



### **Latvala creates rally history as Ford fills Swedish Rally podium**

**Karlstad, February 11<sup>th</sup> 2008** - BP Ford Abu Dhabi World Rally Team driver Jari-Matti Latvala made history by becoming the youngest driver to win a world rally in Sweden today. The 22-year-old Finn and co-driver Miikka Anttila claimed their maiden victory on the Swedish Rally in a Ford Focus RS World Rally Car. Team-mates Mikko Hirvonen and Jarmo Lehtinen were second and Ford secured a clean sweep of the podium places as Gigi Galli and Giovanni Bernacchini were third in a Stobart-entered Focus RS.

Latvala's victory on this second round of the FIA World Rally Championship eclipses the late Henri Toivonen's win on the 1980 RAC Rally in Britain when the Finn was 24 years old. The maximum points score moves reigning world champion BP Ford Abu Dhabi into a 10-point lead in the manufacturers' series. Hirvonen leads the drivers' standings by six points with Latvala tied for second.

Fittingly, as they returned to the team's service park at the end of the rally, Latvala and Anttila were greeted by fellow countryman and double world champion Marcus Grönholm, the man they replaced in the BP Ford Abu Dhabi line-up this season following his retirement. This is an incredible day for Jari-Matti and one he will never forget," said Grönholm, winner of 30 world rallies. "He is part of rallying's new generation and he and Mikko have great futures to look forward to in the sport."

Unseasonably mild weather meant there was little snow and ice on the forest tracks for what is traditionally the championship's only pure winter event. Slush and water filled the rutted gravel roads as cars carved through the soft surface and organisers cancelled two speed tests due to the poor conditions. The weather meant studded winter tyres were far from the perfect option on the Focus RS cars but Pirelli's Sottozero rubber worked perfectly despite the inappropriate conditions.

Latvala led from the second of the rally's 18 stages covering 309,10 km in the Värmland region of central Sweden. He won all six of the country special stages on the opening day to build a lead he was never to lose. He was then able to pace himself through the final two days to win by 58,3 sec.

"Henri Toivonen is a big hero of mine and in my dreams I wanted to beat his record, so this means so much to me," said Latvala. "I couldn't have dreamed I could win on only my second event in a works team, especially after such a disappointing start to the year in Monte Carlo last month. I can't really find the words to describe my feelings. I never thought I would win this weekend and it was only this morning that I started to realise I could do it. I started the rally so well on Friday and made no mistakes so I was able to control my speed. I felt comfortable in the car all weekend and the whole team has a reason to celebrate today," he added.

Hirvonen had the worst of the conditions on the opening day but settled into second. He quickly realised it was not worth taking risks to chase Latvala and was happy to settle for the points that promoted him into the championship lead.

"Jari-Matti and I may be two young lads in the Ford team but we proved that we can still take a 1-2 finish and showed how strong the team is," he said. "I came here to win but Jari-Matti made it clear on Friday that he was the man of the rally so I had to settle for second. My consolation is that I've never led the championship before. I'm sure I will have more battles with Jari-Matti. I was frustrated I couldn't find a rhythm on Friday but then I eased my pace because I wanted to make sure of the points. I've always said that if I can't win this year, I must finish second and that's what I did."

BP Ford Abu Dhabi team director Malcolm Wilson reflected on a perfect rally. "This is a dream result and a special weekend. We're proud to have the youngest ever winner of a WRC event in our team. I knew Jari-Matti would win this season but it came sooner than I expected. Mikko delivered a textbook performance, the cars ran faultlessly and to score this result in such conditions is outstanding," he said.

Mark Deans, Ford of Europe's motorsport director, said: "This was a wonderful weekend for Ford. Three Focus RS cars on the podium and four in the top five emphasises the speed and strength of the car, the hallmarks which have taken Ford to the world title in the last two seasons."

### Final positions

<b>1. J-M Latvala/M Anttila</b>	<b>FIN</b>	<b>Ford Focus RS</b>	<b>2hr 46min 41,2sec</b>
<b>2. M Hirvonen/J Lehtinen</b>	<b>FIN</b>	<b>Ford Focus RS</b>	<b>2hr 47min 39,5sec</b>
<b>3. G Galli/G Bernacchini</b>	<b>ITA</b>	<b>Ford Focus RS</b>	<b>2hr 49min 04,4sec</b>
4. P Solberg/P Mills	NOR	Subaru Impreza	2hr 49min 40,6sec
<b>5. A Mikkelsen/O Floene</b>	<b>NOR</b>	<b>Ford Focus RS</b>	<b>2hr 52min 27,2sec</b>
6. D Sordo/M Marti	ESP	Citroen C4	2hr 53min 54,3sec
7. T Gardemeister/T Tuominen	FIN	Suzuki SX4	2hr 57min 16,5sec
8. J Hanninen/M Markkula	FIN	Mitsubishi Lancer	2hr 59min 08,7sec
9. M Østberg/O Unnerud	NOR	Subaru Impreza	3hr 00min 09,7sec
10 J Ketomaa/M Teiskonen	FIN	Subaru Impreza	3hr 00min 31,9sec

### Drivers

<b>1. M Hirvonen</b>	<b>16pts</b>
<b>2= J-M Latvala</b>	<b>10pts</b>
2= S Loeb	10pts
<b>4. G Galli</b>	<b>9pts</b>
5. P Solberg	9pts
6. C Atkinson	6pts

### Manufacturers

<b>1. BP Ford Abu Dhabi</b>	<b>26pts</b>
<b>2= Stobart VK M-Sport</b>	<b>16pts</b>
2= Subaru	16pts
<b>4. Citroen Total</b>	<b>15pts</b>
5. Suzuki	5pts

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

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