



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

2017 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

RALLY SWEDEN

Pre-event Press Conference
Thursday 9 February

Present:

Craig Breen, Citroën Total Abu Dhabi World Rally Team
Thierry Neuville, Hyundai Motorsport
Ott Tänak, M-Sport World Rally Team
Juho Hänninen, Toyota GAZOO Racing World Rally Team

Q:

Craig, great start to the season for you in the older DS3 but now you switch to the C3 - will expectations be high?

CB:

Now I get to try the big car and it's an awesome feeling, the car is fantastic to drive. It's starting a new chapter in my career.

Q:

You are the driver with the most experience here in Sweden out of the team. Were you aware of that? Does that add more pressure?

CB:

It is actually something we only figured out last night. It's the rally where I have the most experience and that in theory should mean I should do something special, but at the same time it's a big step up. Now I just want to get started.

Q:

This is a moment you have been waiting for for quite a while, does that make you nervous or are you calm about it?

CB:

I've waited all my life for a chance like this so of course I'm a bit nervous, but whenever the nerves kick in I think how a chance like this is so rare and there's no point letting the stress get to me but that I might just as well enjoy it.

Q:

Your pace in Monte-Carlo was something special; can you replicate that pace here on snow?

TN:

The pace in Monte-Carlo somewhat surprised me, but everything came together in a good way and made me feel confident and comfortable. The opening of the season is always special.

Q:

Thierry, how has the new Hyundai been performing on snow in testing? How many kilometres have you covered on this surface?

TN:

For sure it's been better than before Monte-Carlo. I'm really happy and have been able to do two full days in good snow conditions. The conditions this year look so much better than last year.

Q:

You mentioned yesterday that you feel that the pace at the top will be closer here in Sweden than in Monte-Carlo. Why is that?

TN:

In Monte-Carlo the guy with the most confidence is leading the rally, but here I think we're going to see more of the real speed from the teams. I expect a much tougher and more difficult fight.

Q:

So who do you think will win?

TN:

It's a tough question, we saw some surprises in Monte-Carlo, but I think we will have a more regular race this weekend. Ogier will be strong and some other guys too and we will try to keep pace with all of them. There's going to be a few of us fighting it out.

Q:

Ott, you had a great start to the season in Monte-Carlo. Does that bring you confidence coming here to Sweden?

OT:

Obviously Monte-Carlo was a good event for us and now we're here with some good points and it feels nice to start like this.

Q:

The route has been altered this year, what are your thoughts on the stages? What could we see being the toughest aspect of this event this year?

OT:

It looks quite nice, it's a lot better than last year and from the outset it looks good. Obviously we miss some snowbanks but it looks very nice out in the forests.

Q:

So without those snowbanks you have to be more precise out there?

OT:

Well, it's like a normal gravel rally [without the snow banks] and I think in the end it's still the same

Q:

What's the aim here for you? Are you targeting the top step of the podium?

OT:

This is one of my favourite rallies and especially this year with some really fast and smooth stages. Normally I feel confident here and now I just want to enjoy it.

Q:

Toyota achieved a podium in Monte-Carlo with Jari-Matti but it was you who opened up the event with strong pace Juho. Were you surprised at the pace or did you know the car would be on par?

JH:

I knew that the car was good and I was confident with it, but at the same time, yes, it was a surprise since we didn't have any idea where we stood compared to the other cars. So it was a big thing for the entire team, having put in so much work and getting results straight away.

Q:

How much testing have you done on snow? Are you happy with the setup? What areas still need more work?

JH:

I did three days last week in Finland. The conditions were a little bit different than here but the set-up of the car is not all that far from the gravel set-up which I did quite a bit of testing with last year. I'm really happy with the car.

Q:

What areas of the car would you say still need development work on them?

JH:

We've been quite lucky from the start of the project with the car. There are no weak areas or points, so it's more a case where all areas can be improved a bit but it's getting more and more close to finished. But at the same time it's only the second rally for us so we just need to stay calm.

Q:

How quick do you think you will be here?

JH:

I honestly have no idea. It's been three years since I last competed here so it's difficult to say. The main thing is to relax and the results will come.

Q:

Is it a different atmosphere now in the team after Monte-Carlo? Is it more relaxed?

JH:

It's difficult to be more relaxed, but the feeling is we have something unique and I'm very happy with the team.

FIA WRC 2 CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

Pontus Tidemand, FIA WRC 2 Championship

Emil Bergkvist, FIA WRC 2 Championship

Teemu Suninen, FIA WRC 2 Championship

Q:

Pontus, how are you feeling ahead of this year's event? We've seen some success from you in the past here, what's the objective this time around?

PT:

I feel very good for this event. For me it's the highlight all year round and I really enjoy this road and the surface. I've had good preparations and the car is very good but for sure it's a very hard competition in this class. For sure it will be a good fight but I'm ready for it and I'm really looking forward to the start tonight.

Q:

You're talking about good preparations, how much in terms of testing have you been able to do?

PT:

Two days of test, last weekend and this weekend also, so for me the team has done very good preparations as always so they've done their work from last year so I think we have the best chance to, yeah, take this rally. But for sure we need to stay focused, that's the key point.

Q:

You mentioned that there is strong competition in WRC 2, and it certainly is at this event. How much are you willing to risk out there Pontus, to get maximum points?

PT:

It's hard to say. It's a long championship and in this rally there are many drivers that can do really well, lots of Norwegian drivers and some more. We just need to start and see where we are and I think it's important to be on the spot from the beginning and avoid any mistakes. Thirty seconds in one snow bank I think can be the difference between, maybe a podium place here so it's the main thing I think.

Q:

I'm guessing this season is very important for you, aiming for the WRC 2 Championship title?

PT:

Yes, that's the main target this year so me and the team will give 100 percent for this. That's what we're working hard for every day.

Q:

What do you feel that you've learned from last year?

PT:

Obviously you learn and get better on everything, but for sure you need to finish the rallies. That's very important if you're going to have a chance to take the title in WRC 2. If you have two-three results out of the normal points obviously it's very tough so that's what you learn.

Q:

Pontus is obviously confident, how about yourself, how are you feeling ahead of the rally Emil?

EB:

We have quite a good feeling. It's my third time here so, yeah, it feels great actually. We had a good test as well, which is important, but like Pontus said, there are a lot of fast drivers here and it's important to be on it from the beginning on the stages in Norway. But we will try.

Q:

Now we do see changes to the route here in Rally Sweden this year. What are your thoughts on the new stages we've seen, the new sections?

EB:

On the recce it looked quite okay actually. This stage, Knon, is a quite fast stage I would say and the organisation has done a really good job to put everything together for us, and yeah, I think a lot of drivers are happy to get out on the stages.

Q:

Being your home event, would you say this is your best opportunity, your best advantage here for you to get maximum points?

EB:

Yeah, I think so. Okay, we did some WRC 2 events last year but we had some struggles in many ways. But I feel well prepared for this rally and I think this our biggest chance to get a great result.

Q:

Is this going to be a full season in WRC 2 this year?

EB:

Not at the moment, but if we do a good result here I think it can help us. If we can do some more rallies it would be great.

Q:

So at the moment, this is the only event you'll be competing in?

EB:

No, also France, Portugal and Germany.

Q:

From a sponsorship point, getting a good result here would obviously help those sponsors to maybe give you more funding to help you get more events?

EB:

Yeah, I hope so. If you show that you can be among the fast guys, it's helpful.

Q:

The Swedes are on form. Are you confident as well Teemu?

TS:

Yeah, quite confident. Of course we have a new car and have done testing, and I'm really happy for the car, but as always when something is new it means new challenges.

Q:

How many kilometers testing have you done?

TS:

200.

Q:

Do you feel that was enough for you to adapt to the new car?

TS:

Yeah, that's enough.

Q:

What's your opinion of the stages? You were successful here last year, do you feel that the stages are going to favour you this year?

TS:

I think so. This year the stages are in good condition, good ice on the ground, so I think it will be faster than last year.

Q:

So, you're aiming for the top spot on the podium?

TS:

I'm aiming for a better result than last year.

Q:

Well you were second here last year so that will be the top of the podium you're aiming for then. What about the season ahead, I know you're doing a lot of WRC 2 events in Europe, but there is a possibility of seeing you in a WRC car as well this year. What's happening with that?

TS:

I think we will get the new WRC car for Poland and Finland. I'll try to learn and get a good result from here to be able to be fast in the WRC car.

Q:

So how much are you thinking about the WRC 2 season, Teemu, how focused are you on that knowing that you're actually going to get into a WRC car?

TS:

Both of them are really important. I'll try to do my best here and then move my focus in two rallies, then back to WRC 2.