



PART 2: DRIVING WHAT'S NEXT: A CONVERSATION WITH JENSON BUTTON, ASTON MARTIN ARAMCO TEAM AMBASSADOR

Haslinda Amin 00:01

Hello. Just when you thought it couldn't get any more captivating on stage after Daniel Dae Kim, Milken decides to drop an F1 world champion on you.

[Applause]

Haslinda Amin 00:19

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Jenson Button.

Jenson Button 00:22

Hello. Good evening.

Haslinda Amin 00:26

For the uninitiated, Jenson Button is not just about horsepower, he's about staying power. Back in 2009, when his then team, Honda, decided to pull out of the championship just weeks before the season started, he and his teammates were left with no engine, with no funding, and it didn't look too well. As luck would have it, Brawn decided to pay a token of £1 to take over the company, but even then, the bettors were saying there was an 80-to-1 chance against Jenson Button in winning that championship. Well, guess what? He won. So, that is testimony—

[Applause]

Haslinda Amin 01:18

—to the grit, determination, and of course, he wins in style. So, Jenson Button, really good to have you with us.

Jenson Button 01:25

Great. I don't need to be here—

[Laughter]

Jenson Button 01:28

—I mean, you know so much.

Haslinda Amin 01:29

Actually, I could be your agent. It's true.

Jenson Button 01:31

Right? You know everything about my life.

[Laughter]

Haslinda Amin 01:34

The beauty of ChatGPT. And according to ChatGPT, I asked, "What does it take to be an F1 champion?" They said, "It takes the fitness of an Olympian, it takes the focus of a chess master, and also the speed of lightning." So, Jenson, what does it take—to be an F1 champion?

Jenson Button 01:58

I'm not sure. I feel bad saying it's all three of them. But that's pretty amazing if we were able to achieve all three of them. But a lot of dedication. First of all, natural ability. For example, someone like Max Verstappen, I raced against his mom in karting, and I raced against his dad in Formula 1. So, he was always going to be quick. But then it's how much work and effort you put in. I know from the age of eight, I was racing. My dad wasn't letting me drink sugary drinks. I ate a certain type of food to keep my weight down, because I'm tall. And I was doing fitness training at such a young age, and I had no idea what I was doing, but I was pretending I was doing fitness training. And it started really early on. And then it was dedication. I loved competing. That was what I loved. And we talked about it before; my dad bought me a go-kart when I was seven. I started racing when I was eight. And everything before I raced was nice. I liked driving the go-kart, but it wasn't as exciting as it should be. It was when I won my first race, which was my first race, there were only four karts. And standing on top of the podium, and I've got a bigger trophy than all the other kids. That was it, I was hooked. It was the competitive instinct kicked in. So, all the way through my career, it's been like that, whether it's fighting at the local go-kart track or fighting for a world championship in Formula 1. And it took me a long time to win a world championship in F1.

Haslinda Amin 03:34

113 races.

Jenson Button 03:36

That was probably when I won my first race. Yeah. And then 160, I think, before I won my world championship, my 10th year in Formula 1. And people were like: "How did you deal with that, not winning?" And it's like, well, you just have small targets the whole way through. Beat your teammate in qualifying as much as you can. Standing on the podium for the first time in 2004 was pretty awesome. Getting a fastest lap in a race. So, there are all these little things that, throughout your career, that excite you and you have a target of achieving, because if not, yeah, it's a sport where you lose a lot more than you win. Lewis Hamilton, the most decorated Formula 1 driver in history, he's

won 100-odd Grand Prix, and he's taken part in 400. So, you lose a lot in this sport, and I think it's such a mental game, and that's why it's so exciting.

Haslinda Amin 04:29

Has it been a low point? We talk about how it took 113 races before you won your first one, first race. Was there a low point when you thought—because I know, I remember reading that you were saying you are constantly finding a place, your place, in F1. So you weren't that sure about your place in F1.

Jenson Button 04:48

Well, sportsmen are actually very insecure. And I think a lot of it is because you lose more than you win. And you've been in the limelight your whole career. Since I was 20 years old, there's been a camera filming me do everything at a racetrack. So, you can't get away from that. You can't hide from it. So yes, there's a lot of pressure to perform. And for me, the most interesting year in my career in F1 was 2009, winning the world championship, but it wasn't all rosy. It wasn't just win the first race, win the last race, there's your world championship. The first six were amazing. First seven, sorry. First seven races were amazing. I won six of them. And then I didn't win a race for the rest of the season. And the car wasn't performing; I wasn't performing as well as I should. So, the emotions were really high and I struggled mentally, I really did. Because I put so much pressure on myself to perform, and I thought this might be the only opportunity I get in this sport to win a world championship. I think very different to someone like Kimi Antonelli, who's leading the world championship at the moment, and he's 20 years old. But I don't think he has that fear of it might not happen again, or the fear of pressure. I just think he's so young that he just goes racing and has fun. Whereas I was, at a point in my career, 10 years in, that I knew this was my moment and I put way too much pressure on myself to perform and it took my dad to actually pull me out of that, which was pretty special.

Haslinda Amin 06:26

You left F1 racing about 20 years ago?

Jenson Button 06:30

I'm not that old—10 years.

Haslinda Amin 06:34

10 years ago.

Jenson Button 06:34

Yeah.

Haslinda Amin 06:36

And you left competitive racing just last year. Is there anything you miss about racing?

Jenson Button 06:41

Yeah. No, I still race, just for fun now. I just don't get paid to do it, which is a shame. Costs me money, actually. But no, I retired from F1 in 2016. I did one race in 2017, and the reason why I did that was because Fernando Alonso, who was racing for McLaren at the time, he decided he wanted to go and race in the Indy 500 in America. So, I was still signed to the team, and they're like, "JB, you're racing in Monaco." So, I jumped in his car for Monaco, and as I was driving out the pit lane, he said—He came on the radio from America, and he's like, "JB, I hope you have fun today. Enjoy my car, but please look after it for me." And my immediate reaction, which is pretty disgusting, was,

"I'm going to pee in your seat." That's what came to mind. But, yeah, it wasn't a great race. That was the highlight of it. But there you go.

[Laughter]

Haslinda Amin 07:38

So quite an adrenaline junkie. I want to take you to Singapore, given the race over this weekend. Singapore was the first night race ever on the F1 calendar. What was that like?

Jenson Button 07:51

A shock, definitely. It was a learning curve for all of us, because it's a night race, but we don't have lights on our cars. So, the floodlights had to be all in the right direction and pointing at the track and not in your eyes through a certain corner. And there were some dark spots around the track initially in the first year. So, it was really difficult for your eyes to really focus on the light. In Monaco is the only place where we get darkness, really, in the tunnel. You come out and it's bright light. Whereas here, it was really difficult because the lights would be in your eyes in some corners. Other corners would be completely dark. So, it was really tough mentally to get in the groove. And also physically, I mean, it's so hot, so humid, no rest. And it's also one of the longest races because it's every Formula 1 race apart from Monaco is the same length of 300, I think it's 300 kilometers. And this was 300 kilometers. But the problem is, there was a lot of slow corners, so the average speed was lower than most tracks. So, it meant you were out there for two hours in the heat.

Haslinda Amin 08:59

They say it's a furnace in the cockpit—

Jenson Button 09:01

Yeah, it is a furnace—

Haslinda Amin 09:03

—about 3 kilos of water.

Jenson Button 09:05

Yeah. You do lose 3 kilos of weight. You have to put it back on, obviously, because it's unhealthy not to. But you see the drivers after the race, they fall out of the cars, basically, and some of them will be put on a drip after the race. It's so, so tough, and I think because you have both elements, the physical side and also the mental side, the stress that you have around Singapore.

Haslinda Amin 09:25

How do you stay focused in such an environment? What's the mindset?

Jenson Button 09:28

Preparation. A lot of preparation.

Haslinda Amin 09:31

And how do you do that?

Jenson Button 09:32

Well, fitness. We used to do a lot of training. I used to do a lot of cardiovascular. I had to because I was tall. I am tall. I weighed 70 kilos, and I'm six foot tall, so I'm 183 tall, so I'm super, super skinny, because they wanted to use that weight to move it around the car. So, I was really light. But I did a lot of fitness training. I did a lot of work in the heat. We used to put the bicycle in the sauna in the local gym, to really get me used to that humidity. And I think when your fitness level is high and you've also done all the preparation work; there's a lot less stress going through your body. You can relax, and then you're focusing on the most important thing, which is driving.

Haslinda Amin 10:16

We've had these night races some time now. Has anything changed? They used to call it the Wild Wild West kind of environment because it's so different from the other circuits. I'm just wondering, has it become better, meaner? We do get all those crashes in Singapore, too.

Jenson Button 10:33

Yeah. It's a street circuit. One little mistake and you're in the wall. Which is great. I think unforgiving tracks are awesome. I love Suzuka in Japan because it's fast-flowing, unforgiving. Those tracks are good, and I think they reward the drivers that build up to it, which I was always one of those guys. I wasn't the driver that went past the limit and then come back. I would always build up slowly. So, the street circuits were my kind of thing. I enjoyed them. This street circuit has improved over the years. It's been tweaked here and there, and I think really well. Every driver loves coming here.

Haslinda Amin 11:11

What do you get now that you didn't get before?

Jenson Button 11:15

Before there were a couple of corners where there were massive curbs, and it was easy to hit that curb, which would send the car into the barriers. It was down by the Fullerton, I think, the chicane. So that's changed. It's a bit more fast-flowing through there. So, I think there's a lot more mid- to high-speed corners now than there were before. It was all slow-speed before. So, it makes it even scarier for the drivers.

Haslinda Amin 11:41

Mm.

Jenson Button 11:41

Which is good.

Haslinda Amin 11:45

It is tough also because I think previously you had about 18 races, and now you have 24. What does that take? You're constantly traveling on the move. How does that impact your psyche as a driver?

Jenson Button 12:00

So much has changed in the sport since I raced. It was only 10 years ago, but a lot's changed. We used to have testing. So, we used to finish a Grand Prix, and then we'd go off somewhere in Spain normally, for three days of testing before we'd go on to the next race. Now they don't do any of that, so it's all in the simulator. It's all data-driven. Driving a simulator, which is basically the cockpit of the car, which is on different—sorry, on axes, so it spins

around, it gives you the feeling of G-force, and you've got this big screen. It's like a big Nintendo, basically. A lot more advanced. So, the drivers are spending days in there fine-tuning the vehicle before they get to the track. So, it's definitely changed a lot. I think for the drivers, the stress is very different to what it was for us. Physically, I think it was really demanding, the amount of time we spent in a race car. Now it's the mental strain of traveling around the world, getting on the time zone, trying to make sure that you're eating the right food at the right time, getting the right sleep, getting the right fitness in. And then you walk in the paddock, and you're everyone's, basically. So, there's a microphone over your head. There's cameras on you from the moment you walk into the moment you walk out of that paddock. So, a lot of pressure. You can't get away from it, so you've got to be on your best behavior most of the time.

Haslinda Amin 13:23

You talk about how it's data-driven now. There's cloud computing. How does it change the way you drive? Because I think previously from watching Senna and so on, there's so much intuition. There's so much risk still. It's a different ballgame now. Is it as exciting, less exciting? As a driver, how do you look at it?

Jenson Button 13:44

There's a lot less driving and a lot more work with the crash helmet off. So basically, the drivers are close to being engineers, mechanical engineers now, because they need to understand the systems. And all your prep work is really important before you even step in the car. We've always said with racing cars, especially the last few years, "You only mess it up when you get to the racetrack." It leaves the factory and everything is perfect. They've done all the tests, all of the simulations. You've driven a simulator. The car's been put through all the simulations for setup, strategy. And you get to the track, and then the human gets involved, and that's where you mess it up. But that's what sport's all about, right? It's about the mental side of it, and that's what makes it exciting. But, as long as you do your homework and you understand what the car can do for you and what the car needs, you're in a great place, and that gives you so much more confidence than the other drivers if they're not doing their homework.

Haslinda Amin 14:44

And of course, it is about innovation. There's so much innovation there. What's the biggest one? What's the key one for you?

Jenson Button 14:50

Oh, I mean, there's so many.

Haslinda Amin 14:51

It's constant.

Jenson Button 14:52

Yeah. It's efficiency, I guess, in terms of the workforce, but also what we achieve with the cars. We still race with a combustion engine, which is a very small combustion engine, which produces an unbelievable amount of horsepower, and uses very minimal fuel. So, we're pushing the boundaries all the time, and that's what makes the sport exciting. The only thing I would like to see is a slight simplification so that the fans understand what is going on behind the scenes. We've had a couple of moments this year where things have happened that shouldn't have happened, and everyone's like, "Well, what's that?" Difficult to understand why Malaysia last weekend, all the cars were driving around at 30 kilometers an hour at the start of the race. And they didn't understand either. So, it's very complex, and sometimes there's a glitch and it goes wrong. But, we're always pushing, and I think that's why the sport is so exciting. I really love how we're so data-driven, but then the human element is the one at the end of the day that gets the job done.

Haslinda Amin 15:59

It's much safer, though, right? Because of innovation.

Jenson Button 16:02

It is. Cars are a lot safer, which is good. When you look back to the '70s, every other race, somebody was getting killed. And it's down to the governing body, the FIA, down to the Grand Prix Drivers Association of really pushing safety, whether it's the racetracks being safer, the cars, the driver's crash helmet, the fireproof overalls. There's so much that's improved over the years. And, you still get freak accidents. We're still driving at 230 miles an hour on some tracks. So it happens, but it's few and far between.

Haslinda Amin 16:42

But it's really a different sport now because there's a cap of \$135 million. Does that change the way the sport is received and perceived by the drivers and the engineers? There was a cap of \$135 million, right?

Jenson Button 16:57

Yeah, I think it's a bit more now. I think it's \$155, I think. But it's still a lot of money, isn't it? \$155 million for two racing cars to drive on racetracks around the world. But everything is basically built in-house. There's 1,000-odd people in most teams working on developing this car from scratch. They don't carry anything over from the previous year. The power unit externally will be the same, internally very different. The gearbox, a lot of the teams build their own gearboxes. Carbon fiber gearboxes, the internals are extreme, the technology. So yeah, it's amazing that they can do it on the budget they have. I remember when teams were spending \$500, \$600 million, and that was 15 years ago. So, it is impressive, and really, you've had to streamline the business and make sure that everyone is basically pulling their weight.

Haslinda Amin 18:00

A show of hands, who's watched *Drive to Survive*? Be truthful now. Binge-watch? Yes. That has changed F1 in terms of the fan base and your reach and the popularity of F1.

Jenson Button 18:18

Yes, it has. And I think a big part—

Haslinda Amin 18:21

Do you wish you were racing now?

Jenson Button 18:22

—No. I liked when I was racing. We could get away with more. But it's amazing for the sport. I really think we all need to be thankful for the TV show. It's brought a lot more eyes to the sport, and I think the reason for it is it's the human element. You see the individuals. You see behind the scenes. You see the drivers' personalities, their mindset, what they stand for, and you're not just choosing your driver on the color of their crash helmet or whether they're winning races. And I love that. The personalities are coming out, not just the drivers, team principals, mechanics. It's really good to see this sport grow, and it's not at the peak yet—it's still growing. So yeah, really, really proud of where Formula 1 is right now. And that's why we have so many great partners in Aston Martin F1 because where the sport is and what it brings to most companies. It's worldwide. It's like having 24 Super Bowls in one season. It's pretty awesome.

Haslinda Amin 19:36

But the base is now so different. It's more American. It's younger. The appeal is different because of *Drive to Survive*.

Jenson Button 19:45

Yeah.

Haslinda Amin 19:45

Would that be fair to say?

Jenson Button 19:46

Yeah. And I think it's 50 percent male and female now, which is not what it was when I was racing. And I think the average age when I was racing was mid-40s, which is what I am now. Even my fan base on social media is in their 30s now. So, it's amazing how the sport has changed. So, it's definitely for the better. It's good to see that we are getting young fans into this sport. They're excited by it and excited by the young, handsome racing drivers... that we have in F1 at the moment. But also, they're interested in their girlfriends and their wives. My wife said to me the other day, she said, "Why didn't you stay in Formula 1 for two or three more years?" "I could've got so many deals out of it." But it's true. They're almost as famous as the F1 drivers now.

Haslinda Amin 20:38

But the thing is, the psychology is also different. For you, if you had brought your girlfriend or your wife, you would have deemed being unserious about the sport.

Jenson Button 20:47

Yeah. It was frowned upon. My wife came to quite a few races in my last year in F1, and it was not a nice atmosphere for her. She didn't really enjoy it. Now it's different. She comes to a few races. She says, "Oh, this is amazing." It's so cool. It's a much younger atmosphere, a much happier, positive atmosphere. And, it's an exciting place to be. It really is.

Haslinda Amin 21:13

Where is the sport headed? There's so much talk about how a lot of the countries, especially in Asia, want more of it. They want to host it. Where is it headed? Could we be seeing perhaps 24 races with alternating locations? How are we looking at it?

Jenson Button 21:32

It's possible, and we are already seeing that in Europe with a few of the races. But I can't see the—well, there might be more races on the calendar. I would prefer that there weren't. And I think 24—

Haslinda Amin 21:45

But there could be two in Japan.

Jenson Button 21:47

—exactly.

Haslinda Amin 21:47

Would you love Japan?

Jenson Button 21:48

24 is a big number already. For the drivers, it's fine. They finish the race, they get on a private jet, and go home. But for the mechanics and everyone else that's working within the team, the pack-up is insane. They also don't leave the track and go on holiday. They go back to the factory and start working again. So, 24 races around the world is really, really tough. So, I wouldn't want to see any more. The people that are in F1 are obviously passionate about it because they wouldn't be doing it otherwise. It's so much time away from your family. So, I hope there aren't more races. I think one thing that I would like to see, sorry, two things. One is that they're not too technically advanced in terms of understanding how the power unit's working, because it's very complicated at the moment. I know that we're pushing technology, but also there needs to be some understanding for the fans, really, to get behind it. And the other one is still opening the sport up to more fans. I feel that it's always been very closed off, especially the paddock. It's grown in terms—

Haslinda Amin 22:55

It's also getting too expensive in terms of tickets.

Jenson Button 22:58

—yeah. Even just getting in the door. So, the problem is it is in such a good place, the sport, that all the countries are raising prices on grandstand tickets and what have you. So, I think there maybe should be a limit on what you can do.

Haslinda Amin 23:13

Since we're talking money, let's talk about sponsorship. When you take a look, you have a lot of FinTech companies now sponsoring the F1. How's that working out? As long as money comes in, it doesn't really matter.

Jenson Button 23:26

Well, the thing is with Aston Martin, they don't want to just have sponsors that give them money and put a sticker on the car. They want to actually be able to work with them, and progress the team and work with those companies. AI is a big thing right now, and there's a lot of crypto AI involved in Formula 1. And it has to work for both companies. And I think that the technology in Formula 1 is helping crypto and AI companies quite a lot, and vice versa. So yes, you have that side of it, but then you also have a lot of fashion brands that are really excited about being in Formula 1. You look at the drivers, you look at the girlfriends, there's a lot of fashion there. So yeah, there's many different areas that we can focus on in terms of partners that work in Formula 1.

Haslinda Amin 24:18

I want to touch on sustainability because it seems like F1 is also headed in that direction. While it's looking at sustainable fuel, it's also flying all around the world all at the same time. How do you square that?

Jenson Button 24:31

Wow. Have we got any other questions?

Haslinda Amin 24:36

I'm just wondering how you think about it.

Jenson Button 24:38

Yeah. No, I—

Haslinda Amin 24:39

We talk about being green, and yet—

Jenson Button 24:41

Yeah.

Haslinda Amin 24:41

—it's a tough sport.

Jenson Button 24:42

Yeah, it is. It's a difficult balance. But, no, I think in terms of the technology that we produce now, it's very fuel-efficient. We're using sustainable fuels also. I even did a race in the UK driving 1950s, 1960s race cars. And even those cars now are running on sustainable fuel. So, it's really good to see the progress. I love that we have different ideas in terms of technology for road cars, for example. We have electric, we have hydrogen, we have hybrids, we have combustion engines, and it's great that we have all these different ideas. Personally, I would like to see it come back to combustion engines, and running sustainable fuel. For me, it's the best way. But that's just my opinion because I love the sound of a combustion engine. And it adds to the excitement of a race car.

Haslinda Amin 25:40

I got to say, I'm with you when it comes to the sound. We have a couple of minutes left, so some easy questions. Your best or unforgettable F1 experience, racing experience?

Jenson Button 25:52

That's a tricky one. There's been so many.

Haslinda Amin 25:56

Favorite.

Jenson Button 25:57

But memorable, there's been so many. I think the one that stands out, I would say, was the first time I drove out as a Formula 1 driver in Melbourne, Australia. I was behind Michael Schumacher in a Ferrari. I was in a Williams. And all the leaves had fallen on the racetrack, and he was first out, and I was behind him. So, there was a rooster tail of leaves that flew over my car from behind Michael Schumacher's car. He was a hero of mine growing up. So that was, for me, as a 20-year-old, that was a real special moment. A made-it moment.

Haslinda Amin 26:34

Your favorite track, and why?

Jenson Button 26:36

Suzuka, Japan. Fast flowing, unforgiving. It was narrow. The sequence of corners was just epic. And it's a figure of eight as well. It was a bridge, obviously, not a proper figure of eight. But such good memories there. And I was able to win there in 2011, which was obviously a really difficult time in Japan. So, a very emotional win.

Haslinda Amin 27:02

The one thing we all don't know about Jenson Button, and it's not out there. Anything you can share with us?

Jenson Button 27:08

It's going to stay there.

Haslinda Amin 27:10

Well, he's a triathlete. He's been competing in HYROX.

Jenson Button 27:15

Yeah.

Haslinda Amin 27:17

So, what should we know about Jenson Button now?

Jenson Button 27:20

Yeah. That's a tricky one. I'm very competitive and I've done a few other things, sports, around the world. Triathlons, I did the IRONMAN World Championship, 70.3 IRONMAN World Championship a few years ago, which was horrific. And HYROX. I always want to push myself. I'm in my mid-40s now. I can lift weights, which is great. So, I couldn't do that when I was racing. So, now I can do lots of different things and most importantly, got two kids. Forget the F1 World Championship. That is the most amazing thing I've ever done, so.

Haslinda Amin 27:53

If you weren't an F1 racer, what would you be? What would you have been?

Jenson Button 28:00

I've probably had this question quite many times. It's a great question. I have no idea. My whole life was about achieving in this sport. And we spoke about it backstage, that it's so tough for sportsmen to actually make it. What they go through in their childhood, what they give up. But it's the ones that go through all that and actually don't make it. I really feel for them because you've given everything up, really—education. And so yeah, I don't know. It would've had to have been something... I'm an adrenaline junkie, so it'd have to be something a little crazy.

Haslinda Amin 28:37

Jenson Button, we thank you so much for your time today. It's been a pleasure.

Jenson Button 28:50

Thank you. Thank you.

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