



BP-Ford retains world series lead with Portugal podium double

Portugal, 1 april 2007 - Ford World Rally Team claimed a double podium finish on the Rally de Portugal today to preserve its lead in both the manufacturers' and drivers standings in the FIA World Rally Championship. Marcus Grönholm and Timo Rautiainen were second in a Ford Focus RS World Rally Car with Mikko Hirvonen and Jarmo Lehtinen third in a similar car.

The result ensured reigning world champion BP-Ford retained its 15-point advantage in the manufacturers' series after five of the 16 rounds. Grönholm remains in the lead of the drivers' championship, two points ahead of Loeb, with Hirvonen in third.

The series returned to Portugal after a five-year absence and with a new base on the edge of Faro in the heart of the Algarve holiday region. The gravel speed tests in the hills to the north were unknown to virtually all the drivers but proved technically difficult as the characteristics of the roads changed frequently. They were also extremely abrasive and, combined with high temperatures on Friday and rain yesterday, placed high demands on tyres. Drivers tackled 18 special stages covering 357.10km, including two passes over a spectacular test inside the Estádio Algarve soccer arena at Faro.

After leading for most of the opening leg, Grönholm began today's third leg in second place. With no realistic opportunity of catching leader Sébastien Loeb over the five stages, covering 81.39km of competition, and with no pressure from behind, the 39-year-old Finn was able to pace himself today. He still won two stages, taking his total for the rally to five, and finished 37.1sec behind Loeb.

"It was a good weekend, but not a perfect one," he said. "I'm still leading the championship and that's good but I really wanted to win here. The first day was good, especially considering our road position and a broken shock absorber, but I lost time with bad tyre choices on leg two and I couldn't regain the time. I was quite careful today because I had nothing to gain and everything to lose.

"If we want to win the championship, we have to win rallies. We can't afford to make mistakes because we can't give Loeb any advantage at all if we want to come first," he added.

Hirvonen held third for most of the rally. He started today just 13.0sec ahead of Petter Solberg but the 26-year-old Finn sealed the position on the opening stage when he was fastest and doubled his advantage. He eventually finished 65.8sec ahead.

"I couldn't do any better than third but I've scored valuable points for myself and the team," he said. "Last night I decided to attack hard on the first stage. I watched the in-car footage from the recce last night on video and Jarmo and I agreed that we would push hard to try to widen the gap to Petter. I was flat out and it worked well, so I was able to pace myself for the rest of the morning.



"It was a fantastic, but difficult, event with really enjoyable stages, proper drivers' roads. I was frustrated on Saturday morning because the times that Marcus and Seb set were a shock to me. I have to think about why I'm wearing out my tyres so quickly in conditions like this," he added.

BP-Ford team director Malcolm Wilson said: "I'm pleased that we have preserved our lead in the manufacturers' championship. We didn't make optimum tyre choices this weekend but we have to

look at other aspects as well. We have some work to do to improve but it's still a great team result."

Jost Capito, director of Ford TeamRS, said: "To place two cars on the podium is a great achievement but we have reached the top level now where it is victories that really count. I hope we can return to winning ways in Argentina and so increase our lead in the championship."

Final positions

1. S Loeb/D Elena	F	Citroen C4	3hr 53min 33.1sec
2. M Grönholm/T Rautiainen	FIN	Ford Focus RS	3hr 54min 10.2sec
3. M Hirvonen/J Lehtinen	FIN	Ford Focus RS	3hr 55min 1.2sec
4. P Solberg/P Mills	N	Subaru Impreza	3hr 56min 47.0sec
5. D Sordo/M Marti	E	Citroen C4	3hr 58min 38.4sec
6. J-M Latvala/M Anttila	FIN	Ford Focus RS	3hr 59min18.0sec
7. D Carlsson/D Giraudet	S	Citroen Xsara	4hr 01min 46.3sec
8. G Galli/G Bernacchini	I	Citroen Xsara	4hr 03min 12.7sec
9. H Solberg/C Menkerud	N	Ford Focus RS	4hr 04min45.5sec
10 M Stohl/I Minor	A	Citroen Xsara	4hr 06min 19.1sec

Drivers

1. M Grönholm	40pts
2. S Loeb	38pts
3. M Hirvonen	32pts
4. D Sordo	17pts
5. P Solberg	13pts
6. H Solberg	11pts

Manufacturers

1. BP-Ford	72pts
2. Citroen Total	57pts
3. Subaru	24pts
4.Stobart VK M-Sport Ford	23pts
5. OMV Kronos Citroen	19pts



BP-Ford maintains world title lead despite results change

Reigning world champion BP-Ford maintained its lead in the FIA World Rally Championship manufacturers' standings despite a time penalty following tonight's finish of the Rally de Portugal. Marcus Grönholm and Timo Rautiainen and team-mates Mikko Hirvonen and Jarmo Lehtinen each received a five-minute penalty after this fifth round of the FIA World Rally Championship. It dropped Grönholm and Hirvonen from second and third respectively to fourth and fifth.

Event scrutineers drew the team's attention to the fact that the rear side windows on the Ford Focus RS World Rally Cars of both crews did not comply with the homologation form of the car in terms of thickness. The matter was referred to the FIA stewards of the meeting.

Team representatives attended a meeting of the stewards at which they accepted that a breach of regulations had taken place. The penalty was accepted by the team and no appeal was made.

"We were disappointed to learn from the scrutineers that the team made an error," explained BP-Ford team director Malcolm Wilson. "We will launch a detailed investigation into how this could have happened at M-Sport."

Despite the time penalty, BP-Ford retains the lead of the manufacturers' championship and is now eight points ahead. Grönholm is now second in the drivers' standings, one point behind Sébastien Loeb. Hirvonen remains third.

Amended final positions

1. S Loeb/D Elena	F	Citroen C4	3hr 53min 33.1sec
2. P Solberg/P Mills	N	Subaru Impreza	3hr 56min 47.0sec
3. D Sordo/M Marti	E	Citroen C4	3hr 58min 38.4sec
4. M Grönholm/T Rautiainen	FIN	Ford Focus RS	3hr 59min 10.2sec
5. M Hirvonen/J Lehtinen	FIN	Ford Focus RS	4hr00min 41.2sec
6. D Carlsson/D Giraudet	S	Citroen Xsara	4hr 01min 46.3sec
7. G Galli/G Bernacchini	I	Citroen Xsara	4hr 03min 12.7sec
8. J-M Latvala/M Anttila	FIN	Ford Focus RS	4hr04min 18.0sec
9. M Stohl/I Minor	A	Citroen Xsara	4hr 06min 19.1sec
10 A Mikkelsen/O Floene	N	Ford Focus RS	4hr07min 24.7sec

Drivers

1. S Loeb	38pts
2. M Grönholm	37pts
3. M Hirvonen	30pts
4. D Sordo	19pts
5. P Solberg	16pts
6. H Solberg	11pts

Manufacturers

1. BP-Ford	67pts
2. Citroen Total	59pts
3. Subaru	27pts
4. Stobart VK M-Sport Ford	21pts
5. OMV Kronos Citroen	21pts



| PRESS INFORMATION

For more information: Contact Mark Wilford or Georgina Baskerville on the **BP-Ford World Rally Team** media desk in Faro Tel: + 351 9 1801 6469. Photographs are available on www.fordpress.be and www.worldrallypics.com/ford