



SS8 : LA BRÉOLE / SELONNET 2

Date :	26.01.2024		
Day :	2	Flash N° :	13
Special Stage :	8	Distance :	18,31 km
Weather :	8°C – Spéciale de Nuit		
Road conditions :	Dry road		

SS8: Ogier rejoins Neuville and closes the gap on Evans

It was quite a day of rallying, which ended in a draw between two of the WRC's greatest players : three fastest times for Thierry Neuville (SS3, SS6, SS7), three also for Sébastien Ogier (SS4, SS5, SS8) in this 92nd Rally Monte-Carlo where the Frenchman is the title holder... with absolutely no guarantee of retaining it on Sunday.

"We did our job. We came back well (in the overall standings). It was a good day," soberly summed up Ogier at the pitstop on SS8, which was run entirely at night and in which he put his foot down to finish the day on a high. The Frenchman from the Hautes-Alpes, eight-time world champion and nine-time winner in Monte-Carlo, is now just 4.5 seconds behind his Toyota team-mate Elfyn Evans, who was dominant on Thursday evening but much more cautious on Friday (no best time all day).

"This rally is never easy. And it's very difficult at night. I had a lot of information, but I couldn't manage everything at once. I had to trust the notes. It was very difficult to assess the road conditions. I'm happy to have got to the end of the day without a single problem," said the Welshman.

His lead over Neuville was 15 seconds on Friday morning when he left Gap. On Saturday morning, it will be just 4.5 seconds over another big WRC customer: the formidable Seb Ogier, who is not aiming for the world title this year. That's something to think about before taking any unnecessary risk...



Neuville steps up the pace

The other contender for the 2024 world title is bound to be a Hyundai driver. And after eight out of 17 stages in this first round of the season, Neuville has taken the upper hand, for the time being, over his team-mate Tänak: *"I'm happy to be here. It wasn't a good morning, but we had a much better afternoon. We need to stay focused and do a better job tomorrow. We've made a few changes to the set-up. It went well on the first two stages [of the day]. Here, the conditions are tricky, so it's not easy to stay focused, but we're here"*, Neuville reckoned before heading back to Gap.

His Estonian team-mate, who was driving for M-Sport Ford in 2023, needs to regain confidence in the Hyundai. That is definitely happening, slowly but surely. *"We managed to finish [the stage]. It was really scary and we didn't have a good pace, but we'll see..."*, said Tänak, the 2019 world champion, at the end of a nerve-wracking day.

The final word on Friday's rally goes to Ogier, the local hero, who delighted the many fans lining the roads of his native region with his immaculate driving style: *"It was a lot more slippery than this morning, with a lot of mud. We had a difficult start to the rally, but we expected that with our starting position. Now, I'm happy that we've managed to get closer [to the lead]. Tomorrow should be fun"*.

Saturday: 120 km on the menu

On Saturday's menu, there are six more tricky stages, spread over two loops of three stages, totalling 120km of timed sections. Given the current very narrow gaps between the contenders for victory, both in Rally1 (three drivers within 16 seconds of each other) and in WRC2 (three drivers within five seconds), it's reasonable to expect that Day 3 of this rally will be very lively. If not completely wild.



Quotes

33. EVANS-MARTIN

« It never gets easier, this rally. Very difficult in the dark. I had a lot of information but I couldn't see a lot of it to be honest, I just had to trust it [the race notes]. It's very difficult to read the conditions on the road. I'm happy to get through today without any issues. »

11. NEUVILLE-WYDAEGHE

« I am happy to be here. It was not a good morning but we had a better afternoon. We will keep focused and we have to do a better job tomorrow. We worked a bit on the setup, It went quite well on the first two stages [of the day]. Here, there is tricky conditions, it's not easy to stay focus but we are here. »

8. TÄNAK-JÄRVEOJA

« We made it through [the stage]. It was definitely sketchy and we were not in a good rhythm, but let's see. »

17. OGIER-LANDAIS

« Much more slippery than this morning, with a lot of mud. We had a difficult start to the rally but we expected that with our start position, and now I am glad that we managed to be very close. Tomorrow will be fun. »

18. KATSUTA-JOHNSTON

« It's not so easy to improve myself because the situation is not really like I need to push. I have to look after everything and I am trying to work on improving my driving and pace notes for the future. »

9. MIKKELSEN-ERIKSEN

« We had a good day. A lot of mileage. I would like to be faster, but there's so much to learn in these cars at this speed and it will come. I spent four years in a different car. I am really looking forward to tomorrow to get the mileage in and improve. »

16. FOURMAUX-CORIA

« It was a really tricky stage. I was struggling to find the confidence because the car was moving so much and the line was full of dirt everywhere. That was tricky. »

13. MUNSTER-LOUKA

« [The stage] It's always nice in the dark, but very tricky in the last part. Every ice patch has melted so it made a lot of water and mud on the road. The car is jumping all over the place so we will try to improve that for tomorrow. »



Classifications SS8

POS	DRIVER	STAGE TIME	DIFF 1st	DIFF PREV	CAR No.
1	Sébastien OGIER	10:26.3	-	-	#17
2	Thierry NEUVILLE	10:29.2	+2.9	+2.9	#11
3	Elfyn EVANS	10:30.4	+4.1	+1.2	#33
4	Ott TÄNAK	10:38.1	+11.8	+7.7	#8
5	Adrien FOURMAUX	10:41.5	+15.2	+3.4	#16
6	Takamoto KATSUTA	10:43.8	+17.5	+2.3	#18
7	Grégoire MUNSTER	10:50.7	+24.4	+6.9	#13
8	Andreas MIKKELSEN	10:53.8	+27.5	+3.1	#9

After SS8

POS	DRIVER	TOTAL TIME	DIFF 1st	DIFF PREV	CAR No.
1	Elfyn EVANS	1:25:28.9	-	-	#33
2	Sébastien OGIER	1:25:33.4	+4.5	+4.5	#17
3	Thierry NEUVILLE	1:25:45.0	+16.1	+11.6	#11
4	Ott TÄNAK	1:26:42.5	+1:13.6	+57.5	#8
5	Adrien FOURMAUX	1:27:06.9	+1:38.0	+24.4	#16
6	Andreas MIKKELSEN	1:28:27.8	+2:58.9	+1:20.9	#9
7	Grégoire MUNSTER	1:28:56.0	+3:27.1	+28.2	#13
8	Takamoto KATSUTA	1:32:25.2	+6:56.3	+3:29.2	#18