



FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

2023 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

91ST RALLYE MONTE-CARLO

Pre-event Press Conference
January 18, 2023

FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT – Sébastien Ogier, Toyota GR Yaris Rally1 Hybrid
Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT – Kalle Rovander, Toyota GR Yaris Rally1 Hybrid
Hyundai Shell Mobis World Rally Team – Esapekka Lappi, Hyundai i20 Rally1 Hybrid
Hyundai Shell Mobis World Rally Team – Thierry Neuville, Hyundai i20 Rally1 Hybrid
M-Sport Ford World Rally Team – Pierre-Louis Loubet, Ford Puma Rally1 Hybrid
M-Sport Ford World Rally Team – Ott Tänak, Ford Puma Rally1 Hybrid

Q:

Kalle, it's been a short off-season. Have you had chance to celebrate the title?

KR:

Yeah, there was some time to do that – it's always too busy for a proper holiday with testing. It was a quite good break I enjoyed it.

Q:

Kalle, how did the recce look?

KR:

Monte Carlo is always a big challenge, it's definitely not the easiest rally and also, for me, not the rally where I am the most confident or the most comfortable. It is a special event to start the season.

Q:

You could have had number one, why not?

KR:

I think it was quite easy choice – 69 looks much better than number one.

Q:

Séb, how did it feel with the partial season last year?

SO:

You have seen me more and more relaxed and now *even more* relaxed with no pressure for the championship here, I have the chance to have fun. This rally is always demanding, but in the past it has been pretty good on this rally. Every time you start here, there are no guarantees of what's going to happen. The conditions changing from the recce to the rally can make it very exciting and, of course, the tyre strategy can spice things up on the race compared with other events.

Q:

Years ago your dad called you to help with the tyre choice, is he around this year?

SO:

I never really used him for tyre choices or any choices in rally. It's true these years we were too optimistic to take five slick in the Alps, it's always risky. The Alps are missing this year and I don't say that because of where I am from. The stages are OK here, but I think we are missing the Alps or the Ardeche. Last year there wasn't much snow and there's less and less snow – and actually when you have a lot of snow this makes the tyre choice more easy to go with the stud.

Q:

Do you think this will be one of the most competitive years, having a top driver in every team?

SO:

I hope so for the fans. It's always good if there's a chance for all the teams to win and like you say now we have a top driver in every team, I wouldn't be surprised to see every team winning and even more fighting over the season. I hope it's like this, but I hope my team is going to make it. I will support my team and team mates and help support Toyota to win the manufacturers' [title]. But I hope, for the sport, it's going to be interesting year.

Q:

How many times do you expect to help the team this season?

SO:

We keep it open for the team, we have to be flexible – the general idea is like last year. One more time, maybe Jari-Matti [Latvala] is happy to tell you, we have an initial plan which can always be adapted to the situation.

Q:

Ott, back to M-Sport, thoughts on Puma

OT:

We will find out. The first impression not too bad. We did one and a half days testing and we drive on few different roads, so we have a bit more feedback. It's difficult to expect anything before the first rally.

Q:

What's your expectation for the year?

OT:

It's difficult to know what to expect. Like I said, we need get going to know where is the pace and how do we feel in that pace?

Q:

Much changed at M-Sport since you were last there?

OT:

Not so much

Q:

What drove your decision to move?

OT:

There were many things, but the past is past – now we look to the future.

Q:

Esapekka we see you in new team colours again. Are you keeping all of the old ones? Selling them?

EL:

I have the overalls, but yeah for the team kit I need a second house! I'm not saving them but not selling them either. I can't break the record by driving because of these guys, so I need to do it some other way – that's why I'm changing team as much as I can!

Q:

What drove the decision for you?

EL:

The full season is the full season. For yourself, if you are offered work for half the year or the full year, it's an easy decision. I know I said last year I like the balance of professional and family life, but I'm still not that old yet and I still have some hunger and competitiveness in my mind. I want to drive and I couldn't turn down this opportunity.

Q:

Aiming for the title?

EL:

That's not in my mind so much. Theoretically it's possible, but I don't really think about that at the moment. I guess I'm in a similar situation as Ott, I have no idea where we are...

Q:

How much testing have you done?

EL:

One day. If you don't count last year.

Q:

Count last year!

EL:

A few days more...

Q:

Feel home in the car yet?

EL:

I don't feel at home yet, but I do feel pretty good.

Q:

Thierry, been same colours many years. Is this your year?

TN:

I heard that question many times. First of all, I'm happy still to be here and still motivated and looking forward to the upcoming season. Is this my year, let's see. But I will give the best we can and we will only know at the end of the year if it was our year.

Q:

Can the MC be mastered?

TN:

It's a tough and challenging event for sure, even if Séb already mentioned. It's more dry and that makes it a bit more easy when the conditions are like this. There can always a few surprises during the event and these can easily catch you out, so you need to stay focused and do the best we can. We need to show great speed, sometimes we have been on the podium here, but also there have been some bad experiences. I think it's going to be a close battle looking for the weekend.

Q:

How does the car feel?

TN:

It feels good. It feels similar to the end of last year, there were not a lot of changes – the winter is short and tough and for the team there is so much to prepare. We change a bit on the aero and we hope we feel some benefit. We don't know what the others have done, it's always a bit of a surprise on the first couple of rounds. Somebody can have the advantage, but hopefully it will be pretty much equal and we can have some good fights.

Q:

Pierre-Louis, what's the target for this season?

P-LL:

The target is a bit like last year, with a bit more race. It's important to be at the races I don't know, like Monte Carlo. On gravel we can fight for good things, but with Ott and a full season, it's a bit like a dream come true and we have to enjoy that.

Q:

What preparation have you done differently for this event compared with other rallies?

P-LL:

For the notes, it's different to the other race. I watch a lot of video for this rally, but it's always tricky – if we don't know the way the weather will look. Now it's not so bad, but tomorrow it could be snowing.

FIA SUPPORT CHAMPIONSHIPS

FIA WRC2 CHAMPIONSHIP

M-Sport Ford World Rally Team – Adrien Fourmaux, Ford Fiesta Rally2

PH Sport – Yohan Rossel, Citroën C3 Rally2

FIA WRC2 Challenger CHAMPIONSHIP

Erik Cais, Škoda Fabia RS Rally2

Motorsport Ireland Rally Academy – Josh McErlean, Hyundai i20 N Rally2

FIA WRC MASTERS CUP

François Delecour, Škoda Fabia RS Rally2

Mauro Miele, Škoda Fabia RS Rally2

Q:

Adrien, WRC2 looks fabulous – how do you feel?

AF:

For sure the championship will be a really high level and we can expect a lot of big fights, this is why we are here. I want to enjoy my time in WRC2 – we have a beautiful rally with Monte Carlo and a really difficult one. Maybe it could have been even more difficult but it seems a bit more dry than we thought – but the competition will be hard.

Q:

Is the weather going to be stable?

AF:

Let's see this afternoon and tonight. After that it's cold and dry. There will be some humidity in the stages which can become ice, but it's not a Monte with a lot of snow for sure.

Q:

How does it feel to be in WRC2 and not in Rally1 and can you get back there?

AF:

My car make some fitness and it's much smaller now... I drove the rally last week (Jänner Rally) and we won the rally. It's difficult to jump from WRC2 to Rally1, so I hope to get the pace back quickly. The guys will not wait for us... The Fiesta is a nice car to drive and I'm sure I will enjoy it.

Q:

How is the pressure on you?

AF:

There is always pressure, it's always there for sure. But we have to respect Monte Carlo, it's the most difficult rally of the season – I realise this last year and this can happen for one corner. If you want to win the rally, for sure it's a long one.

Q:

Mauro, it was great to see you win WRC2 Masters last year. And now you defend the title?

MM:

Last season was an incredible season. I was really happy. For me, I had a dream and that dream came true. This season we are here, but the competition is high from the driver beside me (François Delecour). It will be very difficult for sure.

Q:

You took confidence from your performance last year – what's the plan for this season?

MM:

Step by step. I made a good season and even in Japan I finish in a very, very well condition – especially in the Wolf Power Stage. If I was 40 years less, maybe I would be not far from them!

Q:

You were second in the Power Stage and we joked about you doing the same here in Monte Carlo...

MM:

I don't think it will happen here. For Monte Carlo I just have to finish the race to get the result. I did like this and in the end we make the results.

Q:

François how much do you look forward to this event and how's the car?

FD:

It's difficult to tell you, I don't have so much experience in this type of car and WRC2. I test a lot, I do about 200km last week, which is good training – we had some wet and some dry conditions to understand and learn the car. This is the best way to appreciate the speed compared with Adrien and Rossel.

Mauro was so fast last year, with a good performance. I watched. I will drive full attack, maximum attack, like I know I can do.

Q:

Can you win?

FD:

Not at all, with not so much experience with the car – I need some more training they (the other WRC2 competitors) are going so fast. In the future, I think this (WRC2) can be the best category. We have 10 Rally1 cars and we are about 40 cars similar [in WRC2]. The challenge will be great.

Q:

What about the weather?

FD:

The forecast is apparently dry. This morning we drove Turini and Cabanet and they were completely dry, I have never seen the stages like that. Most of the stages will be like that, we expect the weather to be clear and cold, not so much difficulty.

Q:

Your passion seems like get stronger for the sport all the time?

FD:

It's easy to understand: we have a fantastic chance to make a lot of sport. Physically I'm in good form, it's no problem with the eyes, touch wood. I see in the dark like I was young and the day I'm not like that, maybe I stop. Physically, the bike help me a lot.

Q:

Yohan, what's the feeling heading into this year?

YR:

I think it's completely different to last year – it's a new year. The car is the same, the team is also, but I changed my engineer and we know very well the car. The rally changed a little bit, if it's completely dry I have good testing before [the event]. We will see with the new line-up in WRC2, it's crazy – it's good to compare it with WRC driver. Monte is Monte and last year we play for the victory all year and finish sixth. We will see. The plan is no mistakes and we will see what happens.

Q:

Look back over last year, what can that experience help you to achieve this year?

YR:

The most important thing in WRC is experience. After three years in WRC2, I think you can win. It's my sixth Monte and I have no excuse for the win. For the other events, it's the same I know Portugal and Sardinia and I go to Chile where it's completely new for everybody. The plan is to play for the victory, but if you need to finish second, I will finish second. Last year I wanted to win all the time and I have crash in Sardinia and I lose the championship. I am happy to be here.

Q:

Erik, you had a dream start in Monte Carlo last year, how does it feel this year?

EC:

It's always a dream to come for a Monte Carlo and last year's result was a dream come true. It was about waiting for mistakes and trying to push on my limits, I need to bring more confidence to driving in new car.

Q:

How is the new car?

EC:

It's the Czech car national car! It's always amazing to step on with something new.

Q:

Plans for the year?

EC:

We will do the WRC2 championship and some events in the ERC. I hope we can bring this home and be ready for every rally.

Q:

Josh, you've been in WRC2 before, but this is your first time in Monte, how does that feel?

JM:

I had lots of great opportunities last year, but this debut in Monte Carlo is quite special this year. Coming down the hill into Monaco today for the first time was incredible. I'm looking forward to the challenge, the stages are amazing with some that are representative from home. The weather always play a part and that's when having a good ice note crew plays a big part.

Q:

What did you learn last year?

JM:

I've done some events in the WRC and getting this experience is very important – you go to different countries and see different stages. In places like Finland and Estonia it's something very special to commit to those roads. This year I need to capitalise on that.

Q:

You're competing against François Delecour, the legend that is... how does that feel?

JM:

It's quite crazy look at entry list, guys beside me. These roads, the road up to Col de Turini... it's just really special and I'm very grateful to be here.