

GRAND PRIX OF JAPAN

FRIDAY PRESS CONFERENCE - 12 OCTOBER 2001

DRIVERS: Mika HAKKINEN (McLAREN), Heinz-Harald FRENTZEN (PROST) and Alex YOONG (MINARDI). **TEAM PERSONNEL:** Ron DENNIS (McLAREN), Eddie JORDAN (JORDAN) and Craig POLLOCK (BAR).

Q: Eddie, you said that you're hoping to find a job for Jean Alesi; have you any idea what you will do with him?

Heinz-Harald FRENTZEN: First it's me, huh? First you have to find a job for me.

Eddie JORDAN: It's a bit of a delicate situation up here. I'm not speaking to Heinz, I'm only speaking to his lawyers at the moment. We were very conveniently sat beside each other on the plane coming out here, so that was quite nice. Jean, Jean I think, as we already know, has done 201 Grands Prix (*Ed's note: 200 at this stage*). I personally feel he's a fantastic guy. I think Formula One will lose if he doesn't continue in some form. He will be an asset to this business and if I can give him a position that gives him his integrity and continues in the style and the position that he's able to do a meaningful job then I will be very happy to do so, but it's very early. We're all dreaming at this stage. Look, we've had a very difficult last couple of months and I'll be very pleased when it's over then I shall have time to think about what we can do.

Q: On the subject of your new man, Takuma Sato, some people might see it as an easy way of holding on to your Honda engine supply.

EJ: Pretty original comment, I must say. Maybe you should ask Craig the same thing. Of course it had absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with it! They're not linked in any way. I can't understand the analogy, it doesn't even come into consideration. They are completely different. Craig spent a lot of money preparing him, which is very nice and thank you Craig, giving him his testing, and we have him next year and that's the way it works. It's got nothing to do with Honda, it's got nothing to do with engine manufacturers, he's there on talent.

Q: So did you look at Ryo Fukuda and Toshihiro Kaneishi, both of whom also won European Formula Three championships this year?

EJ: Yes, but I think the turning point was very clear. The turning point beyond all doubt was Zandvoort where the Masters is considered to be the Blue Riband event in Formula Three and from pole position he won by 12, 14 seconds. It was an absolutely outstanding performance. You have to get things in the right perspective. The drivers that you mentioned are very very good and it's a real recommendation to the people in Japan that these young drivers are finally believing that they've got to come to the hard cut-and-thrust effort of what goes on in Europe to be real successful in Formula One, because that's where all Formula One drivers come from, and I commend them for taking the change in pattern. But Sato has won 12 races, don't forget that. It's more than anyone else has done, OK, rules have slightly changed and there are double-header races and stuff like that, but what he has achieved and more especially, what he did in Craig's car is highly commendable and he will be a big asset to Formula One I'm sure.

Q: Ron, next year for the first time, you have a relatively inexperienced driver. How is that going to affect the team and will it mean that David Coulthard gets Number One status?

Ron DENNIS: Starting with the last part of your question, no, David won't have Number One status. We don't have Number One status and never have had. We will provide them with equal equipment and the outcome will be the outcome. As regards Kimi's experience, he's had a season in Formula One. It's pretty obvious that he's a talent. How good he's going to be, we will just have to wait and see. I think he's pretty good already. He races very well and that's the important thing. He's going to have the opportunity to show what he can do,

hopefully in a competitive car, but I'm not worried about his inexperience. He's got a good head on his shoulders.

Q: Everyone wants to know what happens if Mika does come back, because you will have an embarrassment of riches if he does.

RD: Well I was glancing at an article about what was supposed to have happened between Mika and I today. I don't know who wrote it because it is one of the few pieces that doesn't have someone's name on it. He's sat in front of me. I think the article went along the lines that I had convinced Mika that the best thing for him was to have a year off. That's complete rubbish. Mika opened the dialogue with me in Monte Carlo. It stayed between he and I for quite a long time, and then broadened to Keke and some of the other management of the company. We constructed the plan together. It also says that to keep Mika happy in this year off, he's being paid \$3m. I can assure you he's not, and I'm sure he will assure that he's not. It just goes on and on and on. What we said at the time was the truth. He's just tired, wants a year off. Has he lost his motivation to race? No. Does he enjoy racing? Yes. What better example of that than the last Grand Prix, putting aside how this weekend goes. As regards what happens if... It would be a nice problem to have, and if we have that problem, we will take the appropriate decision at the time. We have the ability to take any decision that we want, so from a contractual point of view we have the ability to do anything we want, so we will just wait and see. Mika is adamant that he's coming back, and so would I be if I was in his shoes. I think it will be interesting to see if he's trying to get into the first Grand Prix, knocking the gates down and trying to get into a car, whether he's going to be on the beach in a year saying 'I'm not coming back', but right now he's totally committed to coming back, and we'd love to have the problem.

Q: Craig, we were talking about Takuma Sato. Why did you let him go?

Craig POLLOCK: Actually it wasn't a question of letting him go. The team believes in Sato as a driver. He's done a very very good job. We obviously have a contract with him until after this race. What we have done is we signed up two drivers in the month of August for next year. We had to do that because we had an option on Olivier that we had to take up at that time. We couldn't offer Sato a race seat and he had an opportunity to buy himself out of his contract which he's decided to do. So all I can say, is 'well done Eddie,' he's got a good driver on his hands and wish Sato all the best for the future and many sandtraps...

Q: Could this prejudice your Honda engine supply?

CP: I think Honda would be very stupid just looking at a driver and choosing the team that they want to go with in the future if they're going to go down to one team. But they haven't even said that they want to go down to one team. We have a contract until the end of next year with Honda, as I believe does Eddie, and I'm sure they will chose it on other merits, not just the driver. As you said, there are two other extremely good Japanese drivers out there, both won Formula Three championships so if it was just a driver, then there are other options.

Q: Alex, what have been your first impressions in your first two races?

Alex YOONG: I don't think we have enough time today to go through all the impressions. It's been everything I hoped it would be. I've enjoyed myself very much. There has been quite a lot of pressure from back home, being in a slightly unique position of being the first driver from south-east Asia. But the team has been great, they've supported me well and I think they've been happy with what I've done so far. It's been good, it's all been positive so far.

Q: Have there been huge expectations from home?

AY: In a way, yes. From back home, it's an education process. Although it's been there three year now, the whole industry of racing is quite new to Malaysia, so I'm just trying to educate them, to explain that I'm not going to go into Formula One and win races straight away. In a way, yes.

Q: Mika, any further thoughts about what you are going to do your sabbatical year? It has been suggested you might race for Keke in DTM?

Mika HAKKINEN: Like you all understand definitely what I'm planning to do next year is to just take it easy, and to experience the time with the family and to have a lot of good time with them and to say in one place for a long time and to get the feeling that when you wake up in the morning that you feel hungry to do something and is it going to be racing or something else? We have to wait and see. That's what's going to happen in the future. It's not going to be anything to do with racing DTM in Keke's team.

Q: How easy do you think it's going to be to get back into Formula One after a year off?

MH: There is definitely a couple of examples who have come into Formula One and they have done a tremendous job, so I see no problem at all in that. To be a member of Team McLaren is definitely going to be a great support and opportunities to test if I decide to come back.

Q: Heinz-Harald, how are you enjoying the Prost team, and are you feeling at home there?

Heinz-Harald FRENTZEN: It wasn't a question of looking for a new home. I was quite excited about the team. Before I made the decision to drive for the team I had a close look at all the aerodynamics and mechanics of the situation and also Ferrari has got some quite interesting things to offer and basically offer a good racing car. That was on paper, so when I joined the team, there were a few things... there was a lot of work but basically the people are very nice and they are very good to work with. I really have enjoyed it. It was hard work swapping teams mid-season. Normally you have a lot of time over the winter to adapt slowly to all circumstances but it had to go quick, but I have to say it was hard work but I do not regret it.

Q: What's the situation for next year? You've already sat in a mock-up of the car, I believe.

HHF: It's not decided yet. Alain is bringing up the package for next year. The financial situation is not officially announced yet, so it will take a little bit of time. It would be a great pleasure for me to drive for them next year, that's for sure, but we have to see and wait how we get things together.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: (Mike Doodson - Auto Action) For the three team managers: the world's economy seems to be in a big dip, we've had some cataclysmic other events which have affected things. I would like to know from each of the team managers whether they have felt any effect yet, whether they anticipate any effects, and what will be the consequences for motor racing and Formula One in particular?

CP: We have felt the effect. We've had sponsors we have been dealing with actually say that they are not going to come on board now because of it, even if they were small sponsors. I think every team really needs to reflect on what has happened because it is going to affect the whole of Formula One. I think it's going to be harder and harder to fill up the sponsorship books, and the teams should be getting together to discuss it.

EJ: I think exactly what Craig has said is true and it would be preposterous for us in this sport to think we are immune, that everyone else can cut budgets by 20, 30, 40, 50 per cent to make sure the tough times that are confronting us, and it's not just because of September 11, I think it's been on the cards for some time. The world is in recession and we are not recession-proof and unless we make and cut our cloth so suit was is required, we will suffer the penalties and one of the things that I remember and probably Craig luckily enough doesn't, was in the early nineties when I came to this sport there were 18 teams and in '93 or '94 there were nine or ten. We mustn't let history go amiss at this stage and go clear over our

heads. I think, with the greatest of respect, and Ron can answer this, I think there is immense responsibility on teams like McLaren, Williams and Ferrari, to guide us through this time because the people who will suffer least will be them because they are the successful ones, but if we want to have a strong, meaningful Formula One championship for years to come, we need to make prudent steps that encompass the crisis that we are about incur. That's where we come from. It's down to Ron and the boys.

RD: I think there are two issues. Both Craig and Eddie have already addressed the commercial issue. I think there wasn't much said going into the American Grand Prix by any of the teams but there was a lot of dialogue going between the teams. It was very difficult for the teams to go. It was not easy. We were having to make a commercial and moral judgement in a very difficult situation. I think the thing that made people feel much better about going was the fact that we received letters from the Governor of the State and also from the Mayor of Indianapolis, encouraging us to come and telling us that they wanted us there. I think many greater people than I have said so many eloquent things about what took place and of course, we were committed to Monza at that time. We had time to reflect on America. I think terrorism is designed to kill and maim but it's also designed to destroy the democratic society that most of us live in and therefore not going would have been giving in, I think, and actually helping them achieve their goals.

I think when we were there, we were all very surprised - you as well probably - at the warmth that all of the people gave us, not just the people at the circuit, the people in the hotels, the fans, they enjoyed the event, we did too, and it was a good feeling that I had, not just because of the race, but because of just everything. We had a good feeling coming away from it and we felt that we had put on a good race and that they enjoyed it.

Moving to the economy of Formula One, no one is immune - you're in business - no one is immune to what's happening. Share prices have gone through the floor, companies look immediately to their advertising budgets and that, ultimately, trickles into motor sport, and it does trickle. We tend to be last in and last out of any recession, and that's going to happen this time round. Whether all the teams will survive you will have to wait and see. The big teams are just as exposed to this as the smaller teams. We can see like Craig... we've got sponsors who were on the brink of commitment and have pulled back and are re-evaluating where and how to spend their money, what they have of it. So Formula One is going to be no different from any other business. It's going to be a tough time. Eddie's call for the larger teams to in some way contribute to the stabilising of the situation, to perhaps look at ways of reducing costs... The problem with Formula One, when you go down that path, and it's a path we have to go down, the teams traditionally spend the money they've got. The only way that we economise is that we are forced into economies. Whether we, all the teams, are genuinely prepared to cut their cloth and cut their budgets, I doubt it. They will spend what they've got, they always have and they always will - except for Eddie who sticks a lot in his pocket!

Q: (Joe Saward - Inside F1) **To follow up on that, we have a situation now where there is no testing restriction after January 1 and you are talking about going into a recession where there is no money. Why can the 12 teams not get together and organise that testing is restricted?**

RD: Well, first of all, the testing currently is as last year, and the reason that the testing is as last year is that there has been no proper process by which the sporting regulations have been changed. We need to formally change them. It needs to go through the Formula One Commission and then it needs to be voted on by the World Council, so theoretically, the correct regulatory process at the moment, hasn't been followed, but there is a desire by the teams to change things so strictly by the book, nothing has changed. Is there a desire to change? Yes. How severe the change should be, I think every team bar one wants to stop all testing the week preceding a Grand Prix. The fact is that is something with one signature from each team we could put into place. All teams want an August break. All teams have agreed to the break from mid-December to the end of the first week of January. So there is agreement. There's another meeting here and I hope, I sincerely hope that we will come to a common sense position and then that we will action that through the correct channels.

EJ: That's not altogether true, with respect to Ron, that it is actually confusing what he's just said, in my opinion, because he's saying that there are regulations in place for next year. There are absolutely none, it's a free-for-all. Let us all be aware of that, it's a free-for-all.

RD: Eddie, you're wrong.

EJ: I'm sorry, it's a free-for-all, in my opinion. I got the notice. In my view it's a free-for-all and unless the teams... we had a meeting recently, it's no secret, and the proposal was that we actually have three weeks more testing than we had this year. Now how can that be logical? It's beyond me, I'm sorry.

RD: You're wrong.

CP: Do I have to be the referee in this year?

EJ: Can you imagine Craig the adjudicator? Please Craig.

CP: I'll adjudicate. But I actually tend to agree with Ron on this one. As it stands today, the rule stands as is, so therefore there is a rule in place if the teams agree to adhere to that rule. It's if the teams don't agree to adhere to the rule, then there's a free-for-all.

Q: There was an announcement that testing...

RD: Well, strangely enough they didn't announce it in a way. If you look at it, it was not part of the findings of the World Council. It has not gone through the correct process. At the moment, the sporting regulations remain unchanged.

EJ: But rather than disagreeing, Joe (*Ed's note: Saward*) is right, it would be sensible and that's why I used carefully the word 'guidance', that what we need to see. That's why we look up to them, we need their assist... because they are the ones who can, as you rightly said, one team wants to test all the time and I don't see the logic in that right at this moment in time. But there has to be a reasonable and fair argument for that team to stand....

RD: Prior to the first of November, you do not need anything other than an 80 per cent vote to change the sporting regulations for next year.

EJ: And let's hope we will do it. But Ron is very mindful of this year and I have to say that he has been one of the big advocators in this to find a good solution.

Q: (Sophie Tutkovics - L'Equipe) **Mika, this weekend for us looks special because this is the last time we see you for a while but what about you, do you have special feelings this morning when you say in your car?**

MH: Well, definitely, every time when you sit in a Grand Prix car it's quite a special feeling but it is the last Grand Prix for me for a long time, maybe for ever, we don't know yet, I don't know myself yet to be honest, but that's what we have to wait and see. But I'm still focusing very hard on this weekend. I will try to make a best possible race for myself here and for the team, so I don't want to put my mind to start thinking other things. So probably after the weekend, I will find it easier to talk about what I'm really feeling.

Q: (Britta Weddige - Pole Position) **Can you compare your performance of your team this year compared to your main rival Ferrari? Secondly, which teams this year have surprised you in a positive way and which in a negative way?**

MH: I will start with the second question. It's definitely difficult to tell directly which team has done a good job in my opinion and it's difficult to say but I would say where Kimi has Nick has been, racing for Sauber this year, I think they have been really progressing all the way through the season. It's been interesting to see that.

And talking about Ferrari and McLaren, we have been in a team progressing the car all the time. If you saw at the last Grand Prix, and I believe in this Grand Prix too, the performance has definitely been raising, both from the chassis side and the engine side. It's difficult to

start criticising the team for what has been going wrong and what Ferrari had done right and what they have done wrong. I still, like here today, have enjoyed enormously the effort that the team has made since the last Grand Prix, to make new things for the car. That way, we can win. It's been really impressive, the work that they have done.

Q: (Stéphane Barbé - L'Equipe) **I would like to know if Mika had any influence on the team in choosing Kimi Raikkonen?**

MH: No, I didn't have any influence on the team to take Kimi. But Ron knows that obviously if they want to win, they have to get the Finn.

Q: (Mike Doodson - Auto Action) **In Tokyo on Tuesday, you talked about a re-structuring of your team. What does it involve?**

EJ: Well, a lot of things really. I haven't been happy with the last couple of years, the way we've gone ahead. It needs to re-look at everything. It was a pleasant thing, I was able to win a couple of races. As Ron will tell you, I only won one by merit but we did win some others by default - according to him. It's a very pleasant feeling, and I want to do it again and I need to do it quickly, and I think now with Honda it has helped us, but in the second year we really need to get our act together and by re-structuring - OK, it's a fancy word perhaps - but it means looking at all of the reason as to why we were successful in the past and why we are not now. I don't know if it can happen again, but I think Formula One needs other winners. There are three teams here which are equally committed to winning as anybody else and it's something that we should all strive for and this my way of going about trying to achieve that. There needs to be and there is a figurehead, my name is the name that's over the door so if I screw up then it's me who carries the can.