



SS2 : ESCLANGON / SEYNE-LES-ALPES

Date :	22.01.2026		
Day :	1	Flash N° :	3
Special Stage :	2	Distance :	23,80 km
Weather :	2°C – Dry		
Road conditions :	Melted snow in the first section. Snow from Kilometer 10 to the end of the stage.		

SS2: Solberg makes a big splash!

Toyota Gazoo Racing's new driver Oliver Solberg set a stunning time in SS2 on Thursday evening, between Esclangon and Seyne-les-Alpes (23.8 km), to take the lead of the 94th Monte Carlo Rally ahead of his prestigious teammates Sébastien Ogier and Elfyn Evans. The other big surprise of the early evening was the provisional third place of Irish rookie Jon Armstrong in his M-Sport Ford Puma.

'I tried not to take too many risks, but every time I came into a corner, it was panic on board,' said the very talented son of Petter, the 2003 world champion in a Subaru, at the SS2 stop point. 'It was the most difficult special stage of my life,' added Solberg Junior, who managed to beat Evans by more than 31 seconds on a road covered in slush, the worst kind of slush, much feared by drivers.

Behind Oliver Solberg and Elfyn Evans, who had taken the top two places in SS1, but in reverse order, the other drivers did everything they could to limit the damage, and the two Frenchmen, Adrien Fourmaux (Hyundai) and Sébastien Ogier (Toyota), had to admit defeat to the unknown Armstrong, who is making his WRC debut in this Monte Carlo Rally. The road conditions were so tricky that even studded tyres were useless, with some corners being negotiated at 30 km/h or even less.

'We didn't go through too many scary moments, but it was a fight for survival,' said Thierry Neuville, the Belgian World Champion from Hyundai, visibly relieved to have made it through this ultra-tricky special stage, contested in front of hundreds of delighted spectators in the Alpes-de-Haute-Provence.



A third special stage is on the menu for this particularly challenging opening evening, with weather conditions changing by the minute, depending on whether the cars were going uphill or downhill, in the trees or not, and with an explosive mixture of slush, ice, water and dirt on the road, depending on the section.

One thing is already certain: this is a great vintage of the Monte Carlo Rally starting this Thursday evening, with Toyota fielding a trio of drivers who will be hard to beat this weekend: the maestro Ogier, the highly competitive Evans and the surprising Solberg, last year's champion of the WRC2 class.

In WRC2, after only two special stages, the top two places are provisionally occupied by two French drivers, the highly experienced Eric Camilli (Skoda Fabia) and the young Léo Rossel (Citroën C3). Leo is the brother of Yohann, who got off to a very bad start in his brand new Lancia Ypsilon HF Integrale: a violent collision damaged his front end on SS1, while it was still daylight.

Quotes

1. OGIER-LANDAIS

2 Super Soft, 4 Studs

"I have never seen something like that in my whole life. Such a [expletive] tyre. Unbelievable."

33. EVANS-MARTIN

2 Super Soft, 4 Studs

"If you told me I was two minutes slower, I would have believed you. It is horrendous. It is so much worse obviously, now it is freezing with the slush. It is so difficult."

11. NEUVILLE-WYDAEGHE

2 Snow, 4 Studs

"I guess you saw everything on TV. The conditions are crazy and we don't get any grip from these tyres. It is really really challenging at a very low speed. Sometimes, I was pushing the clutch to let the car go. I won't say the feeling was good but it is what it is at the moment."

18. KATSUTA-JOHNSTON

2 Snow, 4 Studs

"It is tricky, not fun. For us there was no chance. Our gravel crew went through four hours earlier and it has all changed. We need to be patient."



16. FOURMAUX-CORIA

2 Snow, 4 Studs

"It was one of the most difficult stages I have done in my life. We have no grip at all. We were passengers all the way through the stage. I had one spin so I feel lucky to be here. It starts to freeze now in the stage so I guess time will be slower. It was a difficult one."

5. PAJARI-SALMINEN

2 Snow, 4 Studs

Stopped at 8.3 km mark.

99. SOLBERG-EDMONDSON

2 Snow, 4 Studs

"There is no line. My god, that is the craziest I have done in my life and I thought I went off many times. In the beginning my driving was really bad, I had no rhythm, but then on the snow I thought I'd just go for it."

13. MUNSTER-LOUKA

2 Snow, 4 Studs

"I had no steering assistance in the last three kilometers."

55. MCERLEAN-TREACY

2 Snow, 4 Studs

Stopped at 5.5 km mark.

20. PADDON-KENNARD

2 Snow, 4 Studs

"We are getting some "welcome" tonight, I'll tell you that! This is so tricky and when you are not confident in the car and you don't feel the grip, it makes it ten times worse because you don't know how to make the car work. It wasn't fun but we've got to carry on."

95. ARMSTRONG-BYRNE

2 Super Soft, 4 Studs

"We had plenty of events. We had a couple of moments at the end and hit the bank with the right and hit the front off a wall. Hopefully, we can get through the next one. It was very difficult to know how to drive in these conditions because it's my first time. Let's go and see if everything is ok. I'm annoyed that I have made some mistakes at the end."



Classifications

SS2

POS	DRIVER	TEAM	STAGE TIME	DIFF PREV	DIFF 1st
1	O. SOLBERG		16:47.3	-	-
2	E. EVANS		17:18.4	+ 31.1	+ 31.1
3	J. ARMSTRONG		17:21.8	+ 03.4	+ 34.5
4	T. NEUVILLE		17:31.7	+ 09.9	+ 44.4
5	A. FOURMAUX		17:39.0	+ 07.3	+ 51.7
6	H. PADDON		17:43.3	+ 04.3	+ 56.0
7	G. MUNSTER		17:44.0	+ 00.7	+ 56.7
8	T. KATSUTA		17:51.6	+ 07.6	+ 01:04.3
9	S. OGIER		17:56.5	+ 04.9	+ 01:09.2
	S. PAJARI		-	+ -	+ -
	J. MCERLEAN		-	+ -	+ -

After SS2

POS	DRIVER	TEAM	TOTAL TIME	DIFF PREV	DIFF 1st
1	O. SOLBERG		32:58.6	-	-
2	E. EVANS		33:24.1	+ 25.5	+ 25.5
3	J. ARMSTRONG		34:01.9	+ 37.8	+ 01:03.3
4	A. FOURMAUX		34:04.6	+ 02.7	+ 01:06.0
5	S. OGIER		34:14.2	+ 09.6	+ 01:15.6
6	T. NEUVILLE		34:20.9	+ 06.7	+ 01:22.3
7	T. KATSUTA		34:24.4	+ 03.5	+ 01:25.8
8	G. MUNSTER		34:32.0	+ 07.6	+ 01:33.4
9	H. PADDON		34:38.0	+ 06.0	+ 01:39.4