



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L' AUTOMOBILE

2021 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

ARCTIC RALLY FINLAND POWERED BY CAPITALBOX

**Post-event FIA Press Conference
February 28, 2021**

Present:

Ott Tänak (EST) – Hyundai Shell Mobis World Rally Team

Kalle Rovanperä (FIN) – Toyota Gazoo Racing World Rally Team

Thierry Neuville (BEL) – Hyundai Shell Mobis World Rally Team

Andrea Adamo (ITA) – Hyundai Shell Mobis World Rally Team, Team Principal

Q:

Ott, first win of the season on the board and you certainly did it with style this weekend. Have you enjoyed the experience in the Arctic?

OT:

Definitely. It was an incredible experience, conditions couldn't have been better. The stages were more than demanding, they were fast but they were still tricky in places. Altogether, the challenge we had this weekend was definitely worth some WRC points.

Q:

After the test sessions that you had in temperatures that were down as low as minus 30 degrees, to come with the weather slightly changing this weekend, did you notice a difference?

OT:

It was nice because we were able to stay outside from the car a bit between the stages. I guess if it would have been minus 30, it would have been maybe less enjoyable.

Q:

Did you note a difference in terms of performance and the reactivity of the tyres?

OT:

It's hard to say. When we had the pre-event test, we had some very different road surface and conditions, actually. From there, it was difficult to compare anything. We did a small event in Estonia but the conditions were different. In winter, it's so easy to get some fresh snow and different conditions so when we came here and did the recce, we understood the circumstances would be different and obviously, these roads have had some rally one month ago. It was definitely tricky in places but WRC needs to be demanding and in the end, it was more enjoyable.

Q:

In the times we are living with COVID-19, we are seeing some new events come onto the calendar and that brings some new challenges, you have to make brand-new pace-notes, stages are unseen, do you like that new challenge?

OT:

It always makes the things a bit more open. When we came here, we really didn't know what to expect or what was going to happen, who is going to be faster and if the set-up works and how to manage the tyres. If you come to a new event, you really never know, you have to learn while you are driving. You have to react quickly to some things and probably, yes, it's probably at the beginning of the rally where you can make the biggest difference. Because during the event, everybody will learn and react and the gaps start to get smaller and smaller. For myself, I knew I'd need to make a good difference from the beginning and then build myself some margin. After I was able to manage.

Q:

Kalle, let's turn to you. Congratulations on second position and leading the championship now as we head into the next event - and the youngest leader of the championship in history aged 20. Talk about how you're feeling right now about the result because I imagine, you expected to get a little bit more?

KR:

Yeah, thank you. It was quite a difficult weekend, to be honest. For sure, I am happy with the points that we got from here. Like Ott said, at the beginning the plan was to be quick from the first stage already. I tried to do that also but I just couldn't manage it completely well on the first stage and I lost some time there. And after, we were just trying to be as quick as possible all the time. But I was struggling with the car the whole weekend, it was not perfect. There were some difficulties to be on the optimal pace. But it was still a nice weekend.

Q:

You changed something on Friday that hadn't gone on the right direction, can you say what that was now?

KR:

Not really, I'm not going to tell that. There was nothing really big. It's always a bit risky to change something big on the set-up. It got better during yesterday afternoon's loop and today, it was really quite okay - still not perfect - but it was getting better all the time and it was nice to see that we could fight back in the end.

Q:

Thierry put you under huge pressure going into the final day. Did you feel that pressure this morning?

KR:

Yeah, it was quite interesting to have the fight with Thierry. It was really clever from him on yesterday's loop with the tyres, he did really well. It was nice to start today with a smaller gap. It's not really a big difference and it was enough. We could gain on both stages a bit more but it's always interesting. You just have to do your best and see what happens.

Q:

It was a pretty impressive final stage from you. Was there a lot of risk on that Power Stage?

KR:

There was. I have to say, the whole weekend I have been pushing pretty hard. I have been not perfect with the car in many places and I can see that I am losing time in some places. So, I need to push a lot to gain back in some other places. There was a big risk also in the last one. For sure I tried to not take the last risk of course, because we need to take the points for the team also. I didn't want to end the rally there but I needed to push.

OT:

I'm pretty sure he used quite a lot of talent on the last stage. I saw there were a lot of snowbanks lying in the middle of the road. He used a lot of talent!

Q:

Turning to Thierry, congratulations on third position. It was good to see the battle today for that second position but not quite. How are you feeling about walking away with third?

TN:

Most of the time, I came out as a winner on the battle in the Power Stage. But, to be honest, I knew that today, it was going to be difficult. The stage was maybe not as demanding as the other stages and there were a couple of fast corners that, if you took some risks, you could gain some time. I probably didn't take that risk that I should have taken to gain P2. But on the other hand, it was an important weekend for us and for the team as well. After Monte-Carlo, we needed those Manufacturers' championship points because we lost a lot in Monte. So at the end, I am satisfied with P3. To take home the points in both championships is a good move. And now I'm P2 in the overall classification for the drivers so I think we can't complain.

Q:

A great time on that final stage yesterday and a great tyre strategy from you but you said, you could have gone a little bit quicker than you did on that final stage. But it was a brilliant time though...

TN:

Yeah, like always you feel like you can go quicker but on the other hand, maybe I managed the tyres better through the whole stage. I had a clean drive and I really enjoyed the stage, to be honest, in general. It's been a long time since I didn't enjoy driving as much as this weekend in my rally car. The car was just working fine, I had no complaints. It did exactly what I wanted it to do and I just feel comfortable. Despite some really challenging stages, already on Friday night, it kicks off with a very demanding stage. We managed well. I think, we lost between five and 10 seconds probably with some communication issues on Saturday morning, which went a little bit better after some changes on Saturday afternoon and today. But, still, it's something we need to improve and work on, but in general I am really satisfied with the final result.

Q:

You've only done two events with your new co-driver, Martijn Wydaeghe. You've spoken about some of the communication issues but really, what was that about?

TN:

Basically, we have a different communication inside the car. It worked quite well with my former co-driver, but Martijn is speaking French and his native language is Flemish. So sometimes already, it's difficult to get the right conversation yet. Combined with this intercom system that was made on the voice of my former co-driver, I struggled sometimes to clearly hear the difference between a 50 and a 70, for example. And therefore I am hesitating. There were a couple of moments due to that but a couple of places where I lost time way too much because I understand the corner was slower than it was. It maybe cost us a second position at the end. But we had a trouble-free run, no mistakes, the car was working well, the team has done an incredible job. They gave us the opportunity to go testing a lot before this event and it finally worked. Ott in P1, we are in P3 and we closed the gap in the Manufacturers' championship also.

Q:

Your team boss, who is sat next to you, was vocal after Rallye Monte-Carlo. He was asking for more determination from the team...

AA:

I say that from myself first of all.

Q:

Did you feel it had a bit of ripple effect through the team, did it motivate everyone to push a little bit harder?

TN:

I start to know my boss more and more. Obviously, it's been now a couple of years that we are working together. I need to be careful but I think the direction after Monte-Carlo was a little bit too much compared to the final result. We knew that we had a new co-driver and we couldn't expect the impossible. Ott obviously had a bad weekend but still, there was some performance and we could have been on the podium with two cars maybe. We showed some great speed on some stages but unfortunately, we didn't get the final result and we were only at the first rally of the season. Now we fight back and we showed that for sure. Thanks to Andrea, he put some people in the right place, back on the good line. As I said before, they gave us the opportunity to be a lot in the car and finally, it paid off. We have to say thanks to everybody in the team. But we are only on round two now and round three is approaching so we need to be even better than here this weekend.

Q:

Turning to Andrea Adamo: congratulations, a win for the team and a third place this weekend. Are you a happy man now after this event?

AA:

I would lie if I'd say no. After the rally, what I am happy to say is that I see that people have done the same approach we had last year and that allowed us from Estonia onwards to really fight back and win the Manufacturers' championship. For different reasons, we were not good enough overall to also allow our drivers to fight for the Drivers' championship. For different reasons on Monte-Carlo, we were not performing. Not in terms of the performance but in the approach we should have done and I question myself first of all. I really think here that we have prepared the event in the way we were used to and in the way we have to, with the determination that is needed. Also, to relax after Monte-Carlo was needed because some of my people very tired. Because I have to say, after Estonia onwards, my people have been working hard, they didn't come home for a long period without seeing family, children and so on for months. Sometimes, I have to manage the things under this point of view.

Q:

Craig [Breen] was in a podium position but he seemed to slip away from things. What was your evaluation of what Craig did out there this weekend?

AA:

I will never criticise my driver publicly so for sure, anyhow, yesterday I slipped a bit. But Kalle, Ott and Thierry can confirm the level of performance that nowadays in these kinds of cars and these kind of rallies that are a bit shorter are demanding and they need a deep knowledge of the car and the continuous use of the car to really be able to fight for the last 10th. Let's remember we are speaking about stages that are finishing with 10th of a second difference between drivers. Thierry just said sometimes just lifting a bit you lose. Craig had not been driving the car since Estonia last year basically. He did one day of testing. Of course, I think he's a guy who is sometimes more Italian than me. He was feeling the pressure, not from me, but the responsibility to bring home points but, on the other hand, to be also fast and I think it's not easy. When I say I am happy about my team, because I see in between this day's stages, I saw a proper reaction that I expect from my people - checking the data, trying to understand where the problems are, why there are problems and trying to solve them. And I saw people focus on this and this is the kind of reaction that I expect from my people.

Q:

On his debut in a World Rally Car, what did you think of Oliver Solberg's performance this weekend?

AA:

His presence has been decided during the Power Stage in Monte-Carlo because there are things in life you decide without using too much the brain but using the feeling. Sometimes it works and normally they work much more than when you think too much about something. When you let your emotions speak too much sometimes it's good. During the Power Stage I said to Alain [Penasse]: 'Alain, let's give him a run in the Arctic with our test car'. Of course, we were a bit worried. Mum, Dad, you know... Dad It was more difficult to manage Petter than Oliver honestly. I think it has been emotional for them but at the end, he did what we ask him to do, to enjoy, and I think he did well. I think to have young guns like Kalle here leading the championship, even if he is driving a Toyota, and with Oliver it's good because I think we need the young guns to attract the young generation in rally and keep the future of rally alive. With the Promoter, people I think they can agree with me to have young 19 or 20 [drivers] can allow us to have the attention of the younger generation.

Q:

Will we see him in a World Rally Car again with you?

AA:

I think he's too young to say no.

Q:

I'm sure he's too young to say no but are you going to say yes to another run in a World Rally Car for him soon?

AA:

Soon, it depends on what you mean, 'soon'?

Q:

Next rally?

AA:

No.

Q:

First half of the year

AA:

When does the first half of the year finish?

Q:

Safari Rally?

AA:

Who knows?!

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR:

Jason Craig, Autosport (GBR)

Q:

Firstly, does this performance suggest we are beginning to see the Ott Tänak from 2019 and, secondly, are you puzzled by the fact that this is only your second WRC win since joining Hyundai?

OT:

Of course, you want to win every event but things are not being so smooth and generally, as well, times have been somehow mixed and strange. All the situation has not been so straightforward. But let's see, hopefully this year, we have a lot longer season ahead and we can get some more consistent feeling.

Elliot Wood, Dirtfish.com (USA)

Q:

How proud are you of this victory given Hyundai's disappointing Rallye Monte-Carlo?

OT:

Let's say I was not really so much focused about Monte when we came here. It was more important to get the good result from here. The biggest challenge was Kalle and obviously, the Toyota guys. He's the only guy who has done these stages in this car last year and obviously, he's been always very fast in these types of roads and already he starts to have some experience as well. He only gets faster, there is no doubt. It was going to be a big challenge to take the challenge with him. But let's say, this year it worked out and hopefully, it stays like this. But in the future, I'm sure he will be a very quick guy.

Jason Craig, Autosport (GBR)

Q:

What lessons will you take from the Arctic Rally moving forward in the FIA World Championship as a Toyota driver and are there any other rallies coming up where you believe you could score your first WRC win at - Finland or Estonia perhaps?

KR:

I don't know what the lesson will be. The most obvious one will be that we need to be more clever with the testing to have the perfect car for the rally and not to have the situation like this that we have to struggle during the event. I am sure we try to fight for the win in other rallies also.

Elliot Wood, Dirtfish.com (USA)

Q:

Were the understeer and balance issues that you had the same as your team-mates and was the Yaris more drivable today than it was on Saturday?

KR:

I don't know if my team-mates had so big issues with it but I think the balance was similar for all of us and maybe they managed it in their side a bit differently and didn't complain about it so much, I don't know. The car was a bit better today but not perfect.

Elliot Wood, Dirtfish.com (USA)

Q:

What do you and Martijn plan to do between now and Croatia to improve your collaboration? You will move forward together, yes?

TN:

Already Martijn is taking French lessons, he did it already before the weekend and I think if you watch the onboard, I could clearly hear the difference and he will do more for sure. But what impressed me the most is his calmness, he's very calm. He's very quiet all the time and you feel relaxed. He knows as well that he's sitting next to a good driver but still there's a lot of motivation and it gives me an extra boost again with some new things around me to push myself even more and so far, it's working. We will do a rally in Italy, in the home country of our boss, in an R5 (Rally2) car to get more work time in the car and then, I am sure, in Croatia it will be even better than here.

Ben Johnston, Paddock Eye (IRL)

Q:

What are your thoughts of this weekend's rally, both as an event and also your performance as a team?

AA:

I can only confirm what I said before, that I think it's good to see even in these tricky days that we are living altogether. FIA, Promoter and event organisers are doing amazing things to let us have proper rallies. We did Monte-Carlo, even if we had to wake up early and make many things. But we had Rallye Monte-Carlo and in the end, that is what in history will be remembered. We had a winter rally here. I know it's been sort of organised in the last moment so we appreciate even more the passion and the amazing job done by the organiser, by the Promoter, by the FIA. And I think we have to be proud. We are trying to find solutions and to make things happen. I don't think no one is happy to have more COVID tests that it means but if it's needed then we do. But really, from the bottom of my heart, seriously speaking now, thank you from the bottom of my heart all the job that has been done. We have to be happy, happy that we are here and enjoying. Now we have to hope between vaccines, no vaccines, whatever it is, it's good. The only thing that makes me sad is that here in Finland we are missing Hannu [Mikkola] this weekend so if I can, I wish to dedicate this win to him and to the memory of the nice dinner I had with him many years ago. Thank you.

Eric Dupain, Belga Press Agency (BEL)

Q:

How important is this victory and your double podium to you and your team to try and convince Hyundai to continue in WRC?

AA:

This kind of questions make me laugh but with all the respect of them. Sorry if I am a bit long but I was with Lancia winning everything and the championship and the programme was closed. I was with Alfa Romeo and we were losing and the programme wasn't closed. The things that are deciding to stay in the championship are much wider than a win or a loss. I am not at all worried about the permanence of Hyundai in this championship in the future. Anyhow, the strategy of a board spending millions and millions of euros is not something that the chairman call me on Thursday while I'm boarding [the plane] and say, 'hey if you don't win this rally, we close everything'. People believe that there are people much better than what I am managing a company like Hyundai.

Reiner Kuhn, Motorsport Aktuell (DEU)

Q:

What do you think about the results of the Hyundai drivers in the support categories?

AA:

If no one wins, I cannot be happy.

FIA WRC2 CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

Esapekka Lappi (FIN) – Movisport

Q:

Esapekka, it was a pretty dominant victory this weekend in FIA WRC2, have you enjoyed the experience in the Arctic?

EL:

Yes, thank you. First of all, it was really cool how they managed to make this event happen in such a short time. I really wanted to do a rally here again. I did it nine years ago and really wanted to come again and now it happened. The stages were beautiful, the weather was cool and the sun was very shiny as well so it can't be better.

Q:

How did the car feel this weekend, were you happy with the performance of the car?

EL:

Yes, I was really surprised how different this Volkswagen actually is from the geometry and the suspension, it really impressed me. I didn't need to do big changes, to be honest. I've not touched a car... it's many years ago that I haven't tried to find better settings during the rally. We needed to raise the car for some stages and then we went back down but that's all we did. I was really satisfied.

Q:

It looked as though you had a completely problem-free run out there, was that the case?

EL:

Yeah, year, nothing.

Q:

No hot moments, I'm sure there was one?

EL:

Yeah, or maybe two. Yesterday evening, we were in a bank a bit, we had a spin and probably the hottest moment was yesterday morning. We had this flat-left and I really thought I was in a World Rally Car, so I didn't remember I don't have the aero and the downforce. But I got a good reminder, yeah.

Q:

When are we going to see you next this season?

EL:

Well, that's a good question. Honestly, I have no idea. I will go home and then we will see. Probably building a house.

Q:

Are there any more opportunities in FIA WRC2 to take you forward?

EL:

It always depends on money, that's the question. Hopefully, we can find more sponsors or something and make it happen. But let's see. I'm sure this didn't make things worse.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR:

Reiner Kuhn, Motorsport Aktuell (DEU)

Q:

Will we see you at the Croatia Rally or any other rallies? Is there a timeframe, are you talking to people right now?

EL:

I'm talking to you, now! I talked with Jari-Matti at the finish of the Power Stage but not really.

Q:

Does he have a spare care for you?

EL:

Or two! It's tricky.

FIA WRC3 CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

Teemu Asunmaa (FIN)

Q:

Turning to Teemu, congratulations on another win in Lapland. It's your 11th participation in this area so how did it go for you this weekend?

TA:

It's a nice feeling. Okay, my first time in a WRC3 event in snow and I got my first class win in a WRC3 rally. In fact, it's my second class win in six weeks here. It's a nice feeling.

Q:

It was a very close battle with you and Egon Kaur this weekend, it's been flat out?

TA:

Yeah, sometimes. I was smart driving all weekend. We had a little bit the wrong set-up at the start of the rally and we had to change it more and more hard in the suspension. The times were better all the time. It's different to drive in these conditions versus to what we drive in the Finnish championship because the start position is different and the road condition is different. So I was improvising my driving style all the time.

Q:

What was the most challenging stage out there this weekend?

TA:

The first stage was very nice - okay very rough in the second loop - but it was okay.

Q:

Will we see you do more FIA WRC3 events now?

TA:

For sure in Rally Finland and maybe Rally Estonia, we have a plan. I will do all the Finnish championship events because this is my main aim but I will do more in WRC3 and I need to defend my Finnish championship.