



Debut win for new Focus RS WRC as Grönholm creates history

Jyväskylä (Finland), 5th of August 2007 - BP-Ford's new Focus RS World Rally Car scored a one-two finish on its debut in Finland today as the team stretched its lead in the FIA World Rally Championship to 40 points. In winning Rally Finland for the seventh time in eight years, Marcus Grönholm and Timo Rautiainen entered the record books as the first drivers to win a full WRC event on seven occasions. Team-mates and fellow Finns Mikko Hirvonen and Jarmo Lehtinen delighted the huge home crowds by taking second.

The new Focus RS dominated this ninth round of the championship to such an extent that it won 20 of the 23 speed tests through the blisteringly fast Finnish forests. Grönholm won 16 stages, Hirvonen three and the pair shared fastest time on one test. This was Grönholm's 29th world rally victory and his third in a row and he has extended his lead in the drivers' championship to 13 points with seven rallies remaining. Maximum points enabled BP-Ford World Rally Team to increase its lead in the manufacturers' standings by another 12 points.

Rally Finland is the fastest event in the series. The smooth, flowing roller-coaster roads demanded precision and bravery in equal measure and average speeds topped 132 kph. Drivers tackled 23 special stages covering 360.34 km near Jyväskylä. The BP-Ford drivers fought tooth and nail for every tenth of a second during the opening leg but 39-year-old Grönholm edged clear during yesterday's marathon second leg and came home 24.2 sec ahead of his 27-year-old colleague.

"When I started driving at 19 I never thought I could win Rally Finland on seven occasions," said Grönholm. "Mikko pushed me incredibly hard all weekend and there was never an opportunity to relax. One small error on my part and he would have been passed me. I'm happy that he helped my championship challenge by finishing in front of Loeb. This result is great for both the drivers' and the manufacturers' championships. It was important for the title for me to score 10 points here.

"We've made a step forward with the new car, which was reliable all weekend and never missed a beat. The top speed has increased and in Finland, which is the fastest in the championship, that made a difference. We've been airborne and landed in places that we've never been before!" he added.

Hirvonen relished the battle with his team-mate. "I tried to push Marcus as hard as I could and it was a great duel," he said. "It's a big step up mentally for me to be up there matching Marcus. I knew I could be fast here but the fact I was able to maintain that pace throughout the weekend was really satisfying. I loved every minute of it and it was a fantastic event. They are scary due to the speed, but Finland's stages are the best in the world. I've never driven this fast anywhere before.

"The new Focus RS was great on these fast roads and it's a pleasure to have a machine like that to drive. The handling is easier and the car felt lighter in places. We've made a bigger step forward on gravel than I thought," he added.



Team Abu Dhabi pairing Khalid Al Qassimi and Nicky Beech finished 16th in another Focus RS on their debut with the BP-Ford team. "It was everything I thought it would be," said 35-year-old Al Qassimi. "It was hard work but enjoyable. I came to Finland to learn and get a good feeling with the car. Everything in Finland is so special and I would love to see a rally like this in Abu Dhabi."

BP-Ford team director Malcolm Wilson was overjoyed by the success. "I have two diamonds in the team. Both drove fantastically and made no mistakes. For them to create that time margin over Loeb was superb. We have a great package and the new car was faultless. It is one of the best one-two finishes we've had and to achieve that on the fastest rally in the championship is the icing on the cake. There was huge pressure on Marcus but he drove perfectly and Mikko also did an incredible job," he said.

Ford TeamRS director Jost Capito said: "To take a one-two finish is the perfect start for the new Focus RS WRC. All the team's hard work in developing the car paid off on its first event and this result has given us huge confidence for the rest of the season."

Final positions

1. M Grönholm/T Rautiainen	FIN	Ford Focus RS	2hr57min26.1sec
2. M Hirvonen/J Lehtinen	FIN	Ford Focus RS	2hr57min50.3sec
3. S Loeb/D Elena	F	Citroen C4	2hr58min36.0sec
4. C Atkinson/ S Prévot	AUS	Subaru Impreza	3hr00min28.9sec
5. H Solberg/C Menkerud	N	Ford Focus RS	3hr01min55.5sec
6. X Pons/X Amigo	E	Subaru Impreza	3hr04min26.6sec
7. U Aava/K Sikk	EE	Mitsubishi Lancer	3hr05min05.7sec
8. M Östberg/O Unnerud	N	Subaru Impreza	3hr06min58.0sec
9 G Wilks/P Pugh	GB	Ford Focus RS	3hr07min05.5sec
10 M Wilson/M Orr	GB	Ford Focus RS	3hr08min39.5sec

Drivers

1. M Grönholm	75pts
2. S Loeb	62pts
3. M Hirvonen	57pts
4= H Solberg	28pts
4= D Sordo	28pts
6. P Solberg	26pts

Manufacturers

1. BP-Ford	132pts
2. Citroen Total	92pts
3. Subaru	48pts
4.Stobart VK M-Sport Ford	45pts
5. OMV Kronos Citroen	27pts
6. Munchi's Ford	6pts

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