



Grönholm's second place in Corsica keeps BP-Ford in top spot

Ajaccio (Corsica), October 14th 2007 - Marcus Grönholm and Timo Rautiainen finished second on Rallye de France in Corsica today to ensure BP-Ford World Rally Team preserved its lead of both the manufacturers' and drivers' standings in the FIA World Rally Championship. It was the 11th podium from 13 rounds for the Finns in a Ford Focus RS World Rally Car. Team-mates Mikko Hirvonen and Jarmo Lehtinen staged a superb fightback after a first day crash to claim the final manufacturers' point in another Focus RS.

BP-Ford leads the manufacturers' championship by 32 points in its quest for a second consecutive title. Grönholm tops the drivers' standings by four points with just three rounds remaining in Japan, Ireland and Great Britain. Hirvonen remains third in the drivers' table.

The Ajaccio-based event is regarded as the definitive asphalt round of the series and is characterised by twisty narrow roads high in the mountains of the Mediterranean island's west coast. Drivers tackled three days of flat out competition covering 15 speed tests and 344.22km, virtually all in glorious sunshine which ensured tyre selection was never the difficult challenge it so often is here.

Grönholm led during the first leg before arch title rival Sébastien Loeb moved ahead and stretched his advantage on the second day. The 39-year-old Finn started today's final four special stages 27.5sec behind Loeb, content to set a fast but safe pace to settle for second and a solid haul of championship points.

"I could not win so second was the next best result," said Grönholm. "I only conceded two points to Loeb on what is one of his strongest events of the season and I still lead the championship after two consecutive weekends on asphalt, which is my least favourite surface. I really had to drive quite hard today because Dani Sordo was pushing behind us and I couldn't afford to let him get near. On the first day I was really close to Seb but I couldn't match him on Saturday, although I feel my asphalt driving is more consistent than last year.

"It will be really tight for the next three rallies and I have no idea who will be world champion. A four-point lead is nothing, especially with three rallies coming. I could not do better here but Japan will be really hard now. Winning there would help me a lot but I'm not feeling too much pressure at the moment," he added.

Hirvonen crashed out on the first day after hitting a concrete block but the 27-year-old Finn returned under SupeRally rules in 63rd position. He steadily climbed the order, while also using the final two days to check his pace notes for the future, and his perseverance was rewarded when he moved in to the final points position on the last stage. He finished 13th.

"It was an up-and-down weekend but in the end it all feels OK," he said. "I didn't think I would be able to carry on after the accident but we scored this point because of unbelievable



work by our mechanics. I'm disappointed not to finish higher but relieved to score a point for the team. It was good for our confidence to continue and even on the last stage I made two corrections to my pace notes so they should be good for next year."

BP-Ford team director Malcolm Wilson was delighted with the outcome. "Marcus excelled on an event which is not his favourite surface while Mikko completed a remarkable fightback today to take the final manufacturers' point on the last stage after being as low as 63rd. It was a gritty performance at a time of the year when every point counts," he said.

Ford TeamRS director Jost Capito was happy with the results of the asphalt double-header in Spain last weekend and France today. "We've performed well and scored good points on both rallies to keep us in the lead of both world championships. I'm convinced that with just four points separating Marcus and Loeb, it will be a thrilling fight for the drivers' title over the final three rounds," he said.

Final positions

1. S Loeb/D Elena	F	Citroen C4	3hr 28min 31.5sec
2. M Grönholm/T Rautiainen	FIN	Ford Focus RS	3hr 28min 55.2sec
3. D Sordo/M Marti	E	Citroen C4	3hr 29min 15.8sec
4. J-M Latvala/M Anttila	FIN	Ford Focus RS	3hr 31min02.0sec
5. P Solberg/P Mills	N	Subaru Impreza	3hr 31min 13.6sec
6. C Atkinson/S Prévot	AUS	Subaru Impreza	3hr 32min 25.3sec
7. J Kopecky/F Schovanek	CZ	Skoda Fabia	3hr 36min 34.4sec
8. X Pons/X Amigo	E	Subaru Impreza	3hr 38min 05.7sec
9. H Solberg/C Menkerud	N	Ford Focus RS	3hr 38min43.7sec
10 D Sola/C Del Barrio	E	Peugeot 207	3hr 46min 29.1sec

Drivers

1. M Grönholm	104pts
2. S Loeb	100pts
3. M Hirvonen	74pts
4. D Sordo	45pts
5. P Solberg	38pts
6. C Atkinson	29pts

Manufacturers

1. BP-Ford	179pts
2. Citroen Total	147pts
3. Subaru	71pts
4. Stobart VK M-Sport Ford	64pts
5. OMV Kronos Citroen	39pts
6. Munchi's Ford	6pts

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



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