



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

2012 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP
ADAC RALLYE DEUTSCHLAND

Pre-event Press Conference
Thursday 23 August

Present:

Sébastien Loeb, Citroën Total World Rally Team
Evgeny Novikov, M-Sport Ford World Rally Team (excused)
Jari-Matti Latvala, Ford World Rally Team
Thierry Neuville, Citroën Junior World Rally Team

Q:

Sébastien, after years of being on the top step of the podium of this event we saw a different winner last year. Are you back to correct that this year?

SL:

I don't know. Last year we had a puncture and the tyres are different this year, so that shouldn't happen anymore. I am prepared, there are many good stages. The rally probably is a little bit more complicated.

Q:

Do you like the changes made to the rally?

SL:

No, I prefer to do the same stages as in the past, but it is the same for everybody. It just means that we have to do some more work in the recce, and I don't really like to work.

Q:

How do you rate this event in terms of difficulty in comparison to the other Tarmac events? Is it the most difficult?

SL:

Yes, it is, because you have some very fast places in Saarland and some very fast parts and hairpins in the vineyards and Baumholder which is special in itself, so there are three different segments. Also the weather can change, which is making it more complicated.

Q:

What is your impression of the Panzerplatte?

SL:

The stage at Panzerplatte is different from any other roads we do in rallying. For me, it would be better to have two stages of 20 kilometres than one stage of 40 kilometres, because that would enable us to push more. With such a long stage, you have to look after the tyres all the time, you have to take it easy, which isn't fun for us and not for the spectators either.

Q:

What happens here when it gets wet?

SL:

In the wet, it is really tricky because especially in the vineyards, it is so narrow, it is easy to slide off the road. With soft rain tyres, it is okay, but with hard tyres, it is tricky.

Q:

The rally community is waiting to hear on your future in the sport - is there anything you can tell us about 2013 yet?

SL:

It is the same question as all the time, and you get the same answer: nothing has been decided yet. We are speaking with Citroën about the future, not just for next year, but also for the longer term, but there is nothing we can speak about yet.

Q:

When will we know? By Wales, later?

SL:

I don't know. Ask my boss. It will be this year.

Q:

Jari-Matti, after Rally Finland - despite being on the podium - you were disappointed with the lack of pace. What have the team discovered after analysing what happened there?

J-ML:

We already lost the rally on Thursday as Sébastien had a very strong start and we were too slow. You are fighting for tenths of a second there, so that made it very difficult for us to catch up. The others didn't make any mistakes, they were just quick. But we were on the podium, we got some points, so now we are in Germany, a new rally, new things.

Q:

We have seen you get stronger on Tarmac over the years, how are you feeling about tackling the stages here in Germany?

J-ML:

First of all, it is important to have the right tyres, to have a good feel and then see what happens. I hope to be able to fight for the podium. We had our best result here with fourth place overall in 2010 and we won some stages last year. But first you need to be consistent before you can win the rally. I will try my best. If we can be close, it is good, but you have to be enjoying it and be relaxed first.

Q:

In terms of testing and preparation, do you feel satisfied with what has been achieved? You have been testing on a circuit in France - tell us about that?

J-ML:

The test was more about working with the tyres and the driving technology. Before this rally, we tested in the vineyards and Baumholder. I am quite confident with the car. It has improved a lot. The car was good in Monte Carlo already and will be good here. But due to the changes, we have to work with new notes, you have to be really concentrated in the vineyards. The tyre choice will be difficult as well, especially if the weather changes.

Q:

What will your approach be for this event and how do you begin to prepare for the 'Panzerplatte'?

J-ML:

Panzerplatte is my favourite stage in the rally. It is wide, you choose your lines, it goes up and down. It reminds me a little bit of Finland, but then on a concrete surface, and with the Hinkelsteins at the side of the road. It is very long stage with 44 kilometres, but the main thing is to look after your tyres, not to destroy them. I enjoy going there.

Q:

Thierry, we have only seen you compete here once in the past and that was in a S1600. How do you think you will fare in a World Rally Car?

TN:

My first experience here was quite bad: the engine went after a few stages. I am happy to be here. Preparations went well, the shakedown went well, I am happy to be here.

Q:

We have seen you do well on events where you have little experience, why do you think you are able to adapt so quickly?

TN:

It will definitely help me. Most of the stages are relatively new, which could help me close up to the faster drivers, but many others are really quick and they know exactly what to do with the set-up when it rains.

Q:

We have seen you compete well on both Tarmac and gravel - which surface do you feel more at home on?

TN:

My experience on Tarmac is much better, my confidence is much better and I should be making less mistakes, so that is what I want to show this weekend.

Q:

What do you feel is the toughest aspect of the event?

TN:

It depends on if it rains or not. If it rains, it will be a very tough weekend for us. I have never driven the new Michelin tyres in the wet.

Q:

What do you expect from Panzerplatte?

TN:

It will be a very difficult stage. We have seen a lot of dust on the recce, there are many blind corners and very fast sections, so you need to manage the tyres.

Q:

Could we see you challenging for a podium here?

TN:

I hope so, of course, but we will see where we are after a few stages on the first day. If the pace is there and we have a good feeling, we will aim at a podium. I am not saying that I am going to win, but third place would be a nice result.

FIA PRODUCTION CAR WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

Michal Kosciuszko

Valeriy Gorban

Q:

Michal, you have one win under your belt already in Monte Carlo and you are currently fourth in the Championship, how are you feeling about the season so far?

MK:

We haven't been racing for the last four months, but now we are fully prepared. We have made some improvements on the car and after the shakedown, I can say that I have never felt so comfortable in the car before. We are in with a shot of winning here.

Q:

In terms of the Championship how important is a win here for you and is it possible?

MK:

We still have three rallies to go, so if we want to fight for the Championship, we need to do well. I believe that I can be faster than Benito [Guerra] on all three rallies, so the chances are there.

Q:

What have you done to prepare?

MK:

We had some test sessions, I did some work-out, but I did more mental preparation than working on my driving skills, because we didn't have so many opportunities to drive the car.

Q:

Would you say that this is the toughest Tarmac event?

MK:

It is similar to some of the Polish stages, where I haven't been driving for a couple of years now, but which is where I started my career. The grip is changing a lot. There is a lot of cutting and a lot of gravel on the road as a result. The forecast is rain for tomorrow, so there will be mud on the road as well. We can't play with the compound. My strategy is to go flat-out from the start.

Q:

Valeriy, you are second in the Championship, 10 points behind Benito Guerra - what is the plan here in Germany?

VG:

Second place is quite good. Obviously, we want to fight for the win.

Q:

You have good experience of sealed surface events; how confident do you feel about this rally?

VG:

My experience is not that big, but we have tested in Germany for two days, and I am pretty confident.

Q:

Is there a certain strategy you will follow here?

VG:

I will try to drive really fast and without any mistakes.

Q:

How do you rate the stages here?

VG:

The stages are really tricky and different, so I will try to get some good experience from this event.

FIA WRC ACADEMY

Present:

Timo Van der Marel

Pontus Tidemand

Q:

Timo, your second year as part of the FIA WRC Academy; what experience and knowledge do you bring from last year into 2012?

TVdM:

Last year was purely to learn to get experience on Tarmac and on gravel. Last year was my second outing in Germany. This year, the rally is much more complicated with

more vineyards [stages]. I hope to build on the experience from last year in terms of set-up.

Q:

You also had a training session in Belgium in preparation for this event. Tell us about it.

TVdM:

We had some training from one circuit and one rally driver in Belgium. They taught us more about the racing lines and about how to handle your tyres. Steering in two times before a corner was a bit strange, but it was very interesting altogether. We did a rally in Holland as well before this event.

Q:

You are currently seventh in the Drivers' standings, what is your assessment of the year?

TVdM:

A little bit disappointed. We planned to score as many points as possible in Portugal and Greece, then go flat out in Finland. We took some more risks, it really was all or nothing, and in the end it was nothing. Without that retirement, we would have been fourth in the standings, now we are seventh, but it is just based on one mistake in one rally.

Q:

Tarmac is where we see you shine; is it a more natural surface for you?

TVdM:

I should say yes, but Finland went really well, too. I got the key to be fast on gravel. Still, I am more comfortable on Tarmac.

Q:

Sébastien Loeb gave a talk to the Academy drivers this week; what did you learn from that?

TVdM:

That was very funny, half an hour with him. At the day he was born, he was already meant to be a world rally champion. He is just the best and he knows it, but it is absolutely phenomenal how his attitude towards rallying is, especially in this event. There is nobody better suited to teach you something about German roads. He was also helpful and gave us advice about how to deal with the car and the tyres.

Q:

Pontus, firstly congratulations on your on-going success in the Swedish Championship, you come here after a win last weekend. But how confident are you feeling about tackling Tarmac?

PT:

It is hard to say. We were in the Czech Republic for the Rally Bohemia. We did two stages and then they stopped the rally. I did some circuit racing before I started rally, so it is not entirely new to me, and we got some support in the FIA Driver Excellence programme. That is very helpful as well.

Q:

It is your first season in the WRC Academy, you are fourth in the series - how do you think it is going so far? Are you happy with your progress?

PT:

It is going quite well. We had a third place in Portugal and were in contention for second in Greece, then finished second in Finland again. We have a good chance.

Q:

Would you say a podium finish is possible here?

PT:

All the other drivers in the FIA Academy are quick on Tarmac. We just need to start well and make some good progress.

Q:

It is your first time in Germany, what do you think of the stages?

PT:

They are really cool! But the stages are also very tricky. You need to be confident of your pace notes to be fast here.

Q:

Is it still possible to fight for the Academy title?

PT:

I am currently in fourth place. There are four or five drivers that can win the championship, and I will keep trying.