



BP-Ford stretches WRC lead with podium double in Argentina

Argentina, May 6th 2007 - BP-Ford World Rally Team increased its lead at the top of the FIA World Rally Championship after claiming a double podium finish on Rally Argentina today. Marcus Grönholm and Timo Rautiainen finished second on this sixth round of the 16-event series in a Ford Focus RS World Rally Car while team-mates Mikko Hirvonen and Jarmo Lehtinen were third in a similar car.

The results enabled reigning manufacturers' champion BP-Ford to widen its advantage in the 2007 title race to nine points. Grönholm and Hirvonen remain second and third in the drivers' championship respectively.

Most of the opening leg was cancelled when several drivers became stranded in Buenos Aires, 700km south of the rally base in Carlos Paz, after the opening speed test there on Thursday night. Organisers added an additional special stage to today's final leg to ensure the event completed the required two-thirds distance to award full points. Drivers tackled 246.36km of competition in total, much of it across the wide open plains for which Argentina is renowned.

Today's itinerary took competitors into the rocky and twisty Traslasierra mountains for two loops of the famous Giulio Césare and El Cóndor tests, followed by a second pass over the super special stage at Cordoba's soccer stadium. Massive overnight storms flooded the service park and caused considerable damage to teams' equipment. They left the mountain stages, two of the toughest in the championship, in treacherous condition. The roads, which peak at 2195 metres, were muddy with thick fog in El Condor adding to the hazards.

Grönholm started in second, just 19.2sec behind Sébastien Loeb. The 39-year-old Finn attacked hard on the opening 23.18km Giulio Césare stage but dropped eight seconds after hitting some rocks. Accepting that finishing second was a better option than risk losing valuable points in trying to catch Loeb, Grönholm paced himself through the final four stages to finish 36.7sec behind the Frenchman. It was his fifth podium of the year.

"I went out to push hard this morning but the feeling wasn't so good," he said. "I ran wide and hit a stone with the rear of the car. I was worried it didn't feel right and it was hard to stay on the road. I dropped eight seconds to Loeb so I knew the fight was over. I lost a few seconds after sliding off the road at the beginning of the second stage but after that I had no problems. It was a shame that the first leg was cancelled and that made it a strange rally. I'm disappointed that the fight with Seb wasn't closer but second and third means that Ford has increased its lead."



Hirvonen restarted in third, with no opportunity of catching anyone ahead or of being caught from behind. The 26-year-old Finn eased through the day to secure his fourth podium of the season, 2min 15.2sec behind Loeb.

"There was so much fog this morning that there were sections where visibility was down to 20 metres," he said. "They were really tricky stages but that is the nature of this rally. Quite often here there is bad weather and fog to deal with. The car has been perfect but I'm a little disappointed with the weekend, although I can't complain about six points and a podium. Maybe my lack of experience of these roads was the telling factor because when the stages were repeated I was much quicker."

BP-Ford team director Malcolm Wilson was delighted with a strong team result. "Marcus and Loeb were on a different rally to anyone else in terms of pace and it seems Marcus is the only driver who can take the challenge to Seb. We increased our championship lead over Citroen and were helped by the Focus RS cars of the Stobart VK M-Sport Ford team who took points from our rival," he said.

Jost Capito, director of Ford TeamRS, said: "Four Ford Focus RS cars finished in the top five positions which emphasises the competitiveness and reliability of the Focus. Both championships remain close and we must continue to work as hard as possible to try to put Marcus back on top of the drivers' standings."

Final positions

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. S Loeb/D Elena | F | Citroen C4 | 2hr 52min 03.8sec |
| 2. M Grönholm/T Rautiainen | FIN | Ford Focus RS | 2hr52min 40.5sec |
| 3. M Hirvonen/J Lehtinen | FIN | Ford Focus RS | 2hr54min 19.0sec |
| 4. J-M Latvala/M Anttila | FIN | Ford Focus RS | 2hr55min 46.8sec |
| 5. H Solberg/C Menkerud | N | Ford Focus RS | 2hr56min 13.9sec |
| 6. D Sordo/M Marti | E | Citroen C4 | 2hr 56min 27.4sec |
| 7. C Atkinson/S Prévot | AUS | Subaru Impreza | 2hr 56min 47.2sec |
| 8. M Stohl/I Minor | A | Citroen Xsara | 2hr 57min 24.0sec |
| 9. F Villagra/D Curletto | ARG | Mitsubishi Lancer | 3hr 08min 53.7sec |
| 10 T Arai/T Sircombe | J | Subaru Impreza | 3hr 09min 03.0sec |

Drivers

| | |
|----------------------|--------------|
| 1. S Loeb | 48pts |
| 2. M Grönholm | 45pts |
| 3. M Hirvonen | 36pts |
| 4. D Sordo | 22pts |
| 5. P Solberg | 16pts |
| 6. H Solberg | 15pts |

Manufacturers

| | |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. BP-Ford | 81pts |
| 2. Citroen Total | 72pts |
| 3.Stobart VK M-Sport Ford | 30pts |
| 4. Subaru | 29pts |
| 5. OMV Kronos Citroen | 22pts |

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| PRESS INFORMATION

Contact Mark Wilford or Georgina Baskerville on the **BP-Ford World Rally Team** media desk in Carlos Paz Tel: + 54 3541 487322 for additional information.

Photographs are available on www.worldrallypics.com/ford and www.fordpress.be

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For more information:

Jo Declercq
Tel: +32 2 482 21 03
Fax: +32 2 482 21 07
jdecler2@ford.com