



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

## 2021 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

### RALLYE MONTE-CARLO

Post-event Press Conference  
January 24, 2021

#### FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

**Present:**

Sébastien Ogier (FRA), Toyota Gazoo Racing  
Elfyn Evans (GBR), Toyota Gazoo Racing  
Thierry Neuville (BEL), Hyundai Motorsport  
Jari-Matti Latvala, Toyota Gazoo Racing team principal

**Q:**

Congratulations on your eighth win and 50<sup>th</sup> WRC win Séb. How does it feel?

**SO:**

You mentioned some special numbers, which come on top of this exceptional emotion I have to win this Rallye Monte-Carlo. This is the rally that gave me the dream to be a driver one day. The rally I watched as a kid and back then, I was dreaming just one day to have the chance to do it! Collecting eight trophies from this rally is something I would have never thought of and I am very proud of it.

**Q:**

It wasn't an easy rally though...

**SO:**

The feeling was, for sure, very good this weekend in the car. Maybe not on Thursday evening, where we had the only issue, the only technical issue. This [brake issue] was unusual for the Yaris and after that, it has been really perfect. But that cost us a little time and then, on Friday, we dropped time with a puncture and that was not so good. We reacted quickly to come back into the fight and it's not often these days that you see differences in the stage times like this. Of course, I was happy to see I could make a difference when I was pushing. For sure, it's nice to start the season like this.

**Q:**

A big difference in your feeling in the car from 2020 to 2021 on this event?

**SO:**

Of course, this season of experience with the car means a lot. I understand more how the car reacts and what I can do with the car in these tricky conditions. But coming here there was still a lot of interrogation with the tyres. Even in the race, we saw Hyundai was more clever than us when they used some old tyres and it worked better than us. Later in the season, we will have to discover some more tyres from Pirelli, but this 2020 season helped me a lot to be more ready for this rally. I had a bit of an issue last week with a test crash so I came here with maybe 10km of experience with the slick tyres. So it was not that easy. But it worked out. I am very happy.

**Q:**

Were there some special moments on the event?

**SO:**

Well, of course, the fans were missing a little bit this year but it's already a success for the ACM and FIA. Together they managed to organize this rally with the COVID situation. I'm sure a lot of people were following from their smartphone or at home. It was important to run this rally and have a normal start – or almost normal start - to the WRC season. I'm looking forward to the fans coming - of course we do the sport to make the fans happy and to show the product the manufacturer is building. OK, to buy this kind of Yaris would be tricky, but there's something like it...

**Q:**

Elfyn, you talked about hesitating a lot on this rally, why was that?

**EE:**

Compared to last year I didn't quite connect with the tyre as well. Let's say, I missed the progressiveness and myself, I didn't feel 100% confident. Seb was obviously driving very, very well and ultimately ended up in a league of his own, to be honest. I could see the time and that was frustrating, but I didn't feel confident enough to take the risk. It was perhaps a game of not taking too many risks like I said, but I didn't feel comfortable enough to do it. I felt the risks were too high to go faster this weekend, but we know if we want to fight for the title, we're going to have to do it in the rallies to come.

**Q:**

How much can you still learn from Seb?

**EE:**

I've learned a lot from him in a few seasons as team mates.

**SO:**

I think he doesn't need to learn any more...

**EE:**

I don't know. We're going on the right curve, but he can still turn the needle when he needs to – so there is, perhaps, a little bit more learning to do.

**Q:**

Can you teach him anything?

**EE:**

Maybe, but I'm missing my home rally to do that now! No, I don't know, I don't know anybody that can teach Seb anything anymore – but we can try!

**SO:**

You can learn something every day.

**Q:**

The Arctic is next, what are your thoughts, Elfyn?

**EE:**

We had a brand-new tyre for here and a brand-new tyre for Arctic. We've had Rally Sweden for quite a few years and most years with, let's say, conditions that were not so cold so there's those two factors to take in to the Arctic. It could be slightly different and better winter conditions [in Lapland] so, of course, there will be a little bit of learning to do to get the car to work with a new tyre in those conditions – and that's going to be key to a good result there.

**Q:**

Thierry, you started this event with a new co-driver in Martijn Wydaeghe. How was that?

**TN:**

It is a little bit more than one week ago when I was in a strange situation, left without a co-driver. At one point, we had to take a decision and, with the team, we were able to decide to go with Martyn for this rally. We have no expectations to come here, with no preparation in the car. We clearly didn't know what to expect from this rally. In the last few of years, we've had some good speed and been on the podium, but my personal expectations were definitely again to be on the podium. But I had to be realistic to know it could be more difficult than I thought. Martijn has done a good job, he discovered my pace-notes last Saturday and this weekend wasn't easy at all. There has been some difficult stages, but some good stages as well. We have to increase the speed a little bit, but the main thing we wanted to work on was the confidence and we have done that this weekend.

**Q:**

How difficult was this job for the co-driver?

**TN:**

Of course, he has done the job of a co-driver many times, but not in a World Rally Car, which is very fast compared to other cars. And working with the gravel crew and all the changes you make in Monte-Carlo... We had from black ice to snow to very slippery parts on Tarmac, the shiny black top and a lot of rain and standing water. It was a big challenge. It's difficult to find a rhythm, there are so many unknowns on the road but day-by-day, we were improving. We also had a bit of a struggle with his voice, which is completely different from that of my previous co-driver. I struggled in the first day to hear him but we worked to improve that and by the end, it was good enough for the result. I would have liked to be in P1, but other drivers were stronger than us.

**Q:**

Will this partnership continue?

**TN:**

Yes, I think so. At least for the next rally, Martin will be in the car and if he does the things I'm requesting, I'm sure he will be in the car for many more rallies this year. He has impressed me, he is always in control with the situation – even before the first stage, I couldn't feel any nerves. Before the first stage, maybe I was more nervous than him! Congratulations to him and thank you as well.

**Q:**

Jari-Matti, how does your first win as a team principal feel?

**J-ML:**

I haven't been in a rally-related press conference since 2019 Rally Deutschland and it's a very different feeling to be here as a team principal. But I have been enjoying the weekend and I must say, coming into this weekend and seeing my team so strong and the drivers, the way they drove, it's impressive. I was really impressed with the way the whole team worked: Seb, Elfyn, Kalle and Taka-san, they all had good speed. We can see Seb was doing some very dominant stages which was helping his victory. Elfyn did a very consistent run with no mistakes and Kalle was looking good for a third place, but he had a puncture. This [result] is good for the start to the season and it's good to see Taka-san in sixth and starting the season like this. If you have four Toyotas in the top-six, you can't ask for more.

**Q:**

Was it better as a driver or team principal?

**J-ML:**

As a driver, you know you can influence the result for yourself. As a team principal, when you watch WRC All Live, you can't influence it and you rely a lot on the drivers themselves.

**Q:**

What's your strategy to stay the youngest ever winner of a WRC round?

**J-ML:**

I already said I guess - this is the year when my record will be beaten. I start to see Kalle has the potential so high that he is going to take his first victory quite soon.

**SO:**

Maybe in three or four weeks...

**Q:**

What does a Jari team talk sound like?

**J-ML:**

The main element what I know myself is, inside the team when the atmosphere is relaxed, when you don't feel any tension, that is the best. The drivers feel relaxed and they go in the stage with a smile. I don't need to tell them "do this or do that", but I need to make sure they feel good and relaxed when they go out to the stages.

**Q:**

Seb, is Jari-Matti a good motivator?

**SO:**

The results speak for themselves. I've known Jari for many years and one thing has always been very clear: he is very nice with people and that relation with him is easy. It's early in our relationship to see how he performs [as a team principal] in that way but I'm sure, it will work just fine.

**J-ML:**

Thank you Seb.

## **Questions from the floor**

Fabio Marchi, Mundo Deportivo (ESP)

**Q:**

Carlos Sainz won for Toyota last time here in 1998, how does it feel to follow him on that list?

**SO:**

El Matador has always been a big influence for me in my career. I have a lot of admiration for him as a driver. I have the chance to work with him for many years at Volkswagen, OK many years, maybe not, but at the beginning of the product, when he really helped a lot building this machine. And I'm always impressed with his motivation, the hunger that he still has – he is still competing, he still active, he was very competitive on the Dakar! I have massive respect for Carlos and I'm proud to be the next one after him on the list for Toyota... Best regards to the Sainz family.

**Q:**

Has this been one of the most difficult Montes ever?

**SO:**

It was definitely a hard one. A bit shorter than normal in terms of kilometres, but for the conditions, it's one of the hardest I had to face. It was so difficult to read; the gravel crew was passing, sometimes, very different conditions to what we had and the level of grip sometimes is incredibly low. To be in Monte-Carlo at the finish is already an achievement, so whoever is here can be proud to be here.

Jason Craig, Autosport.com (GBR)

**Q:**

Does this count as the standout weekend of your career?

**SO:**

The standout? It's a special day with these numbers, and record is not the thing you are really chasing. As a competitor, I go for win when I enter any competition. This place has always been unique for me for many, many reasons. My idol was Ayrton Senna and he still has the record here [for Formula 1 wins] and I join him a little bit with this record and that makes me proud.

**Q:**

Does this win count you as one of the Monte-Carlo greats?

**SO:**

Well, I think I can dare to say that, yes. I definitely I have a good feeling for this rally. Probably being born in the Alps helps me to have this connection with the mountains, with this winter conditions we have to face here. I've said it already: there is a strong possibility that I start this rally again in the future. The championship is not on my list anymore, but rallies like Monte-Carlo can definitely still be.

Eric Dupain, Belga Press Agency (BEL)

**Q:**

Thierry, does this third place with Martijn compare to last year's win?

**TN:**

I don't think you can compare any podium position with a victory, especially on Monte-Carlo. It's a good start to the season but I think a victory would have a much bigger value. But we are still pleased with the start of the season and we're looking forward to the next event.

Arnaud Boever, L'Avenir (BEL)

**Q:**

How different was Rallye Monte-Carlo because of COVID-19?

**SO:**

Not that much really, because we are so focused on a very difficult event. We had a lot of information to discuss all the time, with the teams and the gravel crew to make the right choices for tyres and then watch some videos of the conditions. It was such a busy weekend with our head down, you don't feel much difference. The atmosphere was a bit missing but as I said already: we are all very happy to be here.

**EE:**

Like Seb said, it's a busy weekend and you do tend to get a bit blinkered with everything that's going on. But for me, it was when you arrive at the service – normally you can't move coming into Gap [for fans] and it was a shame to see it so quiet. It's a shame not to have such a packed Service Park but on the same breath, we have to be happy the rally could go ahead and able to start our season

**TN:**

For sure, it's not the same atmosphere, but we are doing a job and we are happy to be here. We can only congratulate the organisers and all the people involved to make it happen in a proper way.

Fabrice Bosset, l'Equipe (FRA)

**Q:**

Elfyn and Thierry, what was the difference for Séb this weekend?

**EE:**

He was very, very strong this weekend. He's said it himself, he was ultra-confident and had a very good feeling in the car – but we drove the same car, so there's no excuse there! I just didn't feel the same level of confidence and didn't feel ready to push to the same level and that made a difference. He was very confident and very fast.

**TN:**

Normally, I would've been chasing the victory, but the car wasn't that way and I don't think we would've been able to match the time he was setting in some of the stages. At the end, I think P3 would've been, anyhow, our place. That's the reason we have to be pleased with the start of the season.

## **FIA WRC 2 CHAMPIONSHIP**

**Present:**

Andreas Mikkelsen (NOR), Toksport ŠKODA

**Q:**

Andreas, what a great performance...

**AM:**

I have to start with my ice crew – this started with Taka when he said he was very happy with his ice crew and mine started to ask me when I was going to give them some good words. They did a fantastic job: it's all about being synchronised with your ice crew so you can take their feedback. Ola [Fløene, co-driver] also did a phenomenal job, always delivering the notes on time - a really great work by him. And also by the team, they did the perfect job on the car – there was never anything missing, the car was always 100%. This was really, really the perfect weekend: maximum points, maximum Power Stage points, we are absolutely delighted.

**Q:**

How on the limit were you?

**AM:**

We started on a good pace, not overdriving just where I feel comfortable. I never felt I was pushing to the limit. I had a mistake in the Power Stage, we had no ice crew in there, but luckily it went well and we are here and we were fast. It's a nice to have the feeling of smiling when you are driving and it's been quite a long time since I had that feeling. Now I can't wait to come to my favourite surface in Finland. I haven't driven a ŠKODA on a loose surface for a long time, I'm really looking forward to it.

**Q:**

And nice to have points on the Power Stage?

**AM:**

Yes. Before we couldn't get the points [in FIA WRC2] but now, we can and it's important because different drivers nominate different rallies and sometimes we won't meet them. So it's important to take the most points from every rally.

## **FIA WRC 3 CHAMPIONSHIP**

**Present:**

Yohan Rossel (FRA), Citroën

**Q:**

What happened in the last stage, what drama!

**YR:**

Just after eight kilometres, I lose the tyre. It's so difficult! It was destroyed, but I win the rally and my time is not so bad. It's the perfect start for the championship.

**Q:**

You had a huge battle with your French rivals – nice to beat them?

**YR:**

I know these are cool guys, they're very fast. It's not easy, but it was the perfect result. Thanks to my team for the perfect weekend. It's hard to enjoy on these stages – it's so difficult. It's so important for me to take points, but even with my mistake on the Power Stage I take three points.

## **FIA RGT CUP**

**Present:**

Emmanuel Guigou (FRA), Alpine

**Q:**

How was your Rallye Monte-Carlo experience ?

**EG:**

It's a really difficult rally – it was my first. With two-wheel drive, it's particularly difficult, but as Andreas said, it's very difficult this year with a lot of ice and snow.

**Q:**

Did you have any moments?

**EG:**

Yes! The most difficult was the start. We don't know all the roads and how the road is going to be. It was very slippery. We had only five wheels (one spare) on the Alpine 110 and it's really difficult because we run with not the [six] tyres.

## **Questions from the floor**

Reiner Kuhn, Motorsport Aktuell (GER)

**Q:**

What's the plan, will you nominate Arctic Rally Finland and Rally Croatia?

**AM:**

For us, it's quite clear, it's hard to predict the future. We don't want to end up in a situation where suddenly a lot of rallies have been cancelled and we haven't been able to do them. We will do as many rallies as we can in the beginning.

**YR:**

I have only four rallies and that's why it was so important for me to win here. I don't participate in the Arctic Rally, I am leading in the championship and I hope to continue with Citroën and the [French] Federation [Sport Automobile] (FFSA).

**Q:**

Andreas, is it possible to switch in the World Rally Car this year?

**AM:**

My main focus is WRC2 and ERC, but that's not all the rallies. I want to add other rallies in a WRC car, and that can be whatever brand.

Arnaud Boever, l'Avenir (BEL)

**Q:**

What was it like to compete on this rally under COVID-19 regulations?

**EG:**

I think it's really difficult for the ACM to organise this event and thanks to all them for achieving this and trying their best for this event.

**YR:**

It's not easy. I live in France and for the future, it's not an easy situation. I participate in Monte-Carlo and it's not so bad. We see for the future. I hope for a good season for all drivers and for the spectators.

**AM:**

I missed the spectators on this event. It's a bit tricky for us, we have to be a bit more careful, because nobody can save us if we make mistakes! We miss the passion in the Service Park with the fans. Hopefully we gave a good show on the TV screen!