

In principal approval for 22nd race from the next year

Mercedes boss says teams have agreed to expand the calendar

FORMULA ONE

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

BUDAPEST

Formula One teams have given their approval in principal to an expanded 22-race calendar next year without any allowance for an additional power-unit, Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff has said.

Speaking after a teams' meeting with F1 chief executive Chase Carey at the Hungarian Grand Prix, Wolff was quoted on Sunday saying the 22-race plan with no extra engines – and therefore costs for the smaller customer teams – was supported.

“In a nutshell, we basically agreed to have a 22nd race,” said Wolff, as quoted by *Autosport* (www.autosport.com).

“We’ve got to let Liberty do their business and their business is to grow F1.

“If they are able to attract promoters, we’ve got to support them so, we shouldn’t change the technical regulations because we have an extra race. That was the debate we had.”

No extra components

Wolff added that an increase to the duration of the season and number of races should not be interpreted as a chance for more components to be used on the cars.

“It shouldn’t be seen as an opportunity to increase the number of components, but equally we’ve got to protect our people and all of us because it could get to a point where it’s not manageable any more with one single crew.

“That becomes a factor that needs a solution.”

Support from the Catalan government for the continuation of the Spanish Grand



Toto Wolff.

■ LARS BARON/GETTY IMAGES

Prix this week suggested an expansion of the existing 21-race calendar was inevitable.

The enlargement requires approval from the teams, a factor that precipitated the meeting on Saturday.

Double headers

The expansion may lead to an increase in the number of ‘double-headers’ formed of two successive race wee-

kends in a calendar due to a return of the Dutch Grand Prix and a Vietnam Grand Prix for the first time.

Wolff also said Mercedes was not considering promoting impressive young British rookie George Russell from Williams to the main factory team alongside Lewis Hamilton next season.

He has made clear that current driver Valtteri Bottas is under consideration to retain his seat, but that a final choice between him and highly-rated reserve driver Esteban Ocon is due to be made during the sport’s European summer break this August.

Russell on Saturday out-qualified his Williams teammate Robert Kubica by 1.3 seconds to take 15th place on the grid, the team’s best effort this year.

“I think you’ve got to consider that these guys come

into F1 at a very young age,” said Wolff. “And, yes, there are exceptions to the norm, such as Max Verstappen.”

Learn from mistakes

He said the 21-year-old Dutch tyro, who will start Sunday’s Hungarian Grand Prix from his maiden pole position, had benefited from being allowed to learn and make mistakes at both Toro Rosso and Red Bull.

“You’re not given the possibility to do that in a Mercedes because you’re being put in a car that is able to win races and championships, in a high-pressure environment.”

He said that putting Russell alongside “the best driver of his generation who has been with us for seven years”, referring to Hamilton, could go terribly wrong for him. “And I wouldn’t want to burn George.”