



SS12: ESPARRON / OZE 2

Date :	27.01.2024		
Day :	3	Flash N° :	21
Special Stage :	12	Distance :	18,79 km
Weather :	14°C – Sunny		
Road conditions :	Route sèche		

SS12: Ogier back in the game

Sébastien Ogier, the defending champion, clawed back a handful of seconds from Thierry Neuville early on Saturday afternoon by setting the fastest time on SS12, the second pass between Esparron and Oze (18.79km). The suspense remains intact at the top of the 92nd Monte-Carlo Rally, with the Toyota driver only 2.2 seconds behind the Hyundai driver.

The margin is tiny, insane, barely believable: one hundredth of a second per kilometre, if you divide 2.2 seconds by the 220 km covered since the start on Thursday evening in the Alpes de Haute-Provence. That's the gap between Neuville and Ogier, with around a hundred kilometres left until the grand finale on Sunday in Col de Turini. The battle is total, intense, between two drivers at the top of their game who have, so far, avoided all the traps of this 2024 edition.

Behind Neuville and Ogier, their rivals are falling behind, one by one. First there was Tänak, who crashed out on SS3 and has been doing his best since Friday morning to climb back on the podium. The most recent setback was that of Elfyn Evans, who led from Thursday evening until Saturday morning, but who is now unable to set a single fastest time.



Munster stuck in a barrier

"It did not feel so great, but that's a bit chronic (this week)," said the Welshman at the end of SS12, at siesta time. He didn't even mention the hybrid system that had abandoned him for a few minutes this morning. The reigning world vice-champion is now a privileged observer of this battle of the chiefs, 16.5 seconds behind the Belgian and 14.3 seconds behind the 8-time World Champion, in a Toyota Yaris strictly identical to his own.

The main incident of SS12 involved Grégoire Munster, who had been very clean and efficient up to that point in his M-Sport Ford Puma, on his first Rally1 event, in the top category (his 24th rally in WRC conditions). The Belgian (with a Luxembourg licence) made a small error at km 6.3 and his Puma got stuck in a wooden safety barrier on the edge of a ravine. The co-driver then went to the side of the road, upstream of the bend, to warn other competitors who slowed down at this point, all losing a handful of seconds. The stage was not neutralised.



Quotes

18. KATSUTA-JOHNSTON

« I am trying to drive with a good feeling. The [road] conditions are dirtier. It wasn't easy to trust the information [related to the road]. Now I am starting to enjoy the driving. »

13. MUNSTER-LOUKA

[Went off the road and got stuck]

9. MIKKELSEN-ERIKSEN

« This stage was much easier this time [than this morning]. When I saw Munster, I backed off a little bit, and I got my rhythm back after a while. I had to slow down a bit, and it was a clean stage. The grip was really good, much better than this morning. »

16. FOURMAUX-CORIA

« It's a real shame for Grégoire [Munster, his teammate]. He was doing a great job today and it [his accident] was a corner full of gravel, he just understeered. I don't know if they can restart or not, but they were all okay. We had a clean stage and still managing where we are and it's a nice thing. We have a good feeling on the dry. »

8. TÄNAK-JÄRVEOJA

« It's quite tough, actually. Quite a bit of dirt and very rough in the cuts, so it can be a bit trickier for the tyres. »

11. NEUVILLE-WYDAEGHE

« I had a good stage. Let's see what the guys do behind, but we had a good stage. It's a long run and the tyres started moving after 5km. We have six good tyres with us, so let's see. »

17. OGIER-LANDAIS

« A good start, but there is two more. [Regarding his tyres choice] We had to go for some risk. »

33. EVANS-MARTIN

« I don't know... that's a big surprise. I'm surprised it's so bad - it didn't feel so great but that's a bit chronic [this week]. »



Classifications SS12

POS	DRIVER	STAGE TIME	DIFF 1st	DIFF PREV	CAR No.
1	Sébastien OGIER	11:23.0	-	-	#17
2	Thierry NEUVILLE	11:28.5	+5.5	+5.5	#11
3	Ott TÄNAK	11:36.9	+13.9	+8.4	#8
4	Takamoto KATSUTA	11:36.9	+13.9	-	#18
5	Andreas MIKKELSEN	11:38.2	+15.2	+1.3	#9
6	Elfyn EVANS	11:39.9	+16.9	+1.7	#33
7	Adrien FOURMAUX	11:40.6	+17.6	+0.7	#16

After SS12

POS	DRIVER	TOTAL TIME	DIFF 1st	DIFF PREV	CAR No.
1	Thierry NEUVILLE	2:13:35.3	-	-	#11
2	Sébastien OGIER	2:13:37.5	+2.2	+2.2	#17
3	Elfyn EVANS	2:13:51.8	+16.5	+14.3	#33
4	Ott TÄNAK	2:15:02.3	+1:27.0	+1:10.5	#8
5	Adrien FOURMAUX	2:15:53.8	+2:18.5	+51.5	#16
6	Andreas MIKKELSEN	2:17:29.1	+3:53.8	+1:35.3	#9
7	Takamoto KATSUTA	2:20:43.4	+7:08.1	+3:14.3	#18