



## Japanese joy for BP-Ford as Hirvonen claims victory in Focus

**Obihiro (Japan), October 28<sup>th</sup> 2007** - BP-Ford World Rally Team drivers Mikko Hirvonen and Jarmo Lehtinen today won Rally Japan to claim their second victory of the season and the team's seventh success. The Finns ended a dramatic three-day encounter with a 37,4sec advantage in their Ford Focus RS World Rally Car. The result secured at least third place for Hirvonen in the FIA World Rally Championship drivers' standings with two of the 16 rounds remaining.

Hirvonen's win enabled BP-Ford to increase its lead in the manufacturers' championship to 34 points. A maximum 36 points are available from the final two rounds in Ireland and Great Britain.

Based in Obihiro on Japan's most northerly island of Hokkaido, the rally was characterised by fast but narrow gravel roads through natural forests in hills north of the city. Fog and ice on the opening morning made conditions tricky and heavy rain overnight on Friday made the tracks treacherously slippery yesterday. Glorious early-winter sunshine shone down on the drivers today during the final seven speed tests covering 97,33 km. In total, competitors tackled 27 special stages over 350,19km.

Hirvonen took the lead during the opening afternoon. He extended his advantage as closest rivals Sébastien Loeb and Jari-Matti Latvala crashed and started today's final leg with a comfortable 38,2sec lead over Dani Sordo. With no pressure from behind, Hirvonen matched his pace to Sordo's split times to ensure his third career success in the WRC.

"It was such a strange and difficult rally but the way it has turned out is perfect," said 27-year-old Hirvonen. "The conditions were tricky with fog, ice and rain at different times during the weekend. This morning I widened the lead over Sordo during the first loop of stages and that meant I could relax and drive a little easier over the second pass.

"When my team-mate (Marcus Grönholm) retired on Friday, the pressure was on me to score points to help the team's championship fight and to help Marcus in the drivers' series. The only way I could do that was to fight with Loeb and try to beat him, which is what happened. It keeps the team in a strong position for the manufacturers' title and keeps Marcus in front also," he added.

BP-Ford team-mates and championship leaders Marcus Grönholm and Timo Rautiainen crashed when leading on Friday. The damage to the roll cage on their Focus RS forced them to retire for safety reasons, seemingly handing the advantage to arch rival Loeb in their fight for the world crown. However, Loeb retired and with neither driver scoring, Grönholm retains a four-point lead at the top of the standings.



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"The championship situation for us is the same as it was before we came to Japan," said Grönholm. "I was expecting and wanting to come away from here with a lead over Sébastien and we are doing that. I have to be happy that we still have that lead after what happened on Friday. It's going to be really difficult but we're still confident going to Ireland and it looks like a really exciting end to the season. We have to make no mistakes now and try for the win on both remaining events."

BP-Ford team director Malcolm Wilson was delighted with Hirvonen's performance. "Since midday yesterday he hasn't been under huge pressure and this was an impressive drive. It's an important time for him as he prepares to step up within the BP-Ford team next year and he took his chance perfectly. The way this rally turned out wasn't what I expected. On Friday afternoon it wasn't looking so easy but in the end we've taken a step closer to the manufacturers' title," he said.

Ford TeamRS director Jost Capito said: "To win in Japan is special because this is one of the world's biggest car markets and to have four Focus RS cars finish in the top five here emphasises the performance and reliability of Ford's vehicles. Leading both championships keeps us in a perfect position for an exciting finale to the season on the final two rounds," he said.

### Final positions

<b>1. M Hirvonen/J Lehtinen</b>	<b>FIN</b>	<b>Ford Focus RS</b>	<b>3hr 23min57.6sec</b>
2. D Sordo/M Marti	E	Citroen C4	3hr 24min 35.0sec
<b>3. H Solberg/C Menkerud</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Ford Focus RS</b>	<b>3hr 28min31.3sec</b>
<b>4. M Wilson/M Orr</b>	<b>GB</b>	<b>Ford Focus RS</b>	<b>3hr 30min35.5sec</b>
<b>5. L Perez Companc/J-M Volta</b>	<b>ARG</b>	<b>Ford Focus RS</b>	<b>3hr 30min38.0sec</b>
6. M Stohl/I Minor	A	Citroen Xsara	3hr 31min 01.9sec
<b>7. F Villagra/J-L Diaz</b>	<b>ARG</b>	<b>Ford Focus RS</b>	<b>3hr 35min12.9sec</b>
8. K Taguchi/M Stacey	J	Mitsubishi Lancer	3hr 44min 37.7sec
9. G Pozzo/D Stillo	ARG	Mitsubishi Lancer	3hr 45min 50.6sec
10 A Araujo/M Ramalho	P	Mitsubishi Lancer	3hr 48min 11.1sec

### Drivers

<b>1. M Grönholm</b>	<b>104pts</b>
2. S Loeb	100pts
<b>3. M Hirvonen</b>	<b>84pts</b>
4. D Sordo	53pts
5. P Solberg	38pts
6. H Solberg	34pts

### Manufacturers

<b>1. BP-Ford</b>	<b>189pts</b>
2. Citroen Total	155pts
3. Subaru	73pts
<b>4. Stobart VK M-Sport Ford</b>	<b>71pts</b>
5. OMV Kronos Citroen	43pts
<b>6. Munchi's Ford</b>	<b>14pts</b>



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

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