



Sunday press conference

It was three of the same faces who lined up to face the press for the post-race press conference in Sochi, although two were celebrating the first constructors' championship for their team.

Present were Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes), Nico Rosberg (Mercedes), and Valtteri Bottas (Williams).

Q: What a wonderful race guys. Thank you very much? I know Lewis you are a real fan of Russia, Russian racing. You were back in Moscow sometime and now you've won first ever Russian Grand Prix since 100 years exactly. How do you feel?

Lewis HAMILTON: So happy to be here. We've had an amazing week. The fans and really the organisers... Russia's been so good to me and to the team. I'm so grateful for all the support and I'm really looking forward to coming here many, many more times. It's not very far from where I live so I'm going to be hopping over for some holidays for sure.

Q: I know you're impressed by the ski resorts here. Look, 17 points now, you have. Seventeen points in front of Nico. You think it's enough or not?

LH: Obviously Nico did a great job to recover from his mistake earlier on today but the car was performing really well. We did a great job as a team. It's history for us, so I feel very proud to be a part of it – me and Nico and all the team members. To get the first Constructors' Championship for Mercedes Benz is amazing, so it's a beautiful day.

Q: Nico, it was a really wonderful fight with Valtteri and you won it. Do you really think the tyres were gone or was it a bluff, like in poker?

Nico ROSBERG: No, it was a great strategy from the team. The thing is that our car is unbelievable. It's so good: everybody has done such a great job building this car. That's why half of me of course is extremely disappointed that I messed up today but the other half, I'm really, really happy, because everybody in the team deserves it so much. For them the most important title of the year is the Constructors' Championship, that's why I can even smile a bit, because I'm happy for everybody to have achieved that.

Q: Ladies and gentlemen, 52 laps on the same set of tyres, what a great race. Valtteri, on the last lap of the race, this man set the first ever in the history of Formula One fastest lap of the Russian Grand Prix. But you lost the fight with Nico, so are you happy or not?

Valtteri BOTTAS: Well, I need to be happy for us as a team. You know, what we have been doing since last year is amazing. Again on the podium, so a good amount of points. We were today 'best of the rest'. Unfortunately, Mercedes is still quite a bit ahead but, you know, we did the best we could from where we started, so we need to be happy as a team.

Q: This man is still in the fight for third [in the Drivers' Championship] with Daniel Ricciardo. But we are back for one quick question [with Lewis] because we all know the Russian story: the evening after the race, we must celebrate. And you have three weeks...

LH: Is there vodka?

Q: It's OK for you?

LH: Yeah, I don't mind. Thank you.

Q: Lewis, congratulations, tremendous win there. We could see you were pushing very hard by the number of fastest laps you did – but you seemed to have virtually no problems. Any problems with fuel consumption? Any problems with tyres? Just one little lock-up we saw from you.

LH: Yeah, it was a good, good day and an amazing weekend. Firstly, I'm just so proud to have contributed to have worked with this great team, to get the first Constructors' Championship for Mercedes-Benz. I could have only dreamed of that when I joined this team. So, a great day for that. Huge congratulations to all the guys that are here and back home in the UK and also in Germany. But yeah, today, once I was out in the lead I was really just having to control, just looking after the tyres, managing the fuel was quite straightforward. And then, towards the end of the race the car felt great so I could push or not push. I wasn't really having to push much and even when I was having to pick up the pace a little bit when I eventually found Nico was behind, it was easy to match the times. And the car's been amazing this weekend and I really, really enjoyed the track. I tell you, Russia's been one of my favourite places so far this year, so it's very cool to have won the first race here.

Q: Nico, a fantastic drive through the field really – but what happened on the first lap? We heard you say you had a vibration. Did that go with the change of tyres? Tell us about that because that really governed your whole race.

NR: Yeah, of course. It was just a mistake on my side, braked too late and that's it. Very unnecessary because it was my corner and should have been in the lead after that. So, obviously very disappointed with that. After that my tyres were just square. They were vibrating so much I couldn't see where I was going so I knew that I had to pit. For me, I thought that was it. I thought that was the end of the day – but then of course, partly happy to get back all the way to second, passing Valtteri along the way and then... yeah, it's just thanks to my car. My car was just unbelievable today and that's what allowed me to come back through the field. That's the main thing really. In hindsight really, even if it was a bit... I could have pushed more during the race, y'know? But it's always easy to know afterwards but even at the end my tyres were fine. So, yeah, that's a pity but anyway, it's difficult to know that during the race.

Q: Valtteri, at one point the pace seemed to be really close to Mercedes, perhaps closer than we've seen in any race so far this year.

VB: Yeah, the beginning seemed to be very good and I was not far off from Lewis and everything was going into the plan. The tyres were feeling good and suddenly the rear tyres started to go, started to lose pace and was struggling more and more and Lewis was getting far a way. Then we stopped for the Prime and it took just a really long time to get the Prime tyre to work. It was just getting better towards the end. I did my best lap in the last lap of the race. It was really weird. And as it took so long to get the tyres to work, Nico got me in Turn One. It was a bit of a surprise for me, didn't expect him to come inside. Luckily I saw him in time so there was no contact. Yeah, as a team I think we again did a good job. We've come so much forward from last season so it's again, really good to be on the podium.

Q: (Michael Schmidt – Auto, Motor und Sport) Nico, when you tried to overtake Lewis at the first corner, you were on the inside line: is it because it's not the racing line, is that line, let's say, that you normally have to brake a little bit earlier to compensate?

NR: No, I don't think so. It was definitely do-able and I just messed up, very simple, no explanation. Just braked too late and too hard.

Q: (Heikki Kulta – Turun Sanomat) Valtteri, last year you had your best result in Austin. Is it going to happen this year also?

VB: I really hope so. I got my first points in Formula One in Austin last year so it would be nice to have a good weekend there. I think the track should be OK for us so let's aim for that.

Q: (Frederic Ferret – L'Equipe) Nico and Lewis: now that the Constructors' title has been won, will you change your way of racing together or will it be the same?

LH: Same.

NR: It's the same, you know. Up until now, it's always been we can fight and it continues to be like that. We can fight, it doesn't change.

Q: (Haoran Zhou – F1 Express) Lewis, can you describe your experience on the podium and especially when you were handed the trophy? Be as specific as possible.

LH: Well, it was kind of normal really. Kind of surreal for the president to be presenting the award. That was a great experience. The crowd have been amazing this weekend. I don't know, I just never... I didn't know that Formula One was something that people followed here in Russia. I didn't know that there was actually a real love for it. To see the people turn out in their thousands yesterday and the grandstands full and then again today... They're really enthusiastic, it looks like they're really excited that we're here and on top of that they did an amazing job with the track, the layout, with the surface, with the actual event. You would have thought they'd had this event many many times. I take my hat off to them.

Q: (Leonid Khayremdinov – Red Star) Lewis, you had a wonderful season with this ninth victory and your lead is now 17 points, but I remember this in 2007 and you had the same 17 points behind Kimi Raikkonen. Are you not afraid of repeating the situation as in 2007?

LH: I remember 2007 very well. I wasn't afraid then either but I guess I was perhaps less experienced so I'm a completely different man today so I'm looking forward to the races coming up.

Race report

Lewis Hamilton collected his fourth consecutive win on his way to earning Mercedes their first Formula One World Constructors' Championship at the maiden Russian Grand Prix at the Sochi Autodrom.

A dominant performance from the Briton saw Hamilton lose the lead for a scant handful of metres as teammate Nico Rosberg seized the advantage before out-braking himself, locking up his tyres to such an extent that the resulting vibrations forced the German to pit for fresh rubber at the end of the first lap.

But while that one error cost Rosberg his chance at the win, it was but the beginning of an impressive fightback from the Monaco resident who worked his way back up from the tail end of the field to second place thanks to a low degradation circuit that saw the bulk of the grid manage 53 laps with only a single stop.

Given that Hamilton has twice managed a similar feat this season, it is worth considering the light such performances shine on the true capabilities of the W05, which many in the paddock feel has been sand-bagged all season long, such is the machine's dominance over the competition when not hampered by reliability problems.

The race itself was a fairly dry affair, with less fighting in the field than we have seen for the bulk of the season. But after the horrific events of the Japanese Grand Prix one week ago, the paddock was pinning its hopes on a race free from incident.

With tyres something of a non-story given the one-stop strategies employed the length of the grid - with some teams saying after the race that they could have run all 53 laps on softs and then reused the tyres for the next race in Austin if such a thing were legal - it was down to fuel consumption to add the few notes of drama that occurred from lights to flag.

A significant chunk of the field were warned of their fuel consumption as the race went on, with Sergio Perez running incredibly marginally towards the end, although the Mexican racer was able to finish with enough left in his tank for the mandatory FIA sample.

The two retirements both happened in the pits, with Max Chilton stopping in the garage after having complained of heavy vibrations at the front of his car, while Kamui Kobayashi was retired by his team after the pit wall detected that the Caterham's brakes were overheating to such an extent that it was dangerous for the Japanese racer to continue.

Both McLaren drivers performed well for the duration of the afternoon, securing fourth and fifth place and strengthening the belief that the Woking team have finally got to the bottom of the range of issues that were hampering the car's performance for much of the year. The final three races promise further improvements from the team, and Force India - who lost their advantage in the constructors' standings this weekend - are increasingly unlikely to end the season ahead of their former technical partners.

One man to suffer a terrible weekend after his humiliating performance in Saturday's qualifying session was Williams' Felipe Massa. While the Brazilian lost a lot of rubber and track time stuck behind Perez - having spent the early part of the race passing cars in Rosberg's wake - it was his second pit stop which caused the most damage. Whatever undercutting the team hoped to achieve came to naught, and Massa spent the closing stages of the race staring at Perez' gearbox, unable to pass even when the Mexican was running on fumes.

Daniil Kvyat also had a terrible time of it at his home grand prix, slipping from fifth on the grid to fourteenth thanks to fuel consumption problems and a second pit stop. Worst of all, the Russian racer was passed by both Perez and Massa as the trio were passing the Kvyat grandstand...

Russian Grand Prix race result

1. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1h31m50.744s
2. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) + 13.657s
3. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) + 17.425s
4. Jenson Button (McLaren) + 30.234s
5. Kevin Magnussen (McLaren) + 53.616s
6. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) + 1m00.016s
7. Daniel Ricciardo (Red Bull) + 1m01.812s
8. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) + 1m06.185s
9. Kimi Raikkonen (Ferrari) + 1m18.877s
10. Sergio Perez (Force India) + 1m20.067s
11. Felipe Massa (Williams) + 1m20.877s
12. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) + 1m21.309s
13. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) + 1m37.295s
14. Daniil Kvyat (Toro Rosso) + 1 lap

15. Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) + 1 lap
16. Adrian Sutil (Sauber) + 1 lap
17. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) + 1 lap
18. Pastor Maldonado (Lotus) + 1 lap
19. Marcus Ericsson (Caterham) + 2 laps

Kamui Kobayashi (Caterham) RET
Max Chilton (Marussia) RET

Saturday press conference

Despite a tense end to qualifying and the prospect of a new face on pole, it was three familiar faces in a rather familiar order who lined up for the post-qualifying press conference in Sochi.

Present were Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes), Nico Rosberg (Mercedes), and Valtteri Bottas (Williams).

Q: Lewis, congratulations on a superb pole today. Tell us what you feel about pole position for this race, this first ever Russian Grand Prix and how important is it to be on pole around here?

Lewis HAMILTON: I have no idea in that sense but of course pole is a great place to start. Firstly, an amazing job done by the team: constantly improving and moving forwards this year. Thanks to them we're able to be on the front row quite often. It's great to come here. It's a beautiful place and the weather has been amazing and really enjoying driving this track. It wasn't the easiest session. These guys were looking quite strong. Just hooking up a lap from some reason it wasn't the same as practice. But I'm really grateful that I got the pole here for the first time. It's going to be tough tomorrow. It's a long way down to turn one, so we'll find out how that works out.

Q: What is it about the circuit? A lot of drivers have called it 'cool'.

LH: It is very cool. Yeah, definitely. The track surface is great, it's very smooth but it has a lot of grip. The kerbs are just done really nicely and obviously the surroundings, you know when I landed here seeing the mountains... and also being around where they put the Olympics on, it's quite an incredible place. And today we had a good turn-out as well for the first Saturday of the race here so I hope that tomorrow is even better and that we can put on a good show for them.

Q: Nico, second on the grid. This is an important race, isn't it, to get some points?

Nico ROSBERG: Every race is important at the moment. We have four to go. They are all just as important. Yeah, today Lewis was quicker - all weekend really. So I've been working hard to try to get close but didn't manage to get closer than those two tenths now but that's the way it is. I need to accept that. Also, I had the Williams or Valtteri coming up from behind, going quick, so I needed to keep an eye on that. But front row is OK definitely and from there everything is possible tomorrow. It's going to be an interesting race. It's very unique here because there is hardly any tyre degradation. The track is so smooth on the tyres or I don't know what. It's completely different to everything else we've seen this year and that makes it very unique. It's been a big challenge set-up wise and everything to get to grips with the track this weekend. Yeah, I think it's going to be a good race tomorrow.

Q: Valtteri, so, so close. I think the entire grandstand heaved with excitement when you went off, right at the end on that last corner. Nobody else has been off there either.

Valtteri BOTTAS: Yeah, well I didn't know at that time that it was close to the pole. I only knew how it was compared to my best lap, which was the previous lap, which was not bad. I knew I had one more lap to go. Maybe, looking back I took maybe a bit too much out of the tyres in the beginning of the lap and the last sector became a bit more tricky. As I was gaining time compared to my best towards the end it became more difficult in the last few corners. I risked it a bit too much in the last two corners, went a little bit wide and when you go offline it's really slippery like everyone saw and that was it.

Q: Are you very upset about it?

VB: Of course, yeah. It's not nice to make a mistake. I think in the end today it maybe cost one place maximum. Anyway, I think the mistake was taking a bit too much out of the tyres in the beginning of the lap, that's what made me struggle a bit more in the end of the lap. The lap before, I'm quite happy about that.

Q: Lewis, some of the corners around here seem to invite errors. What kind of race are we going to see tomorrow?

LH: I don't necessarily think they invite errors. At the end of the day we're pushing all the time so you're going to see those mistakes or hiccups occur all the time but they're generally easy to recover from. It's a very fast, flowing or medium to high-speed, fast, flowing circuit. I really think that tomorrow is going to be a good race for people to watch. You've got the long straight that you can follow on, the DRS. It's nice and wide so hopefully you should be able to follow quite nicely. It could be one of the better races we've had for a long time.

Q: Lewis, an interesting message from your engineer saying he thought the track was slowing and then you go and pop it on pole.

LH: Was I not on pole at that point?

Q: You were, but you improved.

LH: Yeah, I improved, absolutely. He said that the track looked like it was getting slower. To be honest I couldn't really hear the message that clear but I kind of worked out what he was saying. But I was up on the next lap. It wasn't a perfect lap. I think there was more time in it. It's a fine line obviously; we're all pushing out there. As I said, it didn't feel as good as the P3 session but hopefully tomorrow should be good.

Q: This morning we saw you had a rather strange incident. What happened there?

LH: I just basically made a mistake. I had the brake bias set the wrong way, forgot to reset it, had it too far rearwards and as soon as I touched the brakes I just locked the rears. Fortunately, I got away with it without damaging the car.

Q: And we mentioned a moment that it invites mistakes but we see a lot of people going off that corner, Turn 17. There are certain corners where people do go off - Turn Two, Turn Four as well. What is it about those corners?

LH: I would say probably the exit of Turn Four... when you're going into it it's very wide and all of a sudden it gets quite narrow on the exit, so it's very misleading when you go into that corner. For 17, it's very hard to find the braking point and know how much speed [you can carry through]... the car is at the end of the lap, the tyres are overheating, it's hard to know how much speed you can take through there. Plus, if you've had a good lap, you don't want to lose it, so it's a real fine line at those two places.

Q: Nico, tomorrow, how important is DRS going to be?

NR: Hopefully very important! We'll see. I think the start will be important of course, there's a great opportunity there. Been having some very good starts lately, so quite confident for that. After that, race pace of course.

Q: What's the most significant part around this circuit? What's that long, long left-hander like?

NR: It's very unique. So long, full lateral G, so it's quite exciting in an F1 car for sure.

Q: Any other specific points on the circuit?

NR: It's really a good track because it's a big challenge to get it right. All those medium-speed corners, the way the asphalt is it doesn't work the tyres very hard, it's completely different scenario to everything else we've had this year. So we've had to adapt to this track and asphalt and the way the tyres are here. That made it a big engineering challenge this weekend. And also driving-wise it's a difficult track.

Q: Thank you very much. Valtteri, can you take the fight to Mercedes tomorrow?

VB: I really hope so. It's never easy. They are really quick and you never know how more pace they have than what they showed in the long runs on Friday. So we will see tomorrow. As team we made a really good job this weekend in getting the car set up for this unique track and unique surface of the tarmac. It's feeling good and I think the car should be a bit better in the long runs than it was in the qualifying.

Q: It has been another good fight-back from Williams. We've seen it quite a few times, that Friday hasn't been so good but you've come through on Saturday.

VB: On the Friday we're always just focusing on our test programme, we're not really looking in detail about the lap times. We're doing our thing, doing it all weekend, to improve the car, make the most out of the tyres and the package we have and then, yeah, Saturday is the time when you show what you have. Sunday, in the end, is the day that matters but I'm feeling good for tomorrow.

Q: (Heikki Kulta – Turun Sanomat) Valtteri, after getting so close to the pole, they say you are very critical on yourself. How critical are you today?

VB: Well, of course, very. I don't know if it was possible to be on pole today, it looked like the Mercedes has been all weekend really quick in the last sector, so difficult to say how much we lost there. Maybe one position could have been better – but obviously when you haven't done a perfect job, you are disappointed – but in the end the race is tomorrow and I'm starting on the clean side, second row, which is not bad at all. I'll learn from this and we go forward.

Q: (Michael Schmidt – Auto Motor und Sport) Valtteri, after two sectors you were in the lead. Where in the third sector did you lose it. Only in the last corner or already before a little bit?

VB: Well, compared to my previous best lap, I started to lose already a little bit in the beginning of the third sector and, yeah, then I lost it completely in the last sector. But I mean the whole weekend and the whole qualifying, Mercedes was really quick in the last sector, so I think they are, in general, still quicker in the corners than us. So, I think anyway with a good lap it would have been difficult to be on pole. But for sure I lost the end of the lap and I think I was a bit more than two-tenths ahead of my best before going into the last two corners so... yeah, it is what it is and we'll see tomorrow.

Q: (Vladimir Rogovets – Sb Belarus) My question to Lewis. This weekend we have the first race, the Formula One in Sochi, and today you are in the pole position here. Is this, have you feelings of love for Russia?

LH: It equals my love for Russia. Really, growing up, I've said before in interviews, but growing up seeing footage of Russia in movies and in pictures. It was one of the countries that I'd never really been to. We travel all the time, always get to go and see new places but it was one that I hadn't really seen. Just the four or five days we've been here, to see the beauty of this place is really pleasing. Moscow is a beautiful place, really enjoyed it there seeing these old, beautiful buildings and then landing here was like landing in a real nice holiday destination – with mountains that I hear in the winter you can ski on, which I had no idea you could ski over here. Yeah, so, hopefully this is the beginning of a real positive relationship Formula One has with Russia. And definitely now for me I know it's only a couple of hours flight from where I live so I think I'll be hoping over more often for some good weekends.

Q: (Autosport es Formula Magazin – Balazs Vajta) This is a question for Lewis. This track is also new and a couple of years ago we went to the first time to Valencia, which was also new and, even though the two tracks are not really similar, they do have some similarities. Everybody's very enthusiastic about the race tomorrow, it will be exciting – my question is what makes you think the race will be exciting because Valencia used to be a kind of boring race usually. What makes you think different this time?

LH: I don't know for sure but I personally wasn't a big fan of the Valencia circuit. I liked the race track they have which is outside the city but the actually street one wasn't very exciting. This one is definitely better for me. Whether or not we can follow... we were just discussing, who knows. They're quite... they're medium to fast kind of sweeping corners where you need maximum downforce, so tomorrow will be a true showing of whether or not you can follow. But you've got the long straights and, for example, Turn 10, you're coming onto a corner which you should be able to follow through there for example, and then you have the DRS straight. Then you have a slower sector with the last sector which then goes onto the long pit straight, which again is very, very long, should enable people to be close and overtake. That's why I think, when you were racing in Valencia it was very hard to follow and then when you did get to those long straights, or the couple of longer straights you had, you couldn't get close enough. So fingers crossed.

Q: (La Gazzetta dello Sport – Andrea Cremonesi) A question for Lewis and Nico. Tomorrow Mercedes can win the World Constructors' Championship. Does it change something in the process of the race or it doesn't matter in your mind this target?

LH: For me it doesn't change much in the race but it's quite a historic moment, it will be a historic moment for us and for me to be a part of this team and see its success and be a part of its success. And also, Mercedes-Benz, having never won a Constructors' Championship, it's going to be the first time so it's going to be historic for the team, very special moment when we get there.

NR: Yes it is. It's the big, one of the two big targets for the team since five years now. I've been there since day one and it's very, very exciting to think that we're so close to that now. That would be a really, really fantastic feat for us. I hope we manage to do it tomorrow and then maybe we're able to celebrate it a little bit.

Q: (Haoran Zhou – F1 Express) Two questions, one to Nico, how are you finding the DRS zone on the pit straight because it's a bit like in Shanghai, it's in the middle of the straight and the case in Shanghai is that the DRS isn't that powerful. How are you finding that in the simulation? And a question to Lewis is – or perhaps to both of you – you are in a chance to win for Mercedes again, one century later after the 1914 Grand Prix – it's not Formula One but Benz also won that. Is that in your target to win a hat-trick for Benz anyway, tomorrow.

LH: Where was that race?

Q: 1914. There was two Russian Grands Prix, one in 1913, one in 1914, both won by Benz cars. Not Mercedes-Benz back then.

NR: That's a nice statistic. Obviously it would be very special to do it 100 years after again. And it's always great to hear these legendary stories of the Silver Arrows, y'know? And then with the DRS, it's always calculated perfectly by the FIA to make sure that the overtaking is not too easy and not too difficult. They try to always get it right. So, I'm confident they've done a good job with it and they've got it exactly right.

LH: I already kind of said it but it's special to... it shows to Russia that Mercedes is the best. So hopefully tomorrow we'll stamp that onto the first grand prix here in Russia.

Saturday report

Lewis Hamilton once again topped the timesheets for Mercedes by a comfortable margin on Saturday morning in Sochi, in a relatively calm session that saw strong showings from Nico Rosberg and Valtteri Bottas as Kevin Magnussen brought out the red flags with a gearbox failure that led to a

five-place grid penalty for the Dane.

When the pit lane opened for the start of qualifying in Sochi it was to balmy and cloudless skies, with a track temperature of a moderate 31 degrees. It was Romain Grosjean who was the first man to put a time on the boards, his 1m46.361s effort nearly eight seconds slower than the benchmark set by Hamilton in FP3.

It was left to the Mercedes pair to log the first of the truly representative times in Q1, with Rosberg leading the way with a 1m39.292s lap, nearly a second faster than Hamilton's 1m40.061s first attempt. McLaren saw both drivers strong in the early runs, but for any Mercedes-powered car to drop out in Q1 at this power-heavy circuit would be a great surprise.

Both Ferrari drivers were outside the 107 percent time of 1m46.242s with their first laps, but later efforts saw both Fernando Alonso and Kimi Raikkonen safe from that humiliation, with Alonso in temporary third place with a 1m50.544s.

Felipe Massa appeared to struggle in the later stages of Q1, locking up at seemingly every corner as he attempted to break through the 107 percent barrier, his progress hampered yet further by a fuel pressure problem. Pastor Maldonado hung on till the final minutes of Q1 before leaving the garage for what would be the first of two attempts at flying laps.

Maldonado's first effort saw him in P17, while Massa's attempted recovery pushed the Venezuelan down to P18, the South American pair joined in the dropout zone by Max Chilton and the Caterham pair. A last ditch attempt didn't help, with Massa out-paced by Marcus Ericsson and ending the session in P18.

After Massa's shock departure from Q1 - while Ericsson was within a tenth of making it through to Q2 - it was Sergio Perez who was first to put a time on the board in Q2, although the Mexican was quickly dethroned by a host of other Mercedes-powered cars, from Jenson Button to Magnussen, Rosberg, and Hamilton, who was top of the sheets at the Q2 mid-point with a 1m38.338s lap.

In the dropout zone with five minutes left on the clock were Kimi Raikkonen, Adrian Sutil, Esteban Gutierrez, Sebastian Vettel, Romain Grosjean, and Alonso, although the latter man was on a flyer and on course to save his skin. Which he did, crossing the line in P7-worthy 1m39.925s effort, pushing Nico Hulkenberg into the danger zone.

Raikkonen responded with a fast lap of his own, eighth on the timesheets with a 1m40.005s lap and pushing Jean-Eric Vergne out of the top ten. With times changing constantly in the closing minutes Vettel struggled to improve enough to break into the top ten, moving up from P15 to P14 before being dropped back to P15th as others found the pace that was eluding the quadruple champion.

A late improvement from Vettel wasn't good enough, with the Red Bull driver only managing eleventh on the grid. Joining him in the dropout zone were Hulkenberg, Perez, Gutierrez, Sutil, and Grosjean.

First to cross the line in Q3 was Bottas, but his time was truly unrepresentative 1m46s effort. Daniel Ricciardo was the first of the quick-ish laps with a 1m40.076s lap, while Hamilton crossed the line in a relatively slow 1m39.980s when the car's capabilities are taken into account; the Briton was quickly outpaced by Rosberg with a 1m38.946s lap, and Bottas' second attempt, 1m39.162s.

Button, Alonso, and Kvyat all crossed the line faster than Hamilton, who responded with a purple first sector and subsequent provisional pole with a 1m38.647s lap. Rosberg also improved, but only by 0.05s, as engineers began telling their drivers that track conditions were slowing.

The last minute saw all but Ricciardo out on track, with Hamilton reasserting his claim to pole with a 1m38.513s effort, 0.2s faster than Rosberg, but with a charging Bottas gaining fast until the Finn ran wide just before the line, scuppering his lap and ending in P3.

Provisional grid

1. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1m38.513s
2. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1m38.713s
3. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1m38.920s
4. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1m39.121s
5. Daniil Kvyat (Toro Rosso) 1m39.277s
6. Daniel Ricciardo (Red Bull) 1m39.635s
7. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1m39.709s
8. Kimi Raikkonen (Ferrari) 1m39.771s
9. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1m40.020s
10. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1m40.052s

11. Kevin Magnussen (McLaren) 1m39.629s ***
12. Sergio Perez (Force India) 1m40.163s
13. Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) 1m40.536s
14. Adrian Sutil (Sauber) 1m40.984s
15. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1m41.397s
16. Marcus Ericsson (Caterham) 1m42.648s

17. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1m40.058s **
18. Felipe Massa (Williams) 1m43.064s
19. Kamui Kobayashi (Caterham) 1m43.166s
20. Max Chilton (Marussia) 1m43.649s ****
21. Pastor Maldonado (Lotus) 1m43.205s *

* Pastor Maldonado qualified in P20, but will start the race from P20 as he takes one place out of his remaining five-place grid drop following his use of an extra power unit component in Suzuka but regained a place with Chilton's later penalty.

** Nico Hulkenberg qualified in P12, but will start the race from P17 following a five-place grid penalty for an unscheduled gearbox change.

*** Kevin Magnussen qualified in P6, but will start the race from P11 following a five-place grid penalty for an unscheduled gearbox change.

**** Max Chilton qualified in P21 and was promoted to P20 with Maldonado's penalty, but will start the race from P21 following his own five-place grid penalty for an unscheduled gearbox change.

Friday press conference

It was the turn of the team principals to face the media on Friday evening in Sochi, and as was the case with the drivers' conference on Thursday, the key subject on the minds of most was Jules Bianchi.

Present were Eric Boullier (McLaren), Christian Horner (Red Bull), Monisha Kaltenborn (Sauber), Graeme Lowdon (Marussia), Marco Mattiacci (Ferrari), and Franz Tost (Toro Rosso).

Q: Graeme, thanks for standing in for John Booth who is still in Japan. Is there anything you would like to tell us?

Graeme LOWDON: It's been an incredibly difficult week for Formula One but it's been an incredibly difficult week for our team. As you know, my team-mate Jules Bianchi had a terrible accident in Suzuka. He's in hospital there. He's in a critical condition and the thoughts of everybody in the team, and I know much wider than that, are with Jules at this moment and also with his family. It has been a really difficult time for the team, but I have to say we have been helped enormously by the Formula One family. I think it would have been really difficult for us to get through this week without the help of some very key people. I'd like to personally thank Marco Mattiacci for his support and kindness, not just in his role at Ferrari, but personally as well. He was at the hospital immediately afterwards and I know provided an awful lot of comfort to those that were there. The Ferrari team also arranged for Professor Alessandro Frati to be present and I know that gave an awful lot of comfort to us, to the people that were there at the hospital and the family. So from our team to the Ferrari team we really want to offer a lot of thanks, it really made a difference. Also at the hospital was Professor Gérard Saillant from the FIA and I think we have to thank Jean Todt for arranging that. I think that was extremely helpful as well and certainly provided support to us. I know Jules is very close with his management team - Alessandro Bravi and Nicolas Todt - and I think they did an exceptional job looking after their driver. It's been a very, very difficult time but it's also been a time that has reminded us of just how much support there is for people within this sport, looking at the wider picture and the fans. Jules is an exceptional Formula One driver but he is also an exceptional human being. I don't know a single person who doesn't like him. You wouldn't wish that accident on anybody. Certainly Jules has so many friends that it has really hit home very hard to a lot of people. Our priority from this point onwards is obviously to Jules and his family and we want to provide them with the maximum amount of support at what is really a very, very difficult time. From our point of view both myself and John Booth, and as you mentioned John is the team principal and the team principal is the most important person in the team and he has remained in Japan to offer what support he can. None of us are medical people - we can't help in that area - but we can provide another form of support, which we hope helps at a really difficult time. From a team point of view we want to thank everyone who has provided support, especially the fans.

Q: Thank you very much, Graeme, thank you. In fact, I'd like to ask all of you for your feelings and thoughts on last weekend. Marco, as you've obviously been a great support to Graeme and the Marussia team perhaps you would start?

Marco MATTIACCI: It has been and it still is an extremely painful week for all of us on Formula One, but specifically for all of us at Ferrari, because Jules is a Ferrari driver, he's part of the Ferrari family and he is one of us. So we are extremely in pain at the moment. We have been trying to stay as close as we can to the family and we will keep doing this. To go to this weekend, we do it with a lot of pain but we are here to race, having Jules in our hearts. That's, at the moment, what I have to say.

Q: Eric?

Eric BOULLIER: It has been an extremely painful week. Someone from the F1 community got injured and on top of that he's French and I'm French so I have known him for a long time, so I'm very sensitive about what happened and followed it very closely. All in McLaren we are very concerned and we pray for him and I think all our thoughts today are with him and his family, which I think are gathered around him now.

Q: Monisha?

Monisha KALTENBORN: For all of us it's been emotionally a very difficult week. Particular regarding Jules, we've known him also for quite a while. It's simply these kind of tragic incidents that really get you out of balance and you just can't go to business as usual and our thoughts, our prayers are all with him and it'll take a while until you really can realise what's happened. We spoke also to Adrian about the situation and it's also very tough for him - standing right there. So it's not easy.

Q: Franz?

Franz TOST: Yeah, the team is still shocked about everything, because Jules was many times with us, he is a very close friend of Jean-Eric Vergne and of course it's a very difficult time and our thoughts are with Jules and the family and I hope that he recovers.

Q: And Christian?

Christian HORNER: Yeah, at times like this everything else becomes unimportant. Even though we are competitors on track when somebody gets injured the immediate priority has to go to the wellbeing of that individual. It was a shocking accident. One could say he was unlucky or not, that's irrelevant at the end of the day. I have to say I know the effect it has had within our team with our drivers. I can only imagine... or I can't even begin to imagine what Graeme and John have had to deal with this week. When you have a team-mate in as serious difficult as Jules appears to be in it's very tough. I think the support that everybody had offered through Marussia, through Ferrari, to the family and close friends and relatives of Jules has been absolutely first rate. Obviously our thoughts and prayers are with him and hopefully for there to be some positive news in the coming days.

Q: Graeme it must have been a difficult decision to decide to even run one car here?

GL: It was a difficult decision. The main thing we wanted to do was to do something useful and supportive as much as we can for Jules and for Jules' family - that was our primary objective. Also we're lying ninth in the FIA World Championship at the moment and that's a very important position for us and we're largely in that position because of Jules and therefore... you know he's a racing driver and he would want us to do the best we can. We thought that the right thing to do was to come here, take part in the event but as a mark of support to Jules and as a mark of respect to his mum and dad and to Jules' family we would withdraw the second car. It's fully scrutineered, it's there, it's ready to go, it's in the garage. It's got Jules' race number on it. We found that was something that we could do. Also it's been useful for the people in our team as well. They want to do an expression of support for Jules so I hope people understand what we've done and why we've done it and even if it makes a small difference it makes a difference in the right place. I have to say as well we did seek opinion from a lot of people to ensure we made the right decision. On a personal note I cannot speak to highly of the support that our team and myself have had from Bernie Ecclestone. Right from the accident occurring... in these situations, which are incredibly difficult, it's incredibly reassuring to know that people care and if I could sum up the support we've had from Bernie, it's that he cares. That has been extremely valuable and extremely helpful.

Q: Turning to this weekend, can I ask the rest of you for your and your drivers' impressions of the Sochi Autodrom circuit, with particular emphasis on the Russian drivers when we come to Sauber and Toro Rosso?

MM: Looking to what recently happened in FP2, we were quite surprised by the dynamics of the circuit and the reaction of our car. We have definitely seen which tyre got longer in order to work properly and again it's a circuit where the power unit is very important as is the traction. Overall, very impressed by the infrastructure, by the facilities but again, tomorrow we're going to have a very interesting qualifying because, looking to the tyre that gets a little bit longer, I would say longer than expected to work, so tomorrow will see something interesting, and as well, on Sunday. But again, point number one for us now we're here is Jules, so that can be considered important but at the same time very much to what is happening to our team at the moment.

EB: Well, I came here three years ago for an F1 demo and I was absolutely astonished last night when I came to see how it had changed. They have clearly built amazing facilities and all the complex around, from the Olympics Games and the F1 is absolutely amazing. It's true that, as Marco said, we can't maybe enjoy it as much as it deserves because obviously part of our head is maybe busy thinking of what happened last week but we have to give credit to the promoter and the organisers of the Grand Prix. The facilities and the track and everything is absolutely outstanding.

CH: It's good to be here, it's a good circuit, probably a few too less corners for our liking but I think what's been created here is fantastic. I think the paddock has a great atmosphere. I've got the feeling that it's the kind of circuit that's going to produce good racing and from what we've seen today, I

think tyre degradation looks like it's going to be pretty low so it's going to be an interesting Sunday.

MK: Sergey did a good job today. It's been nearly half a year since he sat in the car when he did his super licence in Bahrain so what was interesting to see was how he actually could adjust to the car and he built up his performance very steadily throughout the session so we're actually quite happy and satisfied with the work he did.

FT: I must say thank you very much to Putin and to Bernie Ecclestone that they realised that we have a race here in Russia because the Russian market is very important for the future, although we know there are currently some political sanctions but earlier or later they will be stopped. Russia is a country for the future, therefore I think it's very important to be here. Congratulation also for this fantastic facility and for this beautiful infrastructure. Daniil Kvyat is quite happy with the track, he likes it, he was also fast today. I think we have a good possibility here to be with him in Qualifying Three and to score points. I am expecting that we will have interesting race.

Q: (Vladimir Rogovets – Sb Belarus Segondnya) My question to all participants: I remember how much you were asked about participation in the Grand Prix of Russia. Today you are here, I think it's very good for Formula One but you can see the situation is completely different than what you told some of my colleagues. What do you think: why would the mass media make a very negative image of Russia? Who and why is used?

MM: It's a question to the wrong audience. We are team principals, not media moguls so what this theme that the press or someone else takes, to be honest, is not my job or our job to reply. I think we're here at a very difficult moment, trying to put in place a decent race. That's it. About the media spin, I couldn't care less.

Q: (Andrea Cremonesi, La Gazzetta dello Sport) A question for Graeme. We would like to know what you find analysing the telemetry of the car so you can explain to us what happened exactly before the accident because we couldn't see anything about it.

GL: I can't really go into the detail. I think something as important as this accident requires looking at thoroughly. One of the great things about Formula One cars is there's an incredible amount of data available to allow us to analyse things and learn things. I think in an accident like this, there is very little point looking backwards. It's very easy to have the benefit of hindsight. It's so much more important and valuable to look forwards. I think there's an awful lot of information to be looked at. We have some very, very clever people. There's an awful lot of working groups in the FIA and I'm sure there's an awful lot that can be looked at and learned. I think that's really the key thing.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) Question to Christian. Yesterday it was confirmed that Mercedes will now be supplying Lotus. That means that Renault, your engine supplier, will only be supplying three teams next year: yourselves, your sister team Toro Rosso and Caterham – which is supplied with rear end technology by Red Bull Technologies in any event. Does this mean the Renault Formula One operation will become more and more Red Bull-centric? Do you see that as positive, or do you see it from a perspective where Red Bull will have one less car and therefore less data etcetera?

CH: I think that, as far as Red Bull's concerned, it will make little difference but as far as Renault's concerned, it allows them to focus fully on one solution: on Red Bull Racing. Obviously there's some challenges ahead, it's been a disastrous year for Renault this year and they're working extremely hard to close that gap to the Mercedes. The problem is it's a little bit of a moving target because one minute we agree something then suddenly people can't remember what they've agreed and they change their mind, so we've got a bit going on at the moment. Obviously Renault are working extremely hard to narrow that gap to Mercedes, as I'm sure Ferrari are and Honda will be when they enter the sport. But, as we can see from the performance over the last few weeks, it's still quite a gap to reduce and so a concentrated and focussed effort behind one team can only be a positive thing for Red Bull.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) The obvious follow-up question to what you've said Christian, but also to Marco. You're obviously, I assume, talking about the engine unfreeze and the development and progress on that. Where do we stand at the moment? Will it actually be unfrozen for next year or will this year's regulations be carried through.

CH: In Singapore the teams unanimously agreed on a position and then, I think, subsequently from that meeting, Mercedes changed their position. We've subsequently had a strategy meeting and it's been voted on a majority basis for that to go through to the Formula One Commission for in-season upgrades to be allowed. We'll see what the outcome of the Formula Commission vote is. FIA are in support, FOM are in support. Obviously the non-Mercedes teams are in support – so we'll see what that holds in approximately a month's time.

Q: Marco, anything to add to that?

MM: Just the word: thinking of frozen engines – this is not Formula One. Y'know? To talk about frozen engines. So I agree with Christian, now today we have the majority of the votes to move ahead on the idea to unfreeze the engine. Let's see what's going to happen during the F1 Commission.

Q: (Elena Ivlieva – Russian Television Channel 1) I'd like to ask Monisha, tell me please, how do you feel in that's man's society, in this man's fairy tale?

MK: Looking around here, actually quite comfortable. Of course you see that it's not the typical area where women really work but it's changing, it's changing very rapidly, which is good. There were already a couple of women working in Formula One but you never really got to see them. It's not as bad as maybe people want to make it look like. Nobody is really nasty to women in there. You're just judged by what you do and what you achieve. So, I don't think being a woman is any hindrance to a woman here.

Q: (John Burns – New York Times) One of our colleagues here has raised the very difficult question of media approach to Russia – which I have to say does not reflect what I read in the Western press at all – on the basis of that observation I'd like to ask you what I hope is a slightly more modulated question about whether to race or not to race. It's quite plain that there were very heavy considerations in favour of racing, and anybody who suggests otherwise is not, to my mind, being very intelligent. At the same time, there is clearly a question 'does sport have a conscience?' Can people like you allow yourselves to engage in a debate? I'm not asking you to justify racing here or to join those like Ari Vatanen who felt otherwise but I would be interested in hearing one, or perhaps several of you, discuss the question of how you go about resolving these issues that inevitably arise – and not only here. We had the issue in Bahrain, the issue will arise again elsewhere. I'd be interested to know how this plays out in your mind. I'm not asking you to justify racing – I think that would be foolish – I'm just asking you to what degree you can afford to address these issues among yourselves or address them in front of us. I hope that's an intelligent way of approaching this...

CH: As I've said before, Formula One is a sport and we are all sporting teams. When we enter the World Championship, there's a calendar and obviously that calendar is put together by the promoter and approved by the FIA, controlled by Bernie Ecclestone and Jean Todt accordingly. I think that we have to place our faith in their judgement. We are sporting teams, competing in a sport that is popular throughout the world, and wherever we've raced, we've always been extremely well received and welcomed and we do our best to put on a good show. Sport can be a fantastic unifier and we see ourselves not in any way political, but purely as a sporting team, coming here to do the very best job that we possibly can.

FT: Nowadays the big events always are being criticised, whether it's the Olympic Games or the football World Cup or Formula One. There are always negative critics. I think it's simply unjustified. We should be concentrated to do our job. We do Formula One. We are responsible for entertainment. People want to see Sunday afternoon an interesting race and we are not – and we should not be – involved on the political side. Because once we are being taken into this corner, we can't race anywhere. Because there are problems in Arabia, there are problems maybe in Brazil, there are problems in Europe as well. There are problems in China, there are problems in Russia. To be honest, I don't care about this. The only thing I'm interested in is that we have a fast car. The rest is politics. We are here for doing sport, for bringing entertainment and that's it.

Q: (Haoran Zhou – FI Express) A question to Graeme. Can you tell us about Max's weekend so far? The best you can do trackside for Jules is perhaps to put on a good performance and maintain ninth place in the Constructors' Championship. Tell us about Max's weekend so far.

GL: You're right. Max has got a tough job actually this weekend. We try to build our teams around drivers and it's normal for a driver to have a teammate to push against and to learn from and to race against and for the team to act in that way. It's also just a normal feel, y'know, as you go in the garage or anything else like that. So we recognize that we've made a situation for Max where he has a lot of extra things to think about – but we hope that as well we'll try to defend our position in the championship. Max knows how important that is and I think – well I know – he wants to

demonstrate himself support for the work that the team's done and that Jules has done as well. Of course the whole focus of the team for us this weekend is Max. It's been said before, our job is racing. We've got a race to do and we've got a championship to take part in. I know Max is very focused on that and I know he's very, very keen to play his role within the team. Hopefully we'll have a good race weekend.

Q: (Manuel Franco Peral - Diario AS) For Franz Tost. Any news about your second driver for next year? Obviously Carlos Sainz is an option for Toro Rosso.

FT: There are also other drivers. We have Jean-Eric Vergne, which is an experienced driver, we have Carlos Sainz Jr which is currently leading the 3.5litre Renault championship, then we have Pierre Gasly, we have [Alex] Lynn. Fortunately Red Bull has a lot of very fast, high skilled drivers in the driver pool and within the next weeks, Red Bull will decide who will get this seat.

Q: (Silvia Renée Arias - Parabras Magazine) I would like to know if, after the accident, did the team managers meet, for talking about safety - or do you expect to meet? Is it necessary or not?

GL: That happens in the normal course of business for all the right reasons I think. We shouldn't be complacent enough to wait for an accident to discuss things and the way the sport works. I know that everybody sees us every one or two weeks racing against each other but, as Christian's quite rightly said, there's a huge amount of work that goes on between the teams in a cooperative fashion. We all want the same things in the sport and there's a lot that happens behind the scenes and there are forums for this kind of thing to take place and for learning to happen. Everyone's concerned when they see something like this but there's a shared goal amongst everybody in Formula One to improve things all the time.

Q: (Arianna Ravelli - Corriere Della Sera) Question to Mattiacci. What will change for Ferrari and for you personally with [Sergio] Marchionne as president? And maybe if you think you will receive more support from the shareholders than before?

MM: Ferrari is a precious asset of the Group so has always received the utmost support from the Group and the shareholders, so it will be like this in the future as well. At the moment I don't see change.

Q: (Dieter Rencken - Racing Lines) Christian and Marco, returning back to the question of engine freezes and unfreezes, setting aside whether they are or aren't Formula One, you said that the Strategy Group had voted, then it was going to the Formula One Commission. Surely that requires unanimity for next year, or not?

CH: I think the process for change for next year - you know better than anyone, Dieter, having gone into the Commission - it does require unanimity for that to be implemented for next season.

Q: (Andrea Cremonesi - La Gazzetta dello Sport) A question for everybody: we talked a lot last week about the necessity to have the safety car on the track when there is a tractor on the track? What is your personal opinion: do you feel that you just have to change the procedure about the safety car in this case, and for Mr Mattiacci, how long do we have to wait until we have some more updates about the drive line-up for next year please?

MM: On the first topic, these two things are quite challenging but anyway... On the first topic, I think there is an investigation going on, to understand exactly what happened. I think it would be a mistake to start to give today suggestions to reason with if? What? I think what I can say is that in the last 20 years, how the FIA dramatically improved circuit safety and I think with the utmost attention in making sure that we will have all the utmost understanding for that, so what kind of measures for sure will be taken to avoid it in the future. But to start now, to guess what could be done or what could be improved, I don't think we have enough elements to make that kind of suggestion.

Q: Regarding your driver line-up?

MM: I don't have any update, any news, any announcement to be made.

Q: Any knowledge of when we might hear?

MM: I don't have any news, any update, any announcement to be made.

Q: Does anyone have any further comment on safety cars?

FT: First of all, Charlie Whiting and his team have done a really good job in Suzuka with the safety car and generally to run this race under these really difficult circumstances. The accident will be analysed, it has to be found out why the accident happened because it's not normal that a car which comes off the track goes under a recovery vehicle and lifts it up. It means there must be a tremendous speed behind this, as to why this happened, because there were double waved yellow (flags). And the next point is that maybe what we could do in the short term is if there is a double waved yellow, that the drivers have to go with reduced speed of course but with the pit limiter and then they are all with a very slow speed then they have all the same speed. That means they have no advantage and disadvantage and I think what we also should take into consideration that the recovery vehicle would be mounted with a skirt around it so that it's not possible for a car if it spins off to slide below such vehicle. The rest we will see. I think tomorrow there is a team managers' meeting where they will all sit together and they will discuss what could be done in the future to prevent such accidents.

Friday report

Nico Rosberg was the first man to top the timesheets at the end of a session at Sochi Autodrom, home of the nascent Russian Grand Prix. Rosberg ended FP1 top of the pops by the narrowest of margins, heading Mercedes teammate Lewis Hamilton by 0.065s on Friday morning. Hamilton took his turn at the top of the timesheets in FP2, the only man to lap in the 1m39s.

Giving chase to the Mercedes pair in FP1 was Jenson Button, who was two-tenths down on the Mercedes pair, while Fernando Alonso was fourth and in the middle of a McLaren sandwich, three-tenths ahead of fifth-placed Kevin Magnussen.

As is always the case with a brand new circuit - only one other motorsport event has been held at the track - grip levels were fairly shocking, and the drivers did a lot of sliding around as they familiarised themselves with a circuit whose grandiose architecture doesn't disguise its similarities with the Valencia Street Circuit.

Local hero Daniil Kvyat was seventh on the timesheets at his home grand prix, eight-tenths slower than the leading Mercedes pair, while a late quick lap from Sauber reserve Sergey Sirotkin - who took over Esteban Gutierrez' car for the morning - put the Russian racer four-tenths behind Adrian Sutil, having spent much of the session lapping 1.5s slower than the full-time race driver.

Only 21 cars took part in FP1, as Marussia took the decision to leave Jules Bianchi's built and scrutineered car in the garage bay all weekend as a mark of respect, rather than hand over the wheel to one of their reserve drivers.

Hamilton was the faster of the Mercedes pair by a significant margin in FP2, with his best effort of a 1m39.630s lap nearly a second faster than Rosberg's P4-worthy best effort of 1m40.542s in a lap lengthened by driver error. Separating the two were an impressive Kevin Magnussen and the ever-reliable Alonso.

The afternoon's running saw drivers the length of the grid continue to struggle for grip as the track continued to rubber in, but it was Kamui Kobayashi and Gutierrez who suffered the most, both men having handed over their cars to reserve drivers in the morning session, making their

afternoons more exploratory than successful.

With only a few minutes left on the clock at the end of the session, Daniel Ricciardo brought out the red flags with what appeared to be an engine component failure of sorts, and certainly involved an RB10 left stranded on track, smoking at the rear.

While the vehicle was recovered quickly, there were only three minutes left on the clock when the session was restarted. Despite the short window, most runners attempted a final fast timed lap, although the rate of improvement was negligible.

FPI times (unofficial)

1. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1m42.311s [29 laps]
2. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1m42.376s [25 laps]
3. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1m42.507s [28 laps]
4. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1m42.720s [27 laps]
5. Kevin Magnussen (McLaren) 1m43.026s [28 laps]
6. Sergio Perez (Force India) 1m43.129s [26 laps]
7. Daniil Kvyat (Toro Rosso) 1m43.164s [29 laps]
8. Kimi Raikkonen (Ferrari) 1m43.212s [23 laps]
9. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1m43.327s [24 laps]
10. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1m43.542s [9 laps]
11. Felipe Massa (Williams) 1m43.741s [22 laps]
12. Daniel Ricciardo (Red Bull) 1m43.510s [25 laps]
13. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1m43.976s [21 laps]
14. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1m44.506s [30 laps]
15. Adrian Sutil (Sauber) 1m44.625s [26 laps]
16. Pastor Maldonado (Lotus) 1m44.876s [26 laps]
17. Sergey Sirotkin (Sauber) 1m45.032s [22 laps]
18. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1m45.190s [25 laps]
19. Roberto Merhi (Caterham) 1m46.782s [18 laps]
20. Marcus Ericsson (Caterham) 1m46.922s [18 laps]
21. Max Chilton (Marussia) 1m47.284s [26 laps]

FP2 times (unofficial)

1. Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes) 1m39.630s [27 laps]
2. Kevin Magnussen (McLaren) 1m40.494s [32 laps]
3. Fernando Alonso (Ferrari) 1m40.504s [32 laps]
4. Nico Rosberg (Mercedes) 1m40.542s [30 laps]
5. Valtteri Bottas (Williams) 1m40.573s [33 laps]
6. Jenson Button (McLaren) 1m40.718s [32 laps]
7. Felipe Massa (Williams) 1m40.731s [30 laps]
8. Daniil Kvyat (Toro Rosso) 1m41.108s [32 laps]
9. Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull) 1m41.396s [30 laps]
10. Jean-Eric Vergne (Toro Rosso) 1m41.531s [33 laps]
11. Kimi Raikkonen (Ferrari) 1m41.630s [24 laps]
12. Nico Hulkenberg (Force India) 1m41.677s [27 laps]
13. Daniel Ricciardo (Red Bull) 1m42.061s [25 laps]
14. Sergio Perez (Force India) 1m42.090s [29 laps]
15. Adrian Sutil (Sauber) 1m42.233s [31 laps]
16. Romain Grosjean (Lotus) 1m42.892s [30 laps]
17. Pastor Maldonado (Lotus) 1m42.905s [33 laps]
18. Esteban Gutierrez (Sauber) 1m43.055s [33 laps]
19. Marcus Ericsson (Caterham) 1m44.135s [22 laps]
20. Max Chilton (Marussia) 1m44.530s [29 laps]
21. Kamui Kobayashi (Caterham) 1m44.952s [27 laps]

Thursday press conference

It was a subdued press conference that opened the Russian Grand Prix weekend on Thursday afternoon in Sochi, with all thoughts on Jules Bianchi.

Present were Fernando Alonso (Ferrari), Jenson Button (McLaren), Daniil Kvyat (Toro Rosso), Felipe Massa (Williams), Adrian Sutil (Sauber), and Sebastian Vettel (Red Bull).

Q: It's just five days since we were in Suzuka, I would just like to hear your views on the events of last weekend – starting with Fernando.

Fernando ALONSO: I think it was a very tough race. Obviously all of our thoughts are with Jules. All of our minds are there because we have huge respect for our work but when there are big accidents there are no words to describe – but you can feel. As I said, it was a tough weekend and right now we are here, a difficult weekend again. Emotionally very difficult. Ready to race, to race for him, being as professional as we can but definitely our minds, or my mind, is with him in this moment, praying for him.

Q: Adrian?

Adrian SUTIL: So hard to say in words. Of course, very shocking moment for everyone, for myself. Nothing really to say about anything. Probably everyone has seen it. It's just... we have to pray right now. This is all we can do. We can hope that we get some better news. It's just that we are now here in Sochi, a grey cloud over us but try to be professional enough, more professional and focus on the race weekend again and also good to get rid a little bit of this mood but still it affects everyone. My thoughts are the same. Pray for the best and race for him.

Q: Felipe?

Felipe MASSA: For me I think it was the worst race of my life. It's a really bad race, worse than the race of my accident – because I didn't remember. It was the worst race of my life. Yeah. It's so difficult to be everyday because I can just be thinking about him, thinking about Jules. It's a very difficult weekend for all of us. Maybe tomorrow it will get a little bit better because at least you are working, at least you have something to think about, some issue put inside your brain. Try to race and do the best we can for him, for his family. But anyway, it was the worse race of my life.

Q: Daniil?

Daniil KVIAT: Obviously it is a shock for me as well. Wouldn't expect to hear quite negative news after the race finished. All I can wish now is that we can hear better news, positive news about Jules. I really wish him to recover, it's the only thing that matters. Nothing like this has happened for a long time and we all hope, here in Formula One that the health to Jules. I'm thinking of him very often, like all of us. We're all united to support him. I run out of words so I stop here.

Q: Jenson?

Jenson BUTTON: I think, listening to everyone, I think we all echo the opinions of the guys sat here so far. It's a very horrible feeling knowing what one of your fellow drivers went through and is going through. I think the only thing to say, and the most important thing is that we wish him well and our thoughts are with him. I think we all feel the same in the Formula One world.

Q: You're a council member on the GPDA and so are you Sebastian. What lessons can be learned, do you think?

Sebastian VETTEL: I think first of all you need to see that it was an extremely difficult race for all of us. I think I join on what the other drivers said, in terms of how difficult, it is probably the most difficult race to digest so far. But I think difficult conditions, leaving a very, very small margin for error. Obviously for Jules at that time it was too small. On top of that, very unlucky circumstances led to a catastrophe really. I think at this stage, for of all, all of our thoughts are will Jules, with his family, and we wish him all the strength that we can send. About the accident, I think it is very difficult. Obviously there is a lot of stuff going on now but surely if something happens there is always the chance to learn something for next time and avoid these things happening. Also, you need to understand that the cars we race, the speeds we travel, yeah, accidents can happen. But obviously, as I said, extremely unlucky circumstances led to much more than the usual type of crash that you see when you lose control of the car.

Q: Daniil, we move on to this weekend. I suspect a very proud moment for you. Tell us your feelings when you come into your first home grand prix and our first Russian Grand Prix.

DK: Quite mixed feelings as you see here the atmosphere and all our thoughts are still about Japan. So, I think it will be like this for a while. Another side of course, it's my home grand prix. I'm pleased to see what I see here. Big structures, big track and I think around ten years ago, when I was starting my career, we couldn't have even dreamed about this. And not this thing becoming reality. So, obviously it's a special moment for me and the first time racing in Russia. In the end it's our work and we carry on doing what we've been doing for such a long time.

Q: For the rest of you, can I just have your general impressions of the country, if you wish to, and the circuit as well?

AS: It was a positive surprise, or a positive experience when I got here. Flew over Moscow but already went in there without problem. They really welcomed us into the country. I haven't seen so much – straight into the hotel, the hotel is very big but incredible what they've built around there. The infrastructure is really good, the track looks very modern and interesting to drive. I haven't even walked the circuit yet, I will do it after. Of course there is not so much information about the circuit for me and for our team because we have no simulator – so it will be the first time for us, driving on Friday morning. Exciting to have a new circuit, a new country on the calendar. Hopefully it will be a nice weekend with a lot of fans coming and making a good atmosphere. So yeah, pretty good so far. Looking forward to it.

Q: Felipe?

FM: I agree totally with Adrian. It was nice to be here, I think it is a nice circuit, the infrastructure is pretty good so yeah, I think what I've seen until now is pretty positive. I hope we can have a nice race for these guys, these fans. So yeah, tomorrow we'll have a better idea how is the track but it looks pretty OK, pretty interesting. Hope we can have a good weekend, good first weekend and first impression for all these Russian people and fans. Hope they enjoy the first race of Formula One here.

Q: Sebastian, what are your thoughts on the major factors needed around the circuit? I assume you've been around the circuit.

SV: Yeah, I have. Also I've been here a couple of weeks ago for promotional activity with Infiniti. I had the opportunity to take a car around and have a look at the track. I think it's a difficult one to find the right compromise. Obviously you have a lot of corners but also you do have a lot of long straights. Especially the start-finish straight is very long. You definitely need some speed down the straights but overall it looks like an interesting track. A lot of 90° corners, especially I think two and three will be an interesting challenge. Generally obviously it's a unique feeling to drive around in an Olympic Park. So, obviously as has been touched on before, a bit of a shadow going into the weekend due to the events last weekend but for sure it is very exciting to have the first Russian Grand Prix and great to be part of that very first grand prix here.

Q: Fernando?

FA: I share all the comments. I think it's always a nice feeling when you arrive into a new circuit because it's a new challenge. For everyone: for engineers, for drivers, for teams, etcetera. The other side, the feelings are there, especially for our team, which has been very close to Jules all the career, it's an especially tough weekend. We have to be professional, we have to be working in the best way, just to race for him because we need to show we are a strong team – but it's going to be tough.

Q: Jenson, your feelings about the circuit. Presumably you've driven it on the simulator, have you been around and had a look at it?

JB: Yeah, I've done a few laps on the simulator. I haven't walked around circuit yet, I'm going to do that in a couple of hours. I think we all look forward to a new challenge and this is definitely a new challenge. I think the most important thing this weekend in terms of the grand prix is that we put on a good show. It always is. The first year of a new circuit, hopefully we'll have full grandstands and a good fight out on the circuit. So that's what we're hoping for.

Q: (Ian Parkes – Press Association) Gentlemen, you're obviously all aware of the inherent risks of motor racing but partly that's why you love Formula One. Is there any part of you, going into this weekend, that makes you reconsider taking part in this sport after what happened on Sunday? That's for all drivers. Felipe, I can see that you're the most cut up about this. After your accident maybe you could start with this as well please?

FM: Well, for sure you think about it, but it doesn't mean that's the right thing to do. What I love to do is to race. What I love to do is to be competing. That's where I feel happiness. That's where I feel pleasure. We know that in what we're doing we have a risk in this sport, but I think it's what I like to do. It's where I really feel happy, it gives me motivations and give me some, yeah, happiness. Sometimes you think about it but then you're thinking more and you understand that this is my world, this is what I like to do.

Q: Sebastian?

SV: I think Felipe expressed it very well. We all share a common passion for racing; we all share a passion for competing. Obviously we are all very fortunate to find ourselves in Formula One racing the best and quickest cars in the world, which give the best excitement and probably the best satisfaction. But there is always some risk involved, which is, I think, always a part, or a great part, of the feeling why you feel so alive. I think if you have to make the decision, I'm fairly confident for us you'd always prefer to go racing.

Q: Fernando?

FA: Same.

Q: Jenson? Daniil?

DK: I agree with all the comments before mentioned. In my case I just started my career as well. Every sport is risky. You never wish anyone to get hurt, but these things happen. I completely share all the comments of the other guys.

Q: Adrian?

AS: Nothing to add.

Q: (Luis Fernando Ramos – Racing Magazine) A question to all drivers: just to clarify whether you are a GPDA member or not. But regardless of whether you are a member or not, how do you think the drivers can contribute to help F1 to learn the lessons of what happened last Sunday?

FM: Well, I'm not a member but I'm for sure trying to do everything I can trying to help on the safety because for me safety is the most important thing. I think this is not the right place to comment about any point, just comment about safety. Safety is what I care about.

Q: Sebastian?

SV: Well I think it's very difficult right now to give you the golden answer. As I said there were a lot of circumstances that probably led him to that type of accident. For sure, though, there is always something you can learn. I think for now we need to first of all digest what happened and then make the right conclusions. I think it would be wrong only a couple of days after, with all the events going on, with all the happenings we've had since Sunday, to come out with something that hasn't been thought through.

Q: Fernando?

FA: I don't really have anything to add. There is an investigation going on. We don't have all the details. We don't have all the information necessary to suggest any change. So we let the people work and whatever idea, whatever things come from the drivers' point of view we will share it.

Q: And are you a member of the GPDA?

FA: Yes.

Q: Jenson, your thoughts on this?

JB: I think everything's been said already. Obviously we work as hard as we can to help our... to help the GPDA and to help the safety of the drivers, as the FIA does as well. Obviously it will be talked about a lot over the next few weeks and months and we can always learn. There's always more to learn better ways to help our sport.

Q: Adrian?

AS: Yes, very similar opinion about it. I'm not a member yet but that might change. We have a new director now and some good ideas. Whatever we can do, I think all the drivers, we're together and we have the same thoughts: to make things better, especially for safety. It's something you can never learn enough. Development goes always on and research has to go on. We are living in a very modern world and improvement is done every day. The most important thing is to learn out of mistakes and make it better.

Q: Daniil?

DK: Yeah, I think of course in the next GPDA meetings we will have a talk about all that has happened. I think there can't be any rash decisions right now. They have to be progressive and calculated decisions to improve. But of course, like Sebastian mentioned, there was many different circumstances that are yet to be considered but we will be still talking about this for sure.

Q: (Haoran Zhou – F1 Express) A question to Adrian Sutil. Obviously being a witness you know, probably more than anyone else, what happened. I want to ask were you consulted, did the FIA ask you to consult your opinion or what you saw of the accident after the Japanese Grand Prix?

AS: Yes, just how much I could see. Of course I was standing there but I think the pictures and the video which was on the internet it was very clear what happened, so there's not really more I can say. I think we have to wait for the investigation there and there's nothing more I can right now to be honest.

Q: (Andrea Cremonesi – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Sorry Adrian if I continue on this matter because I think that for you it's quite hard and painful but we can see of course the beginning of the accident. What happened before he went off? Maybe you can give some more details if you are watching him? And for Sebastian, changing the matter, we know you split from Red Bull and we would like to know when you can announce the new team and why you wait for the announcement please?

AS: I was standing there and of course I was not expecting anyone to go off and when I realised that there was a car coming it was in the gravel already. I just saw the last seconds. I don't know what happened before. I can't really say. I was just a witness until when the fatal crash really happened. But I haven't seen what happened before. That's it.

SV: No update really. I hope I will be able to make an announcement soon and once the announcement is out I think you are probably clever enough to draw the conclusion why I had to wait.

Q: (John Burns – New York Times) One of you has spoken about there being a shadow, obviously as a result of last weekend's accident. A few weeks ago Ari Vartanen raised another shadow over this race over events occurring 300 miles to the north and northwest of here. I wonder whether any of you would like to comment on the question of politics and sport. Is it realistic to draw a wall between the two and say they shall never intersect or do you as individuals think about this, worry about it, wrestle with it and come to the conclusion, as you seem to have done in every case, to race notwithstanding?

JB: I think you know it's a very difficult question for any of us sat here to give you an answer to. I think the correct people to speak to would be the governing body and if you have to, speak to our team principals but us as drivers I don't think it's the correct question for us.

Q: (Ian Parkes – Press Association) Fernando, just to change tack completely to cycling. I believe the UCI have announced that your team won't be competing next year. Can you offer any explanation behind that? What's the situation going on with your team there?

FA: Well, I think two weeks ago we announced a partnership with Novo Investment from Qatar and they are in control of our next projects, which we are very excited [about]. For them it was not the right moment to create the team. We will have another, as I said, exciting project that will be announced maybe next week or maybe in 10 days' time and, yeah, follow their wishes and try to enjoy that part of cycling that I love so much.

Q: (Sylvia Arias – Parabras Argentina) Daniil, next year you are going to be in Red Bull. I would love to know your feeling about that. It's such a very important step forward for you.

DK: Obviously I've been told about it in Japan. I was very happy about it, very honoured. Joining Red Bull Racing next year means a lot. Obviously the name of the team says it all and we will do our best to fight for the highest position possible. So I think that's all.

Q: (Andrea Cremonesi – La Gazzetta dello Sport) We are talking about closed cockpits; I would like to know your feelings about this option?

FA: I probably tend to agree to at least check and try or test the idea. I think we are in 2014, we have the technology, we have aeroplanes, we have had many other samples that they use in a successful way so why not think about it? All the biggest accidents in motor sport over the last couple of years have been head injuries so it's probably one part where we are not at the top of safety. Even in my case, in 2012 at Spa, I could probably have died there in corner one if it had been 10 cms closer to my head. If the technology is there and available, and there is the possibility, I would not exclude it, for sure.

SV: Sort of a mixed feelings to be honest. If you look at Formula One cars since the beginning of Formula One and open-wheeled racing, I think it's one of the things that are very special about Formula One. On the other hand, as Fernando touched on, there's a lot of reasons why we should look into closed cockpits for the future. As I said, at this stage, after what happened, I don't think it's right to... I don't really have an opinion to be honest.

FM: I totally agree with what Fernando said, so I think it would be interesting to try, it would be interesting to work on that possibility. Definitely, for my accident it would have been perfect. Maybe for Jules, I don't know. But I think maybe it could have been interesting for so many different types of accident, including the one I had, but I totally agree with Fernando. I think it could be an option and we will see when we could try something or

see something to understand if it's positive or not, but I totally agree with him.

AS: I think definitely it would be worth a try to test it out. We don't know how it would be but I think these cars have been open for a long time in this category but maybe it has a future also with closing them. I think this is the category where things are tried to make it better and more modern and going in the right direction, so I think it's definitely worth a try and maybe it works. For sure, we have seen airplanes where it looks quite similar from the cockpit and there it's closed. If we can minimise a risk without losing anything, of course it's very interesting.

JB: It's a difficult one. As Seb said, there are positives obviously, in terms of the safety point of view but this is Formula One that's been open cockpit since the start of time so it's a very big change for the sport to make. Safety is something that, as I said, we can always improve on so I'm sure it will be looked at whether it is possible to change or not for the future.

DK: There are many sides to this decision if it will be taken. Like I said, I think now, when these kind of things happen, you have to take a little break and calculate everything, try everything and calculate what would be the best solution. Like everyone else said, why not but it has to be tried and has to be very well calculated.

Q: (Dieter Rencken – Racing Lines) Obviously race driving consists of managing risk to be the best of your ability, be it drivers' risks, sporting risk, mechanical and technical risk. Is there are such a thing as acceptable risk and where does that level lie? When would you decide something is unacceptable and when is it acceptable?

SV: I think our passports say that we are all old enough to make our own decisions in life and I think generally we all have a brain that we are allowed to use, so it's our conscious decision if we want to go racing or not. I think we expressed the love that we share for racing, for the thrill, managing the car on the limit etc. Obviously there's always the risk that something can go wrong. I think it lies in the nature of the sport, if you look at the speeds involved etc. I think we've come a long way in terms of safety if you look back and a lot of improvements have been made but I think if anyone is not happy, he's old enough to say no. Surely, I think we've been very fortunate that in our generation there have been crashes with limited outcome. Obviously last week reminded us all of how apparent the risk is and how quickly things can change but surely if you look at the type of accidents that we had in the last couple of years, how violent they looked and fortunately nearly nothing happened, shows that improvement has been made. Obviously that's a great feeling but you should never lose the respect, I think, for what you do.

FM: Well, I think over the last years, all these improvements that we had in Formula One was good, it was impressive. To be honest, we saw so many accidents when drivers just jumped from the car and nothing happened which was pretty impressive. I think that's what we need to fight for. We need to fight to have everything the most safe way around, so what happened last weekend was not exactly like that – it was a tractor on the track – and we cannot do anything when it's like that. I think it's two different things. I think we have good working to make the car safer all the time and this is going in the very good direction but in the normal situation around the track.

AS: I think it's clear for everyone that racing can be dangerous but I'm here because I'm aware of it and I like it. I'm here because I want to race and I know and I'm aware of the danger but that doesn't mean that I just accept it. Of course, we all try to make it better and make it more safe because we don't want to see this happening frequently. We've done – GPDA, Formula One – have done a great job in safety over the last years so it has been improved unbelievably but we can always make it better but yeah, still I'm sitting here and I will race because this is my passion and I want to do it and as soon as I feel different and I don't feel like that any more, I will stay at home, this is for sure.

DK: I agree with Adrian. We are here, we are racing and we know that the risks are still high, as we had the confirmation, unfortunately. The speeds are very high, over 300kph but we don't want to race at 100kph because it's not racing any more so on any circuit you cannot exaggerate but we always want to have maximum safety and this is what the GPDA, for example, is doing. And I think we have seen that the improvement has been huge but these kind of things, unfortunately, remind us that there is always something that can be improved.

JB: I think enough has already been said on this matter.

Q: (Carlos Miguel – La Gaceta) Fernando, in the last races you have had some problems in the car. Are you expecting to finish on the podium in the last races of this year?

FA: Well, I think it's our wish. We have some races to go now and the car is picking up the pace. We are becoming more and more competitive in the last events. We lost some opportunities but we will try our best in the remaining races, especially, as I said, now I think the team is quite in shock with Jules and we are all worrying for him but it's time to be united and to deliver a good result and that will also show him great respect so let's try this weekend.

Q: (Andrea Cremonesi – La Gazzetta dello Sport) Fernando, this is the last Grand Prix with Mr Montezemolo as president. I would like to ask you your feeling about it. Everything is overshadowed by Jules but this is also the fact.

FA: I think that president Montezemolo has been very successful in his career and has helped Ferrari in a big way, on the track, outside, as an industrial power. He's done many things for Ferrari so huge respect for his career there. I have a very close and good relationship with him so I'm wishing him the best for the future.

Q: (Andrea Cremonesi – La Gazzetta dello Sport) For everybody, Felipe said before that we have also to improve the environment around us. I think that more safety cars in circumstances like Sunday should be alright.

FA: As I said, there is an investigation going on at the moment. Once I was not on the track at that moment, so I cannot judge the conditions very precisely so I don't have an opinion.

SV: I think with hindsight I think it's always easy to say 'this could have been avoided, this should have been done.' I think there are definitely some lessons. I think everyone is obviously thinking about what we can improve and improve within a week's time. I think here we have a completely different circuit, completely different conditions so I think – as I said earlier and Felipe touched on – it was a very special accident with unique circumstances leading into a very bad outcome. But surely, if the answer is as easy as bring in the safety car then I don't think that's a big thing for people to do in the future. On the other hand, I don't believe the answer is as easy as that either.

Q: (Silvia Arias – Parabrasas) I would like to know if you've found the pit lane is wide enough here or do you think you're going to be very careful coming into the pits to change tyres during the race?

SV: It's quite narrow, especially the pit entry looks very narrow. I don't know, I think in the first place they had a lot of space to build the track so sometimes you wonder why some areas like the pit lane didn't get a bit bigger.

JB: It fits a car, so that's a start. We'll go from there.

FM: Looks a bit tight but we will see tomorrow.
