



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

2019 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

RALLY MONTE-CARLO

Pre-event Press Conference
24 January 2019

Present:

Sébastien Ogier, Citroën Total World Rally Team
Sébastien Loeb, Hyundai Shell Mobis World Rally Team
Kris Meeke, Toyota Gazoo Racing World Rally Team
Teemu Suninen, M-Sport Ford World Rally Team

Q:

Lots of changes for the 2019 season and we see you back with the team where you started your WRC journey. Firstly, how does it feel to be back?

SO:

The main word is excited. I am always excited to start Monte Carlo, but there's even more reason with a new team and a new car. I'm looking forward to seeing what we can do in this new environment. It started well, but a dry shakedown doesn't mean much – we expect different conditions tonight. It's nice to start. It's a bit exhausting to do all the functions we have to do before the start, but now I have a passion to put the helmet on and start the race.

Q:

The C3 WRC has been through many changes since its debut and has been at the hands of many drivers. What were your initial thoughts of the car? What are its strengths? What do you feel needs more work? Do you feel you have a set-up which suits you?

SO:

In terms of feedback I am still working to get to 100 per cent, but there is some speed in there and that's important. We need to work to use every bit of the car, so the target here is to stay out of trouble. If we can do that and put the right tyres on then there's something to achieve. Even if it's not perfect, there's enough to have a good performance.

Q:

Some new stages tonight?

SO:

It's very new. I come from this area, but many of these stages I have never seen at all. I like this feeling, it's the same for everybody. We make new notes and then go for it. But with the ice and slippery corners, we can expect things to be happening. Tonight you cannot win the rally, but certainly you can lose it.

Q:

And how's the feeling in the team?

SO:

It's good. I still feel we miss some things and for sure lots will get better and better, but everybody is motivated to do well and I hope this will be enough to make a good start to the season.

Q:

Seb, a major change for you with a new venture with a brand new team in Hyundai. I think we are all adjusting to not seeing you in Citroen overalls! How are you adapting to the change?

SL:

It's the first time I have this opportunity to change, before this Citroen was always making everything to keep me. This year it was different and I had this opportunity to change. It's exciting to discover what it's like. It's not easy to adapt, all the cars I drove before have all been a bit the same in terms of steering, brakes, but this one feels different. The feeling is coming quickly and I enjoy this. I'm discovering a new way to work with other guys in a new team. It's exciting.

Q:

It has been a swift turnaround from the Dakar to this event, and limited testing for you! The Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC has been competitive across the past two seasons. What did you think of the car on your recent tests? How many kilometres of testing have you completed?

SL:

It's not an easy January for me with Dakar and coming straight to the Monte. But I had some good sleep in the nights. OK, it's difficult to wake up in the morning with some jet lag, but I have been able to manage everything I need to do. On Saturday I did half a day of testing and a full day on Sunday and then here for the recce. It's not an easy challenge when you only test for one and a half days and then a recce for a rally that's nearly completely new for me. But the feeling is quite good. Still I have to adjust to some things, but it's OK.

Q:

What are the strengths of the car?

SL:

It's quite an easy car to drive. In full dry, maybe it's sliding a bit more than the Citroen I had before, but to play with the car it's easier. I didn't drive enough yet, but it has good potential.

Q:

How much of a help was shakedown?

SL:

It's difficult to know, the rally will be very different to shakedown – the conditions will be difficult and many things can happen tonight. I try to stay on the road and not make mistakes or go too hard. I hope the feeling comes and I can fight at the front in the dry tomorrow.

Q:

What can you tell us about your tyre choice tonight?

SL:

I start at nine on the road, I will see eight tyre choices – I will have a clear idea! For tonight it could be too complicated.

Q

Welcome back to the championship Kris. New team, new car and a new co-driver for you - lots of change. How ready are you to tackle a new season?

KM:

It's nice to be back. I'm in a new team with a new atmosphere and there's a new atmosphere in the car with Seb Marshall. I've had a bit of time away from the sport, so I've been able to re-organise things. Thankfully the opportunity came with Toyota and it seems to work nice so far. I still have a lot of kilometres to do to understand the car fully – it was be different again at shakedown: when you get the helmet on and the clocks are running on a new stage, it all feels different. It's then that you start to truly understand the car. The two guys ahead of me said shakedown is not representative. I still have a lot to learn and I have to be patient.

Q:
What's the objective on this rally?

KM:
Specifically on this rally, there is zero objective. I've done two days testing in Tarmac trim, but it's nine months since I drove competitively. I can't truly understand the car until we get out there and really feel it. I was a bit apprehensive this morning, like I said it's nine months away, but it seemed to come back quite easily, which is nice.

Q:
What has the dynamic been like at the team? How have you found working with Tommi Mäkinen so far? Was he a bit of a hero for you growing up?

KM:
It's nice to finally have people who understand the game in control. The team is Finnish based and the Finns have quite a knowledge of motorsport - it's in their blood. There's less talking and more doing. I like the environment up until now and just want to enjoy my time.

Q:
You change co-driver after almost a decade with Paul Nagle. How has it been so far with Seb Marshall?

KM:
Seb I've known a few years now, he's been around the service park for a while, maybe not as a co-driver all the time, but in various jobs. The relationship is good, but it's only the long road sections that you get to know somebody better.

Q:
Teemu this will be your first full season with M-Sport in a WRC car. Last year in Monte you were in an R5, this will be very different prospect for you! What are your hopes for this event?

TS:
I'm really looking forward to being here in a WRC car. We have a difficult rally with snow and icy corners – there will be a lot of challenges.

Q:
You also have a new co-driver with Marko Salminen– how's that working?

TS:
It's been good. We have a really good relationship and on the shakedown he was reading the notes well. For the moment, I'm happy.

Q:
What's your target here?

TS:
The plan is to be more consistent, to get a few more podiums than last year and to try to improve the pace.

Q:
What advice from the team?

TS:
They told me to keep the head cool and focus on my own thing without too many risks. I need to focus on the correct things.

Q:
You learned a lot from Séb [Ogier] last year, will that help this time?

TS:
Yeah, I learn a lot. To follow him with tyre set-up was nice, but now I have to go my own way – maybe I'll give him a call, I still have his number! It's nice to step up in the team and grow up a bit in the team.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Raphaëlle Peltier
AFP, France

Q:
Can you explain the different tyre choices you have?

SO:
We have much more choices here than on other rallies. For the rest of season we only have two tyres, so this is very exciting to have more tyres – there's more chance for strategy. But also here we have to face bigger changes in the conditions. If you have driven the summer [road] tyre on ice or snow, you will know how this feels, it happens during the race. It's difficult to survive, but we have to do it sometimes for the compromise.

SL:
Seb (Ogier) said a bit of everything, there are more choices. Sometimes some part of the stage is ice or snow, wet and dry Tarmac and you have to use the calculation you made to know how much you gain by using slicks on the [dry] Tarmac and then on the ice. You make your calculations and then you make your choice – it's not easy to decide.

KM:
I agree.

TS:
And you need to trust the gravel crew and follow their recommendations.

FIA WRC 2 PRO CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:
Gus Greensmith, M-Sport Ford World Rally Team
Kalle Rovanperä, Skoda Motorsport

Q:
Gus, an interesting season lies ahead for you. WRC 2 Pro and some outings in a WRC car, both with M-Sport. Your biggest season to date? Are you fully prepared?

GG:
It's going to be a busy year. I had three days at home since Christmas, so there's been no time to relax – but that's the way we like it. I hope for the worst conditions here...

Q:
Tell us about those conditions, what have you seen?

GG:
On the recce it was mainly dry. We saw some ice patches but not a lot. Then when we were coming out of the recce on SS2 the snow fell and when I saw some pictures of the road an hour or two later, the road looked nothing like the one we'd just driven down. That's part of Monte Carlo, I'm sure Antoine [L'Estage] and Craig [Parry] will do a good job as our gravel note crew.

Q:
You also have a new co-driver onboard - well almost new! Elliot Edmondson returns after an absence of a few years. Why did you decide to go back with Elliot and is the relationship working well?

GG:

After the crash in Germany, the injuries Craig [Parry] sustained meant the risk was too high and he decided to retire from competing while moving into another area in the sport. I had to find myself a new co-driver and from the options we looked at, Elliot was the best option. We are keeping Craig close so he can help with his experience. I'm only 22 and Elliot's only 24, so we're quite young for a crew.

Q:

What's the objective for WRC 2 Pro this year?

GG:

I missed out on a win or two last year and I refuse to let that happen again this time. I would like to put a win or two on the board. Then there's a new R5 car coming from M-Sport, so we're looking forward to that. I'll drive the World Rally Car in Portugal and maybe on some more rounds. The objective is to drive as fast as I can.

Q:

Where's the focus for this year? Is it times in the WRC car or WRC 2 Pro?

GG:

The most important thing is WRC 2 Pro, that's the majority of the calendar and we have the new car coming, so we'll have work to do with M-Sport. But also I want to show what I can do when I get the chance to drive against the world's best drivers in Portugal.

Q:

Kalle, a successful 2018 season saw you on the top step of the WRC 2 podium twice, what is the objective for you in 2019?

KR:

I think it's the same target as last year: to gain more experience on rallies which are new for us and try to be fastest where we've been before. And then to fight for the title if it looks good.

Q:

After a full season in WRC 2 in 2018 how steep would you say the learning curve was? What was the main thing that you learnt last year?

KR:

We made a big improvement from Monte Carlo last year with the notes, the driving and everything – we should be in a much better place. I don't know, I think everything needs to be working a bit better.

Q:

What do you think of the stages?

KR:

They are really nice. There's some really fast places and some technical places. It looks good and should suit us well. I'm hoping the snow is coming, that would be more fun! If it's a full snow stage, it's more fun for me.

Q:

What have you been doing since we saw you last time in Spain?

KR:

It's been a long winter training and getting ready for the season.

FIA WRC 2 CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

Ole Christian Veiby
Adrien Fourmaux

Q:

Ole Christian - new year and a new car for you, we see you compete in WRC 2 with the Volkswagen Polo R5. Firstly, tell us your thoughts on the car...I believe you rallied it at home recently?

OCV:

It's really good. I feel really comfortable in the car, from the first test it felt like I could drive fast immediately. I've done some testing now and a rally in Norway, but Monte Carlo is something completely different, but it feels really good.

Q:

The changes don't just stop at the car, you have a new co-driver on board with Jonas Andersson alongside you now. You have competed together before and won the WRC 3 class here in 2016 - why did you decide to join forces again?

OCV:

Me and Jonas are working really good together. We saw in 2016 we managed to win in WRC 3. We work good together from the first metre and I think he will have a nice input to the car.

Q:

We've seen you compete in WRC 2 since 2016 with two full seasons in 2017 and 2018. What is your objective in 2019, what are you targeting?

OCV:

We want to be at the top and absolutely we can do that. Here in Monte, the win is maybe not the most important thing, but to score valuable points is really important and to take more experience. Sweden is my home base, it's always fun to compete there.

Q:

So we'll see you going for it in Sweden?

OCV:

Yeah, it's bit different in Sweden. We did good here last year, and I like this event a lot. It will be interesting.

Q:

Adrien, you were the French Junior Rally Champion in 2018 and now you are set to compete here at the legendary Rallye Monte Carlo, what is your feeling ahead of this weekend - excitement and nerves?

AF:

Both! This is my first time in WRC, it's good to be here and during eight years I was spectating in Monte Carlo. For me it's a chance to be here and I prefer that. I'm looking forward to starting tonight.

Q:

You have an experienced co-driver alongside you in with Renaud Jamoul, how is the relationship between so far? Did you choose Renaud due to his previous experience on WRC events?

AF:

With the FFSA, we decide to change the co-driver. We need more experience – he (Jamoul) has done every event three times except Sweden. I hope his experience will be good. It was snowing yesterday and that will be my first time in these conditions.

Q:

How have you prepared for the event?

AF:

At the end of 2018, I spent two weeks at M-Sport learning how to fix things if something is broken. After that I worked on my physical side, then we had a good test with the FFSA and M-Sport – we didn't have ice conditions, only dry conditions. It will be difficult, but I take it how I like.

Q:

You are backed by the FFSA and have graduated through Rallye Jeunes, is your objective now to follow in the steps of the French World Champions?

AF:

Yes, but the way is very long and it's a big step. I have to be patient and do my best.

Q:

What have you been doing to prepare for this event? What are your thoughts on the Fiesta R5?

AF:

Good car. I like this car!