



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

2021 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

RALLY FINLAND

Post event FIA Press Conference

3rd October 2021

Present:

1st Driver – Elfyn Evans (GBR) – Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT

2nd Driver – Ott Tänak (EST) – Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT

3rd Driver – Craig Breen (IRL) – Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT

Winning manufacturer - Jari-Matti Latvala (FIN) – Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT

Q:

Elfyn, what a result for you. It's the rally every driver in the WRC wants to win. You are part of a very select group. How are you feeling?

EE:

Pretty happy with how the weekend went. Perhaps I wasn't that confident coming into it to be honest, but we found a good feeling with the car quite early on, managed to improve that again for Saturday and then took it from there. Obviously the four stage wins on Saturday morning really went towards building the win. From there on it was a case of trying to fend these two guys off, they were charging pretty hard, but I'm happy we managed to do it.

Q:

It was Saturday morning where we really did see you shine: four stage wins back-to-back to extend that advantage. When you were going through those stages at such speed did you know this was one of your best drives of the season so far?

EE:

Everything was working inside the car and I had confidence in what the car was doing. It's funny, I think you can feel more on the edge in rallies where you are less competitive actually when you are fighting the car. It felt really quite good and able to use the strength of the car and the set-up that I chose to deliver good traction at times because they were quite slippery. We had to push hard but it came quite naturally I would say.

Q:

Ott and Craig were putting you under some serious pressure and we've seen lots of moments for drivers. You can't not have them at such speeds. Was there anything that was really concerning for you in terms of moments this weekend?

EE:

A few slides, definitely. The biggest one I had was on Friday on the third stage, I think, just at high speed and couldn't get it turned in. But we actually rectified that part of the set-up later on. Like I mentioned, when the car was going really well it seemed, a little bit anyway, in control.

Q:

Finland in autumn time has been the setting for the last time we will see this generation of World Rally Car on gravel. A very fitting swansong for the car. What does it mean for you to take that final win for this version of the car in Finland?

EE:

I think we are all pretty lucky to be here driving these cars now, I don't know whether we'll ever get a Rally Finland quite like this with so much aero. This style of driving again, what we are going to now, is quite different let's say for 2022. I think we should enjoy this now while we can.

Q:

You did enjoy it on the Power Stage because you went for maximum points. You obviously felt confident enough to be able to push and achieve that.

EE:

Yeah, like I mentioned everything was clicking today and I had to just focus on driving clean and driving well in the Power Stage and thankfully it was enough also to bag the extra five points, which will never go amiss.

Q:

Are you throwing a spanner into the works now for Sébastien Ogier's championship hopes. OK, he's still ahead of you, but it's got a lot closer. We head to Spain with maybe a different complexion on the championship than we had coming to Finland.

EE:

It's definitely moved in the right direction, but it's still a long, long way away. We knew it was a very remote chance after Greece and it's not much of a better chance now. But it's moving in the right direction. At the end of the day, we have to just go to the next two events that are left on the calendar and give it our best shot and get the best results we can. That's all we can do.

Q:

How much do you believe you have a shot at trying to take that championship.

EE:

I don't believe. I don't think too much about it to be honest. After Greece it was a mathematical chance for me and now it's slightly more realistic. It would only take Seb to have one retirement and it's all open. But I don't wish that and all we can worry about is our performance on the next two rallies.

Q:

Big celebration tonight or are you going home?

EE:

I'm not going home, but I have a pretty busy week next week. So not too much time for celebrating. We are already testing on Wednesday. That's probably not how Scott is thinking...

Q:

Ott, you know what it means to win in Finland, you've done it twice. You said to me yesterday 'if Elfyn wins he will truly deserve it because I am putting him under some serious pressure here'. How do you feel about your result and what you've achieved this weekend, because it's been a brilliant performance from you also.

OT:

We are here. So it's a positive for Hyundai definitely, a big thing. Where we came from to where we now in the last two years, for sure it has been a big step. I would say it's a bit of a shame we couldn't do Rally Finland last year to get our first lessons and maybe put a bit more pressure on Toyota this year. But anyway I'm thinking in this period I am in Finland is very specific in the calendar and also with a big history, so it definitely means something if you do well here.

Q:

Of course it does and for Hyundai it's something magnificent to have two drivers on the podium at what has always been the bogey event for the team. Now they have had success here. How much of a part do you think you have played from some of your knowledge of winning here?

OT:

As I said, I'm just a driver who puts some gas in the car, so that's my part.

Q:

As I mentioned to Elfyn, you can't be at these speeds without having some hot moments. Were there any for you where you thought you were past your limit maybe?

OT:

Generally, obviously it took far too long for me to build up the feeling in the car. So for sure in the beginning or the first part of the rally I was quite struggling and not fully confident, just forcing myself and in some moments we somehow managed to put it together. But coming back next year with this car would help. We know some things we did wrong and some things we couldn't change. On these fast, wide roads, just taking some risks and hoping it just goes through on full gas, I would say I was able to be on the pace. But when it got more technical I had to be very precise and clean. In these places I was losing quite a lot. It was definitely demanding and also maybe frustrating in places, but still I would say when the grip was higher and it was easier to drive actually it was quite good fun. It seems Elfyn is not so proud of himself, but actually the pace was quite high and it was for sure on the limit in places.

Q:

We came into the morning with you guys still battling. What was the point when you thought I can't quite catch him now?

OT:

I think the point was when Elfyn accelerated on Saturday morning. Then we knew obviously he has some pace. We had the pace to come close to this, but when we came close he just found another gear. That's how easy it was.

Q:

Craig, we see you on the podium again. You are making a habit of this, because that's three in a row at WRC events. You've led Rally Finland, you've been in an epic battle with the regulars on the championship. How are you feeling at the end of it, on the podium again?

CB:

Yeah, pretty good I have to say. A really nice weekend. I think myself and Paul definitely made another baby step like we've done along the way. I think unfortunately we're not ones for a supersonic rise to the top. I take baby steps and we might have taken a couple this weekend. I've just enjoyed it from start to finish, I was really surprised with the rhythm early on in the rally. OK, we had a very good road position on Friday, so I was quietly confident, but I was aware that Elfyn had quite a bad road position on Friday especially, and was expecting something on Saturday. Kakaristo, the first stage on Saturday morning, I made a small mistake at the end of the stage and lost a couple of tenths so I was quite happy with our time there, but like Ott said he just managed to find, I don't know, a seventh gear or something on Päijälä, especially the first time, and then just drove into the distance. Still, I'm incredibly proud of what myself and Paul did regardless.

Q:

We have seen you flat out over the weekend and you've had your family out there. Also out on the stages I've seen more Irish flags than anything.

CB:

Or Finnish flags, which were quite rare and then Tricolours. I think they all waited so long to get back to this rally and finally it was a possibility for spectators to be here, and it was amazing to see. Last night in the forests, I think we will all agree... the stage on Friday night, but especially last night, just rattling down these forests at 200km/h, the little forest fires, the flags, the atmosphere was just absolutely incredible. What you can do with these cars I don't think we'll be able to do for a long, long time. I definitely enjoyed it.

Q:

You made the maximum out of it this weekend, yes?

CB:

Yeah, we definitely tried.

Q:

Talk to us about the future. We've seen you with Hyundai this year, is this the last time we see you in the car? What happens next?

CB:

Put on the spot... I guess we're getting to it in days of knowing what the future will hold now. Exciting times, I would say.

Q:

We know you are desperate for a full season. Is that on the cards.

CB:

Yeah, it's looking quite positive now, I would say. Let's say we'll be on the start line in Monte.

Q:

That's incredible news. Mr Latvala, let's turn to you now. You know what it means to take a win here. Elfyn is quite a modest chap, as we've heard. He's just won Rally Finland kind of plays it down a little bit. What did you think of his performance?

JML:

For me he came to this event not necessarily the favourite to win and he actually proved he was the fastest man of the weekend. He did an incredible job. For me it was on Friday, Oitilla in the darkness where he proved the speed, he sowed the confidence, and after that he was able to catch the Hyundais and win the rally. There was something more than the others. With respect to Ott and Craig, they did a great, great rally. I couldn't do it anymore myself in 2018 or 2019 so I know to win Oitilla you have to be at a very high level. So Elfyn can be very proud of his victory.

Q:

Were you concerned on Friday when Hyundai were really doing well at the front and there was not a Toyota in the lead. Were there some worries in the team?

JML:

Already on shakedown when we looked at the speed of Craig and Ott we were a little bit concerned. There was a little bit of a feeling, do we have enough speed? But let's say at that time on the shakedown it was slipperier than the stages themselves. It wasn't the case, but let's say we were a bit worried on Friday when we started and it didn't look that strong at the beginning. But like I said, Elfyn found another gear in the Oitilla darkness and since then we were in a much better zone. Of course it's our home rally and we have been very strong with Toyotas, but clearly we could see Hyundai has done great steps with the car and their performance is higher. But really happy we could still win here.

Q:

You can look objectively across the drivers' championship. Elfyn's result here puts him closer to Séb. Séb still has the advantage. Are Toyota going to have some headaches over the next couple of rallies?

JML:

Are target is not to do team orders. But for sure it is not easy to follow when you have two guys fighting. We need to win the manufacturer championship also, so we need points for that. It's an interesting situation, but these drivers, what I love in rallying generally is that all the drivers can be friends to each other. I don't think this can be very much [the case] in all sports. They can fight each other with respect and this is something unique we have in rallying and that is making our sport really fantastic.

Questions from the floor

Tom Howard, Autosport UK (GBR)

Q:

Jari-Matti, as a Finn and a former winner, can you sum up how special Elfyn's drive was this weekend. And secondly, why did Kalle [Rovanperä] sit out the Power Stage and is he OK?

JML:

For me he can be really proud of what he did here. Winning Finland is something I think among the drivers they all want to have. There are two in the championship: Finland and I would say Monte-Carlo, which are the classics. Winning here is always something special so that's a really great job. On Kalle, when he had the accident yesterday and hit the sandbank his arms were a bit crossed and when it hit his arm was pushed backwards and he got some pain in the back. He went to the doctor, everything was fine, but of course the muscles are really solid and he's not feeling comfortable to drive. We just wanted to have him drive this morning in case something happened to our main two cars, so he can then secure the championship points. But things were looking good, so we said you don't need to drive the Power Stage. So this was the target. He only drives when it's needed, but no extra stress on the body because in two weeks' time we have Catalunya and he needs to be testing at the end of the next week. So this is important, the recovery. The most important thing is he can rest now.

Q:

Craig, how do you sum up the rally and why did your victory hopes begin to fade on Saturday night?

CB:

For the rally, I'm happy with the result. Why it slipped away, like I discussed before Elfyn really found another level on Saturday, as you have to do, and progressed. Honestly, I knew how much risk I was taking to keep up the rhythm. I don't agree with anyone who say no risks were being taken at any moment in this rally, at the level it was at. Ultimately it was with a lot of risk and it arrived at a point where I was at the maximum amount of risk I could take and completely banzai and making mistakes. It was better what we did to bring the car home.

Q:

Elfyn, where does this drive rank in your rally career, given that not many people have won here?

EE:

Probably pretty high. I think it's going to be always difficult to beat the first home win in Wales, but obviously in terms of performance I would say this probably ranks the highest.

José Luis Abreu, Autosport Portugal (PRT)

Q:

Craig, three podiums in a row. Can we say that at this point, you are on your best form ever?

CB:

Yeah, I think so. It took long enough! It took 30-odd years, but finally it looks like everything is starting to come together. Honestly, I think it's just being in the car often, a bit of consistency to the programme and that's sort of what we've been missing since myself and Paul came back, obviously after the Citroën years. It's been very stop-start. Like last year for example we did just two rallies all year in the World Rally Car, whereas now we have some consistency more often than before. And just feeling comfortable in the surroundings, getting into the car and knowing which does what, and it all feels natural. Whereas last year I was doing so much in the R5 and then jumping back in the World car again it didn't feel normal at all to be honest. The R5 felt more natural, whereas having stepped back from the R5 programme a bit more in the latter months I definitely feel much more comfortable in the World car now.

Q:

Ott, You won the previous two Rally Finland events, you have the speed and experience. What would you say was lacking this year?

OT:

Speed. I had about 14 seconds of speed missing. That's what it takes.

Q:

Elfyn, you said recently that fast rallies haven't favoured you. What changed?

EE:

It's true that I struggled on the Arctic Rally and then again in Estonia. But on the flip side to that we were OK in Sweden last year. Actually I've changed the car a bit, not as a Sweden car but more in the direction of the balance I had there and that seemed to give me a lot more confidence. Basically I felt much happier behind the wheel and that's mostly where the speed came from.

Q:

Jari-Matti, can you explain where the work is divided in your team between the new Rally1 car and the current car?

JML:

Basically we have two test teams, so now in the coming week we are testing for the Rally Catalunya and there will be another test with the new car in Portugal. So there are two separate teams and our current drivers are mainly focused on what we call the 2017-spec car, but now Elfyn has already had one or two test sessions in the new car, and Kalle as well. But until this point we have focused on having Juho Hänninen testing the 2022 car because we didn't want to confuse things. The next year's car is very different to what we have already.

Jason Craig, Crash.net (GBR)

Q:

Ott, you and the Hyundai team appear to have made big gains this weekend. How do you hope the information you have gathered here will help when you return in 2022 with the new Rally1 car?

OT:

It helps nothing.

Q:

Surely you can take some data which will help you next year?

OT:

I don't know. We will see. We are going to something different and it's a big change.

FIA WRC2 CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

Teemu Suninen (FIN) - Movisport

Q:

Teemu, did it all feel good behind the wheel?

TS:

Yeah, I must say it felt quite challenging at times in a fully different car and we had 200km to try and get used to it and make the set-up, so it was challenging on timing. But the car is really good to drive and I didn't have much to change, just small fine-tuning. I learnt quite a lot from the car during the weekend and I could have changed something small, but it's tiny. Still, we could have been faster.

Q:

I'm sure all drivers say that. You were fast enough to take the win, which is great for you now in WRC2. We will now see you in Spain with Hyundai, but you mentioned the word challenge. Lots of challenges this weekend with the reversed stages and driving in the dark for the first time in Finland. What was that like?

TS:

That was super-challenging. I would say the main thing is have crests and jumps correctly in the pace notes because you can't see beyond the crests in the dark because the lights are cutting to the top of the crest. Then you have to trust your pace notes and what you have done during the recce, and basically that was the place where we attacked and made some difference to the others.

Q:

You mentioned yesterday that you relished the battle between you and Mads Ostberg. It was a proper fight in Finland.

TS:

Yeah, it was a great fight with Mads. I was really enjoying to have that fight and a reason to push the car and our limits. I really felt that's what rallying has to be and what it is in its best moments.

Q:

The next event you switch into the Hyundai. Will you have a pre-event test?

TS:

I'm testing one day, just before the rally.

Q:

How much are you looking forward to a different experience?

TS:

Yeah, I'm really looking forward to finding out what the Hyundai is and then I have pretty much seen all the cars in WRC2, expect the Citroën. It's good experience and it's good to see different cars and understand where the cars are strong, because all the cars have positives things and negative things, and in the end with the set-ups you might be able to make a good package to make any car faster.

Q:

Talking about positives, what about next season? Which championship will you be in?

TS:

Honestly, I have no idea about next year. I really wish these results help to get something. My ultimate call is to get good seats. I don't really mind if it's WRC2 or WRC because my target is to have a lot of rallies, good test kilometres because tests are the only way to become a better and faster driver. My ultimate goal is to compete in the WRC in the coming years and be ready to fight for the world championship

FIA WRC3 CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

Emil Lindholm (FIN)

Q:

Emil, you've had a good couple of weeks of success in the Finnish championship and now a win at your home event in WRC3 on Rally Finland. You must be flying pretty high right now?

EL:

Surely yes. Honestly, it's good to have some results coming in after what I'd say has been a pretty tricky year in WRC. There have been ups and downs and quite a lot of downs, but finally the luck has turned, so I'm all smiles.

Q:

You've led from start to finish, haven't you?

EL:

I guess that's right, yeah! In WRC3 we had a good run so from now on I was comparing to the guy sitting next to me. OK, yesterday evening we lost out and I thought that would happen in the rougher stages and the second passes, but I'm happy with the performance.

Q:

Things have been changed around this year on Rally Finland. What as the most challenging aspect for you this time?

EL:

For me it was combining the new stages with darkness. That was quite a challenge. Usually when new roads are added to the itinerary they usually get quite destroyed on the second pass and especially when you go out on the second loop in the dark. It's tricky to see where the ruts and rocks are. We struggled with that for sure yesterday evening. Honestly, I'm lucky we are here in one piece.

Q:

Were there any hot moments out there this weekend?

EL:

There were hot moments and actually they involved big stones dug out from the cuts. We had two big hits on Friday evening and luckily the Skoda was tough enough to take them. Yesterday evening we decided to take it easy and try to avoid those ones.

Q:

What was the reaction crossing the flying finish?

EL:

We were quite happy. First last weekend and then this the week after, it's quite nice. Reeta [Hämäläinen] and I have only been in the car for four months, but we have grown quite a strong relationship together. It's so nice and also fun together.

Q:

It was fantastic to see you both on the top step of the podium and obviously she was delighted. It's been a brilliant two weeks. What about the future? What can we expect next year?

EL:

Well, I guess there are some plans but nothing is sure yet. Obviously I want to be in the WRC and do as many of the events as possible. Maybe in WRC2, we'll see. As I said, nothing is sure. I hope I'll be here as much as possible.

ENDS