven't done Monaco.

I've not been doing Formula One for long enough to be jaded. But spending the opening practice session of the Monaco Grand Prix weekend trackside has made me fall in love with the sport more than I ever thought possible.

Standing at the entry to Piscine, the cars come roaring straight at you before jinking slightly to the right to make the corner. As they pass, the displaced air washes over you. If you get too close to the barrier (or if you touch it, as I did), you get knocked backwards by the force of the cars passing.

After twenty minutes or so spent at Piscine, we made our way up to the tunnel. Without earplugs, because I am clever like that.

If I thought Piscine was mega, standing in the tunnel as car after car rushes past – sometimes even passing each other in the narrow confines – was something else entirely. As a car enters the tunnel, you can feel the vibrations start in your feet. As the car gets closer, your legs start to pulse as the ground rumbles beneath you. And as the car passes, you can feel the pistons moving inside your stomach, rattling your organs one by one.

And the noise. Oh, the noise.

It's a physical experience, and not only because it strips you of your eardrums. Who needs eardrums, anyway?

The sound of the engine enters your skull, bounces around your cranium, and then works its way down into your veins, so that you are throbbing at 18,000rpm. Every fibre of your being is buffeted by sound, and the combination of noise and physical sensation means you feel part of the car, part of the F1 experience, in a way I'd never heretofore imagined.

You can take your sex, drugs, and rock n' roll and chuck them in the Monaco harbour. For pure passion, energy, and anticipation, there's nothing – NOTHING – like watching the cars tear these city streets apart.

And if you're interested in the outcome of the session, here's some brief news. Kimi Raikkonen didn't run at all; Lotus spent the session changing his steering set-up and the E20 wasn't ready in time for the Finnish driver to complete a timed lap. Heikki Kovalainen brought the session to a premature end when his engine blew up inside the tunnel with only a few minutes remaining. Finally, Fernando Alonso was fastest.

What more do you want to know? It's only practice...

FPI times (unofficial)

1. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.16.265s [22 laps]
2. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1.16.630s [17 laps]
3. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.16.711s [19 laps]
4. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.16.747s [12 laps]
5. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.16.760s [20 laps]
6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.16.843s [19 laps]
7. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.17.038s [21 laps]

8. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.17.190s [13 laps]
 9. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.17.222s [14 laps]
 10. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.17.261s [18 laps]
 11. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.17.413s [14 laps]
 12. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.17.631s [18 laps]
 13. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.18.106s [14 laps]
 14. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.18.209s [25 laps]
 15. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.18.252s [28 laps]
 16. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.18.302s [16 laps]
 17. Bruno Senna (Williams) 1.18.617s [20 laps]
 18. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1.19.39s [20 laps]
 19. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.19.341s [16 laps]
 20. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.20.838s [26 laps]
 21. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.20.895s [18 laps]
 22. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.21.638s [9 laps]
 23. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.22.423s [15 laps]
 24. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) NO TIME SET [1 lap]
-

F1 Monaco Grand Prix – FP2 report

Convenient as it would be to say that the times set in Monaco on Thursday afternoon are indicative of form at this most famous of circuits, it's simply not true.

A light rain started to fall on the principality approximately 15 minutes into FP2, and the winners in this afternoon's timesheets are those drivers who were able to time a good run on the dry track. Those lower down the timesheets either encountered traffic, mis-timed their first flyer, or ran in the wet.

But the efforts of those at the top should not be denigrated – threading together a perfect lap around these twisty streets is no mean feat, and doing so when 23 of your rivals are out on the shortest track on the F1 calendar is more impressive still. Jenson Button did an excellent job to cross the line in 1m15.746s for McLaren, while Romain Grosjean wasn't looking too shabby with his 1m16.138s lap.

It is interesting to note that Felipe Massa bested Fernando Alonso for what feels like the first time in decades. The result will be a much-needed boost to the Paulista's confidence – Massa said earlier this weekend that his performance issues had all been mechanical, and whether or not that's the case his FP2 time will put a spring in his step.

There was a brief break in the rain around an hour into the session, and some exploratory laps took place on slicks, but the bulk of running this afternoon – barring that in the all-important first fifteen minutes, when it was supersofts all the way – took place on wets and inters.

With luck, drier conditions on Saturday will see FP3 a more accurate representation of Monaco form.

FP2 times (unofficial)

1. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.15.746s [17 laps]
 2. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1.16.138s [19 laps]
 3. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.16.602s [21 laps]
 4. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.16.661s [23 laps]
 5. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.16.820s [20 laps]
 6. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.17.021s [15 laps]
 7. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.17.148s [23 laps]
 8. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.17.153s [22 laps]
 9. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.17.293s [11 laps]
 10. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.17.303s [21 laps]
 11. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.17.375s [19 laps]
 12. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.17.395s [21 laps]
 13. Bruno Senna (Williams) 1.17.665s [18 laps]
 14. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.17.800s [25 laps]
 15. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.18.251s [24 laps]
 16. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.18.440s [25 laps]
 17. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.18.522s [22 laps]
 18. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.18.808s [26 laps]
 19. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1.19.267s [25 laps]
 20. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.19.309s [29 laps]
 21. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1.20.029s [13 laps]
 22. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.20.240s [21 laps]
 23. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.20.631s [12 laps]
 24. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.20.886s [10 laps]
-

F1 Monaco Grand Prix – Thursday press conference

It was the turn of senior team personnel to face the media in Monaco on Thursday afternoon.

Present were Ross BRAWN (Mercedes), Jean-Francois CAUBET (Renault Sport F1), Monisha KALTENBORN (Sauber), Vijay MALLYA (Force India), and Frank WILLIAMS (Williams).

Vijay, first of all welcome, I think this is your first grand prix of the year and you love Monaco. But how do you keep in touch when you're a long way away?

Vijay MALLYA: Well you know, particularly at the start of the season there are too many conflicting obligations that I have. Parliament, for one, is in session in March and April and that makes it very difficult for me to leave India. I otherwise would have enjoyed going to flyaway races. But the budget, the union budget, was presented only in the middle of March this year as opposed to the end of February so I was obliged to stay back and attend parliament. Then, of course, in early April starts the IPL (India Premier League) cricket and you know we Indians are pretty passionate about the game of cricket. In fact, I remember I was telling Monisha, that three years ago my team reached the finals of the IPL and I actually had to regretfully abandon the Monaco Grand Prix and fly back on the Saturday night to make the Sunday final. But now it's all over, done and dusted and now I can enjoy Formula One particularly in the summer in Europe and in North America.

How do you thin Sahara Force India is doing at the moment? How do you see the performance so far this year?

VM: We've got 18 points from five races – it's the best start we've ever had. But if you look at our immediate competition, they're way ahead of us. Compliments to them, they've done exceedingly well. I think Sauber has had a second, the podium, and Williams have won the race, so congratulations to both of them. But if I study or try to analyse the various races and the performance of various cars there's a huge sense of unpredictability that has crept in this year. Just as an example: in Barcelona, Nico came tenth, scored one point but kept Webber behind him for more than 30 laps. Up until last year I would never have dreamt of keeping a Red Bull behind me. In Barcelona once again, Lewis actually got pole position before he was given the penalty but Jenson didn't even make Q3. So there's something going on there and the only thing we can put a finger on is the tyres and the performance of the tyres and we're obviously doing all we can to try and understand tyre management better. But I think we can look forward to our moment in the sun as well.

If it's that unpredictable then everyone has got a chance.

VM: Absolutely. The results speak for themselves. There is a definite sense of unpredictability. The usual front-runners aren't front-runners anymore. The midfield teams have in fact outperformed the traditional front-runners. So there is something going on there which I think everybody is trying to understand better.

Jean-Francois, can we first of all clear up the Caterham problem this morning? I believe it was quite an old engine.

Jean-Francois CAUBET: Yes, we blew up an engine this morning, with Heikki. There was a problem of reliability but it was quite an old engine. It was engine of more than 2,200km. It was an engine raced in the two first grands prix on the Friday. It was at the limit but sometime before the limit it is difficult to measure, so we know that we have a good engine today but some problem of reliability.

I'm intrigued to learn that you do more work here than for any other grand prix, can you just explain where that's centred?

JFC: Yes, I think even if Monaco is a long grand it is a tough grand prix on the engine side you we must have the maximum job between 15-17,000rpm instead of 17-18,000, so the map is completely different and you need great feedback from the driver to set up the car.

Is there more preparation involved than that?

JFC: Not. I think each grand prix is specific but Monaco is one that is no especially specific against the other.

And now there is the possibility of more teams winning for you as we saw with Williams two weeks ago.

JFC: Yes, congratulations to Frank (Williams) because it was quite emotional in Renault to have this win in Barcelona. I think we found the same spirit with Frank and we're quite happy as we pushed a lot to have a good relationship and a good spirit with all the teams and with Frank we've found the same spirit as we had 20 years ago. It was quite funny because Frank visited us last week and he told us in French... I will try to translate: Une hirondelle ne fait pas printemps, I think it's one swallow doesn't make a summer in English or something like this. But I don't think it's right. I think the car is good and I think they'll probably have some more wins with Frank.

Well, let's ask Frank. How much of a surprise was the performance in Barcelona, or does nothing surprise you any longer?

Frank WILLIAMS: That's partly right, but I was surprised. I've been racing long enough to know that you should approach any race with a considerable amount of pessimism and you get better after that. All grand prix teams are immensely professional and very few of them make any mistakes worth talking about during a season so it's hard to prise winners away from winning all the time. But whatever we did right, and I don't really know what that was, worked very fine and I'm just delighted to walk away with all those points and another number one on the scoreboard.

What has it meant to you personally having that win, after so many years?

FW: Yeah, well I thought it was eight years actually but if it was seven that that sounds a little bit better but it's an embarrassing amount of time for a man with a big ego.

Pastor told us there's been quite a bit of reorganisation within the team. How important has that been and how difficult was that reorganisation?

FW: It wasn't a major reorganisaiton, a few new people arrived, there was a bit of shuffling around. One or two people can make quite a difference and given that it's a complicated matter, as all these people here will tell you, to put the right group of people together and get them to fire on all cylinders. It comes together once in a while with the car and the driver and everything working very well. We took our chance and got it.

We got the impression that methods within the factory had changed, even the means of building the car and that sort of thing. Is that the case?

FW: Nothing significant has changed. It's the same approach, the same reliability. If we've gone a bit quicker then it's because the car is quicker and that would have come, more than anything else, from the wind tunnel and from the drivers being particularly tuned in to a particular circuit.

Monisha, first of all I wanted to ask you about Chelsea Football Club because I think there's quite a few people back here who don't quite understand that tie-up, how it works and how it happened?

Monisha KALTENBORN: Well, Chelsea approached us last year with this idea. It's very simple really, there's not much mystery to it. Here two teams have got together that belong to the two sports that are probably the most watched sports around the world. So like this we've created a joint platform, an enormous community to which we can reach out and we'll be doing this by doing marketing events together, looking at merchandising areas, so there's a lot of commercial activity that will start and it gives us a very potential to go to potential sponsors. So it's the commercial area that's involved here and if you give us a bit more time you'll what comes out.

Also, of course, some of the ownership of the team has been transferred to you, which is, I suspect, a fantastic opportunity for you.

MK: That's a great opportunity for me – and a big honour. It shows to me the amount of trust Peter has put into me, that together with his son we can operate the company in the future according to the values that he as the founder of our company has actually set out. And at the same time it's a very big responsibility as we're talking about a company here that has been in motorsport for the last 40 years, so you have a big responsibility towards the people and towards Peter.

And, in terms of the future of the team, the team has traditionally started very, very well but seems to have dropped off a bit mid-season. Have you got the budget to keep the development going for the rest of the season?

MK: We often get the question on our budget and that maybe we cannot develop the way that we want to. Now with the Barcelona package I think we showed everyone that we can develop quickly, efficiently and also bring a good and a big package to the track. So we will continue to do that. And it's valid for many other teams on the grid who are in a similar position, the more funding we have, the more we can develop, and you'll see that on track.

Ross, we've seen the ups and downs of the Mercedes team this year, we've heard how unpredictable Formula One is. Is that what it's all about? You won obviously in China but since then the performance doesn't seem to have been there.

Ross BRAWN: I think teams... if we take a normal season, there's always some variability between the teams and if you overlay on that the difficulty in getting a good understanding of how to make these tyres work most effectively, then the two together can sometimes bring quite big discrepancies. Take some of our competitors in Barcelona, they were a second quicker than us, and we were a second quicker than them in the previous race. There's big differences sometimes when these tyres are working or not working properly. I think it's a combination of the two, which makes it quite difficult to always understand where you are in the car and what you have to focus on to improve it. But we've done some useful progress with the car I believe, and when we get to those circuits where it would naturally suit the car and we're in the working range of the tyres, then you'll see the performance come back again. But it's true the last couple of races have not been so great after we had such a wonderful weekend in China.

Is there more strategy decided on the pit wall now than before? Is it becoming harder and harder to think on your feet as the goalposts move?

RB: It's true to say you don't always know what you're going to get in the race, even if you've done the work on a Friday and Saturday, you don't always know what you're going to get in the race and you have to be prepared to react from what you see in the race. Sometimes the tyres don't last as long as you anticipated; sometimes they're more consistent than you anticipated. So you need to have the capacity to evolve your strategy while you're on the pit wall. I think the signs you get are relatively clear in terms of lap times and degradation and so on and so forth. So, it has made strategy, I think, more interesting in many ways, more relevant so, yeah, it does make it more challenging on the pit wall but that's something we enjoy.

Yesterday we had a question from a journalist which quoted you in a German paper – which meant there were about three translations involved – saying that you had said that the team had let down Michael Schumacher this year, so far. Did you say that? Or could you perhaps clarify what was said?

RB: When I talk about the team, I talk about the drivers as well, the drivers aren't outside the team, so when I say "the team hasn't done a good enough job with Michael", I mean collectively. We – and that includes Michael – have not done a good enough job collectively in the first five races because Michael's got two points and that's not good enough. So, my view is that we always look at these things collectively; it's not 'the driver's made a mistake', or 'the team's made a mistake' it's 'together we haven't done a good enough job.' And that's the situation with Michael. It's been a bit better with Nico. Certainly the race win was great and I think in the last three races actually Nico's scored the second or third highest points of any driver. So for Nico we're not doing too badly. But I think also the issue of Michael scoring only two points is not just down to Michael. It's down to some of the technical problems we've had with the car.

Question for Jean-Francois, can you update us on the progress of your new engine, and also with the ACO changing the Le Mans prototype regulations to allow complete Formula One powertrains from 2014, is that a new area you can use for testing, with the testing ban in Formula One?

JFC: I think today for the new engine, for '14 we are now on schedule. We need to respect also the budget from Renault. We will be on time. Is it very high technology so it is quite tough development. We have big help from Renault, I think more than 45 people coming from Renault to help us on the electronics side, the electronics and turbo side. I think we will be ready, in the same philosophy that we have for the future, around November or December next year, so we are not asking for testing before.

And for Le Mans? The ACO has announced they are going to accept a full Formula One powertrain, including gearbox, engine, everything from 2014 onwards for Le Mans prototypes – so is that another market you could move into and is it something you are looking to do?

JFC: I don't think so.

A question for Monisha Kaltenborn, one year ago Sergio Pérez had here a very serious accident. I would like to know which memories do you have from this moment and how the team faced this situation and how Sergio Pérez is handling this situation, coming back to Monaco?

MK: Well the memories are, of course, very much there because it is just a year ago and it was a very bad accident. It's thanks to the safety rules in Formula One and, I guess, also luck, that the driver remained in the situation, so he wasn't really injured. You don't forget these kind of things but at the same time you have to get on and concentrate on the future and I think Sergio has done a great job there. He took it very well, we can see how

mature he handled the situation, even at the next race when he himself said he was not really there 100 per cent to take part in the race. But it's not an issue anymore, we've ticked that off, and he's actually taken it quite well.

Vijay, you talked about your passion for cricket earlier. Do you still retain the same passion as you once did for your Formula One team? And, in particular, given the financial difficulties we read about regarding Kingfisher, do you still have the same financial commitment to Force India? Will Force India continue for this season and beyond?

VM: I don't quite understand the correlation between sporting interests, which are personal in nature, and my business interests. I have several large public companies, most of which, with the exception of the airline, are doing very well. The airline is a victim of extraordinarily high oil prices and excessive taxation. Now, what you read and what you gather from what you read, is something that I don't care to comment on. I have sporting interests and I am passionately involved in all these sporting interests, I think I said it earlier. Sahara Force India is independent, fully funded. It's a joint venture between the Sahara Group and myself, there has been a significant capital infusion at the end of 2011, another significant capital infusion from the Sahara Group is due in 2012 and going beyond to 2013. So, Sahara Force India is extremely well taken care of and set. My other sporting interests, well, I was at every IPL cricket game, as any passionate Indian would be, and the team performed well. A little disappointing at the end because we've been semi-finalists for four years running, we were fifth this time and got knocked off the last game before the playoffs, but such things happen in sport. That's going fine. So, life carries on and passions carry on too.

Vijay, on the same subject, if you had to make a choice between your airline and your Formula One team, which one would you choose?

VM: How can you even start to make such a comparison? One is a large, public utility per se. How would you call Formula One? A public utility or a public spectacle? An airline is not intended to be a spectacle and a Formula One team is not intended to be a public utility either. So where's the comparison?

I was asking purely because of the amount of money that needs to be invested in both, and if you had the money to invest in one only.

VM: Well, you know, Sahara Force India is private team. Kingfisher Airlines is a listed entity. The banks own 23 percent of the equity of the airline. It's a public company, limited by liability as all limited companies are, so it's a plc. So the two are incomparable.

Dr Mallya, in spite of this, you explain to us, everywhere in the world, especially in your home country about your problems with your airline and there are rumours as well that maybe you have problems with your team financially, that people are waiting for their salary for weeks, just rumours. But do you think it's a good idea in respect of all this, just to have a luxury party on this luxury boat this evening? How can you justify it?

VM: Justify what and to whom? As I said, I have twenty different businesses. I have six large publically listed companies, each one is completely independent with different shareholders. One does not cross-subsidise the other because that would violate all principles of corporate governance. If one business, for whatever reason, is not doing well, it doesn't mean that every other business has to shut down. Every business has to be continued within its own values, within its own corporate objectives and the party that I host in Monaco each year is a promotion for United Spirits Ltd which has nothing to do with the airline. So because the airline is a victim of - as I said - high fuel costs and excessive taxation doesn't mean that other public companies and their stakeholders should necessarily be compromised. So who should I justify what to?

If I may, I would like to ask a Formula One question: as far as the engines are concerned there are suggestions that just possibly the introduction of the new green engine - if I can call it that - will be postponed, and also have any efforts been made to try and cap the pricing similar to the V8 engines of the present? What will the costing situation be?

RB: I think it would be a mistake to delay the engines again. If you recall, we've already delayed them one year and we've had to re... in fact we've changed them from a four cylinder to a six cylinder and then we delayed them a year. Every change actually costs a lot of money for the people investing in new engines. We're committed to a new engine programme, it's progressing, we've been able to justify the budgets to our board and we don't want to see a deferment or a delay in that new engine. I think it sends a very bad message back in terms of Formula One to keep changing its direction on things that are so fundamental, which need so much investment to make work. I think the new engine is very exciting, I think today engines are not really a topic in Formula One: they used to be, and I think it used to add to the sport, that the engine was quite a large factor in the performance envelope or the performance cycle of the car. I think the engines are much more relevant. Our company is getting some real benefits from the technology of this engine. We are using expertise and resource within the company to develop and design this new engine. It's a much more relevant engine. We're going to be running around on two thirds of the fuel that we're running on now with, we think, comparable power outputs. We've got to change the engine at some stage. We will become irrelevant with the engine if we don't look to change. The world's changing and I think the new engine is a far more relevant engine for Formula One for the future. If we're going to get new manufacturers into Formula One, which I think is a good thing, then why will they come in to build an antique V8 engine? They won't. They will only come in with this new engine, so we want to attract manufacturers back into Formula One and this new engine is very important (in doing that).

J-FC: I think we are very clear. We have already delayed the engine once, from four cylinder to go to six cylinders. I think it cost us around ten or 15 million, probably the same for Mercedes and probably the same for Ferrari. So we have blown nearly 50 million for nothing. If you delay one year, we think it will be never (happen) because the delay will be '15 and then '16. For Renault, it is a strategic choice. I think the V8 was developed 25 years ago and I share the same advice with Ross. If we need to have some new car makers, only the new engine will open the door to new car makers. The last point is a key point: to have a Formula One in '14 with the old engine will close the door to a lot of sponsors and new technologies. I think we have a clear strategy, I think it would be impossible to change our minds. And for the cost: I think today you must add the cost of the engine and KERS. I think we will probably know in September the cost of the new engine. I don't think the cost of the new engine will be a drama.

VM: We are not engine manufacturers, we never will be, so we have to depend on those who will supply us engines. I guess you've heard from both Mercedes and Renault here. I'm focused, at least, vis-à-vis the FIA on the resource restriction bit, because I think the cost of Formula One should be reasonable for all and give a level playing field for all participating teams. A power train, of course, is a very very important component of that.

MK: As has just been said, we are also one of the non-engine manufacturer teams. We are first of all committed to cost cutting so from that perspective, we have to ensure that we don't go back to a point where engines were so much more expensive - if you look back ten years ago. I think that should always be kept in mind. We fully appreciate and understand that an engine manufacturer wants to showcase his technology in Formula One but they also have to consider that engines have to be affordable and become more affordable in due course.

FW: I've always been a competitor, like everybody else here, and my own position is that as long as we get the very best engine - whether it's a fair price or not - as long as we can find the money to pay for it, we'll go and buy that engine, and our present geography - I mean that bloke behind (J-FC), who we are with presently, we know that they will supply us - if we can afford it - with a very fine winning engine - next year and that's what we intend to do, and if we have to find more money, we'll find the money.

There has been some discomfort and some complaints, I gather, from the general public about the lack of show in the latter stages of qualifying, in Q3, due to the fact that some of the drivers and some teams play with strategy and try to save tyres. So among the suggestions to cure that has been the proposal of allocating an extra set of tyres – call it qualifiers or whatever – for the exclusive use in Q3, which they would have to give back anyway. I understand Pirelli has no objection regarding this, but I would like to know what your view is about this?

FW: I'll put my foot in it. I think it's probably a good idea from the point of view that it maybe gives all teams a better chance. If you're a really skilful team with a brilliant engineer to run and control things, and you've only got three sets of tyres, you'll always get the best. If you haven't got such a person, you're always going to be at a handicap. If there's a fourth set, it may help out one of the weaker members. If there's an extra bob or two involved in running those tyres, maybe you shouldn't be in F1.

MK: We've had many discussions, I think, amongst the teams last year about the tyre situation in qualifying. We think the rule we have now is OK. We also wouldn't be supporting extra tyres, and I think even if you look at the statistics that the amount – when teams do their strategies and don't go out in Q3 – as most of these teams have anyway been doing a lot more laps earlier, so I don't think it would really change much for the viewer. That's what the figures say, at least.

RB: I don't have a strong opinion, to be honest. I actually think there's some interest in teams which don't go out. Of course people are here to see cars run and even when there's some teams that don't go out, you've got six or seven cars still competing hard for pole position. The teams that don't go out generally have resigned themselves to the fact that they can't compete for those positions right at the front, and I think those teams, being able to save their tyres, is in some way a compensation for their performance in the first part of the race. So it does give an extra decision and extra opportunity for the teams perhaps in eighth to tenth to save a set of tyres and be stronger in the early part of the race. There are two sides to every coin and is the show spoilt by the fact that some of the cars at the back of Q1 don't run? I'm not sure it is. I think everyone's focused on what the guys fighting for pole are doing. But if there was genuine proof that the fans want ten cars running all the time in Q3 then we'd accept some extra tyres.

J-FC: I think for a car maker it's quite important not to change the regulations all the time. I think that if you make a comparison, it's like you change the size of the goals during the season.

Just a quick question to Frank: in Barcelona, right before the fire started, a few seconds before the fire started, you had just gathered the team around you. They were all kneeling in the garage. What was it exactly that you intended to tell the team at that moment? And if you've had the chance to talk to them and finish that speech and if that speech changed after the fire?

FW: I believe like everybody else here, when you have a business or a large company – and mine's a small one – communication is fundamental. There was just a spot of communication going on, just happened to be in a rather public place but that was unavoidable. It wasn't about sex. Sorry. Sadly.

Michael Schumacher spoke earlier this week about the irony that the sport is currently pushing to improve safety measures yet we come and race in Monaco every year. I was just wondering what your thoughts are on the safety of this circuit and whether the risk of racing here is justified?

RB: Well, it was our driver who made the comment so... I think Monaco is a unique race, but there have also been big efforts made here to make it as safe as possible. We all know that motor racing can't be 100 percent safe, there is always some risk, but I think the developments in the cars, the technology in the cars, the technology at the circuits is always progressing well. Each year, I believe, it gets safer. There is risk and that risk probably varies at different circuits, but I don't think it's a situation that means we shouldn't race there. I think it's a manageable risk as it is at most circuits or all circuits in Formula One.

Vijay, you said Force India has got two shareholders: the Sahara Group and yourself. Does that mean the Dutch are now right out of the picture?

VM: They have a tiny minority left.

OK, so they are still there though, yeah? Fifteen percent, is that it?

VM: Yes.

Monisha, given the recent history of Sauber, was it particularly sweet for your associate football team to win in Munich?

MK: An interesting angle to look at it! We didn't think of that at the time. We really wanted Chelsea to win, and I will not get into any discussion as to whether they deserved to win or not because we would probably then be talking for a very long time. It was just a nice kick-off of the whole partnership. It was the first time that we really were together in public, being at such an event where you can just make more out of it in the future, so it was a very nice kick-off of the partnership.

One of the things that you guys have discussed today is cost-cutting. We're also given to understand that there were discussions on the same this morning. Could you please let us know what progress has been made in talks on cost-cutting and cost reduction in the sport?

RB: I think there's been some good progress in the last few months. I think the situation with FOTA where some of the teams left FOTA was unfortunate because I think that was one of the main initiatives of FOTA. But that's continued. The FIA are now becoming more and more involved in cost-cutting initiatives for the future. I think ultimately that's who we have to rely on to police the measures we need to take to control costs, because as the costs have become let's say more swingeing, as they've become harder to meet, then it's important that we all have the confidence that every team is complying to the cost restraint regulations, the resource restraint regulations and everyone's applying the criteria in the same way and they are all following the same rules. It's very frustrating if you believe – even incorrectly – that somebody is not following the rules. Within the system we had, it was very difficult to have the right level of confidence. I think the FIA have now, at the request of the teams, have become involved and there's a meeting next week which I think will be a very important meeting to set the objectives and agree the methodologies and philosophies that we want to control costs in the future. But it is an absolutely essential part for Formula One for the future. I think we've seen the situation with the new Concorde Agreement that's been discussed amongst all the teams and we need to make sure that a good majority of the teams have got enough money to meet the limits of the resource restriction, that a team that has a lot more money can't gain any technical advantage. I think the resource restriction, for me, is an essential part to safeguard the future of Formula One.

As the pitlane opened for the final practice session of the Monaco Grand Prix weekend, I could be found running the last few metres to the tunnel, desperate to be in place as the first car rocketed past me.

By a hair's breadth, I made it: as I entered the tunnel, Kimi Raikkonen roared past in his Lotus. The displaced air smacked my face, my ear drums rattled through the ear plugs, and my knees started to shake.

The sheer physicality of the Monaco tunnel experience is incredible, and one that I did my best to cover in the F1 report. But it's just as good the second time around. If anything, FP3 was better than F1, as the shorter session meant we never had to wait more than a few seconds between cars.

Magic as it was in the tunnel, there was a lot more of the track to explore in the sixty minutes available. Heading up towards Portier, there was a perfect vantage point from which to watch the cars snaking slowly down the hill towards us before they turned right, powered down on the throttle, and roared into the tunnel.

There wasn't quite enough time to make it all the way up to Casino Square before the chequered flag fell, so the next stop was Nouvelle Chicane, where you can sit on the road and feel the vibrations in the tarmac as each car passes. With no barriers in the way, it was the purest unfettered glimpse of F1 cars at their finest that I think I will ever be lucky enough to see.

Until I do this all over again next year, that is...

Standing inside Tabac the cars pass by so close that anyone happy to lose their press accreditation could lean over the concrete barrier and smack the drivers in the head as they head up to Piscine.

And it's worth following them to Piscine – standing by marshal post 14, all you need to do is bend over from the waist so you're the same height as the cars and watch the cars as they peg it towards you at high speed before pulling away to the right at the last possible moment.

Heading back to the paddock, there was just enough time to watch the cars going round Rascasse. Iconic, yes, but not as impressive as the tunnel, Tabac, or Piscine.

As far as actual session news goes, the hour was cut short by a red flag when Pastor Maldonado got overly friendly with the walls at the entry to Casino Square, ripping off his left wheel in the process. Maldonado was also involved in an incident with Sergio Perez for which it is widely expected the Venezuelan will be given some form of grid penalty.

FP3 times (unofficial)

1. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1:15.159s [25 laps]
2. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1:15.197s [21 laps]
3. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1:15.209s [20 laps]
4. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1:15.210s [20 laps]
5. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1:15.445s [18 laps]
6. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1:15.471s [19 laps]
7. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1:15.734s [19 laps]
8. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1:15.893s [23 laps]
9. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1:16.110s [14 laps]
10. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1:16.219s [19 laps]
11. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1:16.226s [20 laps]
12. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1:16.301s [21 laps]
13. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1:16.311s [19 laps]
14. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1:16.479s [20 laps]
15. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1:17.027s [20 laps]
16. Bruno Senna (Williams) 1:17.055s [26 laps]
17. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1:17.276s [25 laps]
18. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1:17.390s [19 laps]
19. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1:17.404s [22 laps]
20. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1:18.259s [18 laps]
21. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1:18.488s [22 laps]
22. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1:19.099s [17 laps]
23. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1:19.147s [19 laps]
24. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1:19.151s [19 laps]

F1 Monaco Grand Prix – Q1 report

Monaco is the circuit where qualifying position is more important than anywhere else on the calendar.

If you've been lucky enough to visit Monaco at any point, you will know just how narrow these streets are, and how they appear to be too narrow for a single car, let alone two racing wheel-to-wheel.

So Pastor Maldonado and Michael Schumacher will be starting the weekend at something of a disadvantage – Maldonado was issued with a ten-place grid penalty after turning into Sergio Perez during FP3, while Schumacher carries over a five-place penalty from his Barcelona crash with Bruno Senna.

Perez brought out the red flag less than five minutes into Q1 after he hit the wall near Piscine, knocking his left front wheel and damaging his suspension. By the time the Sauber driver reached Rascasse, his three-wheeled car could go no further and the Mexican racer stopped on track.

On replays, it looks as though the Sauber was suffering steering trouble, as Perez had his wheel locked full right as his car drifted to the left before colliding with the Armco. It's entirely possible that this is an aftershock from the incident with Maldonado in FP3. If that's the case, however, it should have been detected and rectified by the team.

After seven minutes, the pitlane reopened for business and the cars poured onto the circuit en masse.

By the time the session had reached its mid-point, there were times on the board from all bar Perez and Paul di Resta, and the dropout zone was comprised of Romain Grosjean, Charles Pic, Kimi Raikkonen, Timo Glock, di Resta, and Perez.

But that list is somewhat deceptive, as a number of those dropout zone times were set on Perez' red flag lap. Raikkonen and Grosjean will almost certainly be fighting at the front once they've completed a second flying lap.

At the head of the pack, Schumacher and Maldonado are doing their best to make those penalties as painless as possible – the German driver is currently in P1, with the Venezuelan in P4.

With five minutes before the chequered flag, the dropout zone is comprised of Heikki Kovalainen, Vitaly Petrov, Glock, Pic, Pedro de la Rosa, Narain Karthikeyan, and Perez.

Raikkonen is still on the edge of the dropout zone; it looks as though he still hasn't been able to get to the bottom of the steering rack issue that has plagued him all weekend. But the cars behind him are slow enough that the Finnish racer should be able to make it out of Q1. Either way, a disappointment for a man who was tipped as a likely winner this weekend.

Lotus teammate Grosjean is currently sitting pretty in P2, safe to make it through.

A strong lap from Kovalainen has pushed Raikkonen into the dropout zone, but the Finn's first run on the supersofts is good enough for P5. Next on the edge of the dropout zone is Sebastian Vettel, who saves himself and pops up to P4 as I type.

As the chequered flag falls, the dropout zone is comprised of the six usual suspects plus Perez.

Dropout zone

18. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham)
19. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham)
20. Timo Glock (Marussia)
21. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT)
22. Charles Pic (Marussia)
23. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT)
24. Sergio Perez (Sauber)

F1 Monaco Grand Prix – Q2 report

As the pitlane opened for the second qualifying session of the Monaco Grand Prix weekend, it was go-go-go. The tight lap times and heavy traffic in Monaco mean that every lap has to be a banker.

But the pressure to get a few fast laps in the bag as quickly as possible in each session often leads to collisions and prangs as drivers push too hard to string together that perfect lap in these twisty, tiny streets.

The first casualty of the session was Toro Rosso's Jean-Eric Vergne, who lost half his front wing and was slowly lapping his way back to the pits before a fast-moving Ferrari narrowly avoided clipping him. Vergne touched the barriers leaving the tunnel, tearing off the front wing. Half of it went flying, while the other half tucked itself up beneath the car, hitching a lift home.

With the action at the front largely stabilised, and containing no great surprises, the action – as ever in qualifying – comes from those fighting to get out of the dropout zone.

Both Sebastian Vettel and Kimi Raikkonen are struggling more than expected this weekend, while the oft-criticised Felipe Massa is having a whale of a time, currently sitting pretty atop the timesheets.

With only two minutes remaining of the session, the dropout zone is comprised of Jenson Button, Romain Grosjean, Kimi Raikkonen, Paul di Resta, Daniel Ricciardo, Jean-Eric Vergne, and Bruno Senna.

Of interest is the matching times posted by Schumacher and Vettel: both men lapped in 1.15.234s before an improvement from Schumacher saw the elder German – who has a penalty to make up for – pop up the timesheets.

There's only enough time remaining for one more lap apiece, and that only for those already out on track. The dropout zone is now made up of Kamui Kobayashi, Button, Raikkonen, di Resta, Ricciardo, Vergne, and Senna.

Should one of those drivers improve, the man at risk is Q1 timesheet-topper Nico Hulkenberg.

As I type, Raikkonen squeezes in to P10, and Hulkenberg tumbles down into the dropout zone.

Dropout zone

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

F1 Monaco Grand Prix – Q3 report

Both Pastor Maldonado and Michael Schumacher have made it into Q3 at the Monaco Grand Prix. The pair need to do as well as they can in the next ten minutes, as Maldonado carries a ten-place grid penalty into Sunday's race, while Schumacher has a five-place grid drop to deal with.

The highest profile scalp claimed by Q2 was Jenson Button, who has missed Q3 for the second time in a row for the first time in years.

Maldonado's first lap puts the Venezuelan in P1, with Lewis Hamilton in P2 and Kimi Raikkonen in P3. But Romain Grosjean blows them all out of the water with a 1m14.639s lap, putting the Frenchman on provisional pole.

Grosjean's lap is then quickly beaten by Nico Rosberg, who crosses the line in 1m14.572s. This is going to be a very tight end to qualifying, make no mistake.

Raikkonen's 1m16.217s is currently the slowest time on the board, with no times yet recorded for Sebastian Vettel, Felipe Massa, and Fernando Alonso.

With three-and-a-half minutes remaining, half of the drivers have returned to the pits for a new set of tyres for their final runs, while those who have yet to set a time (plus Maldonado and Raikkonen) are doing their utmost to ensure a decent result. It's like the split qualifying we saw in the support races all over again, just unintentional this time.

Vettel is still in the pits with 1m45s remaining of the session. The Red Bull driver has yet to set a time, and is cutting it extremely fine. The defending world champion has been out on track this session, but has been aborting laps left, right, and centre.

Thirty seconds to go, and everyone except Vettel is out on track.

Webber takes provisional pole as the chequered flag falls, while Hamilton crosses the line in P3. Mass's last effort puts him in P6, while Schumacher claims provisional pole – and has a five-place grid penalty to worry about.

Provisional grid

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

* Michael Schumacher has a five-place grid penalty and will start the race from P6.

** Pastor Maldonado has a ten-place grid penalty and will start the race from P19.

F1 Monaco Grand Prix – Saturday press conference

The post-qualifying press conference was an exercise in patience for the man in the middle seat, who was asked to describe his feelings about pole by pretty much every journalist present.

Present were Michael Schumacher (Mercedes), Mark Webber (Red Bull), and Nico Rosberg (Mercedes).

Michael, many congratulations, a great lap. I guess the only shame is that you have to move five places back on the grid, so a bittersweet feeling is it?

Michael SCHUMACHER: First of all, I am more than thrilled and excited about making a pole here in Monaco. Monaco to all of us is the track of the year, which has a very prestigious position, and to manage pole position here after what I have gone through in the past two-and-a-half years is just fabulous. That's what sticks in my mind. I told you guys already in the press conference, my situation is going to be pole, start the race in sixth and I'm going to win it. That's what I'm here for and what I'm going to aim for. That's all I gave in my mind and the past doesn't matter at all.

Mark, you were on pole here in 2010 and you're going to inherit it tomorrow from Michael, what do you think about that?

Mark WEBBER: Pretty amazing session wasn't it. It was very, very close. Q3 was tight between the first few rows. Obviously there were some different tyre strategies going on with different people getting through different parts of qualifying with different sets of tyres and in the end it was a good little battle. Michael did a good lap, fair play to him, but it's nice to move up a position. Of all places, it's good to start definitely towards the front here. The guys have done a good job, they worked hard on the rest day, they pushed very, very hard. We weren't too strong on Thursday and obviously didn't get much running, though everyone's the same. But the car on Sunday is generally pretty good, so looking forward to tomorrow.

Nico, you're only a tenth off pole position. You had provisional pole for quite a long time. I guess you thought you'd done enough. Nevertheless, a chance to win the race tomorrow from where you start.

Nico ROSBERG: Yeah, I wasn't too aware of the situation. I knew I had done a pretty good lap time but at the same time I knew that I would have to improve on that time to be able to get pole. But in general it was a good qualifying for me too. Everything went to plan. I didn't optimise my car perfectly in the end, bit too much understeer, but as such, front row is a great place to start tomorrow.

Back to you Michael. Obviously it's been a tough couple of years since you decided to make your Formula One comeback. What does this pole say about you and how do you feel?

MS: Well, I'll leave it up to the others to say what it means or doesn't mean. For me, I'm obviously excited, very happy. It confirms what I have felt for a long time. It's just sometimes you have put everything at the right moment together. Here it worked out. I have to say a great thanks to all the team, in particular to some of the guys who work very close to me. We had a special session earlier this week that, yeah, it sort of unites us and unites us even further and those are the result that come together with it. I'm grateful for all the trust that Mercedes, the team had in me and [they] supported me. I'm able to give back a little and I hope I give even further and more back tomorrow.

Michael, your feelings about this pole position? Admittedly, it will be sixth on the grid.

MS: Obviously I saw my time on the dashboard and thought, 'well, it shouldn't be too bad'. But then you don't know – as I was one of the earlier ones on track for the lap – what is going to come behind. So I was watching all of these monitors around the track and at one point I saw with a little sign, number one. And that was the moment I started slowly to believe and got confirmation on the radio. Yeah, just beautiful.

Is this a good Mercedes track? Obviously you're first and third in qualifying.

MS: I mentioned before the weekend that here and probably Canada are tracks that are probably going to suit us. We shouldn't look too bad. I told in the round of media after this one down at the TV stations, I said the plan is to be pole here, start the race from sixth and do whatever is possible – may even win – and here we are. It is not a complete surprise that we are able to fight for the front position. But after Thursday free practice and even this morning I wasn't at all confident to be able to fight for pole position. Then everything seemed to work together. We just dialled the car in to perfection and it's... yeah... it's just a result. It's a result of team effort and team work and getting everything sorted and being ready for it.

The statistics say that the highest winning grid position is third on the grid here. What can you do from sixth?

MS: Well, what can I say? I've finished fifth from being last; I won from I don't know what positions. I will do as good as I can. It's most likely to be a one-stop strategy here, that's what you have to live with so in terms of strategy there's only a very small window to play with. Overtaking we know is tough but we have DRS and KERS so you might as well try – and be sure I will.

Mark, as we mentioned the other day, you had your first podium here, you won from pole in 2010, you'll be starting on pole tomorrow, you've been in the top five for the last four years. It all looks good, doesn't it?

MW: First of all, I think it's Michael's day. It's a good lap for him so obviously it was a tight session for us. Lots of different people arrived in the back part of the important session in quali with different situations with tyres. Quali went quite smooth for me. It's the first time of the weekend where you put everything on the line – within reason – so it started to feel pretty good for me and I knew it was aiming for the first few rows for sure. And then it became very, very tight between us and I thought, OK, well, after the first run in Q3, it wasn't too bad a lap, I thought, we can still go for pole for sure on the last run. And yeah, it was a pretty good lap, I'm pretty happy with it. Very, very good position to be starting tomorrow and we have a very, very good car, the guys have done a good job and I'm very happy with today's effort.

How well prepared are all the teams, would you say, after losing most of Thursday?

MW: Everyone's in the same boat. I think that we don't have a huge amount of experience with the supersoft around here on long runs, but everyone's going to be in the ballpark I would imagine.

Michael says he feels it's a one-stop race. Is that pretty much the strategy?

MW: 24 hours mate, we'll see!

Nico, obviously you're starting on the front row. What does it mean here at what is your home circuit?

NR: I can also be pleased with today. Generally it's all gone well, the whole weekend until now. It's especially great to see how we, as a team, have managed to turn things around from a difficult time the last two races and now be right at the front again. It's just nice to follow all the progress we're

making, moving forward and really fighting hard to improve the car and get the best of the situation – and that's why today to really be on top as a team in qualifying is great and I'm very pleased, obviously, to start on the front row in Monaco. That is a great place to start to have a good race.

You needed two laps on the first set of tyres in Q3. We didn't see what happened at the end of the lap.

NR: Two things: mainly the front warm-up on the tyres was an issue but also I did some setup changes from Q2 to Q3 and I had to find my way around those first, because it was quite a different strategy so that's why it took me two laps.

And, as was the question to Mark, is the team perfectly happy with the preparation, given that you lost most of Thursday afternoon?

NR: Yes. It's not going to be easy, the race, definitely, you know a long race and tyre degradation is going to definitely be an issue but I think we've prepared well and done the best we can to make sure we have a strong race car.

Michael, you set a fantastic pole position; I would like to know how you rate this one among all the others?

MS: May I just say that you have to see two different chapters of life and this is the second one, which stands by itself, because in this Silver Arrow time, in terms of qualifying is the best position I have been in and luckily I'm able to give back, in that way, all the trust that has been shown in me over the last two and a half years.

Michael, is this pole position the best of your life and secondly, how many poles do you think you can set for the team this season?

MS: Similar answer to what I just said before, because how I rate this pole to others... it's the first one of the second part of my career and naturally that's the better one, because it's the first one. It's just sweet and a good feeling after you have come back and have hoped for better results in all circumstances at the end of the day, after why and what has happened, but to finally get it together and being able to prove it – that's much more important and therefore I'm certainly delighted.

Mark, on Thursday you were not very optimistic about getting on the front row. What did the team change to make the car so much better today?

MW: We certainly pulled the balance together a lot more. Obviously there are no real fast corners here but there are a few where you need to be able to keep the car in the line, especially into Casino but also through the Swimming Pool. You need to have a very good rhythm and pace through there, which we didn't really have on Thursday, so the car, between low and high speed wasn't great. We really really pulled that together. Also I think the track helped as well, the rubber on the circuit helped pull it together. The driver always brakes a little bit later on Saturday, so that helps a bit as well. Altogether the guys have done a great job and I think we got the maximum, actually, from what we could do today.

Mark, with all the hoopla, all the sponsors, everybody here, do you sleep just as well, starting tomorrow from pole position? Are you a bit twitchy, nervous or whatever?

MW: That's Formula One around here. It is unique, it is a special event. In some cases I used to like Magny Cours because we could go there and just drive the cars and leave, but here, getting around and the people... always being close and demanding things and all that sort of stuff is not always ideal, but that's the way it is. Sponsors, they come to a lot of different races. They are great for our programme but they are not in the cockpit with me and that's why they trust in us to get the job done.

Michael and Nico, do you think the special device that you have in the front wing helped you get this very very good performance, to keep the car more balanced?

MS: First of all, it is obviously only available in qualifying and only if we can overtake in the race, otherwise it's not available. Monte Carlo... you almost get no effect from it. There's a very small advantage because of the nature of the track, so I don't think you see any particular advantage in this one. For sure there is some advantage – that's why we have it, otherwise we wouldn't have built it, but certainly not enough to discuss it.

Question regarding penalties : would you say that it would be better and clearer for the public to apply penalties on site instead of at the next race ?

MW: After qualifying, I thought I had the penalty because my engineer said 'well done, great lap, de-de-de, penalty' and I thought 'shit, what for? I've done nothing.' Yeah, then I was slightly relieved to hear it wasn't me who had got the penalty. When you have an incident in a Grand Prix, that's obviously the tricky thing, because it's people's decisions after the previous race... When incidents happen I suppose that apart from fines, what else can you do? Sunday's indiscretions. How do you enforce any regulation on driver behaviour or team behaviour or whatever after that? Do you have any ideas? I don't know.

Michael, with your rich history round here, can you tell us what it was like to put that lap together today. The world watches this qualifying session perhaps more so than anywhere else; it was the ideal time to remind everybody that you still do have it.

MS: You have probably already put my answer into your question. Monaco, being so special... we call it a bit more of a driver track than some other tracks we run on through the year, but particularly because of the prestigious atmosphere and what it all means to us, it is super-fantastic if you manage to do such a lap. I knew that I was on a lap but then you can never be sure because we have seen how close and how tight today qualifying has been and I just managed to get it together perfectly, because everything was prepared and that is the nature of Formula One. It is very tricky these days and it's not always possible to have everything together at all times but here and now we did, and we hopefully learn more and more in order to do that more often. But reminding people that I'm still around, yup, that's a good point.

Michael, how come that you were able to predict this pole position last week when you were in Le Mans?

MS: Yip, not only did I say it on Wednesday here but I did so at Le Mans as well, that's true. I sort of felt that our car could be strong here, so it wasn't out of the blue, and it wasn't just a funny comment. There was quite a bit of optimism in there but I guess that's my nature.

We've had some particularly variable weather over the last three days and we were expecting a wet qualifying session; are you expecting or afraid of a wet race or do you think it's going to stay dry?

MS: I'm expecting, at my pit stop, that it will start raining.

NR: Local knowledge hasn't really helped the last few days. It's been very unusual, that's not the normal weather here, that in the morning we have sunshine and then in the afternoon everything goes dark. It's very strange.

MW: I just do whatever Jenson does!

Michael, does a result like this – the maximum, pole position – have weight in your decision whether to continue or not in Formula One?

MS: You imagine that just because of one result I've done at this moment I'm suddenly restarting or opening a different subject. No, that's not the case. I'm focused on what I'm doing right now. There will come a time when I will make summary of everything and then I will sit down with the team to see what we're going to do.

Michael, in the first chapter of your life, when you were on pole, you had two or three cars trying to win, like Ferrari or McLaren, and now we have 10 or 12 cars potential winners here. How do you see the race tomorrow from pole position?

MS: Naturally there are more contenders for winning this race than maybe there used to be in the past, that's true and that is why it's also so tight. I don't know what the time gap is between positions one and ten today but I guess it's much less than it used to be in the past. But that's how Formula One has evolved and there are particular reasons for this. Being up front, I like it but being on the other side you may disagree.

Michael, it's a pity you have this penalty, especially here. Do you think it was justified?

MS: I'm not thinking about two weeks ago. I'm just thinking about the now and what will happen. That's it. I'm focused forward.

F1 Monaco Grand Prix – Race report

If I told you the 2012 Monaco Grand Prix was a race of attrition in which only three teams were able to bring both cars to the finish, it would sound like a thrilling spectacle.

But while the statistic is true – only Red Bull, Ferrari, and Force India saw both cars make the chequered flag – it belies the fact that Sunday's race was as much of a procession as the Monte Carlo event tends to be. Yes, it was historic – when Mark Webber crossed the finish line he was the sixth winner in the first six races of the season for the first time in F1 history – but it was also (mostly) dull.

The threatened rain arrived much too late to make much of a difference, although the final laps of the race were a tense run to a finish that saw the three men on the podium split by less than a second. The traditional first lap carnage caused momentary confusion as we tried to establish who was where. But the bits in the middle? By and large they were the procession that Monaco's narrow streets dictate.

Which isn't to say that Webber didn't deliver a strong performance to deliver the win despite a chasing pack that grew to five cars in the dying laps of the race, when the heavens finally opened and rain began to fall just as the tyres were losing all hope of grip.

The Red Bull driver started Sunday's race from pole position, and managed to hold the lead into the first corner, despite the best efforts of Nico Rosberg to beat him off the start. Webber has struggled with his starts of late, but Monaco saw the Australian pull away cleanly and hold his lead until the Safety Car was called out in response to the first lap crashes that claimed the scalps of Romain Grosjean, Pastor Maldonado, and Narain Karthikeyan.

Grosjean found himself being squeezed by both Michael Schumacher and Fernando Alonso off the start, and by Ste Devote had nowhere to go. The Frenchman clipped the rear wheel of Schumacher's Mercedes, went spinning into the barriers, and found himself out of the race. While not an immediate casualty of the accident, Kamui Kobayashi found himself launched airborne by the Lotus: the resulting suspension damage saw the Sauber retire on lap 6.

Maldonado and Karthikeyan both retired thanks to damage incurred when the Williams driver ran into the HRT off the start.

Webber was able to hold onto the lead when the Safety Car returned to the pits on lap 4, and the race continued, with the order largely unchanged, for another 74 laps. Which isn't to say there wasn't some action, especially as a consequence of cars making up positions in the chaos surrounding the various prangs and near misses on the first lap – a perfect example is Caterham's Heikki Kovalainen, who not only got a strong start and eventually finished in P13, but who spent much of the race keeping the McLaren of Jenson Button firmly behind him.

It was a good race for the Finnish driver, who looked on course for a P11 finish before a tangle with Sergio Perez saw the Caterham pit with a damaged front wing. While Kovalainen certainly benefitted from the carnage ahead, the Norfolk racers are steadily improving in their hunt for that elusive first point.

It wasn't Button's day on Sunday. The British driver was knocked out of qualifying in Q2, started in P12 as a result of Maldonado's penalty, spent much of the race unable to pass Kovalainen, and eventually retired on lap 71 after spinning at Piscine.

On lap 71, Toro Rosso took the gamble to pit Jean-Eric Vergne and put him on inters for the final laps of the race. Rain was beginning to fall, and had it come in torrents the move could have been the decision that would have handed the Frenchman his first grand prix win. It was not to be, however – while conditions on track were slippery on the fading slicks, and cars were spinning left, right, and centre, the front runners managed to keep control, merely closing up as a pack to pressure Webber.

Just shy of the podium was Sebastian Vettel, who deserves special mention for his ability to eke out 45 laps on the soft compound, a strategy that enabled the Red Bull driver to get out ahead of McLaren's Lewis Hamilton, a position he held until the end of the race. Vettel's pace on the softs was nothing short of impressive, even towards the end of his stint.

Monaco Grand Prix results (unofficial)

1. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1h46m06.557s
2. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) + 0.643s
3. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) + 0.947s

4. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) + 1.343s
5. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) + 4.101s
6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) + 6.195s
7. Paul di Resta (Force India) + 41.537s
8. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) + 42.562s
9. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) + 44.036s
10. Bruno Senna (Williams) + 44.516s
11. Sergio Perez (Sauber) + 1 lap
12. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) + 1 lap
13. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) + 1 lap
14. Timo Glock (Marussia) + 1 lap
15. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) + 2 laps

Jenson Button (McLaren) RET
Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) RET
Charles Pic (Marussia) RET
Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) RET
Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) RET
Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) RET
Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) RET
Pastor Maldonado (Williams) RET
Romain Grosjean (Lotus) RET

F1 Monaco Grand Prix – Sunday press conference

The post-race press conference in Monaco was a historic occasion, celebrating the first time in F1 history that a season has opened with six different winners from the first six races.

Present were Mark Webber (Red Bull), Nico Rosberg (Mercedes), and Fernando Alonso (Ferrari).

Mark, your second Monaco win, you won't have a closer one than that, how are you feeling?

Mark WEBBER: Yeah, I'm feeling incredible mate. It was a very interesting race. Reasonably straightforward at the start: getting the gap on the Supersofts, just managing it with Nico. Obviously we had a bit of a gap over the rest as well, so both of us were getting away, and it was just a matter then of trying to get back into a reasonable gap. Also, the weather was threatening around that pit stop window as well and we weren't sure if we should go a bit longer there and put a set of inters on if it rained or whatever. But Nico went for it, went early with the undercut, so obviously a few people had to react to his first chess move, and then the next phase of the race was very strange. It was very hard to get the Soft tyre warmed up, the harder tyres in terms of Prime tyre, and Seb, obviously, had his in and it wasn't wearing down that much. So he was then coming back into the picture with his strategy. We were all trying to get temperature and at the start of the stint I had very, very low front grip and I had to manage that and move the brake balance around and things like that trying to get everything organised, and [I was] managing Nico and everyone else. But also, Seb's going 'Hmmm, this is interesting', so I didn't want him to get the magic 2l seconds, to make sure he couldn't do the stop and get the victory – that wasn't part of the plan. I managed to sort that out and I could concentrate on Nico again and then get the car to the end. But the rain – as Fernando said coming across in the car, there were times when he was praying for rain, saying 'good, come on, rain, rain', and then when it started he was saying, 'no, no, I don't want it to rain'. I think it was like that for everybody, except for me, because the first guy there is always tricky. So, amazing day for the team and myself. Yeah, so I'm really, really happy to have won here again. A great memory for me. Fantastic.

Nico, so close at the end – 0.6 seconds behind Mark. You tried a number of different things and you probably hoped for the rain as well but in the end I guess it wasn't to be.

Nico ROSBERG: Yeah, in general. At the beginning it was pretty straightforward. I was hoping for a good start, I had a good start, but Mark had a pretty good start too. That was it then. And then, it was just a matter of tyre management and everything and I must say I was a bit surprised by how strong we were not only in qualifying but also in the race. I think, at the end of day, for the weekend, we probably had the fastest car out there, in qualifying and the race, which is great to see, because we're just making progress all the time, so that's fantastic. Unfortunately, it didn't come together perfectly, so P2, it could have been P1 I think this weekend but there we are. No, I'm very happy with second place of course. It got a bit difficult there in the end, with the rain and the warm-up of the harder tyres but I'm very pleased.

Fernando, fifth on the grid, third at the finish, you now have sole control of the World Championship lead. Does this feel like a win to you?

Fernando ALONSO: Well, our target obviously was to try to finish in front of Sebastian, in front of Lewis – they were with us in the World Championship. And if you go race by race you concentrate on different drivers. The next one will be Mark, now he's second in the championship. So, it will be interesting also this season with constant development of the car and the constant surprises we are having every race – you never know which one will be on pole or take the race win. Everything went smooth after the start, but I had a contact with Grosjean. At that point I thought maybe the car was damaged or something but the car was perfectly fine so I keep running. I felt good, I felt competitive but in Monaco it's difficult with the traffic, to manage the traffic. We overtook Hamilton at the stop, with a perfect time, a perfect pit stop again. Thanks to the team I think we are in a privileged position and well done to all of them.

Mark, back to you. The start, obviously, was decisive and as you say, you got a good one. It's not always been your strength. Tell us about today's.

MW: Yeah, it went well. The first initial getaway was very good and control after that was good, but I knew straight away it was enough to get to turn one in good shape, so that was important. The next thing was the pit stop. When Nico went two laps short – aggressive underneath me in terms of pit stop, I thought 'I hope he can't get the tyres in'. But I was happy. Obviously I have full trust in the guys doing the strategy that he wasn't doing much

more than me or in traffic or whatever. So that was the next key phase and then obviously down to the driver in terms of concentration to the maximum.

Nico, tell us about how the strategies here this afternoon, because the way this race unfolded wasn't really the way it was predicted. There were expectations of two stops. Tell us how things changed during the race.

NR: Well, it was pretty straightforward. You know, there's two way to beat Mark. One is to go really long and hope that I'm that much faster in the end, which is even more difficult. The better chance was to go short and hope that I could put in some really good lap times straight away out the pits. But with the one lap it was just difficult and that's why I couldn't go fast enough to beat him on the track.

Fernando, you mentioned avoiding the spinning Romain Grosjean in the Lotus. Just tell us in a bit more detail what it was like to see that car go through 90 degrees and work out what to do next.

FA: Well, I had a fantastic start and in the first 10 metres I was side by side with Romain and I was passing Lewis as well but it was fair. They went close to each other and I put the car in the middle I think I touched Romain with my rear left and his right front and after that touch he spun. We were lucky that nothing was damaged on the car. After that spin of Romain, positions mixed a little bit. I think I saw Vettel like position five or six after the start. So some people were hurt and some people gained some advantage.

Back to you Mark, you're the sixth different winner in the first six grands prix of the season – never happened before in Formula One. What's it like to be part of this amazing season?

MW: Pretty good. I think we're a little bit... like Fernando said, it's up and down quali and the races are hard to predict so even for us, how we judge how the grand prix is going to unfold is not particularly straightforward. That is sometimes frustrating for us, because we'd like to push the limit and get the most out of everything we have, but we have to leave margin in not only strategy but also in driving and all that sort of stuff. So it's different to how it was in the past. So maybe we'll have seven different winners after Montreal, you never know. But hopefully we can get a bit of routine now. I think we got the maximum; we absolutely got the maximum out of this weekend. We were very, very fortunate to get pole. I was very, very happy with my lap. Then we knew that he race was our, not to lose, but it was a very, very special victory for us today. So, more to come hopefully.

Well done Mark. Was it any easier the second time? I don't suppose it was.

MW: This one was harder. Obviously the strategy was very different but we knew that from the start of the race that it was going to be different to the 2010 victory if I managed to try to win here. The start of the grand prix was reasonably going to plan on the supersoft. Pretty happy with how long that tyre went but we still couldn't quite get the gaps that we were after in terms of the mid-pack. Obviously Nico went for it, a bit shorter, and I was a little surprised that he went then because the tyres were still going not too bad – but it was worth a go. And then the race started to take a little bit of a different phase because then we had... going to the prime tyre – the soft – wasn't our ideal. We had to run it, obviously, but it was a very tricky tyre to get started. Obviously Seb was in the groove and underway and he was doing some very quick lap times in that part of the grand prix. And it was hard for us to get going, so I had to keep an eye on the Sebastian gap but also manage the... we needed to finish the grand prix on those tyres. So when Seb pitted, then I could revert my concentration back to Nico. It was pretty good after that. I must say that there were a lot of marbles on the track. Marbles are tricky, especially at Turn Three, the track was incredibly narrow there, it was just one car width wide, and then the rain. And it's always tricky when you're the first guy arriving into corners when it's sprinkling. So, again, on other tracks and in different conditions, a little bit of rain like that, you wouldn't really have to back off so much for it but all of a sudden the car is wheel spinning, the front's not biting, and around this place that's not very encouraging. Particularly when you're in the lead with only ten minutes to go in the race. So it required me then to really, really control the race and get the car home. The start was key, the pitstop was key, both of them went well. I did a little bit of work in between and we got an incredible victory that I'm very, very happy with. It's great memories for me to win here twice, fair and square off the pole positions. So I'm happy. Nico kept me honest. I had him under control but he drove well as well, and after that I didn't see what else happened – but yeah, it was good grand prix.

Nico, at the start was there anything you could have done any better?

NR: No! My engineer and my team gave me a great start – but the problem was Mark had a great start too. I got away really well but he did too. We were miles clear of everybody else but not enough to get him. And from then on Mark drove a really, really good race, very controlled and at all times in control of what he was doing and in control of me also. So there was not much I could do. But in general it's been a really good weekend for me, for the team and I have to say that I think I had the best car out there today, that was my feeling, so that's really cool and lets me home for a lot more in the next few races. It's really nice to see how we're progressing so quickly.

You got a lot closer in the rain, in the wet conditions, did you have any plans how you were going to get past?

NR: No – I was hoping I might get a chance or something but my tyres were really struggling too and also I had Fernando behind me and at times it was very difficult, just front and rear warm up, tyres lost temperature and then they picked up again towards the end. So it was a little bit easier in the end but very much on the limit.

What does it mean to be standing here on the podium here in your home town, as it were, your home country?

NR: It's very special, having grown up here. It's great. The way through the tunnel is my way to school, so it was fantastic and I'm very happy.

Fernando, I guess the crucial thing was jumping Hamilton at the pit stop?

FA: Yes. I think the start was the first point where we had the opportunity to gain some places, we did a great start again. We had to lift off because there was no space between Lewis and Grosjean, if not we could also overtake Lewis at the start and maybe the race was different. It was good being fourth in the first corner and then Lewis had quite big degradation because he was so slow and before the pit stop we get close and then with one extra lap it was enough to jump him at the stop. I think the tyres were surprisingly good, surprisingly consistent, so with the warm-up problems and the pace that we had after the pit stop, I think if we run longer with that tyre maybe there was the chance to win even more positions, as Sebastian tried to do. So, that was close but it is always difficult to predict. I think it was surprisingly good, the supersoft, and maybe surprisingly difficult to warm up the softs. You never know – only after the race.

Did you have any plans at the end? You were all so close...

FA: If rain, then yes. I think at 20 laps to the end they said 'maybe rain is coming'. And I said, if rain is coming we have to attack. We would put on intermediate tyres and there is always a better chance to overtake in the wet than in the dry. We were out there ready to risk, because victory in Monaco means a lot. So, we were optimistic on that, but then five or six laps to the end with the drops of rain that we had, I think we were all praying 'no more rain' because it was so difficult. As Mark explained, the difficulty of being the first two or three cars, you don't know how the next corner

will be. You have a little snap, a little bit of front problem in the corner before, you see all the drops on the visor on the straight and when you approach the next corner at 250kph, how wet will be that corner? You never know. At that point, five laps to the end, we all, I think, want to keep positions and finish the race as we were.

Mark, were your settings very different from Seb's? And is it one of the keys to your victory today?

MW: I think, in general, qualifying has gone very well for me this year. Seb got me once in Bahrain, the rest have gone for well for me. Set-up-wise, we've always been pretty close, we always work very well as a team, to get the most out of both cars. He made some changes before qualifying, which – it looks in hindsight he wasn't particularly happy with. That's how it is sometimes for us drivers. Obviously we get it wrong and we get it right. Round here, if you haven't got the confidence, then you're not quick, which happened with Seb. He didn't have the confidence in qualifying and he couldn't produce the times, so that can happen at any venue. If you want to look at the battle between us then it was key that obviously qualifying went well for me but then I had my own battle with these guys, so if I just relaxed and tried to be in by one tenth, I would have qualified eighth, so I need to keep my finger out and keep going.

Mark, you and Seb are tied three points behind Fernando. You've said before that wins are what you really need for a championship; you got 25 points today. How much does that boost your championship bid?

MW: It's timely off the back of a difficult weekend for us in Barcelona, through a few small things that we got wrong, and ultimately we paid for that with no points in Barcelona. Up until then, generally, we've got the maximum out of most weekends, and that was the case this weekend. So that's all we can keep doing, Dan, is getting the most out of each weekend. In Shanghai, Nico was untouchable, Barcelona the Williams was quick. So we need to be scoring all the time and then when days like this come along you just cannot let them go at all. You have to grab them with both hands and feet and hang on to them like hell. That was the plan today but consistency is nice, but wins are what wins championships – well, DNFs can shag championships as well, but you need to win and then keep consistent.

Fernando, you seemed extremely happy on the podium. What does it mean for you to be leading the championship, and what is the secret of this change in the team?

FA: I was happy all weekend. Yesterday there was some disappointment in the atmosphere around the result in qualifying, because we had been strong in free practice and then maybe people expected us to be fighting for better positions in qualifying, but inside the team we were extremely happy. We were fifth and seventh for the first time in 2012, both in Q3 after fighting to get through in some of the races one month ago, so this was definitely a very strong weekend with a good qualifying position and I think a good race position as well. In fact we overtook some other teams in the Constructors' championship today with some good points, finally, so I was happy for that, happy for the direction or happy for the momentum that we seemed to have kept from the Mugello test so that we brought some updates for the car. Everything seems to work, not as at the start of the championship when some of the updates were negative and we were a little bit lost, so now we are happy not for the result, not for the pace which we understand that we need to improve – we are not the fastest out there – but happy for the direction that it seems we are in. Everything that we put on the car seems positive, so the next couple of weeks will be important.

Mark, at what stage did you think you had the race won?

MW: Lap 78, out of turn 19. That's Monaco. I watched the 1983 or '82 Monaco Grand Prix. Prost was leading with two laps to go and he crashed. So you never get ahead of yourself around here, because you'll get bitten in the arse really hard. So after the last corner was when I thought I was going to win.

Fernando, the lap before your pit stop, you had two purple sectors. Was the set of tyres good enough to do again the next but one lap and could you have possibly jumped Nico or even Mark?

FA: Yeah, definitely I think so, but as I explained before, nobody predicted the problems with the soft tyre warm-up today. The temperature, the track conditions, whatever it was, the soft was not very quick at the beginning, so when the people around us stopped, you need to make a decision. At the same time, nobody predicted that on lap 30, the supersoft would do pink sectors every lap. Knowing now what Sebastian tried to do and how our in lap was and the tyre state on that lap, with a few more laps, for sure we could jump Nico and Mark.

Mark, last year, at the same Grand Prix, you had a completely different situation than you have today, mainly compared to your teammate. He had won several races, you nothing, even inside the team it was different. Can you tell us what is the big difference between last year and this year?

MW: Yeah, last year was a little bit of a mystery to be honest. The gap sometimes was really really extreme and it was hard for me to understand why it was like that sometimes. I think there was also a factor of me getting on top of the tyres but it wasn't all of it. I didn't feel that I had lost that much form but as the season went on, obviously things got a bit closer and a little bit better. But you're correct in your question, the first five months was very tough and I was in a different category to the other car, whereas this year it's much much more like 2009 or 2010, which is nice.

Mark, Red Bull Racing won today and the last two Grands Prix in Monaco. How do you do it?

MW: Well, we've been on pole position for the last three years here as well, which is a big help. 2010 was a similar race – actually the last three have been similar. I think they've all been one stop races, obviously different safety cars. Sebastian had a red flag to help him a little bit to get him over the line last year, but generally I think that we've had a very very good car every time we've come here. I think this year is probably the weakest car we've had here in the three years that we've come here, but it was still enough to win, so the other years were a little bit more straightforward, this one was much much more difficult. I don't know, maybe the guys are drinking a lot of Red Bull and it gets them in the zone for the special weekend, but they're very fortunate we've won three in row here and it's a brilliant effort from the team.
