



FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

2020 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

RALLYE MONTE-CARLO

Pre-event Press Conference
22nd January 2020

FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

Ott Tänak (EST), Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT
Sébastien Ogier (FRA), Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT
Gus Greensmith (GBR), M-Sport Ford World WRT
Sébastien Loeb (FRA), Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT
Kalle Rovanperä (FIN), Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT
Andrea Adamo (ITA), Team Principal, Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT

Q:

We will start with our FIA World Champion, who for this season has changed teams from Toyota Gazoo racing to the Hyundai Shell Mobis World Rally Team. Ott, the defence of your title begins now. Firstly, what has the experience been like so far at Hyundai and crucially, have you adapted to the i20 WRC?

OT:

It's been nice, to be honest. I've been able to feel good and comfortable for some time. I try to be as efficient and know everybody in the team, but it's taking time to remember everybody! Of course, it's always a bit of a challenge with a new team. I've had a really nice welcome in the team, but we're also pushing hard to get ready for the Monte.

Q:

Why didn't you take the number one?

OT:

I got stuck [with the number eight].

Q:

It's your lucky number?

OT:

I don't know it it's lucky, but it's my number.

Q:

From your testing so far, what do you believe are the i20's strengths?

OT:

The car is strong. It's fast, of course. I have done only a few test days on a short stretch of road, but on this rally, we will get to see everything. We need to know more about the feeling and we can only understand this from a day of rallying. We have been trying to learn to see how the car is reacting and find out as much as possible.

Q:

As well as the testing, we've seen your acting skills being tested on your social media videos...

OT:

Yeah, but we know we are among the professionals... Definitely he [Adamo] feels at home in these things.

Q:

Can you win Monte-Carlo?

OT:

You always come to the rally trying to win. I will give my best and I can say hopefully a bit more when I've done a couple of stages. Before the rally, it's impossible to say anything. Actually, I'm looking forward to a few kilometres of competing.

Q:

Sébastien Ogier, you begin the season with a new manufacturer at Toyota Gazoo Racing. How tough will this one be?

SO:

It might be my 10th start here of all the editions I've done, but it's never twice been the same rally – it's always something unexpected and that's tricky. We're all excited about these new changes. It's good for the sport for this to be mixed up. It's good for the fans, it's exciting and it's the same for us. OK, Shakedown didn't give us much, but we can see the potential is there with the new car. Like Ott said, we need some times, and we need some kilometres to have a feeling of where we are. Then we can have a better view of strengths and weaknesses.

Q:

But you adapt quickly...

SO:

Usually, this is one of my strengths and I hope to carry on that way. But it's not like I can push the replay button and do it automatically. I've done a new challenge and I'm never missing the excitement – that's definitely there. I want to give my best, but we need more time to be sure of what we have, but the first feeling is good. Monte-Carlo is the rally I want to win most on the calendar - I say this every year, it's no surprise to you. But almost everybody here tonight has the potential to win it. We want to be part of the game.

Q:

And the number 17?

SO:

My favourite number was number one, but there was somebody better than us last year! The plan is to take it back. The only one [number] I could think of was 17. It was the day I was born on and the only other link was from autocross when we were kids and my dad was racing with that number.

Q:

Sébastien Loeb, you have also changed your number. You're number nine now. I'm guessing we know the reason for that...

SL:

Yes!

Q:

Back for another season with Hyundai, six more rallies this year?

SL:

Yes.

Q:

Can you win the rally? And please don't stop the answer at yes!

SL:

Monte Carlo is always a special rally. It's not only a question to be fastest in one stage, you need to think more to that, you need to think about the good tyre choice and these things. You are on the limit in the nice parts, but you have to be more careful in the tricky parts – it's a rally where it's easy to make a mistake. The feeling was good in the test, nothing really changed. I have a bit more experience than last year, when I had just discovered the car. Hopefully I will be able to feel the rhythm.

Q:

Tell me about the new stage tomorrow...

SL:

For me both stages tomorrow are brand new. The first one was really a Tarmac stage, really dry, so nothing special. Stage two was really tricky in the recce. I don't know how [much] it will be melting. There will be some ice parts, maybe tyre choice will be the first issue tomorrow.

Q:

You have a lot of experience and a lot of victories here. How much will you share your Monte secrets with the other drivers?

SL:

I'm not the only one who knows how to do it here, the others in the team have quite a lot of experience. We try to share, the goal is to improve the car and the team. There are no secrets with the drivers, we do everything we can do we do.

Q:

Gus, great result in FIA WRC 2 Pro here last year, but now you're at WRC and that's a different level...

GG:

It's the dream for me. The reason I fell in love with rallying is from watching the man in front of me (Loeb) driving down an icy mountain. This is looking like the perfect Monte-Carlo rally, with conditions changing a lot. I'm looking forward to it.

Q:

A new look this year, I understand you're 19 kilos lighter...

GG:

I knew that this was going to happen this year after Finland [last year]. It's an incredible opportunity and I want to give everything I've got. OK, it's been a miserable winter, but it's worth it.

Q:

What did you learn last year?

GG:

People are usually happier when the car's on four wheels! I learned a lot last year, this year's about being more consistent.

Q:

Andrea, huge success last year, what's the objective this year?

AA:

Repeat last year.

Q:

So you don't want the drivers' title?

AA:

If we can have it, I will be more than happy.

Q:

How is it working with Ott?

AA:

Like he said, we haven't yet worked together for long so far. I would say it's something like having a brand-new girlfriend: we go out, buy the flowers, things like that... We will see. Even if he's not the kind of girl I like the most!

Q:

What can you tell us about changes with the car?

AA:

I said in January last year, I would not speak about technical things and I don't see any reason to change this year.

Q:

How will you handle the rivalry in your team this year?

AA:

When you work with intelligent people – and I am so lucky to have four crews like that – these are much more stories built outside to make some news for your job. When the things are clear at the end, you can manage the things. I don't want to say it's easy – that would be a lie and, as last year I told you I would not lie to you. It's manageable.

Q:

Manageable?

AA:

Maybe it depends on the meaning you give to the word...

Q:

We see Hyundai bringing a new R5 team this year, that's going to help bring new talent through?

AA:

Last year, I met with Yves Matton and his FIA people. We talked about making a WRC Pro team and I told them it would be possible only for us to do it in the proper way. We can see how to make this potential in this year with the proper budget and not too much compromise. When Hyundai made the i20 R5 in 2016, it has been done in a short time. It improved along the year, but it is still a bit at the end of the career. If I have not done anything, then it would have died earlier. But we have a new homologation on January 1 and that's good for Hyundai to have this presence and it's good for our drivers.

Q:

Kalle, tells us about number 69...

KR:

It's nothing special, when you are on the roof, the number is still the same!

Q:

How much of a step is it from R5 to the Yaris WRC?

KR:

Today, it was quite a big step. Last week, we drove in Finland on a snow event and it's been one month between the Tarmac test and today. The first run was a bit careful. But it's really nice, it's fast!

Q:

Do you have your sensible head on?

KR:

I think there will be moments when I want to be faster, but the main thing is to stay calm and avoid the mistakes. If there are some clear stages and conditions then I want to be in good speed.

Q:

How much will you ask Ogier?

KR:

I hope I learn a lot from him. He is really experienced and he's been the fastest driver in many years. It's nice to be in the same team and over the year, I hope we can learn from him.

Q:

Do you have some target events to push on?

KR:

I think we will see after Mexico, when we have driven one rally on each surface, we will see the speed. I want to be fast in Finland, but that kind of rally, where you are all the time flat-out, it's quite difficult with these cars.

FIA WRC 2 CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

Adrien Fourmaux (FRA), M-Sport Ford

Nicolay Gryazin (RUS), Hyundai Motorsport N

Q:

Nikolay, a fantastic opportunity for you this year with Hyundai Motorsport N within FIA WRC 2. How much are you looking forward to the season ahead? What's the objective?

NG:

I try to go for the title with Hyundai. I need to get used to the new car. I drove all my time in another car, but I need to have a go for myself.

Q:

Last year, we saw great pace from you, with your best result coming in Finland where you took the FIA WRC 2 win. This however will be your first time competing here at Rally Monte-Carlo - what will be the strategy from you this weekend?

NG:

This is my big opportunity to come to the factory team and to learn a lot. Monte Carlo for the first time is not easy, but I did one rally last year in similar tricky conditions. This event will be the same – it's more like survival. It's not easy to push, I need to be very cautious – it's not easy to trust each other (driver and co-driver) on stages like these.

Q:

Will you be sensible?

NG:

I will try, yes.

Q:

Adrien, also a fantastic opportunity for you also, joining M-Sport for this FIA WRC 2 season. You were second in FIA WRC 2 in Monte last year in what was a stunning display - can you deliver more this time?

AF:

Honestly, I want to do the same or better as last year. Last year was the first WRC event, now I have one season and I want to be faster. It's a great opportunity to be with M-Sport, I want to do my best.

Q:

Tell us about your preparations...

AF:

Two weeks ago, I was in M-Sport. It was beautiful, then one week ago I was testing. I drove this car in Spain last year, I really found something good for the set-up and I'm really happy.

Q:

Your career has been incredible so far, only three years since you began your first rally and you've won the Rally Jeune programme, you became French Junior Champion in 2018 and now a full season within FIA WRC 2. Did you ever believe success would come so quickly?

AF:

No. Honestly today, I was thinking that three years ago I was new to this [sport]. I was working with my paper and now I'm in the official team!

Q:

What's the plan for this event?

AF:

It's a really tricky rally. None of the stages are easy. There's snow and ice – it's changing all the time. We have to manage that. We will take care at the start and see what we can do.

FIA WRC 3 CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

Yohan Rossel (FRA)

Umberto Scandola (ITA)

Q:

How much are you looking forward to this, Yohan?

YR:

It's a great opportunity for me. I won the French Championship last year, but this isn't part of the Monte-Carlo. I won [the French title] last year, but this season starts now – we will see.

Q:

You are French Champion, does that give you confidence?

YR:

I have good confidence, but Monte-Carlo is not the same as the French Championship. The conditions here are just incredible. It's just ice coming this week and I want to do no mistakes. We will see for the result. I want to do a good rally and we will see on Sunday.

Q:

What do you think about the conditions from the recce?

YR:

I don't know. I think it's not the same from recce to the rally. I don't know if we'll have snow, I think yes. But it's very tricky conditions on all the stages. It's very difficult.

Q:

Umberto, how many rallies will we see you on this year?

US:

We start here for the first time and that's a beautiful day. We'll be in Sweden, in Argentina and I think in GB also.

Q:

How have your preparations been?

US:

We prepared with a test on a good stage. The road was quite fast, with snow and ice – perfect for the conditions on the stage and the feeling with the car is good. It's important for us not to push to arrive on Sunday.

Q:

The rivalry in R5 is fierce, what can you achieve?

US:

I don't push, I am starting in these conditions. I am not a young driver, but it's important for me to take confidence in these stages.

Questions from the floor

Reiner Kuhn, Motorsport Aktuell (GER)

Q:

Andrea, in testing we saw the exhaust in the middle of the car. Did you homologate in this version, can you explain a little bit why you did this?

AA:

There is no politics. For different reasons, we decided to keep it on the left. Or the right.

Q:

You homologate this?

AA:

Do you think I run the car not homologated?

Q:

You need a joker or it's possible to change, because it was in the middle, in my understanding.

AA:

When it was in the middle?

Q:

In the test at the beginning of January.

AA:

In the test, we are not required to have an homologated car. Jérôme [Toquet, FIA Technical Delegate] wants to stay close to me, but not in the test.