



## **BP-Ford stretches world rally championship lead in Germany**

**Trier, August 19<sup>th</sup> 2007** - BP-Ford World Rally Team extended its lead in the FIA World Rally Championship after a double points finish on Rallye Deutschland today. Mikko Hirvonen and Jarmo Lehtinen finished third in this 10th round of the series on the asphalt debut of the 2007-specification Ford Focus RS World Rally Car. Team-mates Marcus Grönholm and Timo Rautiainen were fourth after a dramatic finale when the Finns, fighting for second place, crashed on the last speed test.

Reigning manufacturers' champion BP-Ford increased its advantage in the 2007 standings by one point to 41 points with six rounds remaining. Grönholm, chasing his third world drivers' crown, continues to lead the championship although the margin has been cut to eight points. Hirvonen, for whom this was his eighth podium in 10 events, remains third.

The rally was based in Trier, in south-west Germany, and comprised three days of vastly different speed tests through the Mosel vineyards, Baumholder military land and Saarland country roads covering 356,27 km. Mostly dry weather ensured tyre selection was not as tricky as usual on an event which in the past has been characterised by extremely localised rain. As a result BFGoodrich's dry weather rubber was the choice throughout for the BP-Ford drivers.

Grönholm began today in second with a 12,6 sec lead over François Duval having outpaced him yesterday. Duval was fastest on the first four special stages through the fast but narrow vineyards to start the final test just 5,6 sec behind the 39-year-old Finn. However, Grönholm lost concentration after being distracted by a cow on the edge of the road and crashed. He dropped 80 sec and slipped to fourth, making emergency repairs to his damaged suspension to return to the Trier finish.

"We were warned there was a cow near the road," said Grönholm. "The marshal waved us through and I drove round it with no problem but it put me off and I lost concentration. I wasn't listening to Timo's pace notes properly and 100 m later I slid wide on a left corner. The right rear of the car hit a wall and it spun round. I finished the stage and we had to repair the suspension to drive to the finish.

"It's disappointing but I was happy with the Focus' performance on its first asphalt rally. We were closer to Sébastien Loeb here than on previous asphalt events and that's encouraging with three of the final six rounds on that surface. Duval pushed like hell today so I had to as well. Now we have to be sharper on the next round in New Zealand and make no mistakes," he added.

Hirvonen was just 5,1 sec behind Duval at this morning's restart. The Finn gambled by selecting soft compound tyres in the hope that rain may give him an advantage over Duval, who opted for harder rubber. The rain never arrived and 27-year-old Hirvonen had settled for fourth before Grönholm's last stage dramas elevated him to a podium place.



"We decided to gamble with the tyres as there was a small chance of showers but it was dry on the first stage and as soon as I saw Duval 's split times, I knew there was no point in pushing. We did not stand a chance in the dry on soft tyres. We were lucky to take third but it's a real shame for Marcus. Luckily the team did not lose much so we extended our lead. The result is good for me because it shows I can finish on the podium on asphalt as well as gravel. I have never been this fast in Germany before and I'm pleased with both my performance and that of the car," said Hirvonen.

Abu Dhabi driver Khalid Al Qassimi and Nicky Beech finished 16th after starting today under SupeRally rules after retiring yesterday afternoon with a broken starter motor. "I gained a huge amount of experience here. It was totally different to the gravel roads of Finland and almost like starting again. I'm learning one step at a time. It's only when you drive rallies for the second or third time that you notice things you missed first time and start refining your driving," said Al Qassimi.

BP-Ford team director Malcolm Wilson said split times showed Grönholm was faster than Duval when he crashed. "It's disappointing because Marcus was in control of the stage up to that point. But I'm happy to see both cars in the points. I was encouraged by the performance of the new car on asphalt and also by the drivers, for whom this is not their favourite rally. Despite Marcus' setback, we're still in a strong position in both championships," he said.

Ford TeamRS director Jost Capito said: "The new Focus RS WRC proved it is competitive on asphalt and again showed great reliability which enabled BP-Ford to increase its lead in the championship."



# PRESS INFORMATION

## Final positions

1. S Loeb/D Elena	F	Citroen C4	3hr 27min 27.5sec
2. F Duval/P Pivato	B	Citroen Xsara	3hr 27min 47.8sec
<b>3. M Hirvonen/J Lehtinen</b>	<b>FIN</b>	<b>Ford Focus RS</b>	<b>3hr 28min46.6sec</b>
<b>4. M Grönholm/T Rautiainen</b>	<b>FIN</b>	<b>Ford Focus RS</b>	<b>3hr 29min 04.0sec</b>
5. J Kopecky/F Schovanek	CZ	Skoda Fabia	3hr 30min 34.6sec
6. P Solberg/P Mills	N	Subaru Impreza	3hr 30min 42.2sec
7. T Gardemeister/J Honkanen	FIN	Mitsubishi Lancer	3hr 31min 05.0sec
<b>8. J-M Latvala/M Anttila</b>	<b>FIN</b>	<b>Ford Focus RS</b>	<b>3hr 32min56.8sec</b>
<b>9. M Wilson/M Orr</b>	<b>GB</b>	<b>Ford Focus RS</b>	<b>3hr 38min31.7sec</b>
<b>10 G Wilks/P Pugh</b>	<b>GB</b>	<b>Ford Focus RS</b>	<b>3hr 47min15.3sec</b>

## Drivers

<b>1. M Grönholm</b>	<b>80pts</b>
2. S Loeb	72pts
<b>3. M Hirvonen</b>	<b>63pts</b>
4. P Solberg	29pts
5= H Solberg	28pts
5= D Sordo	28pts

## Manufacturers

<b>1. BP-Ford</b>	<b>143pts</b>
2. Citroen Total	102pts
3. Subaru	53pts
<b>4. Stobart VK M-Sport Ford</b>	<b>50pts</b>
5. OMV Kronos Citroen	35pts
<b>6. Munchi's Ford</b>	<b>6pts</b>

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Photographs are available on [www.fordpress.be](http://www.fordpress.be) and [www.worldrallypics.com/ford](http://www.worldrallypics.com/ford)

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