
Getting to know the Hungaroring

It's a racetrack that looks like a go-kart track, with a bumpy surface, endless corners, and the slowest average speed of any permanent facility on the F1 calendar. It can only be the Hungaroring.

Brake demands are highly variable – the first corner demands heavy braking as the drivers slow down after the short main straight. But the rest of the circuit is fairly light on brakes – the endless pile of slow- and medium-speed corners mean that speeds rarely get high enough for hardcore braking to be an issue.

Turn 1 is of interest not just for the traditional charge off the line, but because of its role as one of the key overtaking zones on track. The combination of KERS, DRS, and its location at the end of the circuit's only straight – a short one at that – mean that we should see consistent passing attempts at Turn 1 for the duration of the Hungarian Grand Prix's 70 laps.

Anyone using the DRS along the main straight to get close to the opposition need only preserve that gap in the approach to Turn 2 before outbraking the competition in the downhill approach to that second corner for another opportunity to pass.

Because of the endless stream of low-speed corners, traction at the Hungaroring is vital. Drivers need to be able to trust in their engines to speed out of corners with consistent power delivery. Depending on the engine manufacturer, engines will run at full throttle for between 54 and 59 percent of the lap, putting the Hungaroring on the lower end of average in that regard.

Again as a result of the plethora of lower-speed corners, downforce is critical. Rear wings are set to create maximum levels of downforce, as the short main straight means that any loss of power along that straight is minimal in context. Depending on the characteristics of each car – or preferences of their individual drivers – teams might choose to run front wings designed to minimise understeer.

While there are those men who prefer their cars to have a little understeer, this weekend's circuit configuration means that teams will set up their cars for a stronger front end to negate the natural understeer created by the track layout.

Tyres, as ever, are key. The bumpy, dusty track surface rubbers in over the course of a dry race weekend, and grip is key. There are no high lateral forces to contend with, so tyre management is easier than it might otherwise be. According to Pirelli, "the Hungaroring is one of the lowest grip circuits of the year, which means that tyre wear is not particularly extreme. However, the [traditional] high temperatures, non-stop succession of corners and low average speeds with little airflow make it one of the most physically demanding races of the year for the drivers."

The soft suspension set-up widely held to be ideal for riding the kerbs of the Hungaroring puts extra stress on tyres. While mechanical grip and increased traction help the drivers exit the medium- and low-speed corners, the unfortunate consequence is added rear tyre stress and possible graining. In the event of hot weather, blistering is a real concern.

The Hungaroring is comprised of six left-hand corners and eight right-hand corners, and is run in a clockwise direction. Average lap speeds are around 195kph, while a number of corners are taken at a relatively docile average speed of 95kph.

The current configuration of the Hungaroring has been in use since 2003, when Turns 1 and 12 underwent slight modification, and measures 4.381km. Presuming it runs for the full distance, the grand prix will last for 70 laps, bringing the total distance run to 306.630 kilometres.

The Hungaroring has traditionally been one of those tracks where overtaking is nigh on impossible. That should all change with the combination of Pirelli tyres and DRS, but in recent years winners, pole sitters, and the like have tended to cluster. Past Budapest winners still on the grid are: Mark Webber (2010), Lewis Hamilton (2007, 2009), Heikki Kovalainen (2008), Jenson Button (2006), Michael Schumacher (2004), and Fernando Alonso (2003).

The group of previous pole sitters is slightly smaller: Sebastian Vettel (2010), Fernando Alonso (2009), Lewis Hamilton (2007, 2008), Michael Schumacher (2004, 2005) and Fernando Alonso (2003).

Fastest laps at the Hungaroring have been claimed by Sebastian Vettel (2010), Mark Webber (2009), Felipe Massa (2006), and Michael Schumacher (2004). Kimi Raikkonen had three fastest laps in four years between 2005 and 2008.

The current lap record at the Hungaroring is Michael Schumacher's 2004 time of 1:19.071s, set at an average speed of 199.461kph.

F1 Hungary Blog - Thursday press conference at the Hungaroring

At the Thursday press conference in the Hungaroring, Felipe Massa (Ferrari) was the headline act. Joining him were Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso), Jenson Button (McLaren), Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus), and Mark Webber (Red Bull).

Three of the men present – Webber, Massa, and Button – were asked to explain why they had been consistently out-performed by their teammates this season.

"All three of us have pretty strong team-mates and that's what you want," Webber said. "I think all of us also are pretty good drivers. We are driving for the three top teams and you can argue it's only the six to eight drivers are the best guys on the grid so inevitably there is going to be a bit of momentum either way. Speaking from my side, we know Seb has done a good job in qualifying, particularly at the start of the season. The last few races it has tightened up a little bit and last year there wasn't much in it so let's see how we go for the second part of the championship."

"I think it's the same," Massa agreed. "Qualifying is an important part of the race. The position you start is always important. Fernando did a better job on the qualifying so just need to improve a bit, to fight to try and be in front, and it is an important part. Just pushing hard to improve all the time."

"Exactly the same," Button added. "We are racing against the best drivers in the world and sometimes it goes one way rather than the other. This year for me Lewis has been quicker in qualifying which is something you want to improve on. You want to be as quick as you can in qualifying as it is always all about getting a better position for Sunday and making your race a lot easier. But I think it is a little bit different this year than it has been over the past few years. I think even if you have qualified a few places back, you can still have a really good race and really fight for a victory so I think Saturdays are important but obviously Sundays are the ones that get you the good points."

The same three men were asked if they foresaw a three-way battle for victory this weekend.

"I think it will be tight again," Webber said. "All three teams, as you've said, have shown forms of... well, they have won, simple as that. It's not chances, ifs, buts and whens. They actually have gone out and won grands prix fair and square: Sebastian in Valencia, Fernando in Silverstone and then Lewis. None of those victories were handed to them, no one was in front and then had a technical problem. They were grands prix that were won fair and square, so there is real form there, and I think that this weekend, whether it's three teams remains to be seen, but two definitely could challenge for the victory. Three is a bonus, obviously, for the neutrals, you guys. Three would be the maximum; I don't think we will have four teams but three will probably mean that one of six drivers can win the race."

"I think the same," Massa chipped in. "In the last races we saw improvements from our car, even McLaren at the last race. Red Bull was, for sure, always very strong, even if they didn't win they were strong anyway so I think here we can see another fight between us. Sometimes there are tracks that are better for one car than the others. We will wait and see how it's going to be here, but I think it can be a big battle again."

Button was excited by the prospect of a three-way battle.

"I think it's a great time for F1, to have three top teams fighting at the front," the McLaren driver said. "We've had four different winners from the last four races and hopefully we will have a great race here. As we've said, we don't know who is going to be the most competitive here. It was great to see three teams fighting for victory at the last race, and hopefully it's going to be the same thing here. Hopefully there will be six of us really at the front with a chance of victory. That's all we all love doing, we all love the challenge and hopefully we will get the chance to fight for it here."

Further down the pack, Kovalainen was asked what Team Lotus' targets were over a race weekend.

"Of course, at the grand prix, the aim always has to be a win and a pole but at the moment that is not realistic," the Finnish driver said, "so we are targeting at the moment to be ahead of the other new teams and closing the gap to the cars ahead of us. We still have got a lot of work to do. We have got to improve as a team, but we are constantly working on it and that's where the focus is at the moment."

Kovalainen was then asked whether he thought his team could overtake Toro Rosso by the end of the season.

"By the end of the year, I don't know," he said. "We are trying to close the gap every weekend but Formula 1 is very competitive. The teams ahead of us are bigger and better than we are at the moment so it is not very easy but whether it is by the end of this year or next year, whenever it is, the target is to close the gap. We believe we can do it so that's why we are doing it."

Alguersuari was confident in his team's progress.

"I think this year it's pretty good," the Spanish driver said. "I think it's the biggest example so far as this year everything changed a lot in Formula 1. The tyres, and it was a bit difficult at the beginning of the season to get the best out of the car, to work for qualifying and to work for the race. Now everything is coming up. It's a bit late, as I think the other teams have done a really good step forward, especially Force India, so it has been difficult at the moment to stay in front of them."

"But I think we are getting out the maximum of the car," he added. "Last race at the Nurburgring there was nothing else we could do. I think we did a good race, we did the maximum we could have done and (Paul) di Resta finished a fair bit behind me. He was clearly faster than me, so I think we have done really the best. I think there is still potential to come from our side set-up wise, of development during the year, but I think the target is to stay very close to Force India, to the championship, which will be tough and obviously to stay in front of Williams."

Webber was asked how he thought the RB7 would perform at a circuit referred to by all and sundry as a Red Bull track.

"Well, last year is a little bit of a form card," he said. "Obviously, the regulations have changed a lot since then, so let's see how that goes. Clearly, McLaren and Ferrari aren't hanging round as well. Qualifying has tightened up a lot in the last few events and so have the races, as we saw. Silverstone would have been a track where you would think we could have been a bit more competitive or more dominant compared to the high standards we have set around some particular venues around the world and this one you might pick as well. So, find out Sunday night."

The Australian was then asked about his run of unfortunate starts, which have been the Red Bull driver's Achilles' heel all season long.

"I think the whole team, we all do, need to [work on starts]," he said. "Felipe probably had the best start at the last race. Sebastian [Vettel] was under a lot of pressure himself, so both of us didn't have the easiest run to the first corner. Silverstone was a dry track, intermediates on the car, so it was an

interesting start. Sebastian did the same to me as what I did to him at Silverstone the year before. A little bit more grip on that side and off you go. The starts, you know. Jenson has had some good ones and the last one was a shocker for him. That's just the car. There a lot of things that go into the starts, how it all works, so we need to continue to focus on that. We need to focus on pit-stops. That's Formula 1 racing. Lots of things need to be put into the mix to get the right results."

F1 Hungary Blog - Sauber retain Kobayashi and Perez

The first major announcement of the Hungarian race weekend comes courtesy of Sauber, who have announced that they will be maintaining their current driver line-up for 2012.

"We are very pleased with our drivers," team principal Peter Sauber said. "Kamui has grown into his role extremely well this year. Though it is only his second full Formula 1 season, he is already taking on the responsibilities that naturally fall to the more experienced driver in the team. We are delighted with him at both a sporting and a personal level. We had an option of working with him in 2012 and there was never any doubt that we would take it."

Kobayashi was understandably flattered by the praise.

"I'm very proud that I can drive another year for this team and I want to thank Peter Sauber and Monisha Kaltenborn for putting their faith in me and the guys for all their work," the Japanese driver said. "In 2010 we had a very difficult season and some tough times. We managed to overcome this because we are a strong team."

Kobayashi's career-best result for Sauber - so far - has been a P5 at the 2011 Monaco Grand Prix.

Peter Sauber also had high praise for rookie driver Perez.

"Sergio has achieved more than one could expect from a rookie," he said. "From the very first race he proved that he is capable of driving not only fast but consistently as well. And after the accident in Monaco he demonstrated that he can handle difficult situations too. From the outset we had already signed a contract with Sergio that went beyond 2011. With a rookie that always entails a certain risk, of course, but clearly it has paid off."

The Mexican driver was pleased to be confirmed for 2012; the lack of uncertainty means he can concentrate on developing himself as a driver over the coming years.

"I want to thank Peter and Monisha that they trust me," Perez said. "Of course it is very good to have continuity and this way I can intensively prepare with my race engineer for what will be my second Formula 1 season. But for now I'm concentrating on finishing this season on a high. The summer break will be very good for me because since my accident in Monaco it has been a busy time."

Perez' best result of his rookie season has been a P7, scored at the British Grand Prix earlier this month.

Also retained for 2012 is Esteban Gutierrez, Sauber reserve driver and GP3 racer. While the young driver's results speak volumes, Peter Sauber explained why he had chosen to develop the up-and-coming racer.

"Esteban's career is advancing in steady strides," Sauber said. "After his commanding victory in GP3 it was a logical step for him to move up into GP2, where he has now taken his first win. He will then enter Formula 1 when he is ready for it. For us he has been a firm fixture of the team since 2010, and we will continue to support him on his way towards Formula 1."

F1 Hungary Blog - BBC reacts to Sky high F1 costs

So the BBC are cutting costs, and with the cutting costs has come a dramatic reduction in Formula 1 coverage.

The announcement, which broke worldwide this morning, explained that BBC and Sky Sports would be joining forces between 2012 and 2018, splitting coverage roughly 50-50 between the two broadcasters.

According to the BBC's press release on the subject, "the move will bring increased choice, innovation and breadth of coverage to UK and Irish motor racing fans. The two leading UK sports broadcasters will offer fans unparalleled live High Definition coverage of every race of the season."

The aim - which has been hotly disputed by fans and industry analysts - is to increase the viewing figures for Formula 1 in the UK while splitting the production costs between two bodies, each of whom will be responsible for live coverage of 10 grands prix per year.

"We are absolutely delighted that F1 will remain on the BBC," enthused Director of BBC Sport Barbara Slater. "The sport has never been more popular with TV audiences at a 10 year high and the BBC has always stated its commitment to the big national sporting moments. With this new deal not only have we delivered significant savings but we have also ensured that through our live and extended highlights coverage all the action continues to be available to licence fee payers."

Sky Sports has a much smaller market share than the United Kingdom's national broadcaster, but the combination of global financial crisis, a freeze to the license fee for UK TV viewers, and the ever-increasing costs of following the F1 circus around the world, have made it impossible for the BBC to continue justifying the cost of its coverage of what is widely seen as a niche sport.

Those uninformed observers fail to understand the vital importance of Formula 1 to the UK motorsport industry, which employs around 50,000

people and contributes an estimated £5 billion per year to the beleaguered British economy.

Free-to-air Formula 1 has long served as an inspiration for aspiring engineers, drivers, mechanics, and technicians. While there are still other series available on free-to-air TV, the only high profile international series with comparable coverage is MotoGP, also shown on the BBC.

Details from the press release have been copied below.

”The broadcasting partnership will include:

- ”All races, qualifying and practice sessions live on Sky Sports across TV, online and mobile and tablet devices
- ”Half the races and qualifying sessions remain live on BBC TV, online and mobile including key races such as the British Grand Prix, Monaco Grand Prix and the final race of the season
- ”Extensive BBC highlights on TV, online and mobile, of all races and qualifying sessions that BBC is not covering live
- ”Build up coverage of each Grand Prix on BBC News, Sky Sports News and Sky News
- ”Extensive multiplatform coverage including red button, bbc.co.uk/sport and skysports.com”

F1 Hungary Blog - F1 at the Hungaroring

There might have been action on track at the Hungaroring on Friday morning, but all eyes were on the internet, which was aflutter with the news that BBC and Sky would be sharing UK F1 coverage from 2012 to 2018.

The general consensus is that splitting responsibility is likely to have a negative impact on the quality of coverage, while British fans are outraged that they will, in effect, pay twice to watch Formula 1 – once in their BBC license fee, and once in the monthly Sky Sports subscriptions that will make each race cost approximately £48 to watch.

But the deal has been signed, and there’s very little anyone can do to change it.

And there was racing underway. Well, practice for racing, at any rate.

Lewis Hamilton topped the timesheets for McLaren, with 0.2s in hand over Red Bull’s Sebastian Vettel in P2. Fernando Alonso was just under 0.1s slower than Vettel, while Mark Webber was 0.02s slower than the speedy Spaniard in a red suit.

Webber’s P4 is all the more impressive when you consider that the Australian sat out much of the session – logging 12 laps to his teammate’s 24 – when a serious off at Turn 9 saw him return to the pits with a massive hole where his nosecone and front wing should have been.

As is always the case during free practice, very little happened in the early stages of the session – drivers went out for a seemingly endless round of installation laps but didn’t set times before returning to the pits for telemetry discussions and set-up tweaks.

The first man to put a time on the board was Nico Hulkenberg, who spent the morning behind the wheel of Adrian Sutil’s Force India.

The morning session was filled with longer runs as teams tried to establish how best to make the Pirelli soft and supersoft compounds work to their advantage in the relative warmth – this rubber combination has not been in use since Montreal, when rain negated the need to run on both compounds.

F1 times (unofficial)

1. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.23.350s [19 laps]
2. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.23.564s [24 laps]
3. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.23.642s [29 laps]
4. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.23.666s [12 laps]
5. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.23.772s [20 laps]
6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.24.115s [25 laps]
7. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.24.250s [22 laps]
8. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.24.369s [20 laps]
9. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.24.620s [24 laps]
10. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.25.093s [22 laps]
11. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.25.113s [21 laps]
12. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.25.336s [22 laps]
13. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.25.357s [17 laps]
14. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.25.836s [24 laps]
15. Bruno Senna (Renault) 1.25.855s [25 laps]
16. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.25.890s [28 laps]
17. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.26.099s [36 laps]
18. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.26.124s [25 laps]
19. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) 1.26.878s [26 laps]
20. Karun Chandhok (Lotus) 1.27.352s [21 laps]
21. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.28.533s [30 laps]
22. Jerome D’Ambrosio (Virgin) 1.28.903s [22 laps]
23. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT) 1.29.059s [24 laps]
24. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT) 1.29.904s [26 laps]

F1 Hungary Blog - FP2 at the Hungaroring

Free practice is hardly the most scintillating part of a Formula 1 weekend.

But Friday afternoon in Hungary was somewhat less nail-biting than we're used to. As was the case in F1 this morning, teams concentrated on long runs with a view to establishing the optimum number of laps run under heavy and light fuel conditions on Pirelli's soft and supersoft compounds.

Today was more about testing smaller elements of race strategy and fine-tuning updates than it was about setting headline times.

Analysing times set in practice sessions is little more than a fool's errand – with the variety of test programmes on offer, it can be hard to tell the difference between true pace and attention-grabbing.

But with no action on track to write home about (few spins, no crashes, and no technical failures of the sort that tend to account for a few hundred words in a practice report), there is so little potential content that pseudo-analysis is the only option.

Many would like to think that McLaren driver Lewis Hamilton's pace-setting times in both morning and afternoon – and at a Red Bull circuit no less – mean that the British team is finally in a position to present a consistent challenge the Austrians of Milton Keynes in both qualifying and the race. Add to that Fernando Alonso's competitive times for Ferrari and it might appear that Red Bull are on a decline.

They could be. Who knows?

Friday is not a day for answering questions. It is only on Saturday during qualifying and on Sunday during the race that we will know whether Red Bull's reduced advantage is more serious than a temporary blip. If the team do not score a front row position in qualifying, they could be in trouble. If they finish Sunday's race away from the podium, or with a sizeable gap to the cars in front, they could be in trouble.

Note the use of the word 'could' – one bad weekend does not a season make, and Red Bull are currently sitting on top of a sizeable advantage in both drivers' and constructors' championships.

Premature reports of their death have been greatly exaggerated.

FP2 times (unofficial)

1. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.21.018s [29 laps]
2. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.21.259s [40 laps]
3. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.21.322s [34 laps]
4. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.21.508s [35 laps]
5. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.21.549s [31 laps]
6. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.22.099s [40 laps]
7. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.22.121s [36 laps]
8. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.22.440s [36 laps]
9. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.22.835s [40 laps]
10. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.22.981s [37 laps]
11. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.23.030s [34 laps]
12. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.23.399s [37 laps]
13. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.23.679s [34 laps]
14. Nick Heidfeld (Renault) 1.23.861s [28 laps]
15. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.24.181s [39 laps]
16. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.24.182s [26 laps]
17. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.24.546s [21 laps]
18. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.24.878s [35 laps]
19. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) 1.24.994s [38 laps]
20. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) 1.25.447s [39 laps]
21. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.26.823s [33 laps]
22. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin) 1.27.261s [28 laps]
23. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT) 1.27.730s [31 laps]
24. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT) 1.28.255s [25 laps]

F1 Hungary Blog - Friday press conference at the Hungaroring

On first glance, the Friday afternoon press conference might not appear to be the weekend's hot ticket.

But thanks to the movers and shakers who turn up every week, giving non-PR standard responses, it's the most interesting open event of each F1 weekend.

This week's victims were Eric Boullier (Renault), Graeme Lowdon (Virgin), Jonathan Neale (McLaren), Adrian Newey (Red Bull), and Rob White (Renault Sport F1).

You'd be forgiven for thinking that all of F1 was based in the UK, given the amount of time given to discussing the BBC/Sky F1-share announcement. But the bulk of teams are UK-based, and a number of overseas territory buy the British commentary feed for their coverage. So it is a more international issue than it first appears.

The Q&As relating to the Sky deal have been copied in full below. Normal coverage doesn't really resume...

Q: We have had some interesting news from the UK today about the TV deal that is going to happen. What is your initial reaction to that, as I know it is very early stages?

GL: Yes, it is early stages. Obviously, like most people we found out about it this morning. I think it is going to be interesting to see how it unravels. There are different sides to this. I have read that Sky has said it is good news for fans and they have said there will be an unparalleled experience for them and that sounds very exciting. To be perfectly honest I think it is up to the fans whether they think it is good news or not and that is something that remains to be seen. Obviously, we hope that it is. I think that will unravel over time. For a team like us, we actually get very little of our revenue from TV rights and it is very, very important for our entire commercial strategy that we maximise the global fan base and the number of people who watch our team in action, so obviously there are concerns there but equally we are entering a new era potentially for a commercial model for Formula 1 as well.

Q: Also a question to you about the TV deal in the UK. You were nodding your head just now about the fans to decide.

JN: Well, I think the views and needs of the fans are of prime importance to Formula 1. It has been very pleasing during the course of this year that the exciting racing that we have had has been matched by a growth in the audiences throughout the UK and across the globe. Some of that certainly is that the BBC has done a fantastic job in promoting that. I think we would welcome interest from other forms of media. The devil, of course, is in the detail. Mindful that there is a lot of heat in the air about that at the moment but we just don't know the detail so it would be improper to comment beyond that. But what the fans need and want and a mass audience is something we need to pay attention to.

Q: Question to Eric, Jonathan and Graeme. You have talked about the Sky/BBC deal. Jonathan, you specifically mentioned about the wants and needs of the fans. Point number one is that it really doesn't matter what the fans want does it, as the deal is already done. Bernie [Ecclestone] has got the deal all signed and sealed. And, secondly, going on the reaction this morning on Twitter, on fans forums, the overwhelming majority of those fans are wholly against this deal. Can I just get your reaction to those comments?

EB: With the latest I have been told actually about this deal, I think it is rather good news. It should be positively welcomed by the fans, even if they have not been maybe calling into a forum to discuss the idea. My understanding is there will be more TV viewers, there will be more access to F1 and F1 will broadcast much more through two different channels that are BBC, on free-to-air, and Sky, so with the latest info I have got it is a good deal, as it is good for Formula 1 and it is definitely much better for fans.

JN: I am not sufficiently aware of the detail of quite how that is going to operate. What I can say is that if you look at the last two or three years then Formula 1, whether through the teams' association, or whether through the FIA, has taken a number of steps to try and keep the racing exciting and grow that audience. I think everything from the fans' forum to the amount of digital content that we are now pushing out into the networks says that we are extremely interested in what the fans are doing. They are the backbone of the global reach that we have and we do listen to them, so I disagree with your first assertion that it is just riding roughshod over that, but I can understand some of the concerns when the detail isn't there.

GL: I agree completely with Jonathan that the fans are the most important aspect as ultimately it's a very, very important part of the cycle of the commercial side of the sport that we are in. I am a great believer that the fans will tell us what they think and I think it is very difficult for us to speak on behalf of fans, that's for sure, and I think that's the same for any commentator. Time will tell whether it is good for the fans or not and I am absolutely certain, especially in this day and age, that the fans will make their view pretty clear.

Q: Just a quick follow up to that. There is a bit of talk around that it is in fact in breach of the Concorde Agreement. What would be the situation with that, if indeed that is the case.

GL: I would be pretty surprised if it was. I think Bernie knows the Concorde Agreement pretty well.

JN: I think that is a fair comment. I am sure it has been closely scrutinised and will be the subject of much debate.

[Author's note: According to my paddock sources, the Concorde Agreement doesn't rule on terrestrial/free-to-air TV. There is a separate agreement that says something about making reasonable/best efforts, and the Sky deal falls within those parameters.]

Q: I take on board what Graeme has said about potential new platforms and also Eric's comments, but at the moment we have all races live on free-to-air in the UK and presumably we will have half of them in the future. If that's replicated in other markets, other countries, are there concerns about the impact of that on sponsorship?

GL: Yes, obviously. The model has to reflect the commercial model of the sport, there can't be a disconnect in the commercial model, it's really quite clear. I doubt whether the commercial model in Formula 1... everything in Formula 1 changes, everything moves forward and so I will imagine that the commercial model will as well. It's vitally important that the requirements of the fans are reflected in that and I would anticipate that if there were this kind of move on a global scale instead of one specific market, then the overall model would have to change for the teams, not just to be profitable but to be sustainable and obviously the sustainability of Formula 1 is very important. It's a sport with great tradition and it has a fabulous future and it's important that that future plays out.

EB: I don't have much to add, Graeme just told us what he thinks and I also believe the same. Based on this business model today, which is only free-to-air, we can obviously sell to the sponsors the great access to fans and TV viewers. If you start to reduce the free-to-air broadcasting you obviously have to change the business model and it will affect the sustainability of the sponsorship. In the case of this deal, I think we need to wait to have more details because my understanding is that it will still be free to air and that there will be better access to Formula 1 for the fans which will, in the end, be much better.

Q: You said earlier that the new TV contract in England, which is 50-50, as far as I know there has been no increase of viewers for pay TV anywhere so why should it be better for the viewers that they suddenly have to pay to watch, when a lot of people are hanging on to the dollar that they earn because of the financial crisis, so why should it be better when they have to pay for something that's free today?

EB: With the latest understanding that I have from... the good added value is that Sky will broadcast much more information and show any reports and that's extra information that we will share with the public and with the fans. This is where the added value is. RTL? Your argument is that this is Germany, not England. I'm not sure that we understand RTL in England.

GL: Also, we haven't seen all of the detail. I haven't read about pay-per-view. In the UK, you still have to pay for a television licence if you don't watch... People pay for everything.

JN: I just think it's a little bit premature to be completely judgemental about this until we've seen the detail.

And with all discussions of the BBC-Sky TV deal out of the way, the next major item on the agenda was engines, specifically PURE and the news that Gilles Simon was moving from designing the engine specifications to designing the engines. Some see the move as a possible conflict of interest that will hand an unfair advantage to PURE customers.

As it's another complex topic, it's safest to copy the Q&As than risk changing context by turning the replies into a conversation.

Q: Rob, about the engine rules. Just exactly what does that mean to you, the new engine rules for 2014?

RW: I think the first thing to say is that we are pleased now to have a fairly clear view of where we are going and the most important thing about the 2014 rules is that there are enough people who now understand them and know what we are getting into so that we can go ahead and do the work to deliver these engines in a sort of timely fashion and get all the cars on the grid prepared to go racing for the first race. The fact that we made a bit of an adjustment from four cylinders in-line to six cylinders is, on one hand, a pretty major change. On the other hand it's a relatively modest change. The fundamentals of the rules stay as we had in mind with a double limitation on fuel consumption with a fixed amount of fuel for the race, a fuel flow limit, a big contribution from energy recovery systems, electric only traction in the pit lane. We have got many of the same fundamental building blocks, albeit with a different engine architecture and a programme timing that I think suits more people better than the original programme timing.

Q: Can you give us some sort of idea of what happens now from your point of view. How do you go about building those engines, designing them, what happens now? Has the programme already started?

RW: The first thing to say perhaps is that we were well underway with the previous programme, so substantial amounts of work from that go straight in the bin. Not all of it, thankfully. We try to recover what we can and re-orientate it to the new programme. As ever we may need to structure the engineering programme counting backwards from the first race in order to arrive in the most competitive possible state. Important to recognise that this is a massive technological change for the engine people in F1. Clean sheet of paper, new engine, fundamentally very different to its predecessor, hasn't happened really since we made a switch in the opposite sense from turbo to normally aspirated engines way back at the end of the 1980s.

Q: So the strategy from Renault's point of view: can you give some indication of that? Presumably you almost welcome this engine change as well, as you were a little frustrated with the V8?

RW: I think one of the conditions necessary for Renault to remain present in F1 was that F1 should move on and the family of, I prefer to say power unit, rather than engine, towards which we are now headed is something that creates a much clearer resonance with the products and the processes that we use for the cars that we sell to our customers in, I think it is, 118 markets worldwide.

Q: Rob, as the only engine company executive here and also the representative of engines on the Formula 1 commission, I wonder if you could give us your comments regarding the move of Gilles Simon from the FIA to a competitor from 2014 onwards, considering that he was the man who drove the engine regulations through the FIA?

RW: I guess the first remark is that it is very fresh news. We haven't had much of a chance to reflect on it. First reactions are fairly predictable and understandable from my part. On a personal and professional level, we've had good relations with Gilles for a long time in his present - for a couple more days - job, and in his previous job at Ferrari. Of course, it's of concern to all of us that in this close relationship with Gilles and the FIA over the past year, 18 months, that we've given unprecedented access to Gilles - we certainly have at Renault and I believe all of the engine companies have done so, particularly in respect of the state of progress in our respective engine development programmes alongside the rules package. And so, of course, we would be most concerned to be reassured that information to which Gilles has had access to in those very privileged circumstances as a representative of the FIA is not used in his new capacity as an employee of a competitor.

Q: So to all five of you, about ten years ago Charlie Whiting considered a move from the FIA to one of the teams and that was ultimately blocked. Should a similar situation be blocked, and should safeguards be put in place for the future?

RW: I think that is the kind of question that is the immediate extrapolation of my previous remarks, I think Formula 1 as a whole needs to be conscious of. It's a very complicated sport. In order that the technical and sporting regulations can be administered successfully, then we require the governing body to have good people and they probably require to have access to the teams, and therefore there's an obvious risk that needs to be managed, if the same people can crop up in a different shirt very shortly afterwards.

Q: Follow-up on the PURE question: I'm not sure that anyone took this PURE business really seriously at the beginning, but now that Gilles Simon has gone there, I think it might be a different story. Do you really think there is a place for a new engine manufacturer in F1, someone like PURE which has no history, no background? Do you think there are potential teams which will switch? What are your thoughts about new engine manufacturers coming into the sport?

GL: Unlike Rob, we don't make engines, so I will really answer it in a very simplistic way. From our point of view, we really don't mind about the new engine as long as - first of all - it adds to the show, secondly, it provides a cost-effective solution for the teams, both in terms of how much the engines cost to buy and to run and also we certainly don't want to see this turn into an engine formula. As I say, we don't make engines, we run a racing team and that's what we're about. So from our point of view, it's nice to see a wide selection of engines but the primary concern from our point of view is cost and availability and that's really key.

The rest of the session covered comments on the day's action, with some talk of the McLaren Applied Technologies deal with Marussia Virgin Racing.

F1 Hungary Blog - FP3 at the Hungaroring

It was a long Friday night for Red Bull's mechanics, who used one of their four curfew-breaking 'jokers' to work through the 2am-6am paddock shutdown, rebuilding Sebastian Vettel's car. And while it would appear that their hard work paid off - Vettel was fastest this morning in Hungary - it is worth noting that Friday's fastest time (set by Lewis Hamilton for McLaren) was 0.1s faster than the Red Bull driver's pace-setting lap this morning.

Of course, times set in free practice are no indication of qualifying speeds. And given that the twisty middle sector of the Hungaroring is ideal for the RB7, it would take a very brave pundit to assume that Red Bull will struggle this afternoon.

The final practice session of the Hungarian Grand Prix weekend was error-strewn, although there were no major incidents. Instead, a significant number of the drivers had mini offs, skating across gravel and run-off area and damaging their tyres in the process.

It was a warm and dry session for FP3, and the increased temperatures are one contributing factor to Ferrari's increased confidence going into qualifying this afternoon. The 150° Italia is famously light on its rubber, which is great during long runs but somewhat challenging in one-lap efforts.

Heading the timesheets were the usual suspects from Red Bull, McLaren, and Ferrari, with Mercedes' Nico Rosberg also in the mix. Bringing up the middle were Michael Schumacher and the mid-field runners from Renault, Sauber, Williams, and Force India, with Toro Rosso and Lotus not far behind.

At the bottom of the pack, the times set by Virgin drivers Jerome D'Ambrosio and Timo Glock, and HRT pilots Daniel Ricciardo and Tonio Liuzzi would have seen all four men disqualified from Sunday's race had FP3 been Q1. The 107 percent rule has not been used to disqualify a driver since the season-opening race in Melbourne, and it is unlikely to have an effect this afternoon – the lower fuel weights used in qualifying make all the difference when it comes to those vital tenths.

FP3 times (unofficial)

1. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.21.168s [17 laps]
2. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.21.469s [13 laps]
3. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.21.639s [14 laps]
4. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.21.645s [18 laps]
5. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.22.002s [14 laps]
6. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.22.534s [22 laps]
7. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.22.667s [14 laps]
8. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.23.037s [19 laps]
9. Vitaly Petrov (Renault) 1.23.175s [19 laps]
10. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.23.276s [18 laps]
11. Nick Heidfeld (Renault) 1.23.281s [13 laps]
12. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.23.375s [18 laps]
13. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.23.626s [25 laps]
14. Rubens Barrichello (Williams) 1.23.663s [17 laps]
15. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.23.894s [17 laps]
16. Adrian Sutil (Force India) 1.23.966s [18 laps]
17. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso) 1.23.998s [15 laps]
18. Sebastien Buemi (Toro Rosso) 1.25.061s [19 laps]
19. Jarno Trulli (Lotus) 1.25.141s [20 laps]
20. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus) 1.25.501s [20 laps]
21. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin) 1.26.955s [20 laps]
22. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT) 1.26.991s [19 laps]
23. Timo Glock (Virgin) 1.27.174s [16 laps]
24. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT) 1.27.713s [20 laps]

F1 Hungary Blog - Q1 at the Hungaroring

My Australian colleague was thrilled to spot Daniel Ricciardo in P1 in qualifying. Unfortunately, the first man to set a time always hits the top slot in the timesheets.

It's a temporary victory.

When the pitlane opened for Q1, track temperatures were at a weekend-long high of 28 degrees, causing sighs of relief up and down the pitlane. With pre-Hungary preparations based on the region's typical high temperatures at this time of year, the weather this week has rained on nearly everyone's parade.

Whatever happens over the course of the next hour, Sebastien Buemi will not be starting from his original qualifying position. The Swiss driver was issued with a five-place grid penalty for the Hungarian Grand Prix following a stewards' investigation into his crash with Heidfeld last week at the Nurburgring.

As has become traditional this season, Q1 is a test of confidence and bravery. Those teams unconcerned by the prospect of dropping out in the first session set their timed laps on the prime tyres (softs this weekend), while those who are bit more nervous gamble on a flyer set on fresh options (the supersofts), with the aim of using the scrubbed options during the race.

The biggest problem being reported back to the teams is a lack of balance in the car. The circuit characteristics tend to promote understeer, and it's easy to over- or under-compensate when fine-tuning set-ups.

With less than five minutes remaining of Q1, the dropout zone is currently comprised of Buemi, Jarno Trulli, Heikki Kovalainen, Timo Glock, Daniel Ricciardo, Jerome D'Ambrosio, and Tonio Liuzzi. At risk of dropping out – should one of the aforementioned drivers pull off a stormer – are Sergio Perez, Nick Heidfeld, and Pastor Maldonado.

No change in the final few minutes – the dropout zone is comprised of the usual suspects plus Buemi.

Dropout zone

18. Sebastian Buemi (Toro Rosso)*
19. Heikki Kovalainen (Lotus)
20. Jarno Trulli (Lotus)
21. Timo Glock (Virgin)
22. Tonio Liuzzi (HRT)
23. Daniel Ricciardo (HRT)
24. Jerome D'Ambrosio (Virgin)

* Despite qualifying in P18, Buemi's five-place grid penalty will see the Swiss driver start from P23.

F1 Hungary Blog - Q2 at the Hungaroring

With the six usual suspects plus Buemi out of the running in Q1, the level of competition in Q2 is quite tight. Midfield times in the first session were split by a hair. But as the afternoon progresses, air and track temperatures are dropping, which is likely to help the McLarens as much as it hurts the Ferraris. Despite constant running in the balmy afternoon temperatures, the track temperature thermometer read 27 degrees when the pitlane opened for the second qualifying session.

Williams have sent Rubens Barrichello out on primes, implying that they don't have much confidence the Brazilian elder statesman of the grid will make it into Q3.

There's a strategy split at work in McLaren – Jenson Button has been sent out on the supersofts, while teammate Lewis Hamilton has been shod in the softs.

Sebastian Vettel was another man to set his first – only? – Q2 run on the supersoft tyres. That is an unprecedented move from Red Bull, who usually have so much confidence in their star driver's qualifying abilities that they would send him out on Fred Flinstone's rock tyres were such a move not in violation of the FIA's rules and regulations.

With less than five minutes remaining of Q2, the dropout zone is comprised of Sergio Perez, Jaime Alguersuari, Kamui Kobayashi, Paul di Resta, Adrian Sutil, Rubens Barrichello, and Pastor Maldonado. A good lap from one or more of the above would see Nick Heidfeld and Michael Schumacher at risk of dropping out in this session.

Perez has saved himself, and Heidfeld joins the dropout zone.

As the final times hit the board, it's all change in the dropout zone: Paul di Resta, Vitaly Petrov, Kamui Kobayashi, Nick Heidfeld, Rubens Barrichello, Jaime Alguersuari, and Pastor Maldonado can all hang up their helmets for the afternoon.

Dropout zone

11. Paul di Resta (Force India)
 12. Vitaly Petrov (Renault)
 13. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)
 14. Nick Heidfeld (Renault)
 15. Rubens Barrichello (Williams)
 16. Jaime Alguersuari (Toro Rosso)
 17. Pastor Maldonado (Williams)
-

F1 Hungary Blog - Q3 at the Hungaroring

The final qualifying session of the Hungarian Grand Prix weekend looks certain to be a three-way fight for pole between Sebastian Vettel, Fernando Alonso, and Lewis Hamilton, all of whom have been pace-setters over the past two days.

Alonso is the first of the frontrunners to set a time, although he is quickly deposed by Vettel. But lest Alonso and Vettel get too comfortable, Lewis Hamilton is the first man to break into the 1.19s with a 1.19.978s on his first effort.

With provisional pole Hamilton's for the moment, the chasing pack – particularly Vettel – are not far behind.

The competition is close enough that we will be seeing second runs from any driver in with a chance of pole. Phase two of Q3 gets underway with two minutes of the session remaining, and the pitlane empties. All ten drivers are out on track, and traffic could make the difference between the first and fourth rows.

Supersofts are the name of the game in these closing stages, and the competition is as tight as it's been all season. Red Bull do not have the natural advantage this weekend that all had been counting on – even if Vettel manages to secure pole, he has been forced to fight for it at a track that he should have dominated.

Vettel goes quickest, but there are a number of other cars yet to cross the line. But the defending world champion manages to hold onto provisional pole. It's a victory of sorts, but a 0.1s advantage at a Red Bull circuit will be causing a sleepless night for the team's strategic brains. Mark Webber's P6 is even more worrying for the team.

Provisional grid

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

* Despite qualifying in P18, Buemi's five-place grid penalty will see the Swiss driver start from P23.

F1 Hungary Blog - Saturday press conference at the Hungaroring

And he's back. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) took his usual seat, front row centre, at the post-qualifying press conference at the Hungaroring.

Joining him were McLaren drivers Lewis Hamilton and Jenson Button.

Vettel was thrilled to be back in the hot seat after his mechanics broke curfew to rebuild his car before qualifying.

"I think it was a very good session for us generally after yesterday, where these boys were a little bit quicker than us," he said. "It seems we have done the right thing and I felt much more comfortable this morning. Q1 and Q2 was just about to get through to the last section of qualifying and very pleased with the result. We changed a lot on the car overnight and the boys were working pretty hard and they didn't get much sleep but to have a result like this today is the best way to say thanks. I am very happy. I have got the confidence back. Today I felt much more comfortable in the car and now I am looking forward to tomorrow."

The German driver thanked his team for their efforts.

"I think they got back to the hotel around 5 o'clock, so we went a little bit longer than the curfew but it is the best way to show on the track straight in the morning that we made an improvement," Vettel said. "Also today in qualifying, Q1 and Q2, was mainly to get through and we were a little bit behind. I was surprised by the lap times in Q2 but then in Q3 I think we were right on the pace. Lewis had a very competitive first run, especially in the last sector, but I was able to squeeze out a little bit more on the last run to get pole so very pleased."

"Straight away I noticed the difference and I was happier," the Red Bull driver added. "If you are happier it is usually because you think the car is better and if you feel confident then you are also able to get more out of yourself. You are more consistent. It is not just one particular place where you find the time, it is just all around the lap a little bit everywhere, so I think that is a good sign and very important for tomorrow's race."

Asked to predict the future, Button said he foresaw a race with multiple pit stops.

"It's definitely a multi pit stop race," he said. "I don't know. We will see. It won't be five, it possibly could be two, three or four. We will see. This place is pretty tough on tyres but so far this weekend I think people have been doing reasonably long runs. Lewis's was pretty good yesterday. I'm not really sure how the race is going to go. It's always different than testing."

The drivers were asked to reflect on the continuing success of the Hungarian Grand Prix, which has been on the calendar since the days of the Iron Curtain.

"This is the 26th," Vettel said. "I don't know [why it's so enduring]. I like this place, I like coming here. Obviously, as an Austrian team, we get a lot of support, a lot of Austrian people come. The border isn't very far away, so it's kind of a home Grand Prix for us and yes, the circuit might be a little bit

Mickey Mouse in places but it's different to most of the circuits we race on, so I quite enjoy that. It's quite tough, there are a lot of laps tomorrow. Usually it's very tough on tyres, on the car and on the drivers as well."

Lewis Hamilton enthused about the track.

"It's one of the best tracks we have on the calendar and it's a fantastic city," he said. "The weather's always good, great crowd and whilst you don't have too much overtaking it's a great place to race, so I think that's probably why it's quite a historic circuit for us."

Button also enjoys racing in Hungary, the scene of his first F1 victory.

"It is a great circuit to drive, especially when the car's on the edge in qualifying," he said. "It doesn't really give you any rest, but personally I don't think that's the reason. I think it is probably the fans. We have a lot of support here, outside the hotels, in the grandstand. It's pretty full, which is good to see. It obviously goes up and down through the years but generally there's been good support here. Probably the main reason is that there's a road called Bernie Avenue leading into the circuit. Possibly."

Finally, the highlight of the press conference came when Button and Vettel got into an animated discussion about the pointy finger that fans either love or hate. Or love to hate.

Q: Jenson, when you won here, you started from 14th on the grid so it is possible to overtake here. Are you feeling in a fairly strong position in third on the grid?

JB: It's very different to back in '06 when we had wet weather. I think it's supposed to be dry this weekend, or tomorrow. Third place is a good starting position here. I agree that P1 is better, that's what we do qualifying for, and that's why we get excitable on pole position – or this one does (indicates Sebastian) – but P3 is pretty good. I think we can race well from there.

SV attempts to reply

JB: Sorry. Your microphone's off, mine's on!

SV: He said that he wants to bite my finger off.

JB: Yeah. He put it up and I almost grabbed it, outside with the cameras.

SV: Was that Holyfield, the boxer with the ear?

JB: Yeah, yeah. I was going for it but couldn't get there in time. I was actually just going to straighten it up. It was falling over.

F1 Hungary Blog - Sunday press conference at the Hungaoring

Celebrating his 11th race win and 200th Grand Prix start at the post-race press conference in Budapest was McLaren driver Jenson Button.

He was joined by Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) and Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull).

Button kicked off proceedings by announcing his pleasure with the result.

"It is good [we're] having a couple of weeks break, as it might take me that long to get over tonight!," he said. "This is the first place where I won a grand prix, back in 2006 in these sort of conditions, and it is my 200th race and I have won here again, so a great moment."

But the biggest topic of discussion was strategy in the changing conditions.

"Obviously there were some conversations going on, as I think there were for these guys as well," Alonso said. "It started raining, we were like eight or nine seconds slower than the normal lap, but you never know if that rain continues, so I think you stop, you put on intermediates and you are much quicker. If that rain stops, it's better to keep on the dry tyres, so you have to toss the coin in the air and gamble: whether to choose the dry tyres or if you choose the inters. And it depends only if the next cloud brings some more rain or if it stops so it's completely unpredictable and completely out of teams' and drivers' control. So there is a luck factor that sometimes goes your way and sometimes doesn't. I think that's what happened to Lewis today. He was leading the race, maybe heading for victory and if the next cloud had more rain, maybe he would have won the race because he was the only one on intermediates."

All three men agreed that the move to inters vs the decision to stay out on slicks was key to the race result.

"You're not always going to make the right call in these conditions, and I haven't always made the right call in these conditions," Button said. "But I feel that I'm pretty good at making the right call when it comes to tyre changes, but I'm not the only one. These two guys did exactly the same as I did, so I'm not alone in my decisions. We had good pace today, very good pace and on the option tyre, I was able to make the tyre last for a long time. I was really looking after them. Towards the end of each stint the pace was very good. The reason why we won today was because we were quick and that's the reason. If it didn't rain, it wouldn't have made any difference at all."

Button went into further detail, talking about his decision to stay out on slicks when the team wanted him to box for inters.

"They said 'in this lap for inters' then round the second to last corner they said 'Lewis is coming in, stay out, stay out'," the McLaren driver explained. "I was never really going to come in for inters anyway. I didn't think it was the right choice personally. We weren't going slowly enough, to start with. We were struggling on the tyres, it was difficult keeping the car on the circuit but we weren't that slow, it wasn't inter pace really. And when you put the inters on, you've got to put the dries back on as well, so you've got to stop twice."

"For me, it wasn't the right decision," he continued. "The team made the right call earlier on, we put the prime tyre on at the second stop which was definitely the right call. We could have run to the end of the race on that, whereas Lewis was on the option tyre. I don't know if he would have made it to the end, or he would have had to stop but for me the car was working very well and I personally didn't think it was ready for inters. These guys didn't either."

Vettel, who started from pole, admitted he was slightly disappointed by his podium finish.

“Today I’m not 100 per cent happy because I started from pole,” he said. “I had the feeling we could have won the race, but pace-wise it was not impossible. It was a difficult one, especially with the conditions as Jenson said, with the rain, very, very slippery at some stages, many drivers making small mistakes here and there. I saw Jenson nearly lose it two corners from the end. It always depends, obviously but yeah, as I said, not a hundred percent happy. The target is to win and not to come second. Still, I know it’s good points today, everyone except Jenson finished behind us but as you said, there’s a long, long way to go. Always remember, last year we’ve seen how quickly things can change so we need to make sure we see the chequered flag.”

The Red Bull driver then went on to analyse his comparatively poor performance.

“Start of the race I was struggling a little bit on the intermediates,” Vettel said. “I tried to keep Lewis behind but most important was to move away from the pack behind and build up a gap, so tried to defend and ran a little bit wide into turn two. Opened the car, as it is very easy to do a mistake on the paint. It is very slippery. Managed to stay ahead of Jenson and then pulled away slightly at the end of the stint. Arguably we maybe should have come in a lap earlier. But both times then on the super soft I was feeling reasonably confident in the beginning of the runs. Tyres saw some wear but it was the same for everyone. But then in the end of the stint I was struggling to keep up with Jenson. Second stint I think overall was a little bit better. I was able to change a little bit the car during the pit-stop.

“Both times I think a lap earlier could have helped us a bit and it would have gained us some time,” he continued. “We have to look into that, but, all in all, I think the last stint I felt the pace was there. I had some issues with the brakes and Jenson wasn’t slow either. He was still some three or four seconds ahead at that stage, so first of all I have to close the gap and then overtake him and if you don’t have the confidence it was more important to bring the car home. I think the pace was not so bad but fair to say Ferrari in race pace and McLaren for the last couple of events seem to have made a good step forwards. We need to have a look at why but then we need to look at ourselves as I think there is plenty of stuff to learn and things we can improve without looking at the others. That has to be the target for the next race and for the second half of the season.”

Button agreed that the grip levels left something to be desired.

“The first stint on the inters in the wet, it felt like there was no grip at all,” the McLaren driver said. “It felt like we were on the dries. Then we put the dry tyres on which was definitely the right call but in some places it was very, very slippery. Then with the rain towards the end you just couldn’t find any grip out there. We were skating around and it was hard enough keeping the thing on the round let alone trying to overtake and fight your team-mate.”

Alonso considered whether a different tyre strategy could have improved his race result.

“I don’t know really,” he said. “Yeah, looking now, after the race, maybe the soft tyre was better than the supersoft, especially for second or third stint, looking at the very high degradation but we found ourselves behind Mark for two stints and we had to anticipate the stops a lot so we came to overtake him and coming in that early, it was impossible to go to the end of the race, because you chose four stops already, just to overtake Mark. I don’t think it changes your tyre choice too much”

The Ferrari driver was then asked about his team’s competitiveness in the second half of the season.

“I think we are confident that we can do a good second part of the championship,” he said. “The car did improve a lot and we are fighting for podiums, for pole positions, now in the last few races. For us, I think it was a fantastic July month because I think we are still the drivers that have scored more points in July, in these three races, with three different conditions, three different tracks. We are happy and I think the team did a step forward. I think McLaren also did a step forward so the competition is quite fun for you to watch with three teams able to win races. Unfortunately, it was not very hot in July. We love high temperatures for whatever reason in our car so hopefully August and September will be better for us.”

F1 Hungary Blog - The Hungarian Grand Prix in retrospect

What better way to celebrate your 200th grand prix start than with a win at the track that was the home of your first Formula 1 victory?

I bet Jenson Button can’t think of one...

The 2011 Hungarian Grand Prix was the perfect way to end the summer section of the European season. When we regroup in Spa in three weeks’ time, it shall be autumn. It is always autumn in Belgium, no matter what the season. And by the time we arrive in the shady park that comprises the infamous Monza Circuit, the leaves shall be changing colour.

The F1 summer is well and truly over, and thanks to the combined efforts of variable climactic conditions, Pirelli’s ever-wonderful degrading tyres, and 24 of the best drivers in the world, it went out with a bang.

While there was a slight lull in the middle – isn’t there always? – the action on track led to endless changes of position, gaps to monitor, overtaking manoeuvres, spins aplenty, and a variety of strategies that created 70 laps of drama.

Lewis Hamilton was the big loser of the afternoon, going from a seemingly comfortable lead to a P4 finish off the back of a less-than-successful move to inters, thanks to his internal weather radar. In quick succession, the McLaren driver gambled on a pit stop during what turned out to be light rain, span on track while pushing, and as a consequence earned a drive-through penalty when the move forced Paul di Resta to leave the track to avoid a collision.

Not the result the British driver had hoped for, but a thrilling sequence of events for the fans to follow.

Race winner Button profited from his teammate's losses, but the 2009 world champion had driven a stellar race all afternoon, holding position behind Hamilton when the pair got past pole sitter Sebastian Vettel. Hamilton was first to pounce, taking the lead on lap 1. Button got past on lap 14, and spent much of the race trading position with Hamilton, Vettel, and Fernando Alonso between pit stops.

Alonso drove a good race to deliver a podium finish from what was an average qualifying position and poor start. The Spanish driver is usually one of the fastest off the line, and it was a surprise to see him overtaken. But he fought back admirably, and was quickly up in the tussle for the podium.

First man to retire was Team Lotus driver Jarno Trulli, who had been expecting a decent result after finding extra pace from a new power-steering unit which made its debut this weekend. But it was not to be, and the Italian was sidelined by a water leak.

Nick Heidfeld was next to go, after a post-pit stop exhaust unit failure saw his car catch fire and explode on lap 35. Heidfeld was uninjured, but a fire marshal was clipped by flying debris. According to the German driver, pit stop delays led to the fire.

"My second pit stop took longer than expected because there was a problem with one of my wheels," the Renault driver explained. "The car is not designed to stay running on high revs for so long so it started smoking and caught fire. I noticed the smoke coming from the rear of the car as I was driving out of the pit lane so I had to pull over and cut my race short."

Michael Schumacher spun on track on lap 28 before being wheeled off track and onto an access road. The German driver said in his post-race comments that his spin was tactical – he chose to spin rather than crash into former Ferrari teammate Felipe Massa. But the spin led to a gearbox failure, and Schumacher's race was over.

"We had a gearbox failure, we obviously need to understand details of the failure," Schumacher told BBC Sport after the race. "After spinning and continuing, shifting up through the higher gears, we lost a gear. I obviously wanted to keep my position against Felipe and pushed hard, but in order to avoid contact I had to put the car into a spin. The contact would have been okay, I would have just lost a couple of seconds."

The final retirement of the race went to Heikki Kovalainen; the Finnish driver's Hungarian Grand Prix came to an end when he fell victim to the same water leak that had ended his teammate's afternoon.

It was an impressive race from newbie Daniel Ricciardo, who managed to finish ahead of teammate Tonio Liuzzi and Virgin rookie Jerome D'Ambrosio in only his third F1 weekend.
