



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

2019 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP ADAC RALLYE DEUTSCHLAND

Pre-Event Press Conference
Thursday 22 August 2019

FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

Ott Tänak, Toyota (EST), Gazoo Racing World Rally Team
Sébastien Ogier (FRA), Citroën Total World Rally Team
Thierry Neuville (BEL), Hyundai Shell Mobis World Rally Team
Gus Greensmith (GBR), M-Sport Ford World Rally Team
Takamoto Katsuta (JAP), Tommi Mäkinen Racing

Q:

Ott, you are our championship leader as we head into the weekend. It's 22 points, the advantage you now have. It's a very different story to what we saw last year. It could be win number three for you in Germany this weekend, but there is a long way to go, obviously. Is your confidence high?

OT:

The feeling is good. It was good to get some tarmac feeling again this morning. Generally, I am quite happy with the car. I would say, already in Corsica we had a fine, fine car to drive on tarmac and now we managed to take another step. So, in general, the balance is there and everything should be working. Today's shakedown was still quite simple, but tomorrow we go to the vineyards and it certainly gets a bit more complicated.

Q:

It does get complicated out there. But maybe one thing that is going to help this weekend is the weather, because it looks as though it is going to be dry. Three years ago, you made a great tyre choice with that wet tyre, and you won in 2017, and it was a bit of a headache last year. Do you think, even with the dry weather here, in the early mornings there would be any call for a mixed package of Michelin tyres, or is it hard compound all the way this weekend?

OT:

Normally it should be quite straightforward. If the rally is dry and the tarmac is dry, there is really no need to make any difficult decision. I hope it will be the same way it has been so far this week. Obviously we are still in Germany and many things can happen. We have seen many surprises before, but for the moment the situation looks quite stable.

Q:

It does look quite stable. How's the situation looking in Ott Tänak's world in terms of the future? You are pretty cool, calm and collected when it comes to the rallies, what about behind the scenes deciding what you want to do next year? How cool and calm are you at the moment with that?

OT:

That's happening behind the scenes. I don't need to know everything. Other people are working on this situation. My job is to focus on the championship and let other people work on other things.

Q:

How many other teams are you talking to right now then – or have they been talking to?

OT:

Exactly. I am not actually talking to anyone.

Q:

But you know what they are doing, so what are they doing? Who are they talking to?

OT:

To other people.

Q:

Hyundai, M-Sport?

OT:

Yes, exactly. That's the way it works. Of course, we are speaking to everybody. My aim is definitely to be in the strongest team for the future. That was actually the same when I joined Toyota two years ago. In 2017, I was in the best team. We won the Manufacturers' Championship and also the Drivers' Championship, which I did not win but my team did. So, I was in a very strong team. Now I have joined Toyota and I can obviously say that I am in a strong team again at the moment. On those occasions we definitely made very good decisions, so we need to continue the same way. That is the job for the future.

Q:

Final question on this subject: some media reports are saying that you have already signed at Toyota and you will stay. Is that true or not?

OT:

No, that's not true. There is nothing on paper yet and there are still a lot of talks going on. I believe it will still take some time.

Q:

Seb, I'm so glad we don't have to have these chats anymore, because we had so many over the years, didn't we? Let's talk about your situation in the championship. Second at the moment, 22 points is the difference. We know what you can do in Germany, three wins under your belt here – I know you don't feel pressure generally, because you've won six championships and know how to do it, but are you starting to, now that we are getting to the tail end?

SO:

It's not true to say that people don't feel pressure, because we all feel pressure. We just manage it a different way, maybe, but we all feel pressure. I can tell you that I still have the excitement when I wake up in the morning and we are going to rally. I still have this tension in my belly when I have to go for it. I actually also feel the pressure, but I have usually managed it pretty well in the past. Like you mentioned, having the chance to enjoy success gives you the chance to be more relaxed. But the pressure is still there. And, actually, I need that to be competitive. If I'm too relaxed, most of the time I will not perform well. Sure, Finland was not a nice rally for us. We lost some ground to Ott. We don't want to do the same thing this weekend. We need to fight back and need to score

big points and to finish ahead of him. The goal is pretty clear for the weekend: try to win the rally and score maximum points. Other than that, let's do it.

Q:

I know it is a long way in advance to talk about Panzerplatte at the moment, but a lot of the drivers have said, even on the recce, because it is quite dirty, you're picking up punctures on your road car. Would that put in mind for you that perhaps two spares is an absolute must for Panzerplatte this time around?

SO:

Honestly, I haven't seen Panzerplatte as dirty as this year for a while. I believe that things are going to happen in there. I certainly hope to have a bit of luck with me, because you need that in these conditions. We more or less all drive in the same place, but for whatever reason, sometimes you get a puncture or not. There are so many sharp rocks in there. Let's hope we stay out of trouble. Obviously, if you pick up a puncture then your chances of fighting for a big result are gone. Before that, there is still some mileage to enjoy the fight and more clean roads. Already tomorrow in the vineyards, I think everybody is going to start flat out, because the gap might be very close.

Q:

Thierry, you've obviously done your training on the circuit. We saw you in race car action in TCR Germany. How was that experience?

TN:

It was a great experience. Ahead of Rally Germany, I thought that it could only help. That's why I accepted the invitation, and it was good fun. But now we are back to real business and real competition.

Q:

It is the real business now because, as Seb said, there are five events to go this season and you are third in the championship. It was very different coming into Germany last year for you. Do you feel on the back foot now? Do you feel the title is slipping away, or do you still feel confident it is possible?

TN:

Not at all. I mean, I was in a much better situation last year, for sure. But we went to Turkey and I think both me and Seb had struggles there. We lost a lot. Tough or not, there will still be situations where anything can happen at any point in the season. Even in the last race. I mean, we all know that the championship is still on. But we also know what we are fighting for and against who we are fighting. It's going to be a tough competition this weekend. Nobody really wants to slow down for anything. We'll just try to take out the big hammer and try to get the win over here this weekend.

Q:

What is it going to take to beat the boys in front, Thierry? You are quite evenly matched. What extra does it take?

TN:

You could already see on Shakedown that the performance is again quite similar. It might be, over the whole weekend, who has the cleanest rally with no mistakes. And, as Seb just mentioned before, who has the lucky hand on the Panzerplatte stages. They are quite dirty with a lot of stones, but you need to find a good rhythm between giving it everything, managing your tyres and trying, if you can, to avoid all the little stones that could cause a puncture.

Q:

Gus, a WRC car on tarmac. Another new experience. How was Shakedown this morning? You weren't feeling so great at the end of the first run. How was it towards the end?

GG:

Yeah, it was getting much better towards the end. It went from quite a big gap to the being just over half a second per kilometre, so it was much better in the end. But even then, when we were looking at the data and the onboard, there was quite a lot of time that I could see I could find. It was pretty positive. We need to keep moving from there.

Q:

What is the objective for you here this weekend? We've seen great performances from you in Finland and Portugal, but not quite getting to the end of the event. Always in dramatic fashion, though. That is something we can remember from you. In Finland it was a very different situation to what we saw in Portugal. It was a pace-note misunderstanding?

GG:

That's what it was. It was a shame. It was a bit stupid. That's what happened. This weekend obviously, the focus is just to finish the rally and get the experience. I feel a lot more comfortable on tarmac, so I'd like to see the times progress throughout the weekend.

Q:

It seems you're getting a lot of runs in the World Rally Car right now. That's great for you, of course. Is that going to mean that it is going to be hard to switch back to an R5. What is going to be happening in Greensmith's future?

GG:

I have no idea. I keep having a phone call and Malcom says he will see me on the Tuesday after the rally and he tells me what I am doing. I really don't know what I am driving next.

Q:

Taka, it's going to be a huge weekend for you in a World Rally Car on tarmac. We've seen you in a WRC car on gravel up on Finnish Rally Championship events, but this is the first time in the World Rally Championship and on tarmac. How are you feeling?

TK:

I did four runs and about 20km. This is my total distance on tarmac in this year's WRC to be honest. I drove a little in Finland on tarmac, but only on a track, so got a proper feeling in the morning. It was amazing – the car is so fast. Like I said, the car is really fast. I really need to understand my situation. This time I cannot expect anything, just driving through the stages and get the experience.

Q:

Obviously you've got an incredible team around you. How much advice have you been given from people like Ott and the team?

TK:

I mean it's a great team. The drivers always share information. When I have a question, everybody is giving me concrete advice. Especially Ott. He is very busy but he is giving me a lot of advice. I have no idea what will happen in this corner or this corner – each corner. I ask him and straight away, he gives me advice. This is an amazing situation. I try to improve myself of course. I need to take full use of this amazing team. I am very happy in the team.

Q:

Is this the start of more events in a World Rally Car, Taka? Will we see you in a WRC car again this year, or more next year?

TK:

It depends of this weekend, maybe. But we are planning to do Spain as well. I think the plan for this year's World Rally Championship was Germany and Spain. Otherwise, Japan is a candidate event for next year. I will be there. Otherwise, I have no idea.

FIA WRC 2 PRO CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

Jan Kopecký (CZE), Škoda Motorsport
Mads Østberg (NOR), Citroën Total

Q:

Mr. Østberg, we're going to start with you today. I think you've had a bit of an eventful shakedown out there. We heard from you at the end of the opening stage, you had a little problem with your rear wheel and then you had an excursion into a field? Tell us what happened this morning.

MO:

Yeah, we had a bit of everything, I think. This morning, we left service with a bit of an issue on the rear and, because of the timing and the new regulations, we actually had to do the stage, so we passed the stage knowing it was not so nice. When we came back, everything was fixed by the mechanics, so our second run was fine. Third run was a bit more interesting: there was a break in the shakedown before we started. I expected the tyres still to be warm, but I don't think they were! And I basically misjudged my braking and went into the field. Well, jumped into the field, actually...

Q:

Well, that does sound dramatic. But as long as it happens on Shakedown, we're good. How are you feeling about the rally itself?

MO:

Yeah, we are feeling OK. I think we have done some nice tests over the last few weeks. I still discover the car, trying to find places to improve and also to get used to the car on tarmac. I think we have made some good progress and I feel quite comfortable in the car, but I think we still have some issues, which we can't really solve at the moment and we will try to adapt as well as possible. For sure, it's important that my driving is precise and correct to feel good with the car.

Q:

What issues have you got then? If you need to be precise, what are the issues?

MO:

I think it's quite similar to what we've had before. Some issues during braking and we've tried to solve it and Citroën has done some nice steps to improve, but I still don't feel comfortable with it and it's probably... I need some more practice to do things the way I need to do with that car. So I'm training as much as I can and, obviously, don't do it perfectly all the time.

Q:

I know you love working with Citroën and you've done a lot of work with the development of the car this year, but can you tell us anything about what the future is holding for Mads Østberg right now? Because it is that time of the season, Mads.

MO:

Yeah, it is that time, definitely and I don't really know a lot more about the future. I think that I am quite deep into what I am doing at the moment and really focused on that together with Citroën, of course. Yeah, we don't know a lot about the future. But I feel really happy where I am with Citroën and I would like to try and stay with them for the future as well.

Q:

Jan, let's turn to you now. First of all, congratulations on the win in Barum this weekend. That's your home event. I've lost count of how many times you've won it now – I couldn't tell you! But I can tell you that this is your tenth Rally Germany, which is quite a number. You've been competing here since back in 2002, which was the first Rally Germany. So, you know what it means to compete here, you know how to gain success at this event. Are you feeling confident?

JK:

Hello everyone. Yes, I'm feeling confident, especially now after Barum. Because we tried some new dampers on the car. They're working very well, so basically I will start with the same set-up as I finished in Zlin. This year, I think that the conditions - the weather conditions - will be quite easy and maybe no rain is coming. But Panzerplatte is really broken so it will be a huge challenge not to get a puncture on there. And, you know, that always happens, a puncture on Panzerplatte. So, hopefully, this time, this year, it will not be like that because we already had a puncture on the Shakedown. Hopefully we'll avoid any more.

Q:

Any on the recce?

JK:

No. Zero.

Q.

I know a number of drivers did on the recce. You mentioned Panzerplatte there. It is a key stage here. Is it the toughest stage from the driver's perspective, or is it more the vineyard test?

JK:

I think altogether, because you have three different kinds of stages. The vineyards are very narrow but the speed has to be really high to set the fastest time. Panzerplatte is a different story, because, if you survive the punctures, you really have to take care of the tyres. And then, on these forest stages, they are tricky, so I will try to do my best for sure.

Q:

Now, the competition in WRC 2 Pro is going to be fantastic. You've got Mads alongside you, and of course your team-mate Kalle Rovanpera. We know what you can do on this kind of surface. My question is: are you going to be allowed to really stretch your legs out there, Jan, and go for a win? You have got a good advantage in the championship.

JK:

I don't know, let's see how the first stages will be tomorrow morning, but I would sure like to be in the top. The best result will be if Škoda is first and second. Let's see.

Q:

Well, let's see what happens. Good luck this weekend.

JK:

Thank you.

FIA WRC 2 CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

Kajetan Kajetanowicz (POL)

Marijan Griebel (GER)

Q:

Kajetan, let's turn to you now. It's a great event, Rally Germany, it offers a very unique challenge. As I said to Jan, is it Panzerplatte, or is it a mixture of it all that is a real challenge for the drivers?

KK:

Hello. Yes. This is WRC. There is no easy rally and there are no easy stages. But these stages are very demanding ... We are now on a very different surface, this is changing many times. But definitely, Panzerplatte is the biggest. Why? Because of tyres, the surface is very aggressive, and because it's long and difficult. In my opinion, the opposite way is more dangerous. But we see. To be honest, I can wait for this stage.

Q:

Testing-wise: your pre-event test, were you happy with it, the set-up and the feeling that you got from the car?

KK:

Yes, I am happy. We did a two-day test. In Poland we had a one-day test. I think we found something in the one-day test, something good. My feeling in the car is much better than before. I'm looking forward. We'll see. If you want to fight with these drivers, it's a big challenge as you have to push 100 percent. Because this is like race, not rally. Rally is, in my opinion, like Rally Turkey, or this year, Chile, as this was a new rally ... This rally is for everybody the same. Second time is better than first time...

Q:

Not like Mr. Kopecky here, a veteran of Rally Germany. Looking back across your season, we've seen you on the FIA WRC 2 podium twice. Have you been happy with the pace that you've delivered? Are you happy with your performance?

KK:

Yes. We have the chance to be third time on podium. In Argentina, we were leading but we lost the lead because of a Volkswagen Polo. Anyway, we are really happy. Now I'm back in Volkswagen so we'll see. We want to do good for the rest of season but you know how it is...

Q:

We do. Well, good luck.

KK:

I will do my best.

Q:

Marijan, great to see you at Rally Germany again and in FIA WRC 2. What are your hopes for this weekend?

MG:

First of all, I'm really happy that I can sit here and have the opportunity to drive this new Škoda Fabia R5 evo. I've been doing also Barum Czech Rally Zlin last weekend, which was quite good for me that I can have some seat time before this one. Unfortunately, due to some budget issues, I was doing it in the regular Škoda Fabia this event. So, I did my very first metres with the Evo in the Shakedown and was also doing two co-drives, so testing was really, really limited. But the feeling was quite good. And I think we set second-fastest time in WRC 2, so I think we can be quite optimistic and I hope for a podium this weekend.

Q:

It wasn't bad in Zlin for you: fifth overall.

MG:

Yeah, it was OK. I mean, I had some crashes in Poland so the worst thing I could have done in Zlin is crashing again because then Rally Germany would have been really difficult to do. So, I was driving quite a clever rally, not taking too many risks on the stages and, yeah, just going through and getting seat time and kilometres. And the car was running perfectly so I was happy with that and now we go on.

Q:

I know that, as you said, you haven't had much time in the brand new Fabia, but can you already see the difference between the new Fabia and the old?

MG:

Yeah, I think so. The shifting is quite different and also you can feel that there is some more torque and a little bit more horsepower, especially when you go out of some narrow corners, which is not easy all the time. But for sure in the end, if you can do it in the proper way, then I think it's faster.

Q:

It should be a really interesting weekend. Weather-wise, it is looking pretty calm out there, so that should make it easy for you. But this is never an easy rally, is it? It is a massive challenge.

MG:

For sure, yeah. I think it's really nice that we will have some sunny weather over the weekend but I think the rally in total is longer than last year with more than 340 stage kilometres and also Panzerplatte, with 51 in total of both stages is quite a lot, so this will be very, very demanding. And the pace is really high, so if you want to be in the first slots, you have to push 100 percent from the very first metre and, for sure, this is a really difficult rally.