



Grönholm powers dominant Ford Focus to victory in Sweden

Sweden, 11th of February 2007 - Marcus Grönholm and Timo Rautiainen won their fifth Swedish Rally today as BP-Ford World Rally Team closed to within a point of the leaders in the FIA World Rally Championship. The Finns dominated this second round of the 16-event series in their Ford Focus RS World Rally Car, winning 11 of the 20 snow and ice-bound speed tests. Team-mates Mikko Hirvonen and Jarmo Lehtinen claimed their eighth podium in the last 11 rallies by finishing third in another Focus RS.

The 39-year-old Finn led the four-day rally in central Sweden from midway through the first leg. He stamped his authority on the rally with five consecutive special stage victories yesterday and was able to pace himself through today's final leg. Grönholm's 26th career victory took him to equal second in the all-time standings alongside Carlos Sainz.

Drivers tackled 342.09km of stages, the bulk clustered around the small town of Hagfors, 90km north of the rally base in Karlstad. Frozen roads and plenty of snow ensured near-perfect conditions throughout. While the weather was relatively mild for a Scandinavian winter during the first two legs, today's final action was played out in bitterly cold temperatures that plunged to -22°C this morning as drivers prepared for the final five tests covering 86.32km.

Grönholm enjoyed a troublefree rally throughout and won a further three stages today to finish 53.8sec ahead of Sébastien Loeb and climb to second in the drivers' standings. "It was a perfect weekend with no problems for the car or with my driving," he said. "It's my fifth win here and that's an achievement I'm proud of.

"On Saturday morning I had the chance to substantially increase my lead over Seb and I took it. My advantage more than doubled in two stages and after that I had a little bit of breathing space. The only real problem this weekend was the temperature this morning. It was so cold on the first stage that there was ice inside the car on the rear windows and, even with foot warmers, my feet were so cold it was hard to feel the pedals," he added.

Team-mate Hirvonen recovered from early power-steering difficulties to climb to third yesterday. With no pressure from behind and no opportunity to catch those in front, the 26-year-old Finn eased through the final day to finish 47.7sec behind Loeb. He is now third in the drivers' championship.

"It was a good weekend but it wasn't easy because after I dropped time on Friday morning I had to fight to catch the drivers ahead of us," he said. "A podium was my minimum aim before the rally and I achieved that. I love the podium and I love points and I have a lot after two events. I don't think I've had so many points this early in the season before so that's a good start to 2007."



BP-Ford team director Malcolm Wilson said: "It was a dominant display from Marcus. He made his move midway through the second leg when he extended his lead over Loeb by nearly 20sec in two stages and from that moment he was in charge. That was the turning point of the rally. Mikko also had a good second leg to settle himself in third and between them they gave us a good team result. It bodes well for the next round, in the same conditions, in Norway next weekend."

Jost Capito, director of Ford TeamRS, said: "Victory in Sweden shows that the team and Marcus will be strong contenders for both championships this year. The whole team did a fantastic job in conditions that are difficult to work in and we're looking forward to Rally Norway next weekend."

All three Swedish Ford Fiesta ST cars using bio-ethanol fuel finished the rally, the first time that any car powered by bio-ethanol has competed on a WRC event. They were led home by Andreas Eriksson and Per-Ola Svensson in 29th.

News from our Rivals

Sébastien Loeb (Citroen) retained his championship lead after claiming second while, behind Hirvonen, Henning Solberg (Ford) drove cautiously today to take fourth. Chris Atkinson (Subaru) overhauled Daniel Carlsson (Citroen) on the opening stage in their battle for fifth. However, the Australian went off on the third stage and broke a driveshaft and differential at the rear of his car. He dropped more than 2min 30sec over the final tests and slipped to eighth. Carlsson took fifth while Toni Gardemeister (Mitsubishi) moved ahead of Manfred Stohl (Citroen) to take sixth, the Austrian losing time with a spin and a bad stud choice. Twelfth for Dani Sordo (Citroen) was enough to take the final manufacturers' point. Team-mates Matthew Wilson and Jari-Matti Latvala (Ford) were the only major retirements today when they stopped on the opening stage after the icy temperatures froze the engine breather pipe, creating excessive pressure and spilling oil.

Next round

There is no time to rest as teams travel to Norway tomorrow for round three next weekend. Rally Norway (15 - 18 February) makes its WRC debut and the snow and ice rally is based in Hamar.



PRESS INFORMATION

Final positions

1. M Grönholm/T Rautiainen	FIN	Ford Focus RS	3hr 08min 40.7sec
2. S Loeb/D Elena	F	Citroen C4	3hr 09min 34.5sec
3. M Hirvonen/J Lehtinen	FIN	Ford Focus RS	3hr 10min 2.2sec
4. H Solberg/C Menkerud	N	Ford Focus RS	3hr 10min 0.5sec
5. D Carlsson/D Giraudet	S	Citroen Xsara	3hr 12min 18.5sec
6. T Gardemeister/J Honkanen	FIN	Mitsubishi Lancer	3hr 12min 34.9sec
7. M Stohl/I Minor	A	Citroen Xsara	3hr 13min 53.2sec
8. C Atkinson/G MacNeall	AUS	Subaru Impreza	3hr 14min 55.4sec
9. M Östberg/O Unnerud	N	Subaru Impreza	3hr 16min 27.7sec
10 J Kopecky/F Schovanek	CZ	Skoda Fabia	3hr 16min 33.2sec

Drivers

1. S Loeb	18pts
2. M Grönholm	16pts
3. M Hirvonen	10pts
4. D Sordo	8pts
5. C Atkinson	6pts
6. H Solberg	5pts

Manufacturers

1. Citroen Total	27pts
2. BP-Ford	26pts
3. Subaru	10pts
4. OMV Kronos Citroen	9pts
5. Stobart M-Sport Ford	6pts

For more information: Contact Mark Wilford or Georgina Baskerville on the **BP-Ford World Rally Team** media desk in Karlstad Tel: + 46 54 186974

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

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