

Press Conference - Thursday

DRIVERS:

Jenson BUTTON (Honda),
David COULTHARD (Red Bull),
Lewis HAMILTON (McLaren Mercedes)

PRESS CONFERENCE

Q: David, give us the background to your decision to retire?

David COULTHARD: There is not one morning you wake up if you are looking for a date, but I have had a growing feeling that this year is the right time to make it my last year in F1. I am enjoying very much the challenge and the racing even though I had a few incidents at the beginning of the year. The thought process was there before then. I am still competitive with the machinery I have got. After 15 years I am clearly not going to battle for a World Championship and am unlikely to win another grand prix unless something remarkable happens this year. I feel fulfilled in the role I have played at Red Bull. I took that job a few years and I have helped the team grow and I have seen the team move forward and be taken seriously I believe in the paddock, not that they weren't taken seriously before. But people didn't know what to expect from Red Bull. I just think it is a good time. I will be 38 next year and nothing lasts forever. I have enjoyed my racing and now is the right time.

Q: Has it been a difficult decision to make?

DC: Not really, no. I have always had a fairly realistic view on the career of a sportsman, how long it may last and the opportunities that are there for you. I feel fulfilled in the opportunities I have had. I won't be looking back thinking if only, if only I had had a World Championship winning car. I did have a world championship winning car. I just didn't win it. But I won a number of grands prix and had a lot of fun along the way. As I just explained the journey I started with Red Bull will continue but not as a grand prix driver and that is something which I am entirely comfortable with and I am looking forward to the remaining races.

Q: Do you think it will be difficult to keep up the motivation for the remaining races?

DC: No. If I thought that I would be saying today that I would be stepping to one side. That is the other good thing about making the decision in that I have the motivation. I am enjoying the racing. I would hate to find myself in a situation where I wake up and think I do not want to go racing today. I am contracted to the season. I have seen it happen to other people I have been close to the sport who have been in that situation. It may be something that never happens, but I just don't want to find myself in that situation. After 15 seasons I think that's enough. The sport is in good hands with the other younger British drivers, so October in Brazil that will be it.

Q: And do you have any plans or are you open to offers apart from Red Bull?

DC: I will have a test development, consultant role with Red Bull Racing which will enable me to have an interest in F1 and the paddock. I will look at the other opportunities that might be there when the time is appropriate. For nice, emotional reasons I wanted to wait until Silverstone to make the announcement and now that it's out, I can just get on with the racing. I hope we have a good weekend and that Red Bull can score some points. Maybe there can be a British winner and maybe we can all go home and think that was a good weekend for the sport.

Q: Jenson, what are your feelings about David retiring?

Jenson BUTTON: In a way for sure I am disappointed. If you look at David's career he has achieved a lot and a lot more that most drivers will ever achieve in their F1 career. I have also always got on well with DC since 2000. We have been pretty good friends around the paddock but also away from the circuit. I will miss him at the races for sure but I'm also happy for him that he has made the decision to do something else next year. It is nice when you can make that decision yourself and find something else that can take up your time. Obviously, he has a beautiful fiancée to look after also.

Q: You spoke recently about how sure you are that Honda can provide you with a winning car. How long do you think it will be?

JB: It is not going to be this year for sure. Next year I can't say we are going to have a winning car. I can say we are going to make some very big improvements and obviously the regulation changes will make a big difference to all of us. It helps us get back what we have dropped behind. When you have one bad year in F1 you lose a lot of time and to get that back within one or two years is almost impossible. It is going to help us a lot with the rule changes. I know at the factory that we are doing everything we can as I am sure every other team is. But we are a more complete team than we have ever been. I think we have got a lot of very talented people in the right areas and they are all working together very well. I know we will make a much better car next season, but it is what other people do. We really cannot see the future and see what other people can achieve. But I am happy with the way things are going. I am in a happy place at the moment.

Q: What sort of changes have you seen in the team in the last few months?

JB: I think a lot of it is the way of working and obviously the technical leadership of Ross (Brawn – team principal) has made a big difference and making sure that people within the team working in their own areas do everything they can but also working as a team, not having the mechanical, aerodynamical side, all the different areas doing their work individually but bringing everything together. The atmosphere is pretty electric within Honda at the moment. We are very excited about the future. I know it is easy to say when you are having a bad season but a lot has changed in the team from last year and for sure it needed to. Things are moving in the right way and we will definitely see the results in the future.

Q: Any improvements for this race?

JB: We have got a few improvements. There is a different front wing – front and nose which is definitely better plus a few other improvements. Last week's test was a pretty positive test. I am happy with the car and the way it feels, but that mid-pack is so competitive. If you don't get the balance perfect every race weekend, if you don't get the maximum out of the car, you are not going to challenge for points and you are not challenge the middle group. That's the position we are in, but it just means we have to give it our all this weekend and get out heads down and concentrate on the important things.

Q: Lewis, you have been so busy these last 10 days. How have you managed to stay focussed and how have you managed to cope?

Lewis HAMILTON: I don't see that I have been any busier than perhaps last year. For sure I had a lot of commitments which you are contracted to. But a lot of events you do, you do actually get quite a bit of energy from. For example the Abbey National event I did last Friday. I went there and obviously there were a few kids from Great Ormond Street. On days like that you really enjoy it. I have had time at the weekend to get some rest and focus on my training. Through the whole time I have not lost focus. My mind has always been on preparing for the next race. You just have to make sure that every bit of time you try to maximise it.

Q: How do you approach this race after the two non-scores in the last race?

LH: I am approaching it as I approach every race. I am not coming here and expecting to win and to blow everyone away. We have worked very hard and the test was really good last week. We come here with a strong feeling in the team and a strong package. We would love to get some good results both me and Heikki. That would be a good starting point for the next 10 races.

Q: How much of a difference will last week's test make for you compared to last year when you didn't test here?

LH: I think it made quite a big difference. Last year I came here and I had the car, but you don't have that much time on the Friday to get the right setting. I tried last year but the car was terrible the next day and I was very fortunate to get the car around on my qualifying lap and put it on pole. But this year we are in a much stronger position having done the test. I know what I want from the car and having the test has given me the opportunity to get it into the right ball park. Knowing this circuit you do the test and the track is one thing. Tomorrow will be slightly different but at least we have a better starting point.

Q: At the Reebok launch the other day you were quoted as saying you thought you were fitter than Jenson. Is that the case?

LH: I've noticed that Jenson has a bit of a belly and so... I'm only joking! I was just trying to be positive.

JB: They're called muscles.

DC: Place your bets and go win the fight.

LH: Well, you've just done some event recently. What was that?

JB: It was a triathlon.

LH: Yeah, I'm not sure whether I could do a triathlon, so I'm not going to say that I could beat him at that,

but generally I work my arse off... you work your arse off to be fitter than me, and you've got to believe that you're fitter than me and the same way the other way.

JB: I do believe...

LH: Yeah, so, what I think...

JB: I must admit, I do believe.

LH: It would be good to have a challenge.

JB: I'm sure we can work something out there. If you don't like triathlons... The good thing is that you've got three different activities.

DC: Run a lap of the track.

JB: Exactly, we could try different things. I've got a triathlon on July 27th if you're interested.

LH: Where's your strongest point?

JB: Umm, all of them! And yours? We could do it for charity, I'm sure, as well. Yeah?

LH: Yeah? Well, shall we get this...

JB: We'll get DC in there as well.

LH: Yeah, get DC as well.

DC: I'll be the referee.

LH: You can be the bottle-holder.

JB: Yeah, exactly, yeah.

Q: So I think we've got the answer there: DC is going to be the referee and you two are going to do Bath, is that right?

LH: I'm not putting myself into it, I don't know. I'll probably be working or doing something else.

DC: He's throwing down a man challenge, you can't turn down a man challenge.

LH: We'll see, we'll see. We'll talk about it personally afterwards.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Ian Stafford – The Mail on Sunday) The first question is: is this going to happen or not, guys? Come on! Yes or no?

LH: Well, me, I'm a competitor, so I'm for one to say yes, but I've got people behind me who may...

JB: What if I say £10,000 to the charity of your choice if you beat me? What do you think?

LH: Are you trying to steer me off this championship or what?

JB: It's the only thing I can be competitive in at the moment. Think about it.

LH: Yeah, I will.

Q: (Tomas Richter – TV Nova) Maybe a different kind of question: we are almost at the middle of the season, at the end of this race, yet we don't know who will be the championship leader. Can we think that this year it is a much closer and better championship than it was last year? For all of you.

DC: I think he was asking if it is a better championship than last year. It's certainly closer, I think, than last year, so I think that answers the question. There's a lot more going on, it seems to be a lot more open which is good for the sport, good for all of you and good for the fans. I think it's an exciting season so far.

LH: He's just answered it really. It is a lot closer this year and it's great to see that there are a lot more teams competing for the title, as compared to last year especially and it's great for the fans, it's great for us, it makes it tougher for everyone thus competing, but that's what it's all about.

JB: I don't think there's anything left to say. It's been a very competitive start to the year which is great to see, and it's also nice to see another team challenging for victory, obviously in Canada, so it's good to have three teams fighting it out.

Q: (James Allen – ITV) David, there's two ways of retiring, as far as I can see. There's the one where the fire goes out and you don't ever want to drive a car again and there's the other one where there's always that kind of lingering feeling that you wish you could jump in a car, like Nigel (Mansell) for example. Which camp do you think you're in and might you do, as part of this Red Bull thing, might you do a sort of Michael Schumacher-type jump in the car from time to time and get a baseline and work on it like he does?

DC: Yeah, absolutely. Part of the thought and the plan is to drive the car from time to time. I was a test driver for three years before I started racing, so I've been involved behind the wheel of Formula One cars for many, many years and the guys I tested for were Nigel (Mansell), Senna and Prost, so they were great teachers. I have an energy and enthusiasm for driving the cars, so it's entirely logical, in my mind, to do that from time to time and to support Mark and whoever the other race driver will be. It's not like I've run out of enthusiasm or energy, and as far as I know, Nigel still hasn't retired, so I wouldn't say that I won't race something again in the future, but my goal was always to race at the pinnacle of motor sport and to my mind, until someone shows me otherwise, that was Formula One, and anything else I would do after this would be for a different motivation. I'm not saying this isn't fun, but it was a serious commitment and something that you think of every minute of the day and if I was to race something else, I don't think I would want to put that level of energy and commitment into it. But we'll see.

Q: (Ian Parkes – The Press Association) Lewis, can we just get your thoughts on DC's retirement? I don't think you've been asked yet.

LH: No, I haven't. Well, I'm not going to say I'm disappointed. I'd say I'm sad to see him go. I've known David for quite a long time. I remember our discussions before I even got to Formula One. I think I was probably still in karting when I first started to speak to David and he was giving me advice. Do you remember that one time in Sardinia? On your catamaran?

DC: It was... well, not really. You need to remind me.

JB: I've heard some stories of David in Sardinia as well! Would it be the same one?

DC: Distracted, when I was on my boat and my mind was somewhere else!

JH: It's going to be a shame to see him go because he's always been one of the coolest characters in the pit lane and, as you can see, after such a long period of time, he's still here, pushing very hard. He's had a great finish in Red Bull recently and has been one to push Red Bull to where they are today. For me, he's an inspiration for all of us drivers here and he's such a good example. But for sure, as he said, he's going to stay around, so this won't be the last time we see him. I just wish him all the best for the future with his lovely fiancée. As Jenson said, she is lovely. I did try to take her from you but with no... there was no way.

Q: (Dan Knutson – National Speed Sport News) Lewis, compared to a year ago, the media is maybe not quite so kind to you. How have you been dealing with that?

LH: It's not a problem. You guys have a job, we have a job and for sure the best way to deal with it is to keep on performing well. As long as I'm performing well, there's going to be good things said about me. And for sure, when I make mistakes, I expect you to write negative things. We work together, you have a job as do we, but we've just got to work together. It's not really a problem.

Q: (Alan Baldwin – Reuters) Lewis, there was a quote from an FIA spokesman in one of the papers this morning about the super-licence issue, saying that drivers who live in tax havens should maybe pay 15 percent of their incomes as a flat rate instead of the points system. What do you think of that?

LH: I'm not going to tell you what I think of that!

DC: I will. I'll tell you what I think of that. I think you people have got to understand the taxation system. Even if you're a non-resident in the UK, we still pay a percentage of our salaries to race at the British Grand Prix, so my contribution to the UK tax system is still considerably more than any of my family members who have got good jobs and who look after themselves. And I don't use all the facilities in the UK. I had this years ago, when I moved to Monaco, people making comments when they don't know what the real situation is. Our lifestyle choice is a lifestyle choice – everyone's free to make that and I think it's wrong of people to have a dig at someone else who's having perceived financial success and choosing to live in a country that suits his needs at that time.

LH: That's a great answer.

Q: (Ian Parkes – The Press Association) Lewis, if you were to compete in a triathlon with Jenson, are you pretty adept at all three of the events?

LH: So, there's swimming, cycling and running. How far do you have to go? What is it? Fill me in, fill me in.

JB: 1.5 kms swim, 40 kms bike and a 10 kms run.

LH: That's not too bad.

JB: You've got three weeks to practise.

LH: That's not too bad. I was just checking my calendar, so I wasn't being rude. I was trying to see whether I'm busy that day and unfortunately I don't think I am. No, honestly, the biggest incentive is, if I do beat you, then you've got some money for a charity which is great. However, you do have an advantage as you've already done one, and I already know that by doing one you're better the next time. But man, I'm up for it, I'm up for it.

JB: But then again, you have the advantage in a racing car at the moment, you're in a better car so... It's

pretty even.

LH: OK, let's do it. It's a date.

Q: (Bob McKenzie – The Daily Express) David, any regrets at this point, anything you look back on and wish that hadn't happened or you might have done better or whatever?

DC: Well, I could go back through lots of different things and think I could have done that better, but that's not the way life works, is it? You make your choices at the time and going back to the '98 thing in Melbourne, that was obviously something disappointing because it was misunderstood, a team instruction, and then obviously changing places with Mika, that was obviously a fairly defining moment. But there you go, that's the journey of life. I don't think it would be half as fun if everything was perfect all the time. It's how you deal with those little hiccups and mistakes along the way which gives colour to one's life. I presume for you it was running round Silverstone naked!

Q: (Ian Stafford – The Mail on Sunday) Question for DC, going back on the main thrust of today's press conference, the triathlon. DC, you've always made a point of age is not an issue with you over the years, you've always slightly bridled when people have suggested that you're getting on it, so on that basis, why don't you make it a threesome?

DC: Well, as you well know when I took you cycling and you puked up half way up the hill...

Q: (Ian Stafford – The Mail on Sunday) I mean a threesome in the triathlon, David, by the way...

DC: No, but I'm talking about the training that you did. I'm 37-years old, for xxx's sake. These are young kids.

Q: (Ian Stafford – The Mail on Sunday) So, age is now an issue, at last.

DC: Well, when I told you that I was 33, I'll go along and hold the water bottles. I won't enter. I think it's a great challenge between the two of them. I think it's fantastic that Lewis has taken the challenge in front of you all and it would only muddy the waters if I was there beating the two of them. You'd have.... asking me to come back, so...