



SS7 : CHAMPCELLA / SAINT-CLÉMENT

Date :	26.01.2024		
Day :	2	Flash N° :	12
Special Stage :	7	Distance :	17,87 km
Weather :	10°C		
Road conditions :	Dry and dirty road with gravel		

SS7: Neuville, 3 stage wins, back in the fight

A third fastest stage time on Friday for Thierry Neuville on the 7th special stage of the 92nd Monte-Carlo Rally: it was a fitting reward for the Belgian driver, who started his rally cautiously on Thursday evening but began to show his class on Friday, in a Hyundai inspiring him a lot more confidence.

Neuville set the fastest time on SS3, followed by SS6 and then SS7, the second stage between Champcella and Saint-Clément (17.87km). In the space of a few hours, he was back to 8.7 seconds behind Sébastien Ogier and 17.3 seconds behind Elfyn Evans, just one stage away from the end of this superb rallying day (105 timed kilometers), on the heights of Gap.

"It was a good stage," smiled Neuville when he was told at the stage end that he had just taken 4.6 seconds off Evans, while waiting to find out that he was also going to claw back 3.5 seconds from Ogier. The two Toyota drivers are not out of reach yet, and as we have not yet reached the halfway point of the rally (17 stages on the menu), Hyundai can still have high hopes for this weekend.

SS7 was a very technical stage, with lots of hairpins, tight sections over bridges and through villages. The road was dry, but very dirty, with a lot of mud spread by dozens of competitors since this morning. *"It was a bit dirty at the end, there was a lot of dirt and stones. Maybe I wasn't brave enough in the narrowest and dirtiest sections,"* admitted Evans.



Ogier quicker than Evans

"There's nothing special to report, apart from the fact that we're starting to be able to fight on equal terms with the other drivers," summed up Ogier. He was happy to see that his main rivals were finally on the same footing, faced with a road as dirty as his own. And another challenge is becoming more and more crucial: to start managing the quota of soft tyres cleverly, by using super-soft tyres from time to time, in preparation for what promises to be a very turbulent weekend.

There was one beaming driver at the end of SS7, Norway's Andreas Mikkelsen (Hyundai), back in Rally1 after four seasons of purgatory in WRC2, since the end of 2019: *"It's getting better and better and I have to adapt to the speeds you can reach in corners with these cars. It's not so much the hybrid system, it's mainly the aero. It's great to be able to get back into a bit of a rhythm on the stages"*.

Fourmaux delighted with his Friday

Adrien Fourmaux (M-Sport Ford), also returning to Rally1 this year, also enjoyed Friday's action: *"I love driving and it's great to have so many different stages in the same loop. We had everything today, dirt, ice and changing conditions. It's Monte Carlo and that's what we love"*.

The WRC2 drivers also love the Monte Carlo Rally. After SS7, Spain's Pepe Lopez (Skoda Fabia RS) took over the category lead from Nikolay Gryazin (Citroën C3), by just four seconds. And Yohan Rossel (Citroën C3), the 2021 WRC3 champion, remains in the hunt, less than two seconds behind Gryazin. With just one stage left before returning to Gap for a good night's sleep.



Quotes

33. EVANS-MARTIN

« A bit dirty towards the end. A lot of gravel out on the cuts. I was probably not quite smooth or brave enough through the narrow and dirty places. »

11. NEUVILLE-WYDAEGHE

« That's always good to clinch a stage win. It was a good one. »

8. TÄNAK-JÄRVEOJA

« There is some pollution on the road, but it was a clean stage. »

17. OGIER-LANDAIS

« It was OK, it was a clean run but nothing special. This one is dirtier than the morning, but we can see now at least that the conditions are the same for everybody. »

9. MIKKELSEN-ERIKSEN

« It's going better and better. I am still adjusting to the speed you can carry into the corners but it's nice to be back in this kind of rhythm again in a car like this. We just have to take it as it comes. »

16. FOURMAUX-CORIA

« It's nice to have some really different stages in the loop. This one had a lot of dirt at the end of the stage but at least we had some ice, damp, and mixed conditions. This is Monte-Carlo and this is what we like." »

13. MUNSTER-LOUKA

« I think we have a bit more understanding of how the car is working and we are enjoying it a lot.»



Classifications SS7

POS	DRIVER	STAGE TIME	DIFF 1st	DIFF PREV	CAR No.
1	<u>Thierry NEUVILLE</u>	9:49.6	-	-	#11
2	<u>Sébastien OGIER</u>	9:53.1	+3.5	+3.5	#17
3	<u>Elfyn EVANS</u>	9:54.2	+4.6	+1.1	#33
4	<u>Ott TÄNAK</u>	9:56.1	+6.5	+1.9	#8
5	<u>Takamoto KATSUTA</u>	10:04.3	+14.7	+8.2	#18
6	<u>Adrien FOURMAUX</u>	10:04.9	+15.3	+0.6	#16
7	<u>Andreas MIKKELSEN</u>	10:09.8	+20.2	+4.9	#9
8	<u>Grégoire MUNSTER</u>	10:10.4	+20.8	+0.6	#13

After SS7

POS	DRIVER	TOTAL TIME	DIFF 1st	DIFF PREV	CAR No.
1	<u>Elfyn EVANS</u>	1:14:58.5	-	-	#33
2	<u>Sébastien OGIER</u>	1:15:07.1	+8.6	+8.6	#17
3	<u>Thierry NEUVILLE</u>	1:15:15.8	+17.3	+8.7	#11
4	<u>Ott TÄNAK</u>	1:16:04.4	+1:05.9	+48.6	#8
5	<u>Adrien FOURMAUX</u>	1:16:25.4	+1:26.9	+21.0	#16
6	<u>Andreas MIKKELSEN</u>	1:17:34.0	+2:35.5	+1:08.6	#9
7	<u>Grégoire MUNSTER</u>	1:18:05.3	+3:06.8	+31.3	#13
8	<u>Takamoto KATSUTA</u>	1:21:41.4	+6:42.9	+3:36.1	#18