



SS3 : ST-LÉGER-LES-MÉLÈZES / LA BÂTIE-NEUVE 1

Date :	26.01.2024		
Day :	2	Flash N° :	6
Special Stage :	3	Distance :	16,68 km
Weather :	3°C –		
Road conditions :	Dry road, damp patches, frost		

SS3: Neuville the early bird, Tänak in the ditch

After a short night in Gap, the 67 remaining competitors of the 92nd Monte-Carlo Rally set off on Friday morning on a slippery and tricky special stage between Saint-Léger-les-Mélèzes and La Bâtie-Neuve (SS3, 16.68km). The first laurels of the day went to Thierry Neuville (Hyundai), who set his first fastest time of the rally, and the first damage was done to three members of the Top 8: Tänak, Katsuta and Munster, who all crashed out in the same corner.

You had to be wide awake this morning on Col de Moissière (1574m), as the road was very slippery on SS3. *"On some portions of ice, there was no grip at all, so I was very careful. We've sorted out our problem from last night, so it's going better,"* explained Neuville at La Bâtie Neuve, after a long descent that was much drier than the ascent to the pass.

The Belgian, who won in Monaco in 2020, was 5.3 seconds quicker than rally leader Elfyn Evans (Toyota) in that stage, and the third fastest time on SS3 was set by Sébastien Ogier, 6.6 seconds behind Neuville. *"It was OK, but I was more bothered by the dirt on the road than by the icy patches,"* said the title holder, wide awake but very cautious on his home turf. *"I was careful because the road conditions were very mixed,"* also admitted Evans. He is well aware of the number of points to be taken in this opening round of WRC 2024, since he sometimes has a tendency to squander opportunities.



Tänak, Katsuta and Munster trapped

Three drivers were trapped in the same place, going too wide on a long right-hand curve in the forest, where the layer of ice was thin but very effective. Starting on soft tyres, they all ended up in the ditch, more or less deeply. And the spectators intervened to get them out of it, once the green light on their car was on to avoid electrocution.

Ott Tänak, the 2019 world champion, took his 150th WRC start on Thursday (19 wins, 46 podiums, 356 fastest times, half of them with Martin Jarveoja in the right seat). He lost 41.9 seconds to Neuville in the process, and Grégoire Munster, the new M-Sport Ford driver, lost a full minute. The biggest loss was for Takamoto Katsuta, stuck in the ditch for five minutes. *"It's entirely my fault"*, admitted the Japanese Toyota driver before setting off again, well harnessed, towards the sunny descent of SS3.

With 5 more stages on the menu this Friday, M-Sport's Frenchman Adrien Fourmaux has moved up one place in the overall standings. He is 4th before SS4, with a three-second lead over Tänak...



Quotes

33. EVANS-MARTIN

« A tricky stage, a bit careful from my side, and not really driving so well. Otherwise OK. Very mixed [conditions]. »

11. NEUVILLE-WYDAEGHE

« It was really tricky. Once you hit the ice there is zero grip. We got through the stage and I had a decent rhythm. We have to work a bit on the car to give me a bit more confidence. »

8. TÄNAK-JÄRVEOJA

« I went a bit wide on the ice and then it spun around and the front was in a ditch. I was just stuck. »

17. OGIER-LANDAIS

« It was okay, but the most difficult thing [to manage in the stage] is the dirt on the road and not the patches of ice. »

9. MIKKELSEN-ERIKSEN

« It is actually better than expected, I just have to use my eyes. It [road conditions] has changed a lot since my gravel crew came through. The engine feels nice again and [the car seems] easier to drive. »

18. KATSUTA-JOHNSTON

[After being stuck into a ditch] « Just my mistake, so stupid. It's really bad, actually. I will try to finish the stages and see what I can do. »

16. FOURMAUX-CORIA

« We made some changes last night and it wasn't in the right direction for today. Compared to yesterday, the grip is lower so we went in the wrong direction. »

13. MUNSTER-LOUKA

« I expected slippery conditions later in the stage, but not in this one [a corner where he stopped]. I had some info from the team but still we got caught out. Thanks to the spectators for getting us out. »



Classifications SS3

POS	DRIVER	STAGE TIME	DIFF 1st	DIFF PREV	CAR No.
1	Thierry NEUVILLE	9:18.3	-	-	#11
2	Elfyn EVANS	9:23.6	+5.3	+5.3	#33
3	Sébastien OGIER	9:24.9	+6.6	+1.3	#17
4	Adrien FOURMAUX	9:40.8	+22.5	+15.9	#16
5	Andreas MIKKELSEN	9:45.6	+27.3	+4.8	#9
6	Ott TÄNAK	10:00.2	+41.9	+14.6	#8
7	Grégoire MUNSTER	10:19.9	+1:01.6	+19.7	#13
8	Takamoto KATSUTA	14:42.8	+5:24.5	+4:22.9	#18

After SS3

POS	DRIVER	TOTAL TIME	DIFF 1st	DIFF PREV	CAR No.
1	Elfyn EVANS	35:36.5	-	-	#33
2	Thierry NEUVILLE	35:46.3	+9.8	+9.8	#11
3	Sébastien OGIER	35:59.4	+22.9	+13.1	#17
4	Adrien FOURMAUX	36:32.7	+56.2	+33.3	#16
5	Ott TÄNAK	36:35.9	+59.4	+3.2	#8
6	Andreas MIKKELSEN	37:07.3	+1:30.8	+31.4	#9
7	Grégoire MUNSTER	37:38.8	+2:02.3	+31.5	#13
8	Takamoto KATSUTA	41:42.0	+6:05.5	+4:03.2	#18