



BP-Ford's Finns target winter warmer in Swedish Rally

Next week's Swedish Rally (8 -11 February) is the first half of a FIA World Rally Championship double-header in the Scandinavian winter that will provide BP-Ford World Rally Team with one of its most intense periods of the season. The first of two events in northern Europe on consecutive weekends, it is traditionally characterised by snow, ice and numbing cold which guarantee ideal driving conditions but place huge demands on man and machine.

However, BP-Ford's all-Finnish line-up of Marcus Grönholm and Timo Rautiainen and teammates Mikko Hirvonen and Jarmo Lehtinen will feel comfortable in the barren, ice-bound countryside of the Värmland region of central Sweden. They grew up in such conditions and their rallying careers encompassed winter competition from the very start.

Along with the following weekend's Rally Norway, which starts just four days after the Swedish Rally finishes, this second round of the championship offers the harshest environment of the year. Temperatures can plunge as low as -30°C and the unrelenting cold requires huge resolve and determination from technicians forced to lie in the snow and work on the team's Ford Focus RS World Rally Cars in such extremes.

Grönholm, third on the opening round in France last month, enjoys the challenge of winter driving. The Finn, who celebrates his 39th birthday on Monday, has won here on four occasions from 14 starts, including in a Focus RS last year. The rally suits northern Europeans and only one non-Nordic driver has won in the 44-year history of the event.

Despite the conditions, only Rally Finland is faster and Grönholm's average speed topped 110kph. The high speeds are down to the incredible grip offered by BFGoodrich's studded tyres. The fast, flowing, frozen roads are a drivers' delight and the tungsten-tipped steel studs protruding from the skinny tyres bite into the icy surface to provide unexpected grip levels.

After a snow-free start to 2007, winter arrived in Sweden towards the end of last month. Heavy snow and cold temperatures have left the speed tests in perfect order. It should also ensure that frozen snow banks line the forest tracks to provide a safety net, allowing drivers to 'lean' their cars into them to guide them around corners at maximum speed.

"In proper winter conditions the Swedish Rally is a superb event," said Grönholm. "It's really exciting to drive flat out on the snow and use the snow banks to help us around the bends. For me, driving in those conditions is something special and this is one of my favourite rallies of the season. Maybe I enjoy it so much because I started my rally career on those types of roads.

"It sounds surprising but the grip is excellent due to the tyres. We have almost as good grip in the snow with studded tyres as we do on gravel. But it's important to try to keep in the driving line because if you move off the line into the loose snow, that costs traction and time.



You can also become sucked into the snow banks, which is the down side of having them line the roads.

"The second pass through a stage is more difficult. There is normally gravel exposed from the first run, which can 'eat' the studs, just rip them from the tyres. Because the whole field has driven the roads on pretty much the same line the ice is more compacted and the studs don't always get through to the gravel below to offer grip," he added.

This is Hirvonen's fifth Swedish start and the 26-year-old is another for whom this is a WRC favourite. "The weather conditions look good for this year and if it stays like that then I will be happy," he said. "We won't have to worry about losing studs because of gravel on the roads. Gravel affects the way we drive. We have to look after our tyres and that means not using the launch control at the start of stages and being careful about how hard we brake and accelerate out of slow corners.

"Snowy conditions are also slightly different from gravel driving on other loose surfaces. I let the tyres do more work than on gravel and slide the car around more. It's not necessary to be quite as neat and that's great fun. I scored solid points on the first round in Monte Carlo and now I really want to get down to business on a rally and in conditions that I enjoy," he added.

Team News

* BP-Ford will use BFGoodrich's g-Force ice tyres. The single pattern is available with three stud options – long studs for snow, normal studs for full ice and short length for ice and frozen gravel.

* There are nine Focus RS WRCs among the 64 entries, more than 14% of the entry list. There will also be three Swedish-entered Group N Fiesta ST cars using ethanol fuel.

* Grönholm and Rautiainen hope to gain valuable experience of the roads in Ireland when they drive a Focus RS WRC on the Galway International Rally this weekend (2 - 4 February). Based in Galway City in west Ireland, it is the opening round of the Irish Tarmac Championship and covers 245km of asphalt stages over two days. The outing is intended to give the Finns an insight into car set-up and the characteristics of the stages ahead of Rally Ireland's WRC debut in November.

Rally Route

Organisers have made few changes to the traditional route with all three legs clustered around the single service park at Hagfors, 85km north of the rally base in Karlstad. Many tests are identical to 2006 while others show partial changes. The only new stage is a super special at Karlstad's trotting track which opens the action on Thursday evening and brings it to a close on Sunday afternoon. However, competitors will return to the city every evening for



overnight parc fermé rather than stay in Hagfors. Drivers tackle 20 speed tests covering 342.09km of competition in a route of 1732.73km.

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

SWEDISH RALLY

ROUND 2 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP 8 - 11 February 2007

Thursday 8 February: Leg 1 Karlstad - Karlstad

Start	Karlstad		19.56
SS1	Karlstad 1	1.90km	20.00
Finish	Karlstad		20.40

Friday 9 February: Leg 1 (continued) Karlstad - Karlstad

Start	Karlstad		06.00
Serv A	Hagfors (10 mins)		07.10
SS2	Likenäs 1	21.78km	08.44
SS3	Hara 1	11.32km	10.06
SS4	Torntorp 1	19.21km	10.44
Serv B	Hagfors (30 mins)		11.33
SS5	Likenäs 2	21.78km	13.27
SS6	Hara 2	11.32km	14.49
SS7	Vargåsen 1	24.63km	15.28
SS8	Hagfors Sprint 1	1.87km	16.46
Serv C	Hagfors (45 mins)		17.16
Finish	Karlstad		19.15

Total 113.81km

Saturday 10 February: Leg 2 Karlstad - Karlstad

Start	Karlstad		05.45
Serv D	Hagfors (10 mins)		06.55
SS9	Lesjöfors	10.49km	08.03
SS10	Liljendal	34.54km	08.43
Serv E	Hagfors (30 mins)		09.49
SS11	Torntorp 2	19.21km	11.13



PRESS INFORMATION

SS12	Vargåsen 2	24.63km	11.45
Serv F	Hagfors (30 mins)		12.48
SS13	Fredriksberg	24.75km	14.28
SS14	Lejen	26.47km	15.33
SS15	Hagfors Sprint 2	1.87km	16.51
Serv G	Hagfors (45 mins)		17.21
Finish	Karlstad		19.20
Total		141.96km	

Sunday 11 February: Leg 3 Karlstad - Karlstad

Start	Karlstad		06.30
Serv H	Hagfors (10 mins)		07.40
SS16	Backa 1	30.96km	08.18
SS17	Malta 1	11.25km	09.15
Serv I	Hagfors (30 mins)		09.56
SS18	Backa 2	30.96km	10.54
SS19	Malta 2	11.25km	11.57
SS20	Karlstad 1	1.90km	14.00
Finish	Karlstad		Finish at stop control
Total		86.32km	
Rally Total		342.09km	

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