



FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

2022 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

SECTO RALLY FINLAND

Post-event Press Conference

August 4, 2022

FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP:

Present:

Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT – Ott Tänak (EST), Hyundai i20 N Rally1 Hybrid
Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT –Kalle Rovander (FIN), Toyota GR Yaris Rally1 Hybrid
Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT – Esapekka Lappi (FIN), Toyota GR Yaris Rally1 Hybrid
Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT – Julien Moncet (FRA), Team Principal

Q:

Ott, congratulations on your third victory in this rally, you led from Friday morning until the end. How are you feeling now it is down, it's dusted, you are on the top step of the podium?

OT:

I feel actually good. I really enjoyed that one, it's a special one. It was never going to be easy winning here and actually we never really expected to even fight for the win. After Estonia there was not much confidence that we could actually suddenly be competitive here, but somehow the rally here is different, it is not Estonia. Finland is still very unique, it's not an easy event, with a big history and a challenging rally altogether. For sure, it was great to put it together.

Q:

You really did seem to have an attitude of 'I'm going to throw everything at this' when you started on Friday morning. Did you just wake up that morning and think, 'let's just do this'?

OT:

Thursday was quite frustrating, the shakedown was not really happy. The first stage, the super-special stage, things were not really working and it was giving me some extra motivation to just go for it. It seems like these two guys at the front tried to manage a bit from the beginning not going all in and in Finland if you get some gap it's always more difficult to take it back than to manage it. I can't really say I was managing the rally, definitely not! I was really on the limit and over the limit for most of the rally, only really in the last two or three stages we were able to manage a bit already. But other than that all the other stages, every one, we tried to throw it in there.

Q:

You said this morning you've been pretty much on the limit from the first corner on Friday morning, was there any point during the weekend when you thought I can't keep this up?

OT:

I mean, I was never going to think like that. As long as you have the lead you need to try to protect it. Esapekka was trying, then Elfyn was coming, Kalle was obviously opening the road and against him we had a bit better position. But since Saturday morning everybody was in a similar position and then it started to be a fair fight. Kalle was coming for us, but still the gap we managed to build on Friday was big enough, so this one we managed to push back.

Q:

It was 8.4s this morning going in and when you reached the end of the first stage you were almost two seconds quicker than Kalle, and you said you needed to be. Was that not just in terms of time but also psychologically as well?

OT:

No, there was nothing psychological, it was just about winning the rally and for that we couldn't lose more than one or two seconds in that stage. I was really trying to push to be at least equal and after that it would have been OK. But that we were able to actually take some time out was as I said much needed and it took quite a lot pressure off.

Q:

Hyundai had never won in Finland, but here they have led from start to finish with Thierry leading after Thursday night and you from Friday morning. How important is that for the team, to come here to an event which is in Toyota's backyard and really show them what you can do?

OT:

I remember actually that no one has been winning here since 2017 only Toyota, so they've been really strong here and they obviously were this year, no difference. Altogether for sure it's important for the team. We've known a long time what is the job to get the team going again because obviously we have not been on track at the moment and things have not been going the way they should. But all this, myself and Thierry have tried to keep some positive energy and belief that actually if you could do things the right way we could be competitive. We keep pushing in this direction and like we saw today it's possible. Obviously at the moment we are not on the train yet to do it constantly every rally to fight for the championship, but as we can see it would be possible if we do the right things.

Q:

Kalle, second position here at your home event. You've had a strong Rally Finland, we've seen you work your way up into a podium position and challenge for the win. Tell me how you are feeling right now with the overall result.

KR:

The feeling is pretty good. Of course you always want to go for the win in all the rallies, especially here. But yeah, my plan was to still do a good rally without anything too much. Not to make a mistake or have any issues and at the end with the Power Stage we got really good points, so I need to be happy with that.

Q:

You said before the rally you had this balancing act of not too much risk while extending the points lead. It felt like the championship title was more on your mind than a win here.

KR:

Yeah, it was because I was pretty sure already before the weekend that it would be pretty tough to open the road and then try to catch back. Like we saw the gaps are really small all the time. So I was already quite sure that if we can't really do it well we don't need to do it, we just need to be clever and think about the championship. I'm actually quite happy that it went this way. We can be proud that we anyway tried, lost the time on Friday opening the road and then tried to catch up. Ott was all the time flat out, really fast. There is not much you can take out from those stage times and yeah, we catch a bit but not enough.

Q:

At what point did you realise you couldn't catch him, that you were not going to put it on the limit to catch him?

KR:

It was a bit all the time and today of course I tried to push but I was maybe not really brave enough in every place. I was not really feeling 100 per cent with the car that I could what I want, and then always if you push hard you need to take a bit more risk than you want. Especially in this situation when you think you also want to finish on the podium for the points you just leave the last push away. I think even with the last push I don't know if we would have been really winning. We would have been a bit closer somewhere but like today also I knew stages are the same as before. Ott is fast and if push I could be the same pace but it's not enough.

Q:

Tell me about the experience this year. When we were last here we were all wearing masks, there was barely anyone around service even if there were people out on the stage. It's such a different experience this year and all the Finnish driver are really supported by the crowds. That must have been an incredible feeling.

KR:

Yeah, it was really amazing, seeing all the videos and clips from the stages, people cheering so much for us, so much support. It gives you a bit more extra motivation to try and give a good fight for them and like we did on Saturday I think everybody was enjoying us pushing hard and trying to catch up. Still today we tried our best, still push a bit on the power stage and I hope everybody liked that.

Q:

Esapekka, where do we start? The countryside has bitten back this weekend. It was the rock yesterday really spoiling your party, and today it was the roll... Rock 'n roll. But you've been in the fight and you have a big story to tell from this year.

EL:

Yeah, for sure after the victory five years ago this is the second most memorable Rally Finland or even the most, I don't know. It started to be too much action for my mental health.

Q:

But you've made it through, that's the crucial thing, and you are here. Tell me about today. It started out quite calmly. You and Elfyn seemed to pull back in your pace, still fast but not on the limits we saw yesterday.

EL:

Yeah exactly. I think the positions were pretty settled from our side, so there wasn't any reason to push hard but still to keep some speed to keep the rhythm and not to do any mistakes. Then I have no idea really – or I have some idea what happened on this road. But I did pretty well the stage until that moment and after that as well! There was, let's say, a space on the exit to use more road. I was planning to but on the second pass there was big ruts and the slide stopped immediately on the rut and it started to roll. That was quite a big surprise.

Q:

It's handy we are in the land of 1000 lakes to help you out today with water. We've seen countless driver do this through the years: Tommi Makinen in Spain in the early 2000s, using a swimming pool. Mikko Hirvonen has done it as well. Did you think at any point you wouldn't be able to carry on today?

EL:

On the stop line when I saw there was powersteering oil on the windscreen and water pressure warning on the dash then you realise yeah, something is wrong. In that moment you don't know can you fix it, what's the damage? Then it was just a question do I find this leak because of this water pressure warning. Since we found it then I was pretty sure this would be OK, that we would survive to the finish.

Q:

There was a lot of ventilation in the car. No windscreen, the roof was missing in parts. What was it like driving through the Power Stage like that?

EP:

A bit crazy. Yesterday I wasn't prepared to drive without the windscreen because the conditions were much rougher and imagine to have this rock I had on the windscreen to come into my face. I wouldn't be telling the story here. It is a big risk to drive without a windscreen, but this stage is normally in very good condition, so I was ready to take that risk. Actually we had the roof before the stage but it took off on the first acceleration. When I put the fifth gear in there was a horrible noise, then the whole roof went off with all the antennas and the radios. Then there was some airflow inside of the car. Janne basically needed to shout because the wind noise was so high.

Q:

Julien, Ott has said he is hoping now the team has belief so you can move forward. It's been well documented that it's been a difficult few months, but things are looking up, with this result certainly. It's got to give a huge morale boost to the team.

JM:

Well as Ott said he showed us that it's possible. We know we have difficulties, we know where we are not where we want to be. We have to put all the pieces of the puzzle together and we are far from being there. But it's possible and I think this is really what we have to get out of this win in Finland. As you say, it's definitely a specific one because we have never won in Finland. We are in rallying since 2014 and we have always been not really competitive. It's very nice for the brand, we won as well in WRC2 so very encouraging. We have a lot of work to do. The car has still to be developed. But on the positive side we have less and less reliability issues, we know how many opportunities we have lost at the start of the season due to reliability. So now hopefully we can focus more on performance and this will be our target for the next coming months.

Q:

Do you feel a corner has been turned? Are we going to see things in an upward trajectory now?

JM:

Well I hope a corner has been passed but we have to be cautious as well because we had a similar result in Sardinia and after the following races were not so positive following that. We have to be very careful not to be too optimistic. We have to enjoy the result today but it should not put us away from our target which is to have this result every rally.

Q:

It is enjoyable now you have won and you can celebrate later. But how difficult was it to watch when you could see how on the limit Ott was this weekend?

JM:

For us actually it has been a very nice rally. They were fighting altogether every stage, some tenths here and there until the end. Even on Sunday morning which normally is not so exciting it has been very nice to see. A bit tense obviously, we were a bit more nervous and it was nice to finish so we could release the pressure. But it's better to watch when you are fighting for the win than when you are at the back, so let's do it more often now.

Questions from the floor:

Tom Howard, Autosport (GBR)

Ott, you said this was perhaps your best win, but before this week did you think a victory was possible?

OT:

No, no. I never even thought about being competitive for the victory after coming out from Estonia where we lost the first rally by a few minutes, we couldn't really find any chance to be competitive there. Definitely it took us by surprise as well.

FIA WRC2 CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

WRC2 Open – Hyundai Motorsport N – Teemu Suninen (FIN), Hyundai i20 N Rally2

WRC2 Junior – Toksport WRT2 – Emil Lindholm (FIN), Škoda Fabia Rally 2Evo

WRC2 Masters Cup – Freddy Loix (BEL), Škoda Fabia Rally2 Evo

Q:

Teemu, it has been a thrilling battle to watch at the front of WRC2. It has been you and Emil Lindholm fighting it out throughout the weekend. You managed to keep him behind. How pleased are you with the victory at home?

TS:

I'm really pleased for the result we were able to make here. It was quite a tough one. On Friday it was a really good one for us and we were able to increase the gap a bit to a bigger one. But then we faced some technical issues yesterday morning and Emil got quite close and kept the pressure for two days, so it was not the easiest one.

Q:

You were doing well against him, and then suspiciously you lost around eight seconds on the final split at the flying finish. What was going on?

TS:

Suddenly the engine stalled and switched off. Luckily we were able to restart it again and everything was working normally. It wasn't like a bigger issue but it took some seconds.

Q:

You said yourself you were very strong on Friday and he was very strong yesterday. He was starting to get pretty close. How worried were you and how much on your limit were you? You told me at the mid-point media point yesterday you still had a bit more to give but you would be absolutely on your limit at that point.

TS:

I think we pretty much both were on the limit and you can see from the stage times because we were doing many stages just in a few tenths of a second, so normally that's where you can see we were both on the limit. I think Emil also did a really good rally and give a proper challenge to us.

Q:

How did you approach today because it was still a small margin going into the stages. Was it a case of win or bin it?

TS:

I was flat out, 0.4s in the first stage. On the second one 0.2s or something. I had a bit of margin in the end on the last stage, but still the pressure was there because a 10-second gap is quite a small one. You miss a junction once and that's it, or you take a jumped start or stall the car and that's done.

Q:

So it must be very satisfying to be on the top step of the podium after such a battle, yes?

TS:

Yeah of course. And with the team we have done a really good job with the car and have been able to improve the car a lot during this season, so it's great to get Hyundai a win here and the performance we are having now.

Q:

Nice to see Hyundai win in WRC2 and in the same category as well.

TS:

Yeah, that's an even bigger thing for Hyundai as well. It's great to be in a team and nice to get some help and cooperation to make the cars even faster.

Q:

Emil, second in WRC2 but winner of the junior category. How are you feeling right now? A bitter-sweet victory in the Juniors because you would want to be sat where Teemu is right now.

EL:

I won't deny that. In the end it was fine that it wasn't the perfect day for us. Maybe we started a bit too gently then had a tough time catching up. Anyhow, first in Junior and second place... I'd say a reasonably small margin is I guess something I need to be content with right now! Could be better, could be worse.

Q:

It could be way worse, it was a brilliant performance! It must have been so thrilling to be part of such a huge battle that went down to the final day.

EL:

Oh yeah it was. OK, after Friday it wasn't really looking much like a battle but as Teemu said they had some issues and we somehow came back and were really able to fight for tenths of seconds. That's rallying at it's best. Obviously I wish it had been the opposite way around but I know I was [against a] fast guy, so it's OK like it is.

Q:

Saturday seemed to be your day, you seemed to excel on those stages.

EL:

Yeah, when we did those stages for the first time in the rain when the grip was a bit low I think I had a better feeling and my driving style is better for that. But then again when the grip is higher and we have some ruts I'm struggling a bit so we need to work on that. We need to keep on improving.

Q:

Tell me about the atmosphere because it felt like every Finn was out there this weekend. It must have been great after a few years of silence.

EL:

Yeah, it really was. I'm really happy that rallying attracts so many people from my home country. Two years went basically without a proper Rally Finland and now we have one. It was a really great thing.

Q:

Freddy, you competed here on Rally Finland for many years. You are back this year as part of WRC2 Masters. What have you made of the whole experience and how pleased have you been with your own performance?

FL:

It was strange to be back after 19 years, back on the Finland roads, and I really came over here to have some good times and some fun because it is not the most easy rally, especially if you have not done gravel at rallies for 10 or 15 years. The main target was to finish, to have some fun and that's what we did.

Q:

How did you find the changeable conditions? It was beautiful weather on Friday, bone dry and plenty of grip. And then yesterday, so difficult in the wet.

FL:

It was not easy, especially the first stage yesterday morning. I was struggling a little bit, I was not really confident. But then I make a mindset and the second stage was a little bit better so like I said, every stage for me was a big challenge. But at the end we finished the rally and that's a good thing for the championship.

Q:

Nineteen years from then to now. How does it compare in your experience? What do remember from back then that is very similar to now?

FL:

It's similar, yes, for me. I think there are some stages that we also did 19, 20 years ago but I can't remember anymore and even Jyväskylä has changed for me, so it was a big change compared to 20 years ago.

Q:

The atmosphere is still the same though?

FL:

Yes, it's fantastic. Congratulations to the organisers because it is a very nice rally, very nice stages, everything is smooth and a lot of respect from the spectator side. So big congratulations to the organisers.

FIA WRC3 CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

Lauri Joonas (FIN), Ford Fiesta Rally3

Q:

Lauri, you have had an incredible weekend out there. You led from start to finish?

LJ:

Yep.

Q:

That's an incredible thing to do at your home event. How pleased are you with your result?

LJ:

Of course I need to be really satisfied with this result. Yeah, it's not so easy a weekend for us. We had some issues with the power steering, but we managed to do it and thanks to the team for that. After that we were struggling a little bit with the car set-up. But it was good on this last part of the rally.

Q:

How did you deal with the changeable conditions on the stages?

LJ:

I'm not feeling comfortable when it is raining. All the time I am learning with this car because I do not have so much experience. Yep, it was quite good when it's dry, but it's really hard when it's raining to say how fast you need to go through the corners and everything.

Q:

When you've led a rally from the start to the finish it is always difficult going into the final day. I'm sure you heard every single noise in the car. What were the nerves like going into the final stage?

LJ:

Yeah of course I just checked everything on the car is fine before the last stage and you just need to really focus all the time because the gap is so big. But I think we managed it well.

Q:

We have one more Junior round to go in Greece, which is a huge one, a double points scoring weekend. What's going to be the preparation for that?

LJ:

This rally is not good preparation for that! It's a different game in Greece. Of course we need to get a good mindset for the rally and try some new set-ups for the car because it's really rough for the car and tyres.