



FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

2020 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

RALLYE MONTE-CARLO

Post-event Press Conference
26th January, 2020

FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

1st – Thierry Neuville (BEL), Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT
1st – Nicolas Gilsoul (BEL), Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT
2nd – Sébastien Ogier (FRA), Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT
2nd – Julien Ingrassia (FRA), Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT
3rd - Elfyn Evans (ESP), Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT
3rd - Scott Martin (GBR), Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT
Andrea Adamo, Team Principal, Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT

Q:

What does this win mean, Thierry?

TN:

It's difficult to describe. It was another hard challenge to stay always in the fight throughout the four very tough days. We had some incredible conditions and some surprises, starting with Thursday night – nobody of us really knew what would be there with the conditions. Friday was an incredible day, but less good for Nicolas [Gilsoul] and I in the car. Today was really good and we were able to secure the win. Before the last stage, we knew a little bit that the win was ours and we had comfortable gap. After last year, it was a huge disappointment. But when you fight with two or three people, you all want to win, but only one can and the others will be disappointed. Last year, that was us but this year, it's us with the big smile.

Q:

How difficult was it in such a tight battle?

TN:

More than actually the difficulties of the tyres and the conditions were the couple of punches we got. We were also able to get some punches to the others because on Thursday, we made a very good second stage and it was hard for the others to understand. On Friday morning, I got straight away taken for more than 10 seconds on the first stage. Yesterday also, Elfyn was able to take another 12 seconds in the second stage of the day. It was surprising: sometimes you are faster and you don't understand why the others are slower and suddenly, "bang", they put you 10 seconds and you have to deal with that. I was 16 seconds behind the lead and on a Tarmac rally, it's nearly impossible to catch the others if they don't make a mistake. You need so much confidence in the car and this can give you the opportunity to fight back and make a difference. We were able to fight back very hard on Saturday morning and especially Saturday afternoon and today. I'm very pleased with the final result.

Q:

You talk about being confident ahead of the final stage, but it only took a spin for that lead to go and you had a small part of a wheel rim missing...

TN:

That actually happened on the second stage. We were missing a small part of the rim, but we didn't know why. It wasn't a drama. We wanted to keep three soft tyres so we decided to continue with that rim and it was working fine. It's just a matter of confidence, when you can drive on your rhythm and you know the time was good – you are the man with the control. I was able to go faster than Elfyn and Seb and the car worked very well. Yesterday, I was able to find the extra performance to go from 16s down to 12s in the lead.

Q:

Finally, tell me how many Belgians won Monte Carlo before you?

TN:

One

Q:

When?

TN:

A long time ago. Maybe 40' something.

Q:

1924!

TN:

OK.

Q:

Nicolas, it looked like there was an unbeatable atmosphere in your car on this event?

NG:

The atmosphere was really good. It's a test to come to Monte-Carlo after the winter break. This is the busiest event for us, it's a proper wake-up call but the atmosphere was really good. It was really challenging, but we prove that we are ready.

Q:

This win means a lot...

NG:

Yeah, for sure. When I was 18, I had the opportunity to take part in the historic rally. I said to myself: "Do it, this is probably the only time you'll get the opportunity to do the Monte." Now, 15 years after, we have won the "proper" rally. We're living the dream – I'm very, very happy.

Q:

Sébastien, it's been a great weekend for you and the Toyota team – sum up your event please?

SO:

Like you say, I think it's been a brilliant weekend. Everybody expects more from us because we achieve a lot of good results, so everybody expects us to win. Overall, I'm very happy with the weekend. We took a lot of points and the level of performance was quite good for the first rally. We were consistent, but still missing in some sections where we needed to push to the limit. Three stages on Saturday and the last one yesterday night and we lost 36 seconds. Basically, on those sections, I was much too cautious. I will not hide that there is a little frustration when I don't end up on the top step of the podium in Monte.

Q:

Why wasn't it your day today?

SO:

I think the three of us... Look at the timesheet: it's almost always us in the top three ahead of everybody else. The three of us have done quite a good rally. This morning, the grip was not bad, but it was a little bit more slippery on the top of Turini. You have to trust your feeling and when I was feeling not 100 per cent, then I didn't want to push and make a mistake. I knew it wouldn't be a good time [on the Power Stage], we lost too much on the first loop. I improved the result in the afternoon when the grip got a little bit better. Sure, tomorrow I will remember this rally as positive for the championship. I know you journalists like statistics, so do you remember the last time I started Monte-Carlo with second place – it was my best season ever.

Q:

You talked of the disadvantages of winning this rally before the start – is it a positive with the running order moving forward?

SO:

We don't know which the next rally is. I really hope we can do Sweden. I hope Mother Nature can turn it into the conditions we want for Sweden.

Q:

Julien, Nico talked about this event being a wake-up call. Was it for you?

JJ:

It's exciting to get the season started and a release of the pressure. The previous week, we were in Japan, then we went to Estonia and then we had some tests. We arrived directly to the first start with a new car – it was a big relief and I was happy to hear the engine revs when the car started. This is one of the most difficult rallies for the teams and crews. Congratulations to Toyota, this is a good start for a brand-new team and also congratulations to the team [at the TGR factory in] in Finland, they did an amazing job. And for Martin [Jarveoja] and Ott [Tänak], our best thoughts. They might have some small nightmares in the upcoming nights, but they are safe.

Q:

How was it to adapt to another new team?

JJ:

Have you seen the video on my Facebook? We had to train a little bit... we had a bit of time to prepare for that in December, but as you say, this is a new team and we have discover the way they work. We felt comfortable and confident quite quickly with the team. When I arrived for the Shakedown on Wednesday, it was very exciting.

Q:

Elfyn, you led this rally for a long time, how do you feel now?

EE:

Pretty mixed feeling, I must say. We started off pretty strong on Friday morning, then I found a really good feeling and stage wins came pretty easy, to be honest. It just clicked and it happened naturally. But this morning, it didn't happen quite so naturally and this cost us a realistic chance to fight for the win. Thierry, in contrast, had very strong day. Overall, we have to take this as a positive, it's not a bad start. This is something we can build on.

Q:

This was your first time in a new team. How was it?

EE:

I was wondering how it would fare when it comes to the competition – it was a bit strange. We'd done a lot of preparation, we'd done the testing, spent time in the workshop and tried to do all we could to be prepared for the recce and Shakedown. Then we have the office, but we don't know where to sit! It was all a bit new, but it all worked well and this gave me confidence. It was a great help from the team with things like making the tyres work. We prepared well, but it was still a bit of a shock to the system.

Q:

How much more could you have risked?

EE:

I have been a bit cautious in some icy sections yesterday, that cost us three seconds here or there. Those details make the difference. This was a brand-new car and this is Monte-Carlo. We were just taking that little chance to go on the throttle that bit earlier, but that can change the position so early. We had the lead, but everybody has done some sort of moment, the risk was higher today and it didn't happen quite as naturally. At that time trying to push more, I was almost guaranteed to have gone off. I have to accept that at that stage. That doesn't mean you ever give up, but it means you can't quite place the car exactly as you might want.

Q:

Scott, this is a really special podium for you...

SM:

Really special. It's been a difficult rally. It's the start season and expectations are high. To be up here with these guys, it's tough competition so to get on the podium on this rally is a special feeling. There's a lot of hard work and preparation and it's all paid off to have a really enjoyable weekend, really nice.

Q:

Did you allow yourself to dream about that first win?

SM:

No. I didn't dream at all – I actually struggled to sleep. One day, it'll come. It's been a really positive weekend and I can't wait for the rest of the season. The team's had great success, and it's great working with Seb and Julien and the rest of the guys.

Q:

Andrea, we saw real emotion from you at the end – this one meant a lot.

AA:

I have to say for once, this one? It's special for me. I was born not far from here. Monte-Carlo has always been the special one. I grew up with the rally close to me. I remember asking my parents to stay awake listening to Monte-Carlo in 1986 when Henri Toivonen won. I'm sorry, but I'm too old to remember these things, but I do remember listening to Radio Monte-Carlo for the live comments after every stage. I would stay awake in the middle of the night. I remember when I was a child at the start of Turini... For me, it has a special meaning to come here, this is the root of my passion and it's always difficult when we're not in this position. It was difficult last time, this was my first time [as Hyundai Motorsport director] and then this time as well.

Q:

Was it too difficult to watch at times?

AA:

Yes.

Q:

What do you think of the performance of Thierry and Nicolas?

AA:

From when I lead Hyundai team, it was Thierry and Nicolas who have always filled the gap we had to Toyota. From Cataluña, in my view, and I never told them this, they have reached another step of confidence. From Cataluña, there and then in the test there has been a continuous improvement. I would say this weekend maybe, they have been even more calm than me. They have helped to calm me down. The world was a bit upside down for me this weekend.

FIA WRC 2 CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

1st - Mads Østberg (NOR), PH Sport

1st - Torstein Eriksen (NOR), PH Sport

Q:

Mads, what a great way to start the season!

MO:

It's been a very special weekend. I came to try to fight at the top, but I didn't expect the pace to be so good this weekend. We lost 2m45s on stage three and that was quite tricky. I set my target to catch him [Camilli] when we changed the wheel on the stage. We tried and it was fun to have something to follow. I had a clear target and we got quite close, but Eric has a lot of experience and he controlled it well. One more day and maybe, we could have caught him. It was great fun, a great fight, but I'm not sure Eric really saw it as a fight, but I enjoyed it a lot. I made a lot of stage wins and I want to thank Eric for the fight.

Q:

You had a broken rim?

MO:

It was just the rim, we didn't get the puncture at all. I cannot say what happened exactly, but that was a bit unfortunate. That wouldn't have happened if I had stayed on the road, but I didn't think it would happen with a slight touch on the bank. We recovered, that's rallying – the car performed really well. Look at the top five and the Citroëns are on the top. I worked on this project for a year and we're not at the bottom of the list any more.

Q:

This was a challenging Monte though...

MO:

It was quite a change. I've done some difficult Monte Carlos, but they've probably been more clean. This time we had snow here, ice there, then it was dry there, we were never in consistent conditions. We drove different tyre combinations, it was tricky, but I enjoyed it – it was one of the best I have done.

Q:

Torstein, how do you get into the rhythm for this event?

TE:

I don't know! Five minutes before the stage, it's a mess: Mads is yelling and wants to know how far to the stage, what the conditions are like, where we go... Then you're at the start and when you say go, it's nice to be able to focus on reading the notes in time and that's it. I don't know if I have a rhythm, but we did it well.

Q:

Special to win the Monte?

TE:

It's my first ever Monte Carlo, I worked the last four years since 2012 for Mads' team so it's, good to be in the co-drivers' seat.

Q:

You have seen it from different perspectives, including ice-note crew – did yours perform well this time?

TE:

Yes, they did.

FIA WRC 3 CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

1st – Eric Camilli (FRA)

1st – François Xavier Buresi (FRA)

Q:

Eric, congratulations. How does it feel – you must be very happy?

EC:

Completely, I am happy. We lead the rally from the start and by more than one minute. It wasn't a lot, but we pushed and then we tried to manage the gap for the rest of the rally. I am very happy.

Q:

You had a new co-driver in F-X, or at least a co-driver starting Rallye Monte-Carlo for the first time. How was that?

EC:

For him, this is something special. He has only done 20 rallies in his life and it was very good. We say we will start together, we have been together before sometimes – it was a good choice, but this was not easy for him.

Q:

You led from the start, but you did have a couple of issues?

EC:

The car worked very well. We had a small issue on braking and lost time I didn't know how to manage that issue, but then we figured out. That was all. [The lead] Was close to be 1m50s and then the rest of the rally went very well.

Q:

F-X, congratulations and how was your first Monte Carlo?

F-XB:

Thank you for the congratulations. It was very difficult for me, my first Monte Carlo. Eric is my friend though, so it was OK.

Q:

Were you nervous?

F-XB:

Definitely! But now I'm OK. It's finished and I'm very happy. The things on the road section, working on the roll bar, preparing the pace notes and managing the road section... and then you wait for the ice!