



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

2021 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

RALLYE MONTE-CARLO

Pre-event Press Conference
January 21, 2021

FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

Sébastien Ogier (FRA), Toyota Gazoo Racing
Ott Tänak (EST), Hyundai Shell Mobis
Teemu Suninen (FIN), M-Sport Ford
Pierre-Louis Loubet (FRA), Hyundai 2C Competition
Guest: Terenzio Testoni – Pirelli Rally Activity Manager

Q:

Sébastien, we see you back here with the number one on the doors. Looking forward to the new season?

SO:

It's always a good sign to have the number one on the door – it means the last season wasn't too bad. But it's all to be played again. As ever, it's a tricky start to the season. Monte will be a big challenge – we've seen this in the recce, but now there's some rain coming and this will make it more challenging. It won't be easy and tyre choice is always complicated, but now we have less experience with the new ones. It's probably going to be more challenging than before, but I'm always happy to start Monte.

Q:

How different is the new Pirelli tyre?

SO:

The Pirelli is different for the simple reason that Manufacturers have a limitation with the nomination of tyres they can do and they cannot cover the whole window we have to face. In some condition, it will be better and some condition, it will be worse. This is what we need to discover and learn where the limit is. This is going to be one of the big challenges of the weekend. It's always the same with Monte: if you get the tyres right, you have got a good bit of the equation solved, but it will be harder this time.

Q:

What do you think of the route for this year?

SO:

It's a lot of new sections. It's not necessarily one of the most beautiful Monte routes I have seen, some of the sections feel very narrow and challenging, but when it's difficult, the best have to make the difference. We have seen a lot of rocks falling to the side of the road in the recce, so the risk of puncture looks a bit higher than usual. But somehow it's always nice to have new sections and new notes – that's what rallying is about.

Q:

How much of the route is new for you?

SO:

A lot! Honestly, these Sunday stages are fully new – actually not... I did one of those stages in 2007 in a Peugeot. Luckily, we didn't take the notes from that time. Friday is very new. For me, it's more or less the same for everybody. Even if I come from this area, if you don't have to go there, you don't go there – there are many places where I didn't even put a foot. It's been a busy recce, there's been lots to do but soon, we will see how it goes.

Q:

One of the big stories is Jar-Matti [Latvala] becoming your boss. Have you called him "boss" yet?

SO:

It's happened already! I called him after my crash and I say: "Sorry boss, I crashed the car." It was a bit of a surprise for a lot of people, me included. But I'm sure Jari, with his passion, will bring a lot to the team. The team has a lot of experience, so things shouldn't really change right now. One of the important things is that Jari is a really nice guy and I'm not afraid of the relationship with him. Let's see what this brings.

Q:

Ott, tell me about your approach to this event after the accident here last season...

OT:

It's true - last year, the start was not great, we didn't score any points. This year, of course, it would be promising to start with some good points in the bag. That is the aim.

Q:

You lost the championship by 17 points. Every point counts?

OT:

It's no secret, if you want to fight for the title you have to score points. This weekend does not look so straightforward, but the aim is there and we need to score points.

Q:

How difficult is the job for the gravel crews?

OT:

It will be even more crucial because during the recce the conditions were quite consistent and nice and since this morning, it started to rain. Everything is changing. At altitude, probably even it's snowing. In a situation like this, they are a big factor in the game

Q:

What do you think of the new tyres?

OT:

For sure, I try to learn as much as I can, but the learning will come in the year. In the test, you face maybe a couple of different conditions, but during a weekend like this, you face many more. In the rally, every stage can be a different, with a different surface in different conditions. We need to be quick learners.

Q:

Teemu, when you don't have a full season, does it put more pressure on you?

TS:

For the moment, we have six rallies and of course, I have to prove myself that I am worth the drive for the full season. Of course, we tried to pick up my strongest rallies and let's see what happens for next year.

Q:

How do you feel about the Monte?

TS:

In the last years, I have been able to have some good times, but not bring it as a good package for the results. This year, I'm really trying to stay on my area and focus myself to do my best and not overdrive to do any mistakes – that's the way to get a result here. Of course, the tyres are playing a big role when they are unknown here, the tyre gamble will be nice to follow.

Q:

Is there one stage you are more apprehensive about?

TS:

Not really. All the stages are different and quite challenging – like the second stage today which has lots of cutting places with the mud and some other stages have a lot of snow and ice sections. All the stages will be really tricky.

Q:

What's the target?

TS:

I am targeting to be top-five or top-six and to take a clean rally from here, then we can push for a good season.

Q:

Pierre-Louis, are you ready for the Monte-Carlo?

P-LL:

I hope, I hope I am ready for Monte, but I don't know. It's my very first time here I never even did in a small car. We will be ready to do our best for sure.

Q:

What did you think of the stages on the recce?

P-LL:

I said it will be difficult. I don't have a good idea. I don't know how I will do in the rally or how I will feel, but the conditions will be the same for everybody. I will try to be clever and be at the end.

Q:

How did you prepare?

P-LL:

I watched a lot of videos from the past year, but the best thing for learning is to actually experience it yourself. When that will be finished and I get to the end, I will take maximum experience and for the next time, it will be much easier.

Q:

What did you learn from competing in a World Rally Car last year?

P-LL:

Last year was an amazing year for sure. The first time in the WRC.. I learned a lot, but I could see I need to be more calm and do less mistakes. In Sardinia, it was not so bad, I did less mistakes. I have time this year, to be fast at the end of the year is the target. We have to be clever to do stage-by-stage and take the maximum experience.

Q:

Pirellis are new for everybody, how have you found them?

P-LL:

I had a good feeling on dry Tarmac. For the rain, I don't know yet but I think it will be fine. It's the same for everybody – we will have more of an idea after the event.

Q:

How much testing did you do?

P-LL:

I did one full day on ice and one morning was a bit wet and drying in the afternoon so we tried some cross-tyres to take some experience.

Q:

Terenzio, very exciting to see Pirelli back. Are Pirelli ready?

TT:

Pirelli is very happy to be back 100%. We've never stopped with the FIA World Rally Championship as Pirelli has always been here and present, but now let me say we are 100% here with full power and in our strategy, the level is much higher. We started to work with the three manufacturer cars in December and I can say, it's not so easy for the teams because our tyres are different. They need to know the limit of the tyre and they cannot learn this in one day. This is Monte-Carlo and this rally is just tyres. If you get the tyres right, then you can win. The winner will be the driver who makes the less mistakes.

In one stage, we may need all four of the tyres we bring here: the soft, super-soft, the stud and the winter – but we know we cannot use them all. We must take the best compromise.

The teams need to understand how the tyres work. I cannot say it's better or worse, it's different.

Q:

How difficult will tyre choices be?

TT:

OK, on a normal Tarmac rally, when it's wet, you put on the wet and when it's dry you put on the slick. In Corsica or Spain, this is what you do. But here it's more complicated; when it's wet you put on the winter tyre without the stud – that's our wet. It's difficult for the driver. On normal Tarmac, it's very simple when you need to use the wet – but here it's a big step between the slick and the winter tyre. It's not easy for us. Already now, I get a lot of phone calls asking what to do. We need to keep in mind, it's not just the wet here, it's the mud as well.

Questions from the floor

Bo Krister Bofeldt, Worldrally.se to Terenzio Testoni

Q:

Will you use the new Sottozero tyre we saw at last week's Arctic Rally on round two next month?

TT:

No, sorry. This is the tyre we use in Nordic Championships, We are not allowed here [in WRC]. They protrude 2mm more, it's a 9mm stud and it's the first time in the world – we are the only one with such a long protrusion. In the WRC, you have 7mm.

FIA WRC2 CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

Adrien Fourmaux (FRA), M-Sport Ford
Andreas Mikkelsen (NOR), Toksport WRT

Q:

Andreas, you have a busy year coming your way. You start with the biggest challenge in Monte-Carlo. How do you feel ahead of it?

AM:

I feel good. It's going to be a very busy year for me this year – it's a bit different to last year I'm really looking forward to it. Working with a team like Škoda and Toksport, it's a lot of pressure. I really enjoy the car and with the testing program and the development, I will be in the car all the time and hopefully, that will give me a great feeling. The whole package is really nice, I can't wait to start the season and this is a special place to start it.

Monte-Carlo is a big challenge, but it's a rally I enjoy and it looks like the conditions will be a bit easier than before. I love the conditions on the recce with the snow and ice, but now it looks like the snow is melting.

Q:

Are you a favourite?

AM:

It's one mistake or one wrong tyre choice and you are gone. It's the eighth time I'm doing this rally, so I guess in a way, yes I am. I am expecting myself to deliver a good result – we want to start the season with a bang and maximum points would be nice.

Q:

Is there a stand-out challenging stage for you?

AM:

I think the rally will be decided quite early. I think Friday will be a really important day with some stages in the dark, that's somewhere you really have to be on it. I see Saturday and Sunday a bit easier stage as we know those stages a bit more. Friday is quite new for everyone – that's the important one for me.

Q:

Andreas, you worked as a test driver for Pirelli last year, does that give you an advantage?

AM:

Both yes and no. I've been working with Pirelli throughout last year, but we never did any testing on the Monte snow and stud tyres – they were new for me in Monza. I know the slick tyre, so I have to try to make that advantage. It's really going to be a difficult event for the tyre choice, but I'm looking forward to it.

Q:

Adrien, you come here with some experience under your belt. How do you feel about the new season?

AF:

It's a new season and I just want to say that it's very good to be here today – with the new season because of the [coronavirus] situation. I'm really happy to start the new season. I know it will be difficult especially with the guy next to me (Andreas Mikkelsen). I was the spectator when he was doing some rallies with Volkswagen and he was passing in front to me – it will be a big challenge. The Monte is my favourite one, it's the first event for me in the top 10. Last year I had very good pace, but two punctures made for a bad result for me. I know that Monte is always difficult for all the drivers. I think the conditions for this rally will be worse than last year, probably the snow will move in the stage and that will be difficult for the tyre. That will be very, very difficult, but let's see what can happen in Rallye Monte-Carlo.

Q:

You did a good test with a lot of kilometres, tell me about that...

AF:

We did around 280 km of testing with dry conditions on the first day and then snow melting on the rest. It was good conditions for the test but in the end, it's a new season and a new challenge for me. We need to have more experience on the Pirelli, I'm sure we have less than Andreas but hopefully we will know more about the tyres after the first day.

Q:

You also have some rallies coming in the World Rally Car. How excited are you about that?

AF:

I want to push, but I am focused on FIA WRC2 for the first two events and I have to be patient for the World Rally car – let's see when the WRC car will be coming.

FIA WRC3 CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

Nicolas Ciamin (FRA)

Q:

Last year you scored a fantastic result with second in class here on the Monte. Can you go one better this year?

NC:

Yes, the target is to win FIA WRC3 but I'm also looking at Rally2 category. We are trying to build a championship, so we have to look at the programme and the points at the end of the rally. We all know this is the most difficult race. First, we try to win WRC3, then we look at Rally2. Last year was really good. Eric [Camilli] was really fast and we couldn't catch him. The result was good, but the race was not great – I was not pushing so much. I want to push more, but we also have to stay calm.

Q:

What are the conditions like?

NC:

It's my fourth entry here and maybe this will be the most difficult. Every year, it's the same. There is a lot of icy sections – the downhill section of the Power Stage is terrible! It's quite a mix of snow, ice and a lot of muddy sections. It will change a lot from the recce to the rally. We have to adapt a lot and the gravel crew will be very important.

Q:

How do you prepare for the rally?

NC:

I watch a lot of onboard, you always have information to get from them. You can look at the WRC drivers' pace, how they accelerate and slow down in different conditions and to take good test days on all conditions. The best is to make a car which is good everywhere.

Questions from the floor

Pierre Tassel, Auto Hebdo Magazine (FRA)

Q:

What is your feeling about the 2021 C3 Rally2 car? Do you feel a difference with the evolution?

NC:

The new car will not be homologated until the 1st of March, so the car is quite the same as last year. We have some updates, the car is progressing all the time. The car is great, it's better than last year, but not so much different.

FIA RGT CUP

Present:

Raphaël Astier (FRA)

Q:

What's your hope for this weekend?

RA:

I have really good memories from 2017. This is a new challenge with the Alpine. I have done some testing and it went well. It's a good challenge and I look to make a good race with the Alpine.

Q:

Is this a one-off outing?

RA:

For the moment, it is a one-off. The aim is to participate to the FIA RGT Cup for the rest of the season, but it depends on the result from Monte-Carlo.