



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

## 2017 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

### RALLYE DEUTSCHLAND

Pre-event Press Conference  
Thursday 17 August

**Present:**

Thierry Neuville, Hyundai Motorsport  
Sébastien Ogier, M-Sport World Rally Team  
Esapekka Lappi, Toyota GAZOO Racing World Rally Team  
Yves Matton, Citroën Total Abu Dhabi World Rally Team

**Q:**

Thierry, you won the Shakedown this morning. How is the confidence ahead of what could be a crucial event here at ADAC Rallye Deutschland?

**TN:**

Confidence is obviously high. We have had a couple of strong results on the last events, except Finland maybe. And now back on tarmac we know that we have a good pace, so obviously we are looking for a strong event and the fight for the lead.

**Q:**

Sébastien Ogier and you are on joint points, so it could not get any closer. Do you feel the pressure of no mistakes?

**TN:**

In rallying it is always the same, you can never do mistakes. I think we have seen good examples this year. I have done some mistakes on the first two events – very small but with huge consequences. We have seen Sébastien doing one on the last rally and soon you can lose important points for the championship. Obviously in both of our positions now, we have to avoid mistakes for sure but we have to be fast as well.

**Q:**

Now that we are at the stage of the season where everything counts, do you do anything differently than you have been doing before?

**TN:**

To be honest, no. I have my way of working, I do everything the same. I try not to forget something, but I also try not to do too much because this can be disturbing as well. I do the same preparation every time. Just like during the testing, the team gives you more opportunities to drive the car and for sure this is helpful.

**Q:**

Which one is the toughest stage for you here in Germany?

**TN:**

It is probably the Baumholder stage. But if you have a good feeling about the car it is the nicest one as well. I have to say that I hated it during the first couple of years when I came here but I am loving it more and more when I got to experience these special roads. Yes, I think it is going to be good fun.

**Q:**

Sébastien, how are you feeling ahead of ADAC Rallye Deutschland? Your confidence is probably high as always but now that you are in a close fight for points with Thierry Neuville are you getting nervous at all or not?

**SO:**

Pressure is part of the game and I have been managing the pressure for years. Sometimes it is harder than on other days. But at the end of the day you always have to deliver and focus and enjoy what you do. That is the most important. Yes, I feel good to be here. The most important is to be back on tarmac, I must say. I am very happy with that because it is no secret that I have been struggling to open the roads on many gravel events now so it is good to be back on tarmac and to have a chance to fight on the top again. So I am looking forward to it. Let's see what we can do.

**Q:**

The weather always plays a part in this rally, every year we see a mix of it. Have you been able to experience this as well when you were testing ahead of the event?

**SO:**

This year I think I was pretty lucky with my testing conditions. I had a chance to test in both condition and 60 per cent of my testing was dry, the rest in wet conditions. At least like this we could explore different set-ups, which was good. But here the problem is that you do not have the service right next to the stage so you don't fit the tyres right when you need them. So this makes it sometimes a bit more challenging, sometimes it is a compromise, and it looks like it is going to be like this again. It looks like it will be rainy on Friday and let's see what it will be like for the rest of the weekend. There will be slippery and wet sections but also dry ones. So it will be an interesting rally.

**Q:**

Would you say that Panzerplatte is the toughest stage for you as well?

**SO:**

You must mention Baumholder, just like Thierry said earlier. It is the longest challenge of the weekend by far. Normally it makes the difference. I actually have always had the same feeling like Thierry. It was never really my favourite stage because I don't like it when I cannot control everything. And in this stage you can easily be unlucky with punctures. But if you get everything right on this stage, it can also be very enjoyable with very fast and very nice sections.

**Q:**

Esapekka, in Finland you took your first WRC win. You've had two weeks to let it sink in, how do you feel about it now?

**EL:**

I have been trying to forget what happened. I think I managed it pretty well. And I have to say that I don't feel so confident here.

**Q:**

Tarmac is not your favourite surface but what is achievable here for you?

**EL:**

Like I said I don't feel so confident, so it will be a big challenge tomorrow with the rain and the starting position. After each car it is getting muddier and muddier and therefore more difficult. If we do not run into any trouble, I think top five or top six can be possible, but you really have to make it without any issues and still keep some decent speed.

**Q:**

How has tarmac testing been going for you? Have you felt confident when you were testing?

**EL:**

Yes, we had a good test day on Friday. We had dry and wet conditions. I felt good, but I was obviously too slow. So I was not pushing enough on the tests. We will see, it will be an interesting rally.

**Q:**

From what you have seen in the recce, do you agree that Panzerplatte will be the toughest stage?

**EL:**

No, every stage will be difficult for me.

**Q:**

Looking ahead, do you think we have another win on the board from you?

**EL:**

To be honest, I do not believe it. I knew that Finland would be my strongest rally because I have done it so many times. That was the only shot for me to be on a high. Now we really need to forget what happened there and have the same approach like during the first WRC rallies, trying to get the mileage as I have only done three days of tarmac testing. So I need to get more experience with this. So the target for the rest of the season is trying to get as many points as I can, to climb a few positions in the standings and then be in a better starting position in Monte Carlo.

**Q:**

Yves Matton, we have recently seen Sébastien Loeb testing the Citroën C3 WRC on tarmac ahead of this event. How did the test session go and how was Séb's feedback?

**YM:**

First of all, he enjoyed it a lot. He was really happy to be back in a World Rally Car. He was really fast and he was able to give us good feedback with mixed conditions in the morning and in the afternoon. He was able to give his idea about the car in those conditions. He drove both set-ups from Andreas Mikkelsen and Craig Breen – a little bit less of Kris Meeke's because it was more racing style – and he was quite happy with it. He said that the car was on a good level to drive on tarmac.

**Q:**

To get a full analysis of the car, he would need to test on gravel as well. Is this going to happen with Loeb?

**YM:**

We were quite happy to get his feedback. It was good to have his comparison of the 2017 car against the older ones and about the evolution of the car. He is quite busy with rallycross and cross country but something is possible one day.

**Q:**

Might we see Loeb compete in the World Rally Championship again? Is it a possibility this year or next year?

**YM:**

For sure not for 2017. It is too early to speak about that. It was impossible for him to know his level. The next step could be to drive on gravel but it is not a short term plan for sure.

**Q:**

Your current drivers are all under contract for next season. Are you also looking at other drivers?

**YM:**

It is for sure an interesting time of the year. Everybody is keen to speak with everybody. Craig, Stéphane and Kris are under contract and will be part of the team

next year. Andreas is also with us and we are also speaking with other drivers who won an event or nearly won an event before. We are lucky to make a plan in September which is quite free from events, and then I can give it to my CEO and then we will make a decision.

**Q:**

The Citroën C3 WRC has not performed as well as you may have wanted it on gravel. What can you tell us about the development of the car on gravel this year? And what is the next step to get ready for 2018?

**YM:**

We did a great job after Sweden and Sardinia for sure. We made the joker and we homologated some new parts, we took the decision to go for it and I would say on a risky basis and not to test some parts before we homologated, and we are happy with what we have done. There is some potential we have to work on. I don't think there will be new things on the car between now and the end of the year. We have still some work to do on the new parts which we homologated.

## **FIA WRC 2 CHAMPIONSHIP**

**Present:**

Marijan Griebel, BRR Baumschlager Rallye & Racing  
Teemu Suninen, M-Sport World Rally Team

**Q:**

Marijan, it's great to see you as part of the FIA WRC 2 Championship here at Rallye Deutschland. How are you feeling about your chances this weekend?

**MG:**

I'm feeling quite good. My main focus is normally on the European Championship this year. But, for sure, I'm quite a local hero here. I'm living just 15 minutes from the service park or 10 minutes from the Panzerplatte stage. So it was a big wish to take part in this special rally, the ADAC Rallye Deutschland. I'm really looking forward to it. I think there are really good competitors in WRC 2 with former WRC drivers like Teemu (Suninen), Eric (Camilli) and the Škoda factory team is also here. It will be a big fight. My preparation was quite good. I had a really good result in Poland two weeks ago. I'm ready.

**Q:**

And you have the local advantage as well, the local knowledge. You know what the weather is going to do, as well, so tyre choice-wise it should help?

**MG:**

Yes, maybe. That's a difficult thing because I never drove a four-wheel drive car in wet conditions on tarmac. So, I'm not that experienced. Some things are still really, really new for me. I can learn a lot this weekend. We'll try not to push too hard and leave the car on the road.

**Q:**

You said that the European Championship has been your focus this season. Is there a chance that we could see you in WRC 2 next year?

**MG:**

I think there could be a chance, yes. This year, I'm totally on a private budget. So my biggest wish would be to drive for a factory or a national importer of a brand. That is the main target. I'm wide open. I can do ERC again, I can do WRC 2 – I just want to drive that R5 car again next year.

**Q:**

Do you see yourself as one of the favourites this weekend or is this such a strong field that it's too difficult to say?

**MG:**

In the WRC 2 class? Yes, for me there are four favourites: the two Škoda factory drivers, Teemu and Eric. They should be the fastest drivers. But there are nine, 10 really good drivers where I have to fight for places.

**Q:**

Teemu, we see you return to the FIA WRC 2 Championship after a highly successful two events in a WRC car. What does it feel like to step back into the R5 after the Fiesta WRC?

**TS:**

The stepping back is a bit difficult. The car is quite different to drive compared to a WRC car. And also tarmac is a bit challenging for me. Especially when we have a lot of mud and a lot of dirt on the road.

**Q:**

Tarmac is not your favourite surface but you impress on all surfaces it seems. What have you been doing to get yourself in the tarmac mode?

**TS:**

I think I can be fast but the problem is the muddy places, to get experience and get to know what it's about.

**Q:**

There is really strong competition in WRC 2; it's a really strong field of drivers. What is your hope for this one? Do you think the top step of the podium is a possibility?

**TS:**

Of course, yes. The target is to be on the podium in each race. I think I get a big challenge from my team-mates and of course the Škoda factory cars. And we can't afford to look over all the local heroes and the young drivers.

**Q:**

Is there the possibility of more WRC action before the end of the season?

**TS:**

Hopefully, yes. At least I have done my best and showed my pace on gravel. At least on gravel WRC should be the correct class for me.

**Q:**

Next year of course, it's such an important year. This is silly season right now, we're speculating where drivers are going to go. Do you see yourself driving full time in WRC next year?

**TS:**

I hope I can get something to drive, some good car to drive. Because then I can improve my driving and try to take one step up.

**Q:**

Are any teams talking to you about next year?

**TS:**

I haven't heard anything.

## **FIA JUNIOR WRC CHAMPIONSHIP**

**Present:**

Nicolas Ciamin

Julius Tannert

**Q:**

Nicolas, it was a win for you at Rally Finland last time out and now we head to your favoured surface. What are your hopes for this event?

**NC:**

Of course, the hope is to repeat the Rally Finland result. I think it will be very tricky here because of the weather forecast. We will have a lot of muddy places, so the tyre choice will be very important. But I'm ready to go.

**Q:**

What do you think of the stages from what you've seen on the recce? We do have some new stages here at Rally Germany. What are your thoughts on the route?

**NC:**

I don't like so much the vineyard stages as I'm not very comfortable with them. But the field stages that we have on Sunday or the military stages are great.

**Q:**

Talk to me about the championship itself, because you still mathematically have a chance of taking the title. It's going to be tough against Solans this weekend. How much are going to push out there?

**NC:**

Maximum. But he has a 26-point lead. It's possible with the fastest time points, but it will be difficult I think. But I will try, you know.

**Q:**

What about next year, Nicolas? Will we see you back in the Junior Championship? Or are you going to move on and do something else?

**NC:**

The target will be to go to WRC 2 but it costs a lot. So, it will depend on the results of this year.

**Q:**

Julius, it's your home event and I'm sure you have been looking forward to competing here in Germany all year. How are you feeling?

**JT:**

That's right. I've been looking forward to this event since the season start. After three gravel races it's back to tarmac, my favourite surface. For sure, I did this rally many times. It's good to be here, it's good to see a lot of fans and the family on the stages outside. So, that's quite nice.

**Q:**

Is there extra pressure on your shoulders or can you handle all that?

**JT:**

Yes, for sure, there are no excuses for me. I know the stages, I know the rally, so there's no excuses. The rest of the season, all the rallies are new for me. But this is not, so you want to fight for the win for sure.

**Q:**

You know the stages well but we did move back to Bostalsee, where the event started out in 2002. There are also new stages. What do you think of those?

**JT:**

For me, they are also new. I know the vineyards, I know the Panzerplatte. But for sure, these stages are new for me. I know the characteristics from other races, Saarland Rally for example, but they are new for me also.

**Q:**

So would you say you are the favourite this weekend?

**JT:**

I'm not sure because the other guys did this rally many times, so the advantage is very little. But we try our best and want to fight for the podium again, for sure.

**Q:**

What about next year, Julius? Any plans?

**JT:**

That's a hard question. Maybe there is one chance to do the Junior WRC again. We gained a lot experience this year and it would be good to do it again. I think then it's possible to win the championship.