

F1 Malaysian Grand Prix - Thursday press conference

While there were six drivers present at the Thursday press conference in Sepang, a lot of the focus was on the absent Felipe Massa. Both Alonso and Schumacher were called upon to discuss Ferrari's struggles, and the other drivers barely got a look-in.

Present were Fernando Alonso (Ferrari), Jenson Button (McLaren), Pastor Maldonado (Williams), Sergio Perez (Sauber), Michael Schumacher (Mercedes), and Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso).

Pastor, after your performance in Melbourne, are you optimistic you can manage that at all circuits or do you think it was Melbourne-specific?

Pastor MALDONADO: I hope so. I think we did a great start to the season, we've been working so hard from the winter just improving our performance in the car. I feel very confident with the team, so it's looking forward. We can still be competitive though it is early to say but it's a good start to the season and we're looking forward, all of us in the team are pushing so hard, so we feel confident.

You must have been devastated by what happened on the last lap, what exactly did happen?

PM: It was a difficult moment for me because I was fighting with Fernando, it was a great fight and very clean and then the last lap I got too close, I was on the kerb on the wrong side of the track and I just lost the car. I'm disappointed for that because of the team result but nothing to do. I'm looking forward, y'know? It's a new place and a new challenge.

Jean-Eric, first of all tell us about the last lap, but also the first lap, because you had a bit of drama on both the first and last lap - and welcome to your first press conference.

Jean-Eric VERGNE: Thank you. First lap, I thought I had quite a good start. I was next to Mark and I don't really know what happened in the first corner but somebody hit my rear wheel and I went straight in the gravel. I think I lost a lot of positions and I finished the first lap in 17th. And then I made my way up through the field and I had good pace for the rest of the race. And the last lap was a little confusing. Everybody was in the same pack and I guess I tried a little bit too hard to pass a few people. Kimi was in front of me and... I don't even know who was in front of him but I lost position again to Daniel, my team-mate and in the last corner I slid a little bit and didn't have any KERS left and Paul di Resta passed me only by one-tenth.

Obviously looking forward to this race, what have you been doing since Melbourne and how have you prepared for this race?

J-EV: I heard this race was quite tough just because of the conditions, really hot, so I came here quite early, I arrived on Monday night and did some sport with my trainer, visited a little bit Kuala Lumpur and yeah, just getting used to the heat. I'm looking forward to this race. I think we have a good car, the team has me working quite hard and we're looking quite confident.

Sergio, obviously a repeat of last year for you in Melbourne, making the tyre last all the way through with just one stop. How did you make it work and nobody else try the same strategy?

Sergio PÉREZ: To be honest I had no other option after the safety car. It came in the wrong moment for me. It was going really well 'til the safety car came. Then we had no option, because if I pit then I was going to lose many positions, so we decided to stay out and I managed the last 20 laps with really old tyres and it was a shame in the end on the last lap I lost two positions due to clash of Pastor. The track was impossible to go through because of yellow flags, I lift quite a bit and then I had contact with Nico and to the end of the lap I lost two positions with my team-mate and Räikkönen.

Looking at that midfield battle it looks incredibly close, everyone's made a step forward. Have you made a little bit more of a step forward, how do you feel?

SP: I feel really fine now in my second year. I know what to expect a bit more as well, everybody is very close also. The mid teams to the top teams, we are close so in some conditions maybe we can have some surprises from the mid-teams. Hopefully we can have a stable weekend this time, not like Melbourne. It was very difficult to prepare, especially the race. We went out there without knowing what to expect and it was of course difficult conditions.

Michael, the gearbox failure in Melbourne, obviously it wasn't something you expected but do the team think it's just a one-off, or is there a design problem? What's the diagnosis?

Michael SCHUMACHER: Well, it is a one-off. We did quite a few thousand kilometres in winter testing and never had this issue. We understood it though, and fixed it.

And there's no penalty is there?

MS: No, I took the penalty in the race.

Obviously there are a lot of positives from last weekend - what positives did you take from it?

MS: The basic positive is that we definitely have a much-improved car compared to last year. Still we have to learn it and understand it in all circumstances to take the benefit and the full performance from it, as we have seen in the race with Nico, so there is still something to learn, but we're positive that we can improve quite a bit, in race pace in particular.

Jenson, you've won here in the past, you were a winner last weekend, your team-mate interestingly enough said you managed to switch the tyres on, that you seemed to understand the tyres better. Do you think that was your advantage last weekend?

Jenson BUTTON: I really don't know. I think we all try to do the best job we can with the tyres but personally I don't feel the tyres were a big issue

for anyone in Melbourne. They seemed to be very consistent and we didn't have degradation like we do at other circuits, like here, so I feel that I had a good balance with the car, I had a lot of confidence in the car and yeah, I think the consistency was pretty good throughout the race. Obviously we had the scare with the safety car for us – it's always tough when you're leading by ten or eleven seconds, to suddenly find a car right up behind you again. But I think we made good use of the safety car in the end and were able to come home and get a very important victory for the whole team.

You've won here from pole and also had your first podium here. It's a circuit you quite like isn't it?

JB: It is. It's so different to last weekend, it's very fast and flowing, very smooth compared to a street circuit and the tyres. It's always more difficult for the tyres around here. But obviously we have the hard and the medium compound and they're both pretty hard compounds, so it shouldn't be too much of an issue. I think it's just the temperature and the humidity that will be the biggest issue for them. And it's one of those places where you really don't know what the weather's going to do. When I previously won here it was cut short, the race, because of a red flag. That's the thing here, normally it doesn't just rain, it chucks it down. So, if it does rain this weekend we hope we can continue racing because it's a great circuit.

Fernando, is that going to make a difference to Ferrari this weekend? Obviously a street circuit last weekend and you qualified some way down but a great race up to fifth. Hopefully the change of circuit will make a difference to you?

Fernando ALONSO: I'm not sure. Hopefully yes but I don't think so, to be honest. We have been testing at different circuits: Jerez, Barcelona and then in Australia with more or less the same car with the same problems on it. The cars are nearly identical for everybody compared with Australia, I guess, so I don't think there will be big surprises here. Let's wait and see, and try to adapt the car to the circuit, the conditions, the heat. Then, yes, as you said, the qualifying. We saw the true performance, we are not as competitive as we want, probably, but then in the race anything can happen. In Australia with a good start and the stops and the strategy you can put yourself in a decent place. We will try to do a similar race here and try to defend as many points as possible.

And this is a circuit where you got your first pole position, your first podium in 2003, you have two pole positions and two wins as well, a circuit you enjoy?

FA: Yeah, definitely. It will be one of my favourite circuits always because your first pole position in Formula 1 you always remember, the first podium you always remember, and both things happened here in 2003. So, it's a circuit I love to drive. It's quite technical and quite interesting. At the same time, after the accident of Marco [Simoncelli] last year racing here will be always sad, a little bit, knowing that one of our colleagues died here. It will be always difficult to race.

Two questions for Michael. The first one is about this year, about the new 'W-Duct'. Some people are already saying that due to the very long straights here you already have a pole position, do you agree?

MS: Certainly not. There is no doubt that we have an innovation that gives us some performance but I don't think that it is a huge performance and that we only live from this. We'll find out. I can't really quantify this.

But it will be better than Melbourne?

MS: Well, you're probably talking in terms of nature of the track that it will another slight advantage but I think some get a little bit too excited about this compared to reality but that's the usual story.

And the second question is the story: do you remember well the first grand prix here in 1999?

MS: I do yes. I still have good memories of that.

Are you in touch, from time to time, with Eddie Irvine?

MS: No, not really. I see his sister every so often and I see him maybe once a year and that's about it.

Fernando, how can you manage the situation at Ferrari? It's the third year for you at Ferrari and the third year you are catching up somebody in front of you. How can you stay calm and relaxed and composed in such a situation?

FA: This is Formula 1. There is not an easy time for anybody. We need to work hard every day and night to normally catch up people in these three years. But anyway, you know, the experience has been fantastic. As you all know, fighting for the world championship in the first year and then last year with one win and ten podiums. Obviously, the target is always to win the world championship but it was not possible the last two years. This year we are convinced that we will fight for it. We need to stay focused and work more than the others knowing that we are a little bit behind now. But the championship is long. We stay calm, we stay focused, because we see a lot of determination in the team. We see the team with a very good atmosphere, (we) trust each other in the team, we are very united, so the time will come to us very soon.

Fernando, what is your state of mind right now? Are you nervous, are you angry, are you anxious. How do you feel yourself?

FA: I'm calm. Obviously, knowing we need to work, we need to catch up the guys in front. We are not in the situation we wanted to start the 2012 championship but after 11 years in Formula 1 I think you understand how long the championship is, what you need when you have the best and what you need when you don't have the best car – which is sometimes more points or less points. But as far as our targets and our goals (are concerned) we need to score as many points as possible in these couple of races and in a very short period of time try to be on the podium and win races. If we manage to do that we have plenty of races to recover the gap. If we don't manage to do that it's because someone else did a better job than us. We just need to wait and see but I have 100 per cent trust in the team.

A question for Jenson. I presume with these two races between you weren't able to let your down too much these last few days.

JB: What do you mean by that?

Having a good night out.

JB: No, I didn't. I think we're pretty focused on this weekend. It was pretty important to relax after the race because it was a great victory for us. I had a nice evening with friends and family as we all know that's the best way to celebrate a great event. And then Monday/Tuesday I spent a couple of days in Melbourne just relaxing and then arrived here yesterday. It's actually been quite a nice few days. Got here yesterday and thought it was quite important to get used to the humidity, because it's quite different to Melbourne. Yeah, it's been nice, it always is after winning a grand prix and you're always very excited about the next grand prix and obviously your aim is to do exactly the same again.

A quick question for Fernando. You touched earlier on Marco Simoncelli here. Do you have any special tribute planned, anything, a black armband, on your helmet, anything?

FA: Nothing planned. We did one picture this afternoon, Felipe and me and members of the team in Turn 11, where the accident happened and I think that will be the memory for him, and the whole Ferrari family and the Italian people will remember him always and that's the most important thing.

Fernando, is it true that you have a visibility problem from your cockpit?

FA: No.

Michael, we've seen that the Mercedes has pretty strong qualifying pace. Do you think you have the race pace to finish on the podium, given that you and your car seem to be a bit heavy on the tyres?

MS: We certainly understood in Melbourne that we have to do a better job in terms of race pace. I don't think we would have been able to achieve a podium in Melbourne, despite going all the way through. Probably a fifth place would have been the max that we could have had. Nevertheless, we have good ideas how to improve on what we learned from Melbourne. Whether that means we're going to be on the podium or not, that's another story because you obviously have at least four cars which are very strong, with two McLarens, two Red Bulls and then you have quite a big group of cars which are very close to each other. So it's going to be a challenge for all of us.

Question for the front row: not sure how closely you follow football but you may be aware that there was a player who had a cardiac arrest on the pitch. I'm just wondering if one of you could outline the health and medical tests you do throughout the year?

JB: Well, we all have a medical test for our licences, that is the only thing that we're obligated to do. Yeah, most of us do a lot of fitness, we keep ourselves in pretty good shape as it is quite a physical sport. That's as far as it goes for me.

Obviously professional footballers are very fit as well, but you can't see these things coming. Would that be something that would concern you?

JB: It's very different for a footballer. For us we're obviously racing for quite a long period of time, and it's more endurance. For them, there's a lot of sprinting involved, it's very peaky in terms of heart rate and what have you. It's very different to what we do. I read about it in the newspaper as well. It's pretty scary to see and it's happened quite a few times with footballers. I don't know what the reason for it is. There's no point in even trying to speculate but it's obviously a very physical sport and they're pushing themselves to the limit and I'm guessing that's possibly the reason why.

A pair of questions for Michael: you drove a lot for Ferrari. How do you explain the situation they are in now? You are very close to Felipe: what do you suggest to him at this very critical moment for him?

MS: First of all, concerning Felipe, if I look at all the winter testing I think it was very clear that the two drivers were very close together. If you look at the optimum lap time achieved in the Barcelona tests, it's again very close. So to see the big difference that we saw in Melbourne, I can only assume there must have been something not right for him. He's been around for so long. He's been fighting for the championship in 2009, he's always been up front so I don't see any reason why he should not be capable of doing so in the future. I trust he will do so, and that the team will do their utmost to give him the support that he needs. The first of your questions: there's no reason to speculate because I'm not inside so I don't know the details and there's no reason for me to comment.

Sergio, there have been a few rumours these days of your name linked to Ferrari should Ferrari decide to replace Felipe. How do you take these rumours, and what do you think about them?

SP: Well, it's only the first race of the season so it's very early to speculate. I'm really focused with my team, with Sauber. I think we have a great car and there's nothing more that I can say, just focused on my team, to try to make as many points as possible because we have a very competitive car and I was trying to make the most out of the car we have. Melbourne was a difficult weekend for me because I had the gearbox issue so I couldn't do a lap in qualifying so I qualified last and finished eighth. So it was a good race, and hopefully this weekend we can manage a good weekend. And as for the rumours... they are only rumours.

Fernando, when you say that Ferrari and you are going to defend yourselves in this race, are you aiming for fifth or sixth position, as in Melbourne, or do you think you could do something better or are you looking at Lotus who had a pretty difficult race, and it could be problematic for Ferrari to finish in front of them?

FA: We'll see. I think we need to wait and see at the start of free practice. We don't have a crystal ball to envisage our position. I think we need to see how competitive we can be here on this different circuit. As I said, we don't expect any big miracles from Australia to Malaysia because the cars are identical but who knows? In Australia, no one thought that we could finish fifth. I think there were two McLarens, two Red Bulls, McLarens (he may mean Mercedes), Saubers, Toro Rossos so there were a lot of people quicker than us. In the race, for different reasons, with some mechanical problems as Michael had, Grosjean crashed on lap three/lap four, Kimi was out in Q1 so there were some incidents in the race that helped us finish fifth. Here, with a normal race, maybe we will finish further behind, maybe with a more crazy race or rain or something, we can finish in front, so we have to play before we see what we can do.

Michael, one of the last times you were here with Fernando was in 2003: as you may remember Fernando was a young guy and put his finger up to the rest on pole. Did you believe then that that guy could become a World Champion?

MS: I don't know when I started to think that Fernando might be World Champion, but I think his talent has proved that from early stages onwards... I still remember a very good race that you did with Minardi - I think it may even be the first race in Australia. I think he proved his point straight away.

And the second question is for the poleman of 2003 (Alonso): in which race do you expect Ferrari's big step forward?

FA: I don't think it will be one race in which we change the car. This is up to you that you write that there will be a new car coming. I think at every race we will try to make improvements as we did over the last few years and it won't be just for us: I think everyone will make updates at every race. We just need to make ours work a little bit more. Obviously we have a little advantage from that because our car needs more speed and maybe it's easier for us to find than for some others whose cars are maybe more developed than ours. New parts will slowly come at every race and hopefully they work, but there's not one magic race or one magic moment when we think things can change. I think we will work day and night and as I said before: the team is very focused on that and I see great reaction from everybody, so I expect a strong Ferrari soon.

Pastor, it was a brilliant drive in Melbourne but in the early stage of the race you made contact with Grosjean and people at Lotus are very unhappy about this. Romain said you didn't leave space for him in the corner. Can you describe your point of view of this incident?

PM: I think that I was completely in front. The overtaking manoeuvre was at the entry of the corner and I was quite surprised because the Lotus suspension seemed really fragile because the contact was minimal and it was not intentional. It was a clear movement, so it was a bit disappointing for Romain because he did a very good job, especially in qualifying. The car even looks pretty strong but this is racing.

Pastor, you said earlier in the press conference that you're over your last lap accident; has it actually been easy to put that behind you these past few days, because I ask that more from the team perspective because you were on course to take more points in that one race than Williams managed throughout the entire season last year?

PM: Yeah, for sure. For sure all the team – even myself – were a bit disappointed because we missed a great opportunity to score some important points but this is racing. I think it was my mistake and now we need to look forward, turn the page. I think our car is competitive at the moment, we need to keep pushing like that, keep concentrated, keep working, focused. This is going to be a new challenge for us because the track is completely different, but we need to believe in our performance and hopefully we will again be in the top ten and fighting for good places.

This is a political one for the front row: last year's race in Bahrain was cancelled. We all know the reasons why; the government is still in place, in five weeks' time Formula 1 will race there. What are your thoughts about that?

JB: I think for us, as you know, this is a very difficult subject and personally, from my point of view, we need to look to the FIA – for all of us – for common sense. We will go with what they have to say.

MS: I'm honestly pretty relaxed to go there. From our perspective, one is obviously that we're going to be very well looked after, because they might foresee whatever and will be prepared. I've quite a few good friends over there and I'm pretty sure that for them it's a very important event and they just want to make everybody happy. If you look around the world, you probably find other places where there might be the possibility that we could have the same reasons to think about and we don't. So at the end of the day, I'm pretty sure that they're going to do their utmost and we're going to be OK.

Jenson, I saw a picture in the newspaper – I don't know if you saw in Australia your girlfriend had a special T-shirt for you which said 'Jenson press all my buttons.' Did you see that after the race?

JB: I actually saw the T-shirt before the race to be fair. It was just after. Yeah, it was a gift from a fan. I think someone was trying to do some publicity for their T-shirt company. She was given it as a gift as we entered the circuit. It's not mine which is quite annoying. Do I push her buttons? I think that one's a little bit too private.

F1 Malaysian Grand Prix – F1 report

The first practice session of the Malaysian Grand Prix weekend saw more running than is traditional on a Friday morning.

With rain expected during FP2, hot on the heels of an Australian weekend that saw all teams suffer to varying degrees as a result of the reduced running caused by the Melbourne monsoon, the feeling in the paddock was that Friday morning represented the best opportunity to harvest telemetry at the Sepang International Circuit.

One of the biggest problems faced by the teams this weekend is extreme levels of tyre degradation, thanks to a combination of Malaysia's extreme heat and the characteristics of the Sepang track. The twin straights and high speed corners both stress the rubber in different ways, although lateral loading is always a factor here in Malaysia.

In the run-up to practice, a number of teams and drivers were moved to comment on their concerns vis-à-vis the wear rate of their rear rubber, and degradation was one of the hot topics on the in-car radios.

Based on what we've seen this morning, it looks as though the tyres begin to fall off that infamous cliff after 13 or 14 laps, which should make pitstop strategy interesting come Sunday.

But it wasn't all about the rubber.

Lewis Hamilton topped the timesheets for McLaren at a circuit many thought would favour the Red Bulls. But to try and read too much into the times set in a practice session is a fool's errand, and the half-second gap between Hamilton and title defender Sebastian Vettel is not insurmountable.

In fact, given fuel loads and practice strategies, the perceived gap may not exist at all.

One gap that did catch the attention of the press room was the one found between Williams test driver Valtteri Bottas and full-time racer Pastor Maldonado. It has been announced that Bottas will complete 15 Friday drives this season, all of them in Bruno Senna's car, and it is widely accepted that the Finnish driver will usurp the Brazilian in 2013.

On his first time out in 2012, Bottas impressed by bettering the more experienced Venezuelan in the timesheets. The final gap may have appeared negligible, at only 0.059s, but the fact that Bottas was on the pace straight out of the pitlane and kept Maldonado on his toes throughout the morning was nothing short of impressive.

Also impressive was fellow Finn Heikki Kovalainen, who managed to split the two Toro Rossos when the final times were logged. Caterham had expected to make significant step forward this season, battling with the mid-field, but the Australian Grand Prix weekend showed the boys in green and gold to be off their projected pace (and the very real pace of the tightly-packed midfield).

While there are still no guarantees that this will be the year in which Caterham score their first longed-for point, it appears as though concerns the team will spend the season battling with HRT and Marussia may have been unfounded.

In other news, HRT were able to run both cars this morning, although Narain Karthikeyan only managed eight laps. Based on the 107 percent rule neither he nor teammate Pedro de la Rosa would have qualified had this morning's session been qualifying and not practice.

FP1 times (unofficial)

1. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.38.021s [19 laps]
2. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.38.535s [21 laps]
3. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.38.813s [21 laps]
4. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.38.826s [19 laps]
5. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1.38.919s [17 laps]
6. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.39.092s [20 laps]
7. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1.39.128s [22 laps]
8. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.39.298s [23 laps]
9. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.39.323s [15 laps]
10. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.39.440s [19 laps]
11. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1.39.724s [23 laps]
12. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.39.783s [23 laps]
13. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.39.896s [16 laps]
14. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.39.910s [21 laps]
15. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.39.980s [23 laps]
16. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.40.099s [23 laps]
17. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1.40.247s [19 laps]
18. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.40.469s [23 laps]
19. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.40.857s [25 laps]
20. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.41.085s [23 laps]
21. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.43.170s [18 laps]
22. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.44.580s [14 laps]
23. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.45.360s [8 laps]
24. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.45.582s [18 laps]

FP1 Malaysian Grand Prix – FP2 report

The famous Sepang rains failed to make an appearance during FP2 this afternoon, and as a result the teams were able to bank more track time than anyone had anticipated.

That's good news for everyone, but best for HRT as the Spanish team's drivers were both able to set times within the dreaded 107 percent. As a consequence, should either driver fail to meet the 107 percent time during Saturday's qualifying session, an appeal to the FIA is likely to see the driver in question line up on Sunday's grid, as the team has established that it is capable of running safely with the competition.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the session was in the times set, which were – by and large – slower than those set in the morning.

Some drivers did improve on their earlier efforts, but the bulk of the grid were a few tenths down on their fastest lap of the morning, which is unusual in this sport. Unusual, but hardly surprising given the additional punishment meted out to the tyres in the afternoon heat of Malaysia.

It was in Malaysia that I first understood the physical reality of Noel Coward's "Mad Dogs and Englishmen", although the modern equivalent of that '30s tune would have to replace Englishmen with F1 drivers, which doesn't scan as well. The Malay circuit staff could all be seen retreating for the shade and the air-con as the drivers were pouring into their garages in layers of flame-proof fabric.

The effect of the heat on the tyres cannot be underestimated – not only is durability seriously compromised in temperatures this extreme, but when you add to that the fact that the circuit layout itself is already one of the two most punishing on the calendar in terms of lateral loading, and it's easy to see just why the high temperatures are a factor in slowing drivers down.

Lewis Hamilton once again topped free practice in his MP4-27; it is the third consecutive practice session that has ended with the Briton on top.

The McLaren driver was on course to be the first man to break into the 1m37s in the last half hour of the session, but two brief diversions off track on otherwise quick laps scuppered his chances and ensured that Hamilton would be one of those men not to improve on his morning time.

There were a few minor troubles up and down the pitlane, although nothing too serious. Paul di Resta saw reduced track time as the result of a braking issue, while Kamui Kobayashi missed out on some running thanks to a gearbox problem. Lotus had issues of their own, with a missing tyre set for Romain Grosjean and KERS struggles for Kimi Raikkonen, but the Enstone team were able to get some decent running under their belts despite the difficulties.

It is worth noting that Fernando Alonso was nearly 1.5s faster than teammate Felipe Massa, whose struggles with the Ferrari have been widely documented. The Brazilian driver was supplied with a rebuilt car this weekend, in a bid to boost his confidence, but as yet there are no signs the move has been effective.

FP2 times (unofficial)

1. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.38.172s [28 laps]
2. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.38.533s [34 laps]
3. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.38.535s [30 laps]
4. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.38.696s [34 laps]

5. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.38.853s [33 laps]
6. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.38.891s [27 laps]
7. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.39.133s [29 laps]
8. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.39.297s [33 laps]
9. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1.39.311s [22 laps]
10. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.39.402s [25 laps]
11. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.39.444s [35 laps]
12. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.39.464s [26 laps]
13. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.39.625s [20 laps]
14. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.39.687s [16 laps]
15. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1.39.696s [29 laps]
16. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.40.271s [28 laps]
17. Bruno Senna (Williams) 1.40.678s [34 laps]
18. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.40.947s [33 laps]
19. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.41.464s [25 laps]
20. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.41.681s [20 laps]
21. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1.42.594s [18 laps]
22. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.42.874s [24 laps]
23. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.43.658s [18 laps]
24. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.43.823s [22 laps]

F1 Malaysian Grand Prix – Friday press conference

The Friday press conference in Sepang promised to be a classic, thanks to stories of an F1 stock market floatation, Felipe Massa's struggles, and the ongoing argument about cost-cutting in Formula 1. And so it was.

Present were Riad Asmat (Caterham), Stefano Domenicali (Ferrari), Christian Horner (Red Bull), Monisha Kaltenborn (Sauber), Gerard Lopez (Lotus), and Martin Whitmarsh (McLaren).

Riad, if I can start with you, just a quick question about Melbourne to here. I think you were perhaps a bit disappointed with the performance in Melbourne – are things going to be better this weekend?

Riad ASMAT: We're hoping so, we found reasons why we were disappointed in Melbourne but obviously that's been sorted. Obviously I still want to second or two definitely, but I think for sure we'll show some good pace for this weekend. We're prepared for tomorrow and we'll see where we go from there.

Does that mean Q2?

RA: We always try, because my head is on the block.

Monisha, first of all the result in Melbourne was what you should have had a year ago I guess. Is that the feeling?

Monisha KALTENBORN: No, we don't want to think about a year ago actually. Indeed we have this time a very good start to the racing season. Our drivers showed an excellent performance during the race, we weren't that happy with qualifying but we're glad that overall we could get confirmation on the potential of the C31 and that it's a good basis for developing further, which will be key this year.

Gerard, you have obviously hired Kimi Räikkönen. When he was perhaps going to Williams, allegedly he was asking for a share in the team. Does he have a share in the team at Lotus? Did he ask for a share of the team?

Gerard LOPEZ: No he didn't and no he doesn't. It's that clear. I don't know where that came from. It probably came from his previous negotiations but we would not hire anybody, a driver, by selling shares of the team, that's kind of a nonsense thing.

You wouldn't want to give a shareholding to a...

GL: No, I mean he's a driver, and that's it, so you pay him as a driver. You don't make him a co-owner of the team, that's kind of an odd way of dealing with drivers. It would be for us in any case.

Martin, I mentioned this yesterday to Jenson, it was interesting in the preview to the race Lewis talked about how Jenson had the ability to light up the tyres in Melbourne at the start of the race when he pulled away and also after the safety car. Is that something you've noticed? Is that something that's been manifesting itself in testing?

Martin WHITMARSH: I don't think we've noticed it as a particularly significant phenomena. Clearly it depends where you are with tyre heating but I think in that race both drivers were able to get the tyres going pretty quickly. They're very different conditions from here, obviously. It was pretty good for both of them, I think.

So that's not going to be something that's an issue?

MW: Well I think circumstance here is quite a lot different – I think it's pretty easy to over-heat the tyres here.

Stefano, give us an update today. Have things changed, has anything changed in comparison to Melbourne?

Stefano DOMENICALI: I don't think so, to be honest with you. In one week I think it is important at least as we already said we have identified issues on the car and we are working at home to solve it. At the moment we need to maximise what we're doing on the track and that's it.

So we don't expect anything different?

SD: I don't know. In the race everything can happen, so we need to be focussed then. And of course with no magic stick you can't do anything.

Christian, it's a measure of the team's success last year that we expect you to be at the front all the time. Not today necessarily,

and well, you were very close in Melbourne. What about today? Tell us about the results today.

Christian HORNER: Well firstly Melbourne was an exciting race and congratulations to McLaren who put on a great show there. We did our best to try to get amongst it but Jenson drove an excellent race. The McLarens again looked very strong today, I think Mercedes were also looking quick, and it's a tighter field this year. I think the midfield has bunched up as well. We've worked through a programme today. Obviously with the limitation in testing there is, both drivers have worked through different programmes, had a look at the two tyre compounds and tried to do our preparation for the race on Sunday. All the forecasts say it's going to be dry for the rest of the weekend. Occasionally you look up and you think there's a big thundershower coming.

Now, a question for you all but starting with Stefano. Obviously the story of the last few days has been the possible flotation of Formula 1 and I guess you've had a look at a draft, I guess you've all seen a draft and you know something about it. What are your views on it, looking at Formula 1 as a whole but also your own particular teams? How is it going to benefit your own particular teams and Formula 1? How is it going to affect your own particular teams?

SD: First of all I mean nothing to comment on what are the speculations coming out because you never know what is the reality at the end. What I can see is that there are ongoing discussions that are, as I said, ongoing, going ahead. At the moment the situation seems to be reasonable but nothing more than what I'm seeing now.

Christian...

CH: What are we speculating on? You didn't say...

The flotation of Formula 1.

CH: Oh, flotation. I thought you said flirtation... at the end of the day it's not down to us, it's down to the shareholders, it's down to CVC and Bernie. It's their business at the end of the day, not the teams.

Will you benefit, you as a team, would it benefit Formula 1?

CH: Possibly, possibly. We're not involved in the detail. I heard that there is potential discussion and it's an interesting concept.

Martin...

MW: I don't think it will benefit us as a team. I don't think, but again I have no detail of proposals anyway. But generally floatations and change of ownership aren't done for the benefit of a sport. I think what us as race teams need to concentrate on is putting a show on here and clearly the owners can decide what they do with the asset.

Gerard, your thoughts on that?

GL: As I said, there are no details out there and flotation can mean many things. If you take to the market a minority share it doesn't change anything in ownership, it gives more liquidity to the owners, maybe more money to the sport, so as long as there are no details on what might be IPO'd or not, I don't think there is much to be discussed because it can mean many, many things to many people. It really depends on what you're going to take to the market.

MK: On the flotation itself, we also do not know more, so anything I guess we'd say is mere speculation. As a team, what's important to us is that whoever owns Formula 1 should prepare the sport to face the challenges, which we all will be (facing), and to create parameters whereby running a team can be sustainable for everyone here.

RA: Mere speculation I guess. On my side, we focus on what we do best and what we're doing right now, and if anything comes along, we'll review it and see what's beneficial.

A question for Stefano Domenicali. I want to know exactly what the situation is inside your team and I want to know how you feel yourself. Are you concerned, are you worried, are you scared, are you angry? How are you feeling?

SD: For sure, I'm disappointed by the performance of the car, no doubt. But on the other hand what I need to make sure is that at home we need to push on the development of the car because we know what are the problems with this car from the other weekend. Nothing has changed on that. I am confident that our engineers will solve the issues we have as quickly as possible because in such a close field a little step makes a difference, and in such a close battle, when you are in a difficult moment, you need to score points because everything can happen. So that's something, it is clear. Not happy as I said but not to be happy doesn't help, and I've asked my engineers to be focused on the job because that is what they have to do.

Another one to Stefano. Can you give us an update on Felipe's situation? Has the chassis change solved the problems he had in Melbourne?

SD: We had a programme today with some changes on the car to verify some different configurations and tomorrow we will have let's say the best package, because in this moment I would say for him it's important to feel the confidence around him. Not only him because the team has a lot of pressure, so that's the status of the art we have done today.

Today we saw another big gap in the afternoon between Felipe and Fernando. Is it due to the different work that they did, or is it something more? The second question is about if you can describe... we wrote a lot about you travelling back home. Can you describe what is the situation there, what did you and Pat (Fry) did there?

SD: In terms of what we have seen today we were trying to work with different programmes on two different drivers and tomorrow we will see the situation. Today there is nothing I can say that is going to one direction or the other. The work of today was done in order to make sure that tomorrow Felipe has the best car in the best condition. This is the thing we have to give to him. On the other hand, what we did was to make sure that the focus on the programme has to be there at home with the engineers, mainly in the aerodynamic department. I've asked Pat to be spot on, on the case, in order to make sure that now that there is a lot of meat on the fire, we need to make sure this meat will be delivered as quickly as possible, as there is no time to lose.

To Gerard Lopez. During your ownership with the team is this the best starting point to a new season with a new car?

GL: Yeah, it really is. In terms of the whole package it's the most complete one we had. We had a good chance last, but then we obviously lost one of our drivers. I think now we have complete drivers, the car's good. We pushed the envelope without going crazy on certain things, it had to be within certain borders. So far we're pretty confident. We said at the beginning of the season that fourth place in the championship is what we're looking for and I think the package right now is probably able to deliver that, but the season's just started. It feels quite OK right now.

A question for Riad. Are you expecting any repercussions from either the governing body or the legal system regarding the court case with Force India, given that the judge found... I've got a couple of comments and I read through the judgement last night, that your team did actually copy bits of Force India's intellectual property and that parts found their way onto your car?

RA: I've got no comment on that but I think the judge has already given his judgement. If anything were to happen, I can't say for FIA or Force India or whoever it is, if anything happens they'll inform us. But I'm quite clear in terms of where we are with our positioning and we're fine.

Christian, I just wondered if you'd managed to speak to Charlie (Whiting) since I spoke to you this morning?

CH: No.

So you've still got no clarification yet on the Mercedes rear wing?

CH: I haven't personally spoken to him. I think there has been a bit of debate obviously about the Mercedes rear wing and you know, assuming the car has passed scrutineering, at the moment you have to assume that the FIA are happy with the configuration that the Mercedes car's in.

So is that the end of the matter for yourself then?

CH: Probably not. I think the biggest thing for all of us - I'm not the only one - I think there are probably other gentlemen that are keen for clarity going forward. Is it something that's accepted as a clever interpretation, and hats off to Mercedes if it is, or is it something that you know isn't permissible moving forward. I think that's the most important thing to resolve and it would be nice to come out of this weekend with that clarity.

I've got a question for all six of you. Could each of you look at the role of the team principal at your particular team? Obviously some teams have a team principal that goes to every race and is very hands on and at other teams he's happy to let other members of the team do different jobs.

MK: In our team, Peter Sauber is the founder of the team, and the team's gone through a quite awkward time, especially since 2010. So I think it's been important for us that since he is the founder he stands for certain stability and continuity, which was important in the last two years. But everyone has seen that over these years he has started to step back a little. He doesn't particularly enjoy going to all the races, and it's of course up to him to whether he will want to change anything, but I guess it's important for us, because of our specific situation, that he is around.

RA: Well, I do have a team principal but he's sort of broken down all rules. Obviously I go to most of the races and I run hands-on with the team that I have and it seems to work. He does it with all his other entities and it seems to be working quite well.

GL: In our case, Eric manages the team as a team principal should, as far as we're concerned, and also for the fact that unfortunately or fortunately, I have other things to do, so I can't devote my time to Formula 1, as much as I probably sometimes would. He plays the role and acts as a team principal, which is the way we understand it.

MW: I think in our team the team principal enjoys going to all the races. Whether the race team enjoy him going to all the races I don't know, but I go because I quite enjoy it. We like to think we're hands-on but I suspect they just humour us most of the time.

SD: Of course, it depends on different teams but on my side for sure I'm not really involved in the technical side of it, because I delegate these things to the people that should follow that. The team is an entity where there are a lot of things that have to go on in terms of organisation, in terms of sponsorship, in terms of commercial activity, in terms of administration, so it's really a company - because we are part of a group that is bigger - and that's the way it is. The best situation would be to have a team principal who is not coming to the races because it means that he really has a very very good number two that can delegate everything so that would be the ideal scenario for the future.

CH: We run a pretty old-fashioned structure. I guess, in that I attend all the races. As Stefano says, there are many faculties with a Formula 1 team these days and you have the responsibility for them on a day-to-day basis, reporting to the shareholders and managing the team on a daily basis. So there's certainly never a quiet moment, and that's part of the involvement and challenge of the role. Every day, you drive to work, you're not quite sure what to expect. It's both a sport and a business and I think the role during a Grand Prix weekend is certainly quite different to during the week back in the factory, so it's a multi-faceted role, certainly in our case.

Question to all six of you: Mr Ecclestone has, this past week, confirmed that he has suggested or proposed to CVC that they do list Formula 1 on the Singapore Stock Exchange. Would you, as team principals, be interested in acquiring equity in the listing individually?

MW: Better ask Gerald, he's the only one who can afford it.

CH: Certainly from Red Bull's perspective, we're an entrant, we're a team, we're very happy to be both an entrant and a team and we don't see a necessity or requirement to have a shareholding.

SD: I can copy what Christian said.

MW: I can't afford it. I don't think it's our business. Our business is that we're a race team primarily - we've got a few other businesses as well now - but being owners of Formula 1 isn't something that's in our plans.

GL: As far as Formula 1 goes, it might have made sense if all the Formula 1 teams could afford it, if they all became shareholders in some form or fashion but that's not going to happen, so as far as investing in Formula 1, I think it then becomes purely a financial position and then it falls out of the sport. It's like if someone wants to invest or not. It's like any other stuff.

MK: No, I join the gentlemen in front. No.

RA: Definitely not. We've got enough challenges in being a Formula 1 team. We will focus on that.

Mr Whitmarsh, McLaren remains involved in FOTA. Are you afraid that this could cause some disadvantages in the negotiations for the new Concorde Agreement?

MW: No, I'm not afraid. Whether it's through FOTA or by whatever mechanism, I think it's important that the teams work together to really develop our sport, to make sure that we're fit for purpose, make sure that we rise to the challenge that Formula 1 has. We're a sport, we're an entertainment, there's many challenges in front of us and I think there's been some great examples of co-operation between the teams. There are other challenges that we've struggled with but I think we should continue to try and work together.

Christian, last week in the press conference, the team principals that were present confirmed that ten of the twelve had signed a copy of the letter to the FIA regarding cost-cutting and policing of the Resource Restriction Agreement (RRA). I believe that your team and your sister team didn't sign; is there a particular reason for that?

CH: Yeah. We didn't see the letter. Simple. I can't sign something I didn't see. Whether or not we agree with the content is something else. Firstly, I think what I would like to make clear is that Red Bull is absolutely fully behind cost control in Formula 1. Whether the RRA is the right route to achieve that is what we question. I believe that letter, from what I read, requested for the FIA to police the RRA which, in our opinion would be the wrong route. We believe full-heartedly in controlling costs in Formula 1 and not frivolous spending, but we think that there are better ways of doing

that and containing that through sporting and technical regulations as opposed to a resource restriction that relies on equivalence and apportionment of time and personnel, which is always tricky in subsidiary companies, particularly of automotive manufacturers. So we would be totally open to any discussion that involves cost control that pursued those avenues.

Continuing on that thread, why would you not want to be policed when ten other teams would agree to that? That would suggest you've got something to hide in your accounts or the way you manage your finances?

CH: Or it would suggest that we're structured in a different way, as a single entity as a race team, and I think that there are things that, when FOTA was first created, did that: clear and tangible restrictions in personnel, restrictions in the amount of engines, restrictions in the amount of gearboxes, restrictions in the amount of testing that has been permitted. All things that you can see policed and genuinely save costs and we think they're the type of things that should be focused on rather than apportionment of people's time and equivalence which is, in any formula, in any mechanism, is fraught with problems and difficulties. I think it was well intended at the time but I think – as with all these things – when you drill into the detail, it's something much harder to police, especially when there are companies or teams which are subsidiaries of other organisations. So for us we would prefer to keep it simple and go on tangible, measurable items.

Following that up with Martin and Stefano, can you appreciate what Christian is saying?

MW: I think the challenge of controlling costs in Formula 1 is something that we've all had a go at and if you can do it by a simple singular number that you can count, see, feel, touch then it's quite a nice simple thing to do. So I can relate to everything that Christian has said. We've done some of those things, we need to do more, and I think you've to carry on. The fact is at the moment we in this room all know that there are Formula 1 teams that are struggling to survive which tells us that we're not doing enough and that's why we've got to keep pushing.

SD: What I can add is that for sure that is something that we were discussing. We said – well, we were putting on the table certain conditions for us to be considered part of the general picture, because as we said, this could be a fragment of what is really controlled through the sporting and technical regulations, because that, at the end of the day, is the biggest thing that you can consider tangible and you can see would be some effort in saving money, so I think that overall this is the target we should aim at and I would say that if I have to look at Ferrari's interests, thank God that our financial situation is really good in terms of general financial position for the future. But we know that the situation of Formula 1 is not so stable. We know that there are a lot of struggles around so we need to put aside our self-interest a little bit, to make sure that we can look ahead in order to make sure that we are a lot competing in Formula 1, because this is a very critical period, where everyone is smiling but we know that it's very tough.

So back to Ferrari's situation; Stefano, you just said that you know what the Ferrari's problems are, but at the same time, you've brought different chassis and a new car for Felipe...

SD: No, I didn't say that. I said that in order to make Felipe comfortable in this particular moment, we took different parts of what we have, and so we changed to the spare chassis for Felipe and we changed all the pieces, in order to make sure there was nothing wrong with the car that he used in Melbourne. And with regard to the problems: we know what are the problems and we now we need to tackle them and make sure that these problems that are fundamental, I would say level priority two, will be solved, as quickly as possible, as I said.

Could you clarify what these problems are, because you bring in another chassis which delivers another message.

SD: No, no, the chassis is a part of the car. The problems with the car are what I said on Sunday evening after the race in Melbourne, so maybe traction in slow speed corners and speed. These are the two fundamental issues which need to solve.

To all you six: I have learned that the problem of the Mercedes F-duct is that it's not that it breaks any regulation but it was only that Ross Brawn, as chief of the technical working group, had more or less broken a gentlemen's agreement. My question is, how can you break a gentlemen's agreement? I think you need gentlemen in Formula 1 for this.

SD: Pubblicità!

MW: Next question.

Christian, back to the letter: does it worry you that ten people had actually left the two Red Bull teams off the list of invitees, and secondly, being one who has never really been slow at coming forward, did you not consider getting a copy of the letter and seeing if you would like to append your signature?

CH: Maybe it will be printed on the internet, you never know. Maybe you've got a copy that I can look at later, Dieter. As I've said, cost control is something that is important, it's something that Red Bull fully supports but we don't agree with the current RRA. Within the RRA you've got restricted and non-restricted areas. How on earth can KERS be non-restricted, a gearbox be non-restricted? So open resources and spend allowed on those areas. So that's why we think a more workable solution... and indeed, we've sat down and tried, certainly prior to Christmas, and I don't think our teams are so different in structure that we can't find a solution and hopefully, with some productive discussion, moving forward, a solution can be found, to make Formula 1 cost control for the top teams, but also, importantly, as Martin says, make it affordable for the teams in the middle of the grid and at the back of the grid. The cost to be competitive in Formula 1 at present is too high. I don't think anybody will dispute that. The debate is how we achieve it.

Did you not try and get yourself a copy of the letter?

CH: If I don't agree with the content of the letter then why do I need a copy? Thank you.

F1 Malaysian Grand Prix – FP3 report

While free practice has never been the most thrilling part of a grand prix weekend, FP3 at Sepang International Circuit got off to a particularly boring start.

Thanks to a brief rain spell that fell shortly before the pitlane was due to open, there was very little running in the first half hour. Force India's Paul di Resta was one of the first men out on track, and informed the team during his installation lap that the circuit was wet from Turn 9 onwards.

The Scottish driver then returned to the pits, where he and his fellow drivers waited for the Malaysian sun to work its magic.

When the track was finally ready for action it was time for the teams to begin working on qualifying sessions, once a little exploratory work was out

of the way. As a result, times on the boards changed more quickly than it was possible to record, and drivers from Williams, Lotus, Red Bull, McLaren, and Mercedes all enjoyed spells at the top.

The only incident of note to take place in FP3 came via Lewis Hamilton, who had a brief trip through the kitty litter on one of his installation laps. The McLaren driver then spent much of the rest of the session ensconced in the pits, before briefly emerging around ten minutes before the chequered flag, going P2 on his first timed lap.

But the competition was strong out there today, and Hamilton's P2 time quickly became P9 as his colleagues crossed the line.

There were strong showings from both Sebastian Vettel and Mark Webber; the Red Bulls looked better this morning than they had all weekend, sparking chatter that the RB8 may have been dismissed too quickly in Melbourne.

Mercedes also look to be contenders in this afternoon's qualifying session if their FP3 pace is anything to go by. Michael Schumacher looked faster than at any point since his comeback, while Nico Rosberg took top honours as the only man to break into the 1m36s.

At the back of the pack it is worth mentioning that Vitaly Petrov once again outpaced Heikki Kovalainen, who is not a slow man. By making a habit of beating his consistent teammate, the Russian driver might yet silence those critics who dismiss him as a pay driver.

Just behind the Caterham pair Marussia rookie Charles Pic set a faster time than Timo Glock, his vastly more experienced teammate. That fact will have put a spring in the Frenchman's step as he broke for lunch.

Both HRT drivers again set times within the 107 percent benchmark, meaning that both Pedro de la Rosa and Narain Karthikeyan are likely to be cleared to race tomorrow irrespective of their performances in this afternoon's qualifying session.

FP3 times (unofficial)

1. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1.36.877s [16 laps]
2. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1.37.320s [15 laps]
3. Mark Webber (Red Bull) 1.37.338s [12 laps]
4. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) 1.37.356s [13 laps]
5. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1.37.382s [13 laps]
6. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1.37.404s [12 laps]
7. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) 1.37.455s [13 laps]
8. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) 1.37.663s [15 laps]
9. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) 1.37.776s [8 laps]
10. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) 1.37.977s [17 laps]
11. Bruno Senna (Williams) 1.38.091s [20 laps]
12. Sergio Perez (Sauber) 1.38.178s [15 laps]
13. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1.38.246s [17 laps]
14. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1.38.285s [16 laps]
15. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) 1.38.423s [13 laps]
16. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1.38.640s [11 laps]
17. Paul di Resta (Force India) 1.38.794s [18 laps]
18. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) 1.39.209s [16 laps]
19. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) 1.39.704s [15 laps]
20. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) 1.40.189s [14 laps]
21. Charles Pic (Marussia) 1.41.901s [14 laps]
22. Timo Glock (Marussia) 1.42.007s [14 laps]
23. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) 1.42.464s [14 laps]
24. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) 1.43.378s [17 laps]

F1 Malaysian Grand Prix – Q1 report

While there were reports of rain in the area as qualifying got underway at the Sepang International Circuit, Q1 started in the dry. Humidity levels were stable at 51 percent, while the air temperature was 32 degrees and track temperature 44 degrees.

The first man to set a lap in the 1m37s was Lotus driver Kimi Raikkonen. The Finn will be starting tomorrow's race with a five-place grid penalty for a gearbox change, and needs a particularly strong qualifying as a result.

Another driver in need of a good this afternoon is Raikkonen's fellow Finn on the grid, Heikki Kovalainen. The Caterham driver carries over a five-place grid penalty issued after the Australian Grand Prix.

Everyone predicted a close qualifying session at the top of the pack, with strong performances expected from Mercedes, McLaren, Red Bull, and Lotus. And based in the times set in the first half of Q1, in which the top 11 drivers are split by a single second, those predictions look to be accurate.

Both Michael Schumacher and Nico Rosberg are showing fast times in sector one, while Jenson Button is fastest in sector two.

With five minutes remaining of Q1, the dropout zone was comprised of the six usual suspects from 2010 and 2011, plus the beleaguered Felipe Massa. The Ferrari driver has done more laps than any other driver in this session, but is lapping 1.1s slower than teammate Fernando Alonso.

But with two minutes remaining on the clock and a fresh set of tyres, Massa set a 1.38.381s, good enough for a brief P11 before laps from other drivers pushed him down to P13 in a matter of milliseconds.

Jean-Eric Vergne was pushed into the dropout zone by Massa's promotion to safety, which Sergio Perez and Mark Webber are at risk of dropping out should one of the men behind set a quick time.

Webber started a flyer with one minute till the chequered flag, and the Australian's last dash effort saw a strong first sector, a purple second sector, and a final time good enough for top slot on the timesheets.

Vergne was in the pits as the chequered flag fell, making the Toro Rosso driver the fastest victim of Q1 in Sepang.

With a 107 percent time of 1.43.974s, all 24 cars have qualified for Sunday's race.

Dropout zone

18. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso)
19. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham)
20. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham)
21. Timo Glock (Marussia)
22. Charles Pic (Marussia)
23. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT)
24. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT)

F1 Malaysian Grand Prix – Q2 report

According to Toro Rosso, Jean-Eric Vergne flat-spotted a tyre in Q1, hampering his qualifying session and explaining why the Frenchman joined the six drivers from Caterham, Marussia, and HRT in the dropout zone.

But that's all history now, with Q2 underway.

Pastor Maldonado had the first 'moment' of the session, taking his Williams for a trip across the kitty litter at Turn 11 before returning to the track with gravel-pitted tyres. The Venezuelan hit the pits, and it looks as though he will not be setting a time in this session.

With only five minutes remaining of Q2, Nico Hulkenberg, Pastor Maldonado, and Bruno Senna were all sitting in the pits with no times set, while Lotus' Romain Grosjean was out setting his first timed lap.

The Frenchman went purple in the second sector, and looks to be on course for a very strong first lap. And it was – he crosses the line in P4, while teammate Kimi Raikkonen has been sitting pretty at the top of the timesheets with a 1.36.715s, the fastest time we've seen all weekend.

At three minutes to go, the dropout zone is comprised of Daniel Ricciardo, Felipe Massa, Sergio Perez, Paul di Resta, Hulkenberg, Maldonado, and Senna, while Fernando Alonso is on the edge.

Massa crosses the line in P9, and in so doing knocks Alonso down into the dropout zone. Kobayashi is currently in the P10 dangerzone, and gets knocked out by Alonso's 1.37.379s.

Senna, Hulkenberg, and Maldonado are all giving it one shot (possibly two) in the final moments of Q2. It's a risky strategy, but one that would pay dividends.

Massa will be dropping out this session: the Brazilian is currently in P12 on the timesheets and is sitting in the pits.

Much has been expected of the Mercedes this weekend, but Michael Schumacher is currently sitting in P11, with only one chance to make it through to Q3. He crosses the line in 1.37.017s, good enough for P4.

Dropout zone

11. Pastor Maldonado (Williams)
12. Felipe Massa (Ferrari)
13. Bruno Senna (Williams)
14. Paul di Resta (Force India)
15. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso)
16. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India)
17. Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber)

F1 Malaysian Grand Prix – Q3 report

Kimi Raikkonen is the man with the most to lose this afternoon – five grid places, to be precise. As a result, the Lotus driver was first man on track in Q2 and Q3; the Finn needs to bank a fast lap early on in order to have the maximum possible recovery time should it be needed later.

But Lewis Hamilton is putting in his own concerted effort for pole. On his first timed lap, the McLaren driver goes purple in the first two sectors, crossing the line in 1.36.219s, the fastest of the weekend, despite making a mistake in the final corner.

Raikkonen was briefly fastest as the first man to cross the line, but he was quickly unseated by Jenson Button, who was in turn bested by his teammate.

Sebastian Vettel's first timed lap saw the Red Bull driver cross the line slower than Hamilton, and just shy of three-tenths down on teammate Mark Webber.

The Mercedes pair were the last of the potential pole pack to set timed laps. Both Nico Rosberg and Michael Schumacher set strong first sectors and were on course to dethrone Hamilton, but the younger German set a slow second sector and was only able to manage P3. Schumacher was similarly slow in S2, and crossed the line in provisional P2 with a 1.36.391s.

With two minutes remaining, Sergio Perez and Fernando Alonso had yet to set times, while Raikkonen was down in P5. All ten drivers were out on track.

Perez crossed the line in P9, with enough time in his pocket to complete a second timed lap should he wish to do so. But given that his teammate qualified in P17, the fact that the young Mexican made it through to the top-ten shoot-out is impressive enough.

Alonso's only timed lap saw the Ferrari driver cross the line in P9 with a 1.37.566s, but it is possible that he will be promoted on the grid depending on Raikkonen's qualifying result.

And with the chequered flag fallen, Hamilton holds on to pole while Button joins his teammate on the front row. Schumacher will be taking part in the post-qualifying press conference for the first time since his comeback, while Mark Webber rounds out the second row.

It was a disappointing session for Sebastian Vettel, who was promoted to P5 on the grid by Raikkonen's gearbox penalty.

Provisional grid

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

* Heikki Kovalainen qualified in P19, but is carrying over a five-place grid penalty from Melbourne.

** Kimi Raikkonen qualified in P5, but was issued with a five-place grid penalty for a gearbox change.

F1 Malaysian Grand Prix – Saturday press conference

It was an amusing start to the post-qualifying press conference in Sepang when Michael Schumacher – attending for the first time since his comeback – took the seat reserved for the man in P2.

Present were Lewis Hamilton (McLaren), Jenson Button (McLaren), and Michael Schumacher (Mercedes).

Lewis, a first pole for you and McLaren here in Malaysia but a continuation of the team's fine start to the season today.

Lewis HAMILTON: Yeah, it's been a good weekend so far. I think it's been a tough day to be honest with the changeable weather conditions and the temperatures climbing. Made some set up changes to the car, nonetheless we still managed to do some good times but obviously got these guys pushing very hard behind but the guys in the factory are doing a fantastic job.

How aware are you that everyone is pushing so hard behind you and how much pressure does that put on you going into a

qualifying session?

LH: I think everyone's under the same amount of pressure. We all put a huge amount of pressure on ourselves and obviously a lot of partners and sponsors are relying on us as well, so it's very intense and probably the most exciting part of the weekend but it's something, at least speaking for myself, that I really enjoy.

Jenson, for you the wait for a first McLaren pole continues but less than a tenth of a second between you and Lewis just shows how competitive it is at the top.

Jenson BUTTON: Yeah, I think it was a little bit more than that but qualifying has been pretty good to me the last two races so I can't complain too much. I think it's good for us as a team to be on the front row again. It's always nice when your engineer keys-up and you can hear all the mechanics in the background cheering because of a one-two. You obviously want it the other way around though but Lewis did a great lap at the start of Q3 and we edged closer but couldn't quite get there.

And you didn't do too badly from second last week. There's a long run down to Turn 1, it could be quite an explosive start.

JB: I think it'll be an exciting start and not just for us two on the front row but the Mercedes is renowned, especially Michael, for getting good starts so it's going to be a fun Turn 1 I think.

Let's turn to you Michael. It's been a long time since we saw you in the top three for qualifying. Is this a welcome return or could this have been pole and even better today?

Michael SCHUMACHER: No, I mean this was the maximum that was available. We managed to work the car very well over the whole weekend, we obviously showed potential in Australia, not so much in the race, so focus was obviously to try to find the best compromise and I guess we have achieved this. We're third here, a very tight business if you look who is behind us, and how close everything is going, we can be more than happy about what we have achieved and look forward now for tomorrow.

Is there a concern about the race given what happened in Australia last week?

MS: I guess all of us have concerns because those temperatures are pretty new to us. We have had some preparation yesterday but I guess we have done a decent job. We have learned quite a lesson in Australia, we have reacted, the boys in the factory, and all the team have done a really superb job. I'm more than happy about the progress and how we understand the car and I look forward for tomorrow.

Finally to you Lewis, you're in the best place possible to start tomorrow's race. But there'll be different strategies, it's going to be hot, it's going to be a race of attrition out there – how do you view what's going to happen?

LH: I don't know if it's definitely the best place to start here, it's a long haul down to Turn 1, but no, I think there are going to be interesting strategies tomorrow and the key is looking after your tyres. So hopefully we'll have a car in a much better position for the race tomorrow, so excited for that.

Lewis, a phenomenal first lap in Q3. Tell us about it, as I think there was a lock-up at the first corner. It was phenomenal, substantially quicker.

LH: Yeah, I think the first lap was quite good. I think I lost a bit of time in the last corner but the first corner was fine. I think I had a small oversteer moment but it didn't cost me any time. Then the rest of the lap seemed to come together quite well. I pushed probably a little too much in the last corner and went a bit wide, but fortunately I was able to minimise the amount I lost.

And is it all about tyre management tomorrow in the race itself?

LH: It is. It's positioning and it's definitely tyre management. This is a very tricky circuit because of the track temperatures and obviously the humidity outside. It's going to be tough tomorrow but we just have to make sure we prepare ourselves in the best way we can.

This is your first time on pole position here. You've actually finished all your Malaysian Grand Prix, which has got to be a good omen for you. Your thoughts on tackling it tomorrow, as it is one of the toughest Grand Prix of the year?

LH: It is, definitely. It's a very long haul down to turn one. Just in the conditions, you never know what's going to happen, the changeable conditions. I hope it stays dry. But these tyres are having a seriously hard time around here, especially under 150 kilos of fuel. It's going to be interesting. I don't know how it's going to go but I'll do everything I can to make sure we're as competitive as possible.

Jenson, quite a last gasp to get on the front row there.

JB: Well, actually, it's quite normal in the end of Q3 to put in your fastest lap, so I think it was the way for most of us, though obviously not for Lewis. I was pretty happy with the lap. I think with the heat it is very difficult to get a good lap out of the car as the car is moving around a lot but I was pretty happy but obviously not as happy as the guy sitting alongside me.

But this is a circuit you really enjoy. Do you still enjoy it, in spite of the heat?

JB: I think we all do. This is a fast, flowing circuit and a circuit that is tough in many ways: for the car, for the tyres and for us as well sitting in the cockpit as well. It's a long, hot afternoon tomorrow. But I'm looking forward to it. I think we have a good race car. Difficult to know how good but I think our long-run pace yesterday showed some reasonable consistency. So, we have to hope for that tomorrow.

You were a winner here in 2009. Has your lady come up with any good omens for tomorrow?

JB: No, but I think as a team we have a lot of confidence at the moment in what we're doing. I don't think we've too overconfident. I think we have to be very good with everything. The pace has to be there, the consistency, the pit stops need to be key, because these guys are very quick – Mercedes – and also the Renaults and Red Bulls. Their pace seems to be better in race trim than in qualifying, so it's going to be a busy afternoon for the strategy guys and the engineers and obviously for us out on circuit.

Michael, a three time winner here in the past, and so close to the front row today. What would that have meant to you?

MS: Naturally, you would rather be further forward than I am, but quite honestly, from where we have come, I think it's quite an achievement to be third, so I have no regrets, just feeling good about it, particularly knowing that we have chosen a car that should work much better in the race. I would rather be compromised for qualifying; that's a situation which I hope will pay back tomorrow.

And of course a home race for Petronas as well.

MS: Absolutely, we would like to do well for a very important partner and supporter of ours, because we definitely take a performance advantage

from Petronas delivering as our partner and we are very keen to pay them back for that.

In third place, you're obviously knocking on the door of the front row, knocking on the door of Vodafone McLaren Mercedes. Is that going to come soon?

MS: We'll take it as it comes, honestly. I think it's quite an achievement if you appreciate who is behind us; who would have thought that last year? That's the way I want to see it, not that we still have maybe to cover up a little bit in front. We are reasonably close, we are not miles away as we have been last year basically, so it's up to us now to have a good development programme, work methodically and focused and then let's see what the season brings us.

To all of you, are you surprised that Red Bull is longer any good in qualifying?

LH: It's quite clear that last year they had a huge advantage with the blown diffuser and they don't have that now. Everyone's a lot more equal.

JB: Well, they're not bad, they're fourth and fifth on the grid so it's not terrible. We definitely had an advantage today, it was a lot smaller than in Melbourne and we did a very good job today. If they've got everything out of the car, yes, we're two tenths quicker than him. It's small, it's not the advantage that we've seen over the last couple of years. And the race is a very different thing, I think they proved that in the last race. Obviously Sebastian got a bit lucky with the safety car but still, their pace was good in the race so we expect that again.

MS: It's a tight business and Red Bull, as Jenson mentioned, looks a bit stronger in race conditions rather than in qualifying conditions, because it's all very close together, it's not so surprising. It's surprising that there are quite a few other teams close around, like us. I wouldn't have expected to be that close, glad I am here as well as in Australia because those are two completely different tracks and that is obviously a good indication for the rest of the season.

Michael, you said you were surprised because some other teams are closer but one team is a little less close now. Are you surprised at Ferrari?

MS: I think we all expected – or we still can expect – Ferrari to be back up there on top. It's obvious that they're not at the moment. I guess they understand their reasons but whenever you have a reason, it will take time to fix and it's just a matter of giving them this time, but I have no doubt that sooner or later they will be back up there.

Lewis and Jenson, Sebastian Vettel qualified on a hard tyre today, can that be an advantage?

JB: I don't think so. I think the tyres are pretty close in terms of lap time. They obviously see a positive in it, otherwise they wouldn't have done it, so somebody obviously thinks there is a reason for doing it, and thinks that it's an advantage. But you've still got to run the option tyre and who is to say that it's slower or the degradation's worse? It's difficult to know, really.

F1 Malaysian Grand Prix – Race report

Sometimes, things happen on track that remind you just why you fell in love with Formula 1 in the first place.

The 2012 Malaysian Grand Prix is going to enter the record books as a classic. We may only have 10 percent of the season under our belts, but it's safe to say that Sepang will be a strong contender for race of the year.

Sure, there was a dull interlude when the teams built a tent city on the grid in the red flag period, but the rain delay was worth it just to see Sauber driver Sergio Perez pick up his first F1 podium – it certainly won't be his last – after a ballsy drive that saw the young Mexican devouring the lead of the vastly more experienced Fernando Alonso in P1.

By lap 16 of Sunday's rain-soaked race, Perez was in P2 behind the Ferrari of Alonso. And that was where he stayed until the very end, hunting down the Spanish double champion as though his life depended on it, setting fastest lap after fastest lap, irrespective of the type of rubber he was on.

On lap 36, Perez was 4.1s down on Alonso with 20 laps remaining. By the time he'd crossed the line to begin lap 37, that lead was down to 3.9s. Then 3.2s, then 2.9s. By lap 39, the Mexican driver had reduced the gap to 2.3s, trimming the Ferrari's advantage every time he completed a sector.

But the best was yet to come. On lap 42, Perez pitted for slicks in what would be his final stop of the race.

The gap to Alonso was up to 7.1s, and there were only 15 laps remaining.

What followed was magic, racing in its purest form and all the more beautiful because of it. Can there be a better story than the young challenger – widely believed to be in line for a seat with the Scuderia when Felipe Massa's contract expires at the end of the year – putting the fear into one of the grid's top talents?

Cry 'havoc!', and let slip the dogs of war...

Over the course of lap 44, Perez devoured the tarmac, reducing Alonso's lead from 7.1s to 5.7s. By the next lap, the Mexican racer had taken another 1.8s out of Alonso, and when he crossed the line to begin lap 46 the margin was down to 3.9s. One lap later, and Perez was 2.3s down on the Spaniard and continuing to close.

And the margin shrank with every sector – the two men started lap 48 a split by only 1.7s. By the end of lap 49, with a gap of only 0.6s, Alonso was within reach of Perez when the pair entered the DRS activation zone.

But it wasn't quite close enough, and Perez didn't manage to pass the Ferrari. He did manage to reduce the gap to 0.3s at the end of lap 50, and it looked as though the Sauber driver might actually pass Alonso and take the lead.

Alas, it was not to be. Perez ran wide on lap 51, slid across the tarmac – luckily missing the gravel trap by millimetres – and found himself 5.3s behind the Ferrari driver with only six laps remaining. It was a tall order, but there was still a very real chance that Perez could win his maiden grand prix.

Speaking after the race, Perez said that he always believed the win was possible.

"I was catching Fernando toward the end of the race," he said. "I knew I had to get him soon because all the sectors with the high speed I was losing already my front tyres with a lot of degradation going behind Fernando, so it wasn't easy. Then I ran wide in the quick corner, I touched a kerb and I went to the dirty side. It was completely wet and that was the end of the win, probably. It was very difficult obviously to get Fernando but I think today the win was possible."

Of course, there were other races going on behind, each of which had their own moments to savour.

Despite never having run on either of Pirelli's wet tyre compounds before (the Lotus was out of action when it rained in Barcelona during pre-season testing), Kimi Raikkonen was able to reclaim the five places he lost for a gearbox change, finishing the grand prix in the P5 he should have started in.

Narain Karthikeyan had his own moment of glory when the HRT driver sat in P10 at the restart, following the brave decision to stay out on track in the opening stages of the race, when all around him were diving for the pits in a rush to move on to the extreme wet rubber.

To keep your inters when all around you are losing theirs'...

Unfortunately for the Indian racer, his moment in the points was scuppered by Jenson Button, who ran in to the HRT on his outlap following a post-Safety Car tyre change. The McLaren driver accepted full responsibility for the crash, saying after the race: "I was struggling to keep the tyres up temperature and it was totally my fault. I hit the brakes, I lost the rear. I was struggling to get the car slowed down. I tried to get around the corner but I couldn't do anything but hit him really."

The incident with Button saw Karthikeyan back down in P23 after emerging from the pits, but even at the back the HRT wasn't safe from further attack. Red Bull's Sebastian Vettel - who is more accustomed to racing in clear air at the head of the pack - botched a passing manoeuvre, clipped Karthikeyan, and scuppered his own race in the process.

One of the heroes of the day was Bruno Senna. The Brazilian driver did in Malaysia what teammate Pastor Maldonado had failed to do in Australia - he brought home a tidy handful of points for Williams with a P6 finish, equalling that team's total 2011 points haul in a single grand prix.

Senna's result came about thanks to a combination of aggressive pitwall strategy and a strong performance from the Brazilian racer, who looked very comfortable in the wet. On track, Senna did the business, passing Daniel Ricciardo, Michael Schumacher, and Nico Hulkenberg.

And on the pitwall, a series of well-timed pit stops saw Senna promoted to P8 by lap 40, improving to P6 by lap 47, a position the Brazilian racer was able to hold until the chequered flag.

Another great drive came courtesy of Toro Rosso's Jean-Eric Vergne, who scored his first F1 points this weekend. The Frenchman started the Malaysian Grand Prix in P18, and made the most of the chaotic weather conditions (and the flurry of pit stops that ensued) to work his way up to P7 by lap 6, deftly lapping on inters as the more experienced drivers made the switch to extreme wets.

By the time Vergne pitted for a change of rubber on lap 15, he was running in P3. Returning to the track in P10, the Frenchman then delivered a solid performance that saw him climb to P6 before a lap 40 pit stop pushed him into P9. When Vettel pitted following his collision with Karthikeyan, Vergne moved up to P8 and held position until the chequered flag.

2012 F1 Malaysian Grand Prix results (unofficial)

1. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 2h44m51.812s
2. Sergio Perez (Sauber) +2.263s
3. Lewis Hamilton (McLaren) +14.591s
4. Mark Webber (Red Bull) +17.688s
5. Kimi Raikkonen (Lotus) +29.456s
6. Bruno Senna (Williams) +37.667s
7. Paul di Resta (Force India) +44.412s
8. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) +46.985s
9. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) +47.892s
10. Michael Schumacher (Mercedes) +49.996s
11. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) +75.527s
12. Daniel Ricciardo (Toro Rosso) +76.828s
13. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) +78.593s
14. Jenson Button (McLaren) +79.719s
15. Felipe Massa (Ferrari) +97.319s
16. Vitaly Petrov (Caterham) + 1 lap
17. Timo Glock (Marussia) + 1 lap
18. Heikki Kovalainen (Caterham) + 1 lap
19. Pastor Maldonado (Williams) RET
20. Charles Pic (Marussia) + 2 laps
21. Narain Karthikeyan (HRT) + 2 laps
22. Pedro de la Rosa (HRT) + 2 laps

Kamui Kobayashi (Sauber) RET

Romain Grosjean (Lotus) RET

F1 Malaysian Grand Prix - Sunday press conference

It's always a pleasure to see a new face in the post-race press conference, and it was a particular delight to see Sergio Perez take his seat among the top three after what will certainly go down as one of the most impressive performances of the 2012 Formula 1 season.

Present were Fernando Alonso (Ferrari), Sergio Perez (Sauber), and Lewis Hamilton (McLaren).

Fernando, Congratulations on a victory that you probably didn't expect at the start of the week but what about in the latter stages as the young Mexican was catching you?

Fernando ALONSO: Yeah definitely, a big surprise today with the win. We were not competitive in Australia, we were not competitive here and our goal for this first race is to score as many points as possible. But today we did 25 so it's an unbelievable result, so great job from the team and trackside I think we maximised the potential we have in our hands at the moment. Good qualifying yesterday going into Q3 and then today keeping calm in some extreme conditions I think, at the beginning with the Inters with a lot of water and then switching to the Inters and then switching to the dry tyres in the perfect moment with perfect pitstops. Congratulations to the team because I think they deserve this victory. It's a tough time for us at the moment but this Sunday we will remember.

I'm sure Sergio it's a Sunday that you'll remember for the rest of your life as well. A phenomenal effort from yourself and the team but do you think this was a win that could have been yours?

Sergio PÉREZ: I think so, I definitely think so. I mean, I was catching Fernando toward the end of the race, I knew I had to get him soon because all the sectors with the high speed I was losing already my front tyres with a lot of degradation going behind Fernando, so it wasn't easy. Then I ran wide in the quick corner, I touched a kerb and I went to the dirty side. It was completely wet and that was the end of the win, probably. It was very difficult obviously to get Fernando but I think today the win was possible. I have to say the team has done an incredible job. They called me always on the right time, especially the first pitstop we did, it was really at the right moment. Unfortunately Fernando pitted one lap earlier than us, towards the end of the race when the track was already dry and he opened some gap there, and even then we managed to get him, the pace was fantastic, I was really quick. I have to say many thanks to the team, they have done a great job and I'm very happy for them.

Lewis, turning to you, a crazy race, so much going on but the upshot was from pole you finished third for the second week running. Can you be happy with that? Can you be satisfied today?

Lewis HAMILTON: I think we can be satisfied, definitely. First of all congratulations to Fernando and also to Sergio who both drove fantastically well. It was very tough to catch them. Yeah, of course we would have liked to have more points this weekend but yeah, I guess I can't really complain. I'm on the podium for second week in a row so I'm pretty happy. I feel pretty fortunate that I was able to stay out of trouble with the conditions changing constantly. I think we did a great job.

Fernando, what does this do to a Ferrari team? So many questions asked about the performance of the car in Australia, does this give fresh motivation and can we see it again in the near future?

FA: I think it changes nothing, to be honest. We are in a position that we don't want, to be fighting to go into Q3 and then fighting to score some points. We want to fight for pole positions, for victories, so definitely in the first two races of the Championship that we find ourselves off the pace. As I said before, the goal was not to lose many points with the leaders. I think we did a job in the trackside, as I said, and we didn't lose maybe any point to the leaders, so this is the positive news about these first two races but coming to China, Bahrain, Barcelona, there is a lot of stuff coming to improve the car and this is the real job we have to do. I know the team is putting in a lot of effort. We trust each other a lot in the team, we are very united at the moment and this win will make us very happy today and maybe the next two days in the factory but it doesn't change our determination to improve the car and to keep winning.

Fernando you've got quite a history at this circuit. It's quite a good track for you. You've won twice before and had all sorts milestones here.

FA: Yeah, I heard on the radio now that it's the third victory for me with three different cars and three different teams, so it's good to keep winning at circuits you love to race. As I said on Thursday here, it's a fantastic circuit, very technical and with a lot of type of corners and very difficult conditions as we had today. So to win third time here with three different cars is good news, but obviously the most important thing, as we've said many times, is championship points and to get some consistency over the 20 races, not making too many mistakes, not making too many DNFs. Today, was one of the races that easily you can make a DNF because the conditions were quite difficult. So we stay calm, we try to do the best job we can and I think the team did, again, a fantastic job, not only preparing the race but the weekend in general, on Friday testing some new parts, in qualifying doing our maximum and then in the race a perfect start, perfect pit stops, at the right time. So we cannot ask any more of today's race. Now back home we have some work to do ahead, because we need to recover a couple of tenths to be more competitive and also fight for victory on a dry, sunny day and not only these conditions.

As you say, the pit stop timing was crucial today. That was what got you ahead of Lewis in the first pit stop after the stoppage.

FA: Yeah, I think it was perfect. We started with inters, which I think was the main choice for everyone. We switched to extreme tyres because the aquaplaning was very bad and we overtook Vettel in that pit stop because we anticipated (it by) one lap. Then as you said, we came with Lewis, to change for inters after the restart. I think I came in behind Lewis but I exited in front, so it was just the pit stop itself that was quicker. Maybe Lewis had some kind of problems. I was making positions little by little with perfect calls from the team, so this victory is definitely for them.

Was the dry tyre choice at the end the correct one?

FA: Yeah. We were not sure about the Medium or the Hard tyre. We put the Medium on because it was the majority put the Medium on. We were leading the race, you don't need to invent anything, you just to copy what they are doing and with that maybe it's enough. We put on the Medium. With the consistency we were comfortable but obviously not quick enough compared to Sergio, he was putting a lot of pressure. Once before the dry tyres so at the end of the stint with the Inters and then with the Inters. They were quicker than us, no doubt about that but we were lucky enough to maintain the position in the last laps.

Sergio, so close, so close! Is that what you're thinking?

SP: Really! I think the win today was really possible. Obviously the team did very good work to call me in at the right times. We lost one lap just at the end to Fernando on the dry tyres, so we lost about two seconds, and then my pit stop didn't go so well with the clutch. And then I managed to catch

him, lap by lap. Towards the end I had some understeer into a left-hand corner, the quick one, and I ran wide enough to go into the wet and then I just lost control of the car and went straight and lost the fight for the victory. But even though, I think it's been a great effort for the team. They called me at the right times. The conditions were very difficult to keep the car on the track and they have been incredible. They were quite focused as well, so they always called me at the right time, which was crucial here and obviously we had a great pace. In my second stint, when we changed to intermediates, we changed a bit late and Fernando was already with warm tyres, so it took me some laps to warm up tyres and at that point it was very difficult to get Fernando, but towards the end of the stint I was very close to him. So again he pitted and he pulled away, he pitted on the right lap and it took me a few laps to catch him. When I caught him I knew it would have to be quick to overtake him because I was having a lot of degradation in my front tyres, especially going behind him. So I went looking for the way to get him and then I just ran a bit wide and touched the wet kerb – I was lucky not to go off. In the end, second it's a great result for the team. Many points and I'm looking forward to the rest of the season. It's only the second race of the season and hopefully we can keep improving our car to fight the big guys.

You were on the hard tyres for the last stint. That was perfect for you?

SP: Yeah it was OK – quite OK.

You mentioned the pit stop. Was there a problem there?

SP: Yeah I had a problem with two pit stops with the clutch. Something was wrong with the clutch and we lost some time there. But anyway, the team has done a fantastic job.

Lewis, again, the pit timing was when you lost out to Fernando but were there other problems today?

LH: No. It was a pretty straightforward day. The guys next door (to me here) did a fantastic job. Fernando and Sergio did a fantastic job, so congratulations to them. We just weren't very quick today. We were a little bit unfortunate with the calls. I think we didn't make the right calls at the right time and lost a bit of ground there. We lost quite a lot of time through a couple of the pit stops. I don't know what problems we had but I seemed to be sitting there for quite some time. Otherwise I was just trying to hunt them down but they were both massively quick.

So, there are positives to be taken from today?

LH: Oh yeah. I feel very fortunate, with the weather conditions and the way the track was today that I managed to finish in third today. It's good points and good points for the team and yeah I just have to look forward to the next one.

Fernando, if they had told you after the first two races, with the car you have, that you would come home as the leader of the championship, what would you have thought. And also do you think, considering the car you have, that this is one of the best victories of your career?

FA: I don't know. I think after Barcelona if someone tell us you are becoming the leader of the championship after two races you don't have a clear answer. Maybe it's possible, maybe not. In Australia we were not competitive, here not competitive, especially in qualifying. Then in the race it seems we pick up the pace a little bit and there is no secrets. I think there is no secret. We are not having the easiest start to the championship with some problems in the car and some lack of pace but we are working on that, working day and night. I think Ferrari (has) proved over 60 years what they are able to do. In a way it's not a surprise but as I said in the press conference, this win changes nothing in the approach in the next coming weeks. In the next coming races we need to have a very aggressive approach in terms of the development of the car. We need to bring updates to every race because we are a little bit too far behind or more than what we want or what we expect. Yeah, we start with inters, then we fit extremes, red flag, inters again, dry tyres, nearly night now. I remember the victory in Korea in 2010, it was also some kind of extreme conditions, as we had today. Every time there is a red flag there is stressful moments on the grid. It's very difficult to keep the concentration, to keep focus. We had other problems in the car. We lost telemetry, so I had to read the fuel every lap when we crossed the start-finish line. So there were a lot of things to do inside the car to keep under control the KERS etc. I was the only one knowing the charge. Without telemetry it's quite difficult for them. I think it was quite demanding but very happy obviously.

Fernando, yesterday you pointed that there were only four people happier than you and now there's none. How important is this victory in terms of the psychological aspect – for you, the team and the fans?

FA: Obviously yesterday, and the days before, as I said before, we are not in the position we wanted, we are not quick enough but it was not a dramatic situation as some voices outside the team said. We just clarified that in Australia we finished fifth and there were only four guys happier than us. Now that we are leading the championship we should be quite proud of the job but as I said we need to work. From a psychology point of view, the win will make more motivation to the guys in Maranello. They don't need motivation because they work for Ferrari and they need to do the maximum for this red car and they know that, but after one win they will go tomorrow at eight o'clock to work with a smile and that maybe will give us some ideas.

Sergio, what were you thinking of: each lap, you were doing fastest lap?

SP: Yes, I was thinking of Fernando, waiting for him, as soon as possible, getting closer and closer. I was keeping my head down, also I had to save some tyres, trying not to degrade them a lot, because it was so easy in those conditions, especially towards the end of the stint on inters. I knew it was crucial to have good tyres towards the end of the stint, so I was catching him with quite good tyres but then he pitted and he pitted on the right lap. Again, I had to catch him again and I was catching him big time and then I just ran a little bit wide, I was obviously on the limit, trying to catch him and I touched the wet side of the kerb and I went straight on.

Lewis, when the track became dry, the gap was not so big to first and second and we thought that in those conditions McLaren could be very very fast and maybe you could fight with them. Then suddenly you weren't catching them. What exactly happened in race conditions?

LH: They were just very quick, equally as quick as me if not quicker. I was losing quite a lot of time in the mid sector. I'm not really sure exactly where I was losing the time and why but I had the option tyre on, I was pushing as hard as I could in the conditions. I probably could have gone from extremes to inters and inters to slicks – on both the stops I probably could have come in a lap earlier. These two probably did a better job there. In one of the pit stops I lost a good four or five seconds, just sitting there with some problem with the front right. After that I was trying to catch them, but we had 15 laps or something like that so I had to alter the car for the tyres as best as I could. I was being chased by the guys behind, so a little bit of lack of pace today from me, but I'm still fortunate to be here.

Sergio, that was absolutely wonderful to watch, really exciting. Shortly before you went off, we heard the team on the radio telling you not to throw away any points. Was that a distracting call?

SP: No, not at all. Obviously the team was worried. Obviously for us, second place means a lot so they were quite worried, I was going quite fast in difficult conditions. To keep the car on the track during the early stages of the race was quite a challenge, so we did quite well so it was a long race for the team, and I fully understand them. But no, it was not a distraction at all. I think they wanted the points as much as I did. I wanted the win because I saw it was possible. Unfortunately it didn't happen, but I'm still very happy and very proud of this second place.

Checo, there's a lot of speculation at the moment that you might become Fernando's teammate later this year. Did you have a chat with Stefano about it when you were on the podium?

SP: No, no, I only congratulated him. As a team they did a great job. And for me, my full commitment is with my team, with Sauber F1 team. It's only the second race of the season and there's still a long way to go so we have to keep improving, especially because we are a small team, so for us, it's getting closer to development, the others can improve more so it's important we remain focused. Obviously it's only rumours but no, I will stay with Sauber for the whole season.

Sergio, you said before that you were struggling with the front tyres; at the end, was it the wrong decision to go for the hard and not the medium in the last stint?

SP: No, I think it was the right call. The degradation was not so bad, so I think it was the right call for us. Obviously I didn't have any new option tyres. The option wasn't working so well for us.

Fernando, is this your best victory?

FA: I don't know. I think every victory tastes different. I think the conditions were more difficult than in some other victories. As I said, only at Korea do I remember these type of conditions, especially at the beginning when we had inters, the visibility was zero behind Webber and there was a crash in turn four between Grosjean and Michael and I think I passed just one centimetre from Michael's front wing. There were many factors in the race, especially in the first ten laps, which could put you out of the race very easily. I had two or three big moments in turn three and under braking for turn one. You arrive at 280 or 290 kilometers per hour with aquaplaning for 20 meters on the inters and then the car recovers thanks to God, so there were big moments throughout the race, so when you get a victory, it tastes better, for sure, but it's difficult. I'm very happy.

Lewis, last week you were seriously annoyed with third place. You bemoaned the fact that you'd gone backwards, as you put it. Why is third different this weekend when you've declared yourself satisfied?

LH: I wouldn't say I was happy with third - I can never be happy with going backwards, but it's really just due to the conditions. Those two guys in front did a better job and today was just really trying to keep the car on the track and bring home some points and I did. The goal is always to try and be on the podium and stay consistent and so far I'm doing that, but of course I would like to be a little bit higher up so I'm going to try and focus on my race pace for the next race and see if I can convert a good position to a better result.

Fernando, yesterday you said that your goal was to stay in front of Sauber, yesterday in qualifying. Would you have expected to be in front of him, to fight for victory? Is Sauber a big surprise to you?

FA: Obviously, yesterday ninth and tenth for me and for Sergio - neither of us probably ever thought we would fight for victory but we said yesterday ... here the weather conditions are quite changeable so with the rain coming, everything changed and now we've found good pace in the car and good pace in wet conditions and it was a good fight. I think Sauber is doing a fantastic job this year. We saw in winter testing they made very good progress, they showed good potential in Australia, they showed super potential here, today, with a very good drive from Sergio. I think it's the tendency of this year. There is no big domination as we maybe had last year or the last two years and everything remains more open, so we need to take advantage of this.

Fernando, how difficult was the call to slick tyres, because at that time, some drivers in the midfield had some very fast laps on slick tyres, but on the other hand some teams were reporting that there might be more showers, so any decision could have been the wrong one?

FA: Yes, it was a very difficult decision because, as I said before, we just wanted to do the same as other people behind us. It was not the time for us to take risks because we were leading the race so it was difficult conditions because as you said, the track was ready for dry tyres, they were doing quick times but the forecast said rain in the next five minutes, so if you put on dry tyres and then it rains you lose everything. I think Button or someone close to us or Vettel put on dries so it was time to make the decision so we pitted and then once Lewis and Sergio pitted as well, we were happy because if the rain came at that moment we were all in the same condition again. We only had doubts for one lap.

Fernando, Sergio has already talked about the possibility of driving for Ferrari and says he's committed to Sauber this season. But given that he's a member of the Ferrari Young Driver academy, do you see him talented enough to make the step up sometime soon?

FA: At the moment, as Sergio said, he is concentrated on Sauber, which is the obligation on the contract side. Ferrari's Driver Academy is doing a great job with young talents and I think if Sergio is in the Academy it's because Ferrari saw big talent in this guy. Today, the victory was not possible, but I think a win will come sooner rather than later for Sergio. At the moment, with Felipe, we are a very strong team, a very united team and I don't see any possibility not to race alongside Felipe, because I think we are a strong team. I think Felipe had some problems in the race in Australia but here, changing a couple of things in the car, he was competitive. Yesterday he was P12 and when it was red flagged he was already eighth, so I think with a normal race and hopefully when the car improves, Felipe and I need to be on the podium together. That's the goal for the remainder of the season.

Sergio, you told me in an interview in Melbourne that you expected to be fighting for podiums, hopefully sooner rather than later, but did you expect it to be one week after that interview?

SP: Not really. I knew that the car had the potential to fight in these kind of conditions because we were not so far off, so in this type of condition, maybe the driver can make a little bit more difference and if you get the right conditions and you make the right calls then you can be up there fighting as we were today. The victory was quite close, but I think all in all, it's a great day for me.

Sergio, as we know in motor racing, catching somebody is one thing, getting past them is another. Did you have a plan?

SP: Yes, I was just starting to plan because I knew Fernando was struggling, especially with the rears and I was struggling with the fronts and I was getting quite close to him in the fast section, but then I had a lot of understeer and the fronts were already degrading. I was just thinking where I was going to save some KERS and then I just touched the kerb and ran wide and it was over.
