



**"I don't feel like one world title is a fair reflection of my ability"**

Lewis Hamilton on life at Mercedes, meeting the Pope, and the 2014 Formula 1 season ↻

# Lewis Hamilton has a bucket list on his phone.

He's constantly adding new things: experiences he wants to try, goals he wants to achieve. There's no particular order, he tells us, but we'd wager that if there were, winning a second Formula 1 world title would be top of the list.

It's hard to believe that it's been seven years since Hamilton first burst on to the F1 scene in that astonishing debut season in 2007. When he became the sport's youngest ever world champion in dramatic circumstances the following year, it seemed like there could only be one trajectory for the boy from a Stevenage council estate. The 29-year-old is the first to admit that his career hasn't gone quite as smoothly as he would have hoped since then. Ahead of last season, he took the bold decision to split with McLaren – the team that nurtured him from the age of 13 – and move to Mercedes.

Now Hamilton is one of the more experienced drivers on the grid. And, with F1 set for its biggest shake-up in decades, the Brit is well placed to break Red Bull and Sebastian Vettel's stranglehold. Hamilton took some time out from testing his new Mercedes in Bahrain to duck behind the team garage and talk to *Sport*.

**There has been a raft of changes to the regulations, but have the cars changed much inside the cockpit?**

"The only thing that's changed in the cockpit is the steering wheel. We have a bigger screen

this year – it has a lot more options. I've been asking the team if I could put some games on there. Yesterday, I was sitting in the cockpit for half an hour just waiting there while they were changing things and getting the car ready.

So I was asking: 'Can I play Playstation or something?' [Laughs]"

**Another big change is double points to be awarded at the last race of the season in Abu Dhabi. Had that been the case in 2008, you wouldn't have been world champion. What are your thoughts on it?**

"I read a comment from [Red Bull chief technical officer] Adrian Newey saying that it cheapens F1. I like reading other people's comments about it – some I agree with, some I don't. But do I think it's a good idea? Not particularly."

**What's the biggest change in terms of how the cars will handle?**

"The biggest change is downforce. This year, we don't have the blown diffuser. So, when you get on the power, you have a lot less downforce. And considering we've now got more power, it makes it a lot harder to get out of the corners."

**Word is Mercedes might be best equipped to take advantage of the new rules. Do you agree?**

"I think there are a number of teams – obviously Red Bull, McLaren, Ferrari – who have

the capacity to adapt quickly, and then there's us. I don't think we have the capacity to do it better than anyone else but we're definitely in that top group."

**McLaren have a lot of work to do after a terrible 2013. Did that vindicate your decision to leave the team and move to Mercedes at the start of last season?**

"I don't really feel like it vindicates it, but every sign that I see confirms to me that I made the right choice. I knew I'd made the right choice anyway, but there's just non-stop positive things that happened on this side that continuously showed me I was in the right place." 📍

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Mark Thompson/Getty Images

# Lewis Hamilton

**At the start of last year, you were insisting that it was about building for the future, and that you weren't expecting to be challenging. You managed one win and four podiums – were you surprised by how well it went?**

"The year went way better than I had ever imagined. But then, once you get into the season and realise where you actually are, your aspirations shift dramatically and you want to do more. But generally it was exceptional. To be able to go into a new team and hit the ground running and really have such a positive result was just fantastic, man, it really was."

**Last time we spoke, you said one of the reasons you moved to Mercedes was that you wanted to be more involved in decision making. Are you enjoying a more integral role in developing the car?**

"Well... when I was at McLaren I kind of had a role, but I would say that here I am listened to more. And that's really how the sport should be, because generally it doesn't matter how smart engineers are – and of course they're way smarter than us drivers will ever be. But at the end of the day, we're the ones that feel what the car actually feels like. Regardless of what it's theoretically meant to feel like, it's what we feel that counts. So the good thing here is that the team listens to us. There are no egos in the way of us winning the championship this season, which comforts me."

**You and Nico Rosberg were teammates in karting when you were much younger. What has it been like working with him again?**

"We were good friends when we were kids. That shifted a little bit when we went up the grades in different teams. And, you know, now that we're grown up... It's been very similar, except that we don't have the fun we used to have – but I still have that with my friends outside of racing."

**Why do you think that is? Is there more of a rivalry now that you have to beat each other out on track?**

"It's not that – it's just that we don't do the things that we used to do. When we were younger, we used to be out on motorbikes and camping and playing tricks and all these sort of things. We don't do those things much nowadays. He used to be into cars when he was younger; he's not into cars now – that's the kind of thing I mean. I'm crazy about cars. I'm always wanting to buy cars, and I ask Nico – he just has his company car and his little Vespa scooter!"

**Do you still have the same interests?**

"When me and Nico met, he lived in Monaco, and we went on holiday together. It blew me away. At his house he had all these dune buggies and toys that we got to ride, and that was just the happiest time of my life at that point. Since then, I just thought that if I ever became successful I would make sure that I'd get those toys as well. So as soon as I had some money, I got all those toys and I created my own version of what we had on those holidays."



**Was seeing all that wealth and success a real motivator for you to succeed?**

"No, I never found it motivating. I just always wanted to win. But obviously once I got there I realised... I'm a bit like Nico's dad [1982 F1 world champion Keke Rosberg], you know. Keke had it right – buying all the cars that he loved. He just enjoyed himself, which was really cool. I guess if I hadn't had that experience with Nico and Keke, I wouldn't have the fun that I do have."

**Did you have the opportunity to do much travelling over the winter break?**

"In the winter season, I don't actually travel anywhere. I take one trip out to Colorado and I stay there the whole time. I like to stop travelling, because all year all I do is travel. And so I like to be in one place and be in my own bed every day – you know, no planes, no airports. It's refreshing for the mind and it's a place to recharge my batteries."

**You managed to brave the snow and get to the Super Bowl while you were out there.**

"I'm actually really into a couple of American sports – but I'm really into NFL. I like rugby in the UK; I'm not a fan of football. I used to play *Madden* years ago. My mum was based in America, so I used to play the *Madden* game, and then I'd play it with my friends online when they were in the States – so I came to understand and watch it. And I'm a big fan of the NBA, so I go to watch the LA Lakers."

**You also took a trip to Rome recently, where you met the Pope. Is he a big F1 fan?**

"Oh, I don't know – I didn't speak to him, I just shook his hand. But it was a real privilege to have met him. And actually the coolest thing was to see his car – the Popemobile – it was a Mercedes."

**It must have been quite an odd experience. What's the most surreal moment you have ever had?**

"The most surreal thing that I experienced is having lunch with the Queen."

**"I'm crazy about cars. I'm always wanting to buy cars, and I ask Nico – he just has his company car and his little Vespa scooter!"**

**Was it just the two of you?**

[Laughing] "I won't go into all the details of it! But it was the most surreal thing: me, sitting there, chatting to the Queen."

**To get back to F1: this will be your eighth season in the sport, do you think one world title is a fair reflection of your ability?**

"No, I don't feel that it's a reflection of my ability. I think if you look at my past, before I got to Formula 1, that's a fair reflection. When you're in Formulas where all the cars are the same, then that's where you got to see it – but obviously in Formula 1 everyone has different cars, everyone has their ups and downs."

**Can we expect a world title run from you this season?**

"I believe that the team has done absolutely every single thing possible they can to get us into a fighting position, but the way Formula 1 is you just never know what's going to happen. The great thing about the sport is that it never fails to surprise us."

**If you could go back and speak to your old self, just before you started in F1, what would you say? What advice would you give a younger you?**

"I don't even know if I would go back and give myself advice... You know what I'd say? I'd say just make sure you enjoy it even more. Make sure you enjoy it and don't care about what other people think." ●

Amit Katwala