



MEET THE CREWS SESSION LEG 1 – 17 August, 2017

Present:

Thierry Neuville, Hyundai Motorsport
Andreas Mikkelsen, Citroën Total Abu Dhabi World Rally Team
Sébastien Ogier, M-Sport World Rally Team

Q:

Thierry, let's kick off with you. Good run through shakedown this morning, but I'll tell you what: everyone is very excited about what's going to happen this weekend. It could not get closer in the championship right now, with you and Seb level on points. How are you feeling coming into Rally Germany?

TN:

I'm feeling great. It's always nice to be here in Germany. It's somehow a home event for me, not far from the Belgian border. I'm looking forward to it. It's obviously a nice fight for the championship between me and Seb. We were able to catch back a lot of points we lost at the beginning of the season, which we could really do with now. To be honest, that makes it even more exciting for us, as well for the fans. So, it's not too bad.

Q:

It's not too bad, I think it's going to be an exciting weekend. Weather-wise it always throws it into the mix here. It looks like we are going to have a little bit of rain tomorrow, which for you, first on the road, is a good thing, right?

TN:

Yes, obviously it could rain tomorrow. That would definitely not be too bad. I would be pleased with that, as I think we've been comfortable in these slippy conditions in the past. It makes the rally difficult for the drivers. The road will definitely be dirtier behind, so I could gain a small benefit from it.

Q:

We're in a new area this year. We're back at Bostalsee, where the rally was originally based in 2002. Some new stages. What do you think of the new route this year?

TN:

I much prefer the vineyard stages like we will do on Friday. It's a bit of a shame, but on the other hand it makes it a different, new challenge for us. You know, we have three different stages over here: the vineyards, the Baumholder area and the countryside stages in the Saarland. It's a tough challenge to find the right settings, to find good confidence on all those kinds of stages. But we have to see. I think we are well armed and ready to attack.

Q:

The WRC is a very friendly championship. Fans have so much access to the drivers, everyone gets on with everyone. But when we are in a fight for the title, Thierry, is there any fighting talk between you? Are guys talking to each other or are you just psyching each other out?



TN:

We are fighting. I think we are fighting on the stages. This is the main thing, obviously. For sure it will be tricky, you know. We both want to win the title. We both would love to win this rally, as well. It will make it an exciting event to follow. Now I wish the best of luck to everybody, and may the strongest win.

Q:

Now let's hear from Andreas. You're back with Citroën this weekend and on tarmac. We've seen your performance on tarmac earlier this year on Corsica, which was exceptional. How are you finding it? How was testing?

AM:

Testing has been really, really nice. Obviously, we were looking forward to coming back to Germany. I have really enjoyed the last couple of years. Leading the event last year until I made a mistake. And here, the car felt really, really nice on a three-day test. We tested on more or less every type of stage. In the vineyards, in the countryside and on the Panzerplatte – my first time ever testing there. That will definitely be helpful for the rally when we get there on Saturday. But the feeling with the car is really, really good.

Q:

What do you hope to achieve out there? How much pressure do you feel, Andreas, to perform? Because it's silly season right now, all wondering who's going to be where next year for drivers who are out of contract. You are one of those drivers right now. Do you feel any pressure to really perform?

AM:

Well, yeah, there's always a pressure to perform in this sport. I think that after this rally a lot will be sorted on the driver market, because there's one month where nothing is happening. I think it's important to have a good display in this rally. Of course, it's not only this rally that counts, you know, it's the performance at the other rallies before. Of course, it's important, because I think now, this time after, will be crucial.

Q:

What are you thinking about the title fight right now? We haven't seen it this close for so many years. Is this something you watch, too?

AM:

Yes, it's very nice to see both Thierry and Seb fighting it out. Obviously, if you look at the beginning of the year, the two rallies where Thierry didn't finish, then he would have had a big lead. No question about that. Again, it will be very interesting to watch. It will be very interesting for the next rallies to come as well. But it will definitely start here in Germany.

Q:

Let's turn to our world champion. Mr. Ogier, how are you feeling about coming to Rally Germany. It's super close in the championship. But you've done this before, you've got four titles under your belt. It's all okay, right?

SO:

Not exactly. But more than anything it's great to be back on tarmac. These guys have mentioned the beginning of the season for Thierry – of course, he could have had more points. But I would have loved to have him in front of me on gravel as well. I think that would have been more exciting for me. For sure, it was not so easy to drive on all those gravel



events as first on the road. Now I'm happy to be back on tarmac, that's clear. We have some cards in the hand to perform this weekend. I like Germany. It's going to be challenging, as always. It's going to be raining, sometimes dry, the tyre choice is going to be complicated. Some sections are going to be slippery and muddy. So, everything is going to be there. We have to be at our best to do it. I have always had a good feeling with the Fiesta on tarmac, so I'm confident.

Q:

Talk to me about the stages here. Everyone kind of picks out the Panzerplatte as one of the more challenging stages that you have, for fear of the Hinkelsteine. Or are there others that are more challenging?

SO:

It's always a big challenge, especially the long one, the long section on Panzerplatte. It's hard for the tyres every year. Most of the time, the biggest differences happen when you have no splits in the car, so you don't know where you are. Sometimes it's incredibly slippery on the greasy sections. Then you have the feeling you are super slow, because you have no grip. At that moment, you have the problem that everyone is struggling but it's hard to know if you are on the right rhythm or not. In the past, I always managed it very well and managed to make a big difference on this stage, so hopefully I will continue that tradition.

Q:

You have four titles under your belt. Do you feel that this gives you a little bit of an advantage over Thierry, because you know what to do when it comes to winning a championship? Or do you think that doesn't matter?

SO:

I think, of course, in the end it's always good, because you know that you've done it many times. You know what you have to do. But that doesn't mean that it's getting easier to do it. You still have to be at your best. I think you are more relaxed when you think it's a tradition, because it's always good to have four titles in your pocket. I think you see the situation a bit more relaxed this way, but it doesn't make it easy. It's not that I have four and will settle for that. I want a fifth one and I want to fight for it.