



Grönholm on podium as Ford nets double points haul in Spain

Salou (Spain), October 7th 2007 - BP-Ford World Rally Team drivers Marcus Grönholm and Timo Rautiainen today claimed their 10th podium finish from 12 rallies this season in Rally de España. The Finns were third at the wheel of a Ford Focus RS World Rally Car to remain clear leaders of the FIA World Rally Championship with four rounds remaining. Team-mates Mikko Hirvonen and Jarmo Lehtinen were fourth in another Focus RS to ensure BP-Ford retains a healthy lead in the manufacturers' standings.

This three-day event in the mountains of the Tarragona region, south of Barcelona, was the first of two asphalt events on consecutive weekends. Characterised by fast, sweeping roads, this 12th round of the campaign is more like circuit racing in its nature than any other sealed surface encounter. Drivers tackled 18 speed tests covering 352.87km.

All the action came on the first day when inconsistent weather provided constantly changing road conditions and major headaches for teams in their tyre choice. After Grönholm led during the morning, both he and Hirvonen were caught out on dry weather tyres when rain fell during the final special stage. Rather than risk everything in the slippery conditions, they adopted a safety-first policy and settled into the third and fourth positions they were to occupy for the rest of the event.

With no real opportunity of closing the gap to Sébastien Loeb and Dani Sordo ahead, Grönholm settled into a safe, but fast, pace for the remaining two days. He was the quickest driver on both the second day and today's final leg, winning four stages yesterday and three more today. "Second was the result I really wanted here but that wasn't to be and I can't change it," said 39-year-old Grönholm, who leads the drivers' standings by six points. "I still have a good championship lead but when I lost 30sec in the wet on Friday, my hopes of first or second were destroyed. I just wasn't confident driving in those conditions on dry slick tyres and I was too careful.

"The last two days were not so interesting as the pattern of the rally was already set on Friday. I enjoy this rally in the dry and we set a fast pace in those conditions but I don't like looking up at the sky guessing whether it is going to rain or not. I have a good, fast car and although it won't be easy in Corsica next weekend I just want to start again and aim for a good result," he said.

Hirvonen, who won a stage on the opening leg, finished 46.0sec behind his fellow countryman. With no chance to catch the drivers in front, he concentrated on staying ahead of fifth-placed François Duval to maximise BP-Ford's points in the manufacturers' championship, which it leads by 39 points.

"First and second was what we really wanted here but in Friday's damp conditions I struggled. In the dry, however, I did really well and I enjoyed driving on these roads. I hit a



fence on the penultimate stage but it wasn't a big problem. I tried to take the perfect line but the fence was in my way. I'm not sure if it's there any more – although it was quite a strong fence!" said 27-year-old Hirvonen.

Abu Dhabi's Khalid Al Qassimi and Nicky Beech were 14th in another official Focus RS. "I've reached a different level of enjoyment with every stage thanks to my confidence improving all the time," said Al Qassimi. "On each day I have lost some of the uncertainty and have been able to push harder. This morning I found a good rhythm but was caught out by some gravel on the exit of a corner and the car slid into a ditch. Spectators pushed me back onto the road and I lost about 40sec."

BP-Ford team director Malcolm Wilson admitted to slight disappointment. "We came here hoping for more than third and fourth but this is still a solid result for our championship challenges. We felt the fast roads here would suit our Finns and once the conditions dried, we showed a good pace and matched Citroen's drivers. We never under-estimated how difficult these asphalt rallies would be and we must keep the pressure on in Corsica next weekend. Hopefully the sun will shine there!" he said.

Ford TeamRS director Jost Capito said: "A podium for Marcus and a strong fourth for Mikko keeps us firmly on track for the manufacturers' championship. But we must remain fully concentrated because we have now reached the point in the season where any slip-up could prove costly."

Final positions

1. S Loeb/D Elena	F	Citroen C4	3hr 22min 50.5sec
2. D Sordo/M Marti	E	Citroen C4	3hr 23min 04.3sec
3. M Grönholm/T Rautiainen	FIN	Ford Focus RS	3hr 23min 30.3sec
4. M Hirvonen/J Lehtinen	FIN	Ford Focus RS	3hr 24min 16.3sec
5. F Duval/P Pivato	B	Citroen Xsara	3hr 25min 19.2sec
6. P Solberg/P Mills	N	Subaru Impreza	3hr 25min 44.6sec
7. J-M Latvala/M Anttila	FIN	Ford Focus RS	3hr 26min 28.7sec
8. C Atkinson/S Prévot	AUS	Subaru Impreza	3hr 27min 12.9sec
9. X Pons/X Amigo	E	Subaru Impreza	3hr 27min 54.6sec
10 H Solberg/C Menkerud	N	Ford Focus RS	3hr 33min 22.7sec

Drivers

1. M Grönholm	96pts
2. S Loeb	90pts
3. M Hirvonen	74pts
4. D Sordo	39pts
5. P Solberg	34pts
6. H Solberg	28pts

Manufacturers

1. BP-Ford	170pts
2. Citroen Total	131pts
3. Subaru	64pts
4. Stobart VK M-Sport Ford	57pts
5. OMV Kronos Citroen	39pts
6. Munchi's Ford	6pts



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