



Grönholm wins Galway Rally in Ireland for BP-Ford

BP-Ford World Rally Team drivers Marcus Grönholm and Timo Rautiainen won the Galway Rally in Ireland today in a Focus RS World Rally Car. The Finns triumphed by 2min 52sec on the two-day asphalt event in the west of the country, and the team gained valuable experience of the Irish speed tests ahead of the country's debut in the FIA World Rally Championship in November.

It was Grönholm's first visit to Ireland for this non-WRC event. He was engrossed in an exciting battle with three-time Irish champion Eugene Donnelly for the entire two-day rally, which comprised 14 speed tests and 210.40km of competition over bumpy, narrow and twisty closed public roads. The special stages were bathed in glorious sunshine, but were still very slippery.

Grönholm led for most of yesterday's first leg, despite two spins, until a puncture on the penultimate test allowed Donnelly to move ahead. The Irishman extended his advantage to a slender 8.8sec during today's second day before Grönholm quickly closed the gap. He slashed the lead to just 1.1sec before the pressure told on Donnelly who crashed off the road and into retirement on the penultimate stage.

"It's a good way to celebrate my birthday," said Grönholm, who is 39 tomorrow. "It's always good to win but the real reason for being here was to learn about the roads and develop a good feeling with the car ahead of Rally Ireland. The roads were totally different to anything I have driven on before, with many blind crests which required total accuracy with the pace notes.

"It was hard for me during the first day but by the end of the weekend I had a good feeling with the car and my confidence had improved. I'm pleased to have come here because the experience was good and the welcome from the Irish fans was unbelievable," he added.

Grönholm was a hugely popular figure throughout the event. Huge crowds packed the stages to watch the double world champion in action and he was besieged by autograph hunters and fans seeking photograph souvenirs wherever he went.

BP-Ford team director Malcolm Wilson said: "We came here to learn as a team and for Marcus to benefit as a driver. We tried various different suspension settings and Marcus finished the event with a good knowledge of what these types of road require. We'll go back and analyse the data but I believe it was well worth the effort of competing here because we have a large bank of information which will assist us greatly when preparing for Rally Ireland."



| PRESS INFORMATION

Final results

1. M Grönholm/T Rautiainen	FIN	Ford Focus RS	1hr 57min 14.4sec
2. G MacHale/P Nagle	IRL	Ford Focus RS	2hr 00min 06.4sec
3. M Higgins/R Kennedy	GB	Subaru Impreza	2hr 00min 56.5sec

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Photographs are available on www.worldrallypics.com/ford