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17 August 2018 – 2018 ADAC Rallye Deutschland

MEET THE CREWS SESSION LEG 2 – 17 August, 2018**Present:**

Tommi Mäkinen, Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT
 Malcolm Wilson, M-Sport Ford World Rally Team
 Michel Nandan, Hyundai Shell Mobis World Rally Team
 Pierre Budar, Citroën Total Abu Dhabi WRT

Q:

Tommi, what a fantastic performance we've seen yet again from Ott Tänak. He's like a machine out there. No-one can catch him again. What are your thoughts on his performance today?

TM:

It has been a great pleasure to follow what he has been doing. He seems to be so confident with the car, the whole set-up, everything. He knows the car well enough. Of course, you need maximum concentration and maximum effort to set the fastest stage times. And whenever you are trying to win a rally, you need to give it absolutely everything. But he makes it look so easy.

Q:

He does. Everyone is shaking their heads yet again, trying to figure out where he is getting this pace from – especially his team-mates, Jari-Matti and Esapekka, who was not so happy with his times.

TM:

I don't think this area is the easiest area, especially for Esapekka. He had a few mistakes caused by gravel and he does not feel absolutely confident here. Tomorrow's stages might be far better for them. We will see. Tomorrow will still be very, very challenging.

Q:

What kind of advice are you giving to Mr Tänak? Is it your influence we are seeing here, Tommi?

TM:

No. We just keep following him and leave him to do his job.

Q:

Malcolm Wilson, Ott Tänak won this rally last year, and it was in your car. You know exactly what he is capable of on these stages. Can Ogier catch him?

MW:

Yes, of course he can. This time last year I think that Seb was ten seconds behind him. Okay, he didn't beat him, but we will certainly be putting up a big fight tomorrow. I think everybody knows that Baumholder is very difficult and that anything can happen. Seb knows how to look after his tyres there, so it'll be a big fight. Ott has certainly done a fantastic drive again here today.

Q:

We're seeing our top three title contenders in the top three positions here. Ogier is so keen to stay ahead of Neuville; are we seeing a flat-out Ogier here or is he being a little bit cautious because he doesn't want to lose what he already has?

MW:

I think those three are at a slightly different level to everyone else, to be honest. They are all trying, but I think they are all mindful as well that if they don't finish then it is probably bye-bye to the championship. There is a lot of pressure on them. But, having said that, the way they are driving, anything can happen. They are just that little bit ahead. Elfyn is the best of the rest. Watch this space for tomorrow, that is all I would say. It is going to be an exciting day.

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**Q:**

It's making it great for everyone to watch around the world. We are seeing brilliant competition.

MW:

Especially now, when the championship is so close. If Ott wins here, it really brings him into the mix with regard to the championship. That then puts the pressure on us team principals, because we have got to give the guys a reliable car. I think that is the bit that none of us are looking forward to, to be honest.

Q:

Let's turn to Michel now. Thierry Neuville is in third position at the moment, but 27 seconds off the lead of the event. What have you thought of his performance today, and has he dropped back a little bit too far to be able to challenge Tänak?

MN:

I think he started the day quite cautiously, which is the right way. Maybe he was slightly too cautious this morning, but he is leading the championship and really has to finish the rally and to base his position on what Seb does. Ott is probably also a bit of a threat, but I think he did it the right way today. We know that this rally is very difficult and that anything can happen.

Q:

We have seen Dani Sordo win this event before, but today he has not been able to find the pace here. Is that due to the fact that he has not had enough time in the car, or is it something else?

MN:

It is true that Dani was not quite comfortable on the morning loop. It is also true that we were lacking a little bit of performance. We did some work and the car has improved, but probably not enough. Dani was a bit more comfortable in the afternoon. I don't think that he is lacking competition. Dani has also been testing for us, so I don't think it is that. He needs to find his confidence in the car in order to set good times.

Q:

Pierre Budar, just a couple of weeks ago there was a fantastic battle in Finland: we saw Mads Østberg up there in a podium position. However, it has not been that kind of rally this time. Tarmac is not his favourite surface and he has had a little bit of a tough day.

PB:

Yes, it has definitely been a tough day for us – for Mads and for Craig. It is obviously not Mads' favourite surface, but he also had some engine problems this afternoon, due to a mistake made in the midday service. He had a lack of power. This made it quite difficult for him this afternoon. It will be better for him tomorrow.

Q:

What about Craig? He loves tarmac, that's what he was raised on at home in Ireland and a lot of people were hoping that he would get a great result here. But he was very unlucky and got caught out by the rain.

PB:

Yes, he was the first one in the rain this morning. He had four or five kilometres in the rain – the only one before Suninen. He lost some time due to this. We could also see a bit of a lack of pace on the other stages. We must chat this evening, because he does not complain so much about the car, the car seems to be okay for him. We have to understand why he has this lack of pace.

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**Present:**

Ott Tänak, Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT
Sebastian Ogier, M-Sport Ford World Rally Team
Thierry Neuville, Hyundai Shell Mobis World Rally Team

Q:

Ott, what a great performance again from you today. It's like a routine now, seeing these fastest times on the board for you. You're like a machine out there. It looks easy. But it isn't. Are you happy at the end of the day?

OT:

Yes, definitely I am happy. As you said, it is never easy fighting against these guys. It is a massive challenge. Obviously, I must say, the conditions this morning were not so bad. Actually, it was pretty enjoyable, quite nice tarmac. This afternoon was completely different. We had some rain at lunchtime and it was crazy in some places with some mud, it was difficult to predict what the grip will be. My main aim was to get through clean and I did it. In the later the stages I was pushing a bit more. Maybe it would be lying to say I was pushing harder, because I was pushing to the maximum on every stage. But still I guess it's never easy to fight with this guy. I said a couple of times before, I am sure he is getting old and losing some speed. That's how it is, that's life. I am coming behind him.

Q:

We change everything tomorrow. We head into the military area, the Panzerplatte, the Hinkelsteins. It's a completely different day tomorrow. Are you confident? Is your confidence still high?

OT:

Yes, for sure. As you can see the car is performing and the rhythm is good. Everything is working. That's for sure nice, but we know tomorrow is a completely different day. We are going to Baumholder. Nothing like today. Obviously everything will be new, but I have been done these stages before and we know what to expect. We just need to keep going in the same rhythm we've been doing today. I know Seb will push as hard as he can. It's been always like this. There is no surprise. I just keep going the same way I've been going today.

Q:

Let's turn to Sebastian Ogier. It's not a huge amount of time between you and Mr Tänak. But he has been on incredible form. It's going take an extra level to catch him, and you have all been driving at a really high level all day.

SO:

I am glad to hear that he was still pushing, because it's clear that he had a really strong day. It's still a long way to go and, even if I am getting old, I will try to give him another fight tomorrow.

Q:

I like the sound of that. That's the kind of fighting talk we like. As I mentioned to Ott it changes tomorrow. We've seen the vineyard test, the country roads, you are heading to more abrasive, broken concrete now. A mixture tomorrow, it's a tough day.

SO:

It's a tough day but it's one where a lot of things can happen. It's very long sections, a bit more tyre management play a role. Looks like the weather should be dry. More pushing as much as you can. We have seen today in some sections that it was very difficult to match the pace of Ott, but hopefully the profile of Baumholder will suit us better. We only can keep trying as much as we can. I am pretty happy with my day, honestly. I pushed very hard all the time. It was just a bit frustrating to see that I was tenths or seconds slower than him on every stage. But tomorrow is another day.

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**Q:**

I know I am not going to be popular when I say this, but you are ahead of Thierry Neuville, which is crucial for you. Now it's early days, but you are keeping ahead of him – which is the objective.

SO:

That's the main target of the weekend but the second main target is to win the rally. So at the moment I'm reaching only half of my plan. It's only 100 km we did today. Tomorrow is much longer so we have to keep trying and you never know. It's still possible. Twelve seconds is not such a big gap.

Q:

Thierry, talk to me about your day. We see you now 27 seconds off the lead. You dropped back a little on those final two stages this afternoon. Are you starting to lose touch with these guys or is there hope for a comeback tomorrow?

TN:

The hope is still there. Obviously, it was a tricky day for me. The morning went quite well. But this afternoon we had to go for a gearbox change. And honestly, I couldn't use the same settings as in the morning. I was constantly losing a bit of time. We knew it was not perfect for the afternoon loop, but tomorrow it should work better. That's what we found out at the testing, at least. That's why, I'm quite confident, we are going to keep up the pressure tomorrow.

Q:

Good to hear. Are you feeling any extra pressure now? You have the lead in the championship. Last year it was joint points coming here. Are you feeling the pressure?

TN:

No, there is no pressure. We still have five races to go and so far any one of us can be the champion. I think we need to keep it relaxed and just do our job. That's what I have done today that's what I am going to try to do tomorrow. Tomorrow is a completely different day. Last year I was here in the same position and it all went wrong on a two-kilometre stage. We know it's going to be long. There is a high risk of punctures as well. We need to manage the tyres very well. We have always been good at that that. We try to keep a good rhythm. Even if I would finish third I could still be happy with the result, because the points gap is not so big.

Q:

A few words to your fans as there are so many of them here.

TN:

I think it's great to see so many fans. We saw everywhere Belgian flags. It's not only me, even the other drivers can see them. It's a great atmosphere out there and a lot of support. My goal is now to bring them home a good result this weekend.