



SS9 : ESPARRON / OZE1

Date :	27.01.2024		
Day :	3	Flash N° :	16
Special Stage :	9	Distance :	18,79 km
Weather :	5°C – Sunny		
Road conditions :	Dry road, black ice in some places		

SS9: Neuville, the Wizard of Oze

Thierry Neuville pulled out all the stops this morning on SS9 of the 92nd Rallye Monte-Carlo, between Esparron and Oze (18.79km), setting a magical, stratospheric time of 12 minutes, 12 seconds and 5 tenths, which enabled the Hyundai driver to move back ahead of Seb Ogier in the overall standings, just behind leader Elfyn Evans. The Toyota drivers will have to remain vigilant.

"I don't understand. I must have been wide awake. The road conditions were better than expected. I did a decent stage", smiled Neuville, totally incredulous, when his time was announced at the stop point. Not only did the Belgian beat rally leader Elfyn Evans by 9.6 seconds, but he also moved up the overall ranking. He also took the liberty to beat, fair and square, the best rally driver of the 21st century, eight-time world champion Sébastien Ogier, by a huge margin: one second per kilometre (18.8 seconds for 18.8km). With the same mix of tyres, three super-soft and one soft.

"It's a lot of lost time. My crew notes were perhaps too cautious", judged Ogier after his under-performance due to the change in road conditions in the space of two hours, between the passage of the road crews and that of the drivers. Several drivers were surprised, like Ogier and Evans for Toyota, but not Grégoire Munster, who set the 3rd fastest time on this SS9, in his Ford Puma entered by M-Sport. This was the other great coup of the early morning, with Neuville's completely crazy time.



As a direct consequence, the overall classification was turned upside down from the outset on Saturday morning, and Evans, still in the lead, now has a 6.5-second advantage over Neuville after SS9. He held a 4.5-second lead over Ogier when he left the parc fermé in Gap, early this morning. So everything remains possible, more than ever, in this rally, especially as Ott Tänak, in the other leading Hyundai, had a bad start of the day: impossible to start his i20N this morning in Gap, then several engine (or throttle) cuts in SS9, the same as on Thursday evening in SS1 and 2.

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Quotes

18. KATSUTA-JOHNSTON

« [Talking about the stage] Very frosty, pretty much surprising, I think we did well but the conditions were changing a lot. It was very difficult, I had to be very careful, but it's OK. We have no target at the moment, we are just trying to gain confidence and have good feelings with the car. »

13. MUNSTER-LOUKA

« These are very difficult conditions and I like it. This [talking about the stage] was the trickiest one, and this tyre choice should be even better for the next one so that's good news. »

9. MIKKELSEN-ERIKSEN

« We had dry [conditions regarding the gravel crew's note] and in the first corner, I flew off the road, I'm super lucky to be here. It was really difficult. After that, you have no confidence anymore. »

16. FOURMAUX-CORIA

« It's quite tricky. From when the route note crew went through to what we have now [regarding the stage conditions] is really different. I took it really carefully. »

8. TÄNAK-JÄRVEOJA

« Quite a struggle again with the engine, like the first stage [on Thursday]. Complicated to drive at the moment. [Regarding the issue in the parc fermé in the morning] This morning we had some engine trouble. »

11. NEUVILLE-WYDAEGHE

« Probably I was well awake this morning! I expected the conditions to be worse, to be honest. But I had a decent run through. »

17. OGIER-LANDAIS

[After learning he lost 18.8 seconds to Neuville in the stage] « It's a lot of time lost. My information was too safe, probably. »

33. EVANS-MARTIN

« Very difficult to judge. Some places were very slippery and in others, we had some frost that seemed to have quite full grip. It's really difficult to judge. »



Classifications SS9

POS	DRIVER	STAGE TIME	DIFF 1st	DIFF PREV	CAR No.
1	Thierry NEUVILLE	12:12.5	-	-	#11
2	Elfyn EVANS	12:22.1	+9.6	+9.6	#33
3	Grégoire MUNSTER	12:26.7	+14.2	+4.6	#13
4	Takamoto KATSUTA	12:30.6	+18.1	+3.9	#18
5	Sébastien OGIER	12:31.3	+18.8	+0.7	#17
6	Ott TÄNAK	12:32.6	+20.1	+1.3	#8
7	Adrien FOURMAUX	12:39.6	+27.1	+7.0	#16
8	Andreas MIKKELSEN	12:59.2	+46.7	+19.6	#9

After SS9

POS	DRIVER	TOTAL TIME	DIFF 1st	DIFF PREV	CAR No.
1	Elfyn EVANS	1:37:51.0	-	-	#33
2	Thierry NEUVILLE	1:37:57.5	+6.5	+6.5	#11
3	Sébastien OGIER	1:38:04.7	+13.7	+7.2	#17
4	Ott TÄNAK	1:39:15.1	+1:24.1	+1:10.4	#8
5	Adrien FOURMAUX	1:39:46.5	+1:55.5	+31.4	#16
6	Grégoire MUNSTER	1:41:22.7	+3:31.7	+1:36.2	#13
7	Andreas MIKKELSEN	1:41:27.0	+3:36.0	+4.3	#9
8	Takamoto KATSUTA	1:44:55.8	+7:04.8	+3:28.8	#18