



FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

2022 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

SECTO RALLY FINLAND

Pre-event Press Conference
August 4, 2022

FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT – Kalle Rovanperä (FIN), Toyota GR Yaris Rally1
Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT NG – Takamoto Katsuta (JPN), Toyota GR Yaris Rally1
Hyundai Shell Mobis World Rally Team – Oliver Solberg (SWE), Hyundai i20 N Rally1
M-Sport Ford World Rally Team – Jari Huttunen (FIN), Ford Puma Rally1

Q:

Kalle, everyone is looking forward to this rally getting under way. You are championship leader, 21 years of age, you are rallying at home ... does life get any better than this?!

KR:

Usually no, maybe sometimes but it sounds quite good.

Q:

It does. You seem very chilled coming into your home event. But it's a bit weird when you just drive to your home event or you don't pack the way you normally do when you are going to another country. Have you switched on the action mode yet?

KR:

Yeah I think now it's on finally now but during the recce and during the week it was a bit difficult, sleeping at home and then driving here.

Q:

What of the event itself? We've seen an incredible season from you, you are on the brink of winning the world championship title, which I know you have told me countless times you don't think about, which is a good thing. But what do you think about winning Rally Finland because that's almost as important as winning the title.

KR:

Yeah. For me it's not so important as the title. But a Rally Finland win is special, it's something everybody wants to win at some point. Of course for me as a home rally it would be nice. Of course we try to do it this weekend, but we also need to know the situation and be clever with the championship like we have been so far. If we cannot make the best result then we have to take what we can.

Q:

There are a number of drivers who can win this weekend, including your team-mate behind you. Do you feel you will be more challenged here than at other rallies?

KR:

I think it depends quite a lot how it affects tomorrow to clean the road and open it. It seems some stages are quite loose with the gravel. We try to push and stay in the fight. If we are close after Friday then we have a chance to try to fight for it. But there are quite many drivers who have won here before and want to win again. Also I think it's more of a home rally for Taka than me because he's been living here! Hopefully he will do a good job.

Q:

But you are the local or have been for many years. What's going to happen with the weather, you should know whether it is going to rain for you or not tomorrow? I'm sure you are begging for the clouds to bring some rain.

KR:

I think with the weather in Finland it is always quite tricky to know, other than the summer is quite bad normally. Raining most of the time. But it seems now it is sunny, so for sure it's nice for the fans and for the rally but if tomorrow morning it could be a bit damp I wouldn't mind.

Q:

Oliver, I didn't include you in the list of people who could potentially win here because it's your first time in Finland in a Rally1 car. If you did win, that would be exceptional. But how are you feeling heading into this?

OS:

A win is maybe a bit too much to be honest, but I feel quite good. Shakedown was OK and we'll see tomorrow.

Q:

In Estonia you were also in the Rally1 car, but a different characteristic. What would you say you learnt from that event in the Rally1 car that you can bring here?

OS:

Just to learn a bit the speed with these cars with the notes is quite different. Of course I knew some of the roads in Estonia, but it was quite different in a Rally1 car. We know we lacked a lot of speed in Estonia. We haven't done any miracles for this race. I think it will not be any easier, but we'll see. The feeling is a bit better, we've done some improvements and I'm more happy and more confident. As you said, it's our first time here in a Rally1 car, so I just need to see how it all turns out.

Q:

How did it feel in shakedown because on the first run there was a bit of a spin.

OS:

I was a bit too stiff on the rear, it got a bit too loose. I didn't really have the confidence on the fast. But after it was better, we made some changes.

Q:

I've noticed a certain Denis Giraudet who is with you this weekend and I know you have a great relationship with him. He is super-experienced. Has he been giving you any tips?

OS:

Of course, he has so much experience, especially in this race. With Juha Kankkunen he won it in 1993 and he has been with every single driver. We looked through the videos yesterday together and he said 'ah, here he went off, here he went off, and here he went off.' He knows every stage, every corner, every driver, so it's very cool.

Q:

Taka, this is also your home event! You have lived in Jyvaskyla for many years now?

TK:

I don't know, something like five or six years.

Q:

So your Finnish is pretty fluent, yes?

TK:

Let's say my daughter is better than me! I cannot say I'm good enough, but some of what Kalle and the engineers say I can understand.

Q:

Talk to me about what it feels like to compete at your second home event. The excitement and buzz is really back. What does it feel like to compete here?

TK:

Like Kalle said, a bit strange feeling in the recce because it is usually normal life using these roads and the service park of course I use a lot in normal life, so a bit difficult to focus. But now the rally has started, shakedown, nothing different than other rallies. I feel more comfortable, because everything is here, my family is here, and fans are also here. So I feel very comfortable and some confidence also.

Q:

Talk to me about expectations because you have had some great results on gravel. In your head are you putting pressure on yourself to get on to the podium this weekend?

TK:

Yeah, of course my target is to get a podium and I try to fight for a podium, but obviously it's never easy especially on this kind of rally. Kalle will be really quick of course and even in the same team there is Elfyn and Esapekka who have both won Rally Finland before. And of course the Hyundai guys are very strong also. It's never easy but this is kind of my target so I try to push as much as I can. And I don't know how it's going but I hope it's going well.

Q:

Last year it was the first time Aaron had sat alongside you, which was a big challenge coming to a super-fast event. That relationship seems to have developed well, how do you find it?

TK:

I feel very comfortable with him. He works very well with organising and of course reading pace notes and preparing. I'm very, very happy how he's working and the relationship is very good. Like the past rally last year in Rally Finland we had some 360... and he didn't say anything, so I knew he was good and I should keep this guy!

Q:

Jari, first ever time in a Rally1 car and it is at your home event. Big smiles all day. An incredible challenge but also experience. What was it like at shakedown?

JH:

Actually it felt like it was the first time in the rally car. I don't know why the feeling was like that. I've tested at Estonia, maybe that's why. But after a couple of runs it started to feel OK, but I noticed it was really difficult to drive, so let's see.

Q:

Like any Finn, you want to show what you can do with the car, but it is your first time so it must be a really difficult balance you have this weekend by wanting to push, but knowing you haven't got the experience with the Rally1.

JH:

Yeah, exactly. First I must get some experience and learn the car. Then hopefully at some point I can show some speed.

Q:

What's the biggest change in the car, what have you noticed the most other than the power?

JH:

The power is amazing. It's quite hard to know how fast you can drive in the fast places and how far you can push the car but I hope I can learn quick.

Q:

Is this just a one-off or are there more events planned?

JH:

No, I don't think so.

Q:

Well fingers crossed there will be eventually!

JH:

Yeah, hopefully! Maybe next year. But at the moment I don't know.

Questions from the floor:

Reiner Kuhn, Motorsport Aktuell (DEU)

Q:

A question to all drivers: in shakedown, Kalle was one second faster than everybody else. Is this a statement, something to think about?

OS:

Big balls, that's the thing!

Q:

And for you, Kalle, it just came easy or you just wanted to show what they will see the next days?

KR:

No, I think the first pass is the most important one. But yeah, actually it went quite well opening the road and the time was pretty nice. So I can be happy with that. The runs after that actually EP was faster compared on the second and third runs. The last run, yeah, you can go a bit faster if you can push for it. So shakedown, it's nothing special.

Q:

I heard the shakedown was all new, also for the Finns. It was a really special shakedown, demanding and difficult to make the pace notes, so it was also risky to go flat out?

KR:

Yeah, it was a nice test to be honest. One of the best shakedowns we have on any rally. So yeah, I was watching some video from 2010, I don't even remember it, but are there on the startline with dad watching the guys get ready. I have been on the stage start once but never before and it was a nice test to do.

FIA WRC2 CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

Toksport WRT2 – Emil Lindholm (FIN), Škoda Fabia Rally2 Evo

Hyundai Motorsport N – Fabrizio Zaldivar (PRY), Hyundai i20 N Rally2

Enni Mälkönen (FIN) – co-driver to Sami Pajari, Škoda Fabia Rally2 Evo

Q:

Emil, home event is always special. Talk to me about the feeling coming here with the fans back, the energy is back. What does that feel like?

EL:

It is something special, I've been here since I was a small child. I've seen what it is, I've seen the fans and the crowds. To have them back this year, last year we did the rally but it was somehow not really normal. Already now in shakedown you see all the people and you see this carnival spirit somehow building up, which is really nice. I'm really looking forward to the weekend.

Q:

I think everyone is. What are your hopes this weekend. We've seen you here before of course, and good pace this year especially on gravel. Are we feeling confident heading into your home event?

EL:

I think we are, yes. I know we are feeling confident. Estonia was good preparation I would say for this rally and feeling-wise and pace-wise I think we were right on spot there. There is no reason why we wouldn't be at this rally. And as well this is becoming quite familiar here for me!

Q:

It should do! But we do see some changes this year, which every driver I've spoken to so far are pleased with the changes. Some stages are reversed, you've got a new stage as well and more talk of wider and fast roads. What is your opinion on the route?

EL:

I think it might be the best route I've done in this rally because there are still some technical sections in there, but those roads that might get properly damaged are gone. So I think we will be really able to enjoy the roads for both passes and anyhow I like the faster roads. I think the roads are great.

Q:

It's always such a strong field of drivers in WRC2. When you look at the list and think where am I going to slip in here do you have the confidence to think you can be right at the top?

EL:

Well, I guess it doesn't make any sense to come here if I don't. So in one way, absolutely, we could slot in at the top. But we have a lot of good drivers and crews, as you said, in this event as well. You need to nail it on every stage and there is no room for mistakes or punctures if you want to finish first. It's not an easy one but I'm sure we can do it.

Q:

Enni, it has been a successful year in Junior WRC alongside Sami Pajari, leading the championship. Before discuss this event, which is outside of the Junior category, tell me about the experience in Junior WRC so far?

EM:

There have been really nice rallies and also good competition with other drivers. Also we have quite good space with Sami.

Q:

Home event for you which you've done in the past. What are your expectations this weekend?

EM:

Of course, this is my favourite rally, so nice to be here. But we are here to get more experience. Let's see on Sunday.

Q:

Talk to me from a co-driver's perspective. We hear from the drivers what it's like on these roads, how it feels. For you making the notes and then reading them, how much of a challenge is it?

EM:

It is because this is quite a fast rally, so you really need to be on time and also there are some technical parts, so not easy.

Q:

From a female perspective, we saw two females on the podium in Estonia in the Junior WRC and in the European Rally Championship as well, where we have a champion co-driver. How important is that representation for women in motorsport?

EM:

I think it's important because then some other girls can see and I think they can believe they can also do the same.

Q:

Fabrizio, we saw some good pace from you in Estonia and you picked up a stage win there within WRC2. How did that happen and how did you feel?

FZ:

Yes, Estonia was quite a good rally for me. On Friday we had some small issues but on Saturday we put those aside to just focus on our pace and to try and keep improving, and that was our objective for the weekend. We had a stage win which was quite hard to believe that it happened. We were fighting and working quite a lot. Also I changed co-driver for Estonia and it was the first rally with him and we managed to get a stage win. It was quite positive and really brings the hope up and you can really start from that perspective.

Q:

It's always difficult changing co-driver and going into a really fast event where you have to have such trust in your notes. But it worked well?

FZ:

Yes, it worked quite well. We'd been testing, we tested before with my new co-driver and it worked quite well. During the rally we just kept working on small details to keep improving and also for him to help me with some pace notes. We are working quite well and for sure we will try to keep on improving.

Q:

How much confidence does the experience in Estonia give you coming into this event?

FZ:

Quite a lot, but still the stages are quite different. Here you have roller-coaster type of stages which have many more crests, so it's a bit different. You need to be really precise on pace notes and on driving, so for sure we will try to start with a good pace, take it a bit easier than in Estonia, but try to build up the speed during the weekend.

Q:

It felt good on shakedown this morning?

FZ:

Yes, yes. We tested some different set-up in the morning and the car is working well, so we are really happy. We did quite a good stage time so we are now just focusing on the first stage and on to tomorrow.

FIA WRC3 CHAMPIONSHIP AND NON-PRIORITY DRIVERS

Present:

Lauri Joona (FIN), Ford Fiesta Rally3 (WRC3)

Toni Herranen (FIN), Ford Fiesta Rally3 (WRC3)

Justus Räikkönen (FIN), Peugeot 208 Rally4 (non priority)

Q:

Lauri, we see you in the Junior championship for the majority of the year, this year with the Rally3 Fiesta. How much are you looking forward to your home event?

LJ:

Of course it's nice to be in Rally Finland. It's my home event and I'm really looking forward with all the spectators and atmosphere and everything. It's really nice to be here. We had a good test before the rally and we really pushed.

Q:

How many kilometres did you manage to do?

LJ:

I think we ran something like 200km.

Q:

You did a rally!

LJ:

Yeah. Now we have a good situation because we can just take our own set-up because in the Juniors we only have a limited amount of set-up, so we can really learn the car more and be at one with the car.

Q:

It's all smiles ahead of the event for everyone, especially between the Finns, but you are hugely competitive. What are your expectations of what you can do this weekend?

LJ:

Yeah, of course we try to win our class, it's the main target. Really we try to compare to the Rally2 cars and we have good competition in this class, so it will be a really tight fight.

Q:

It's your third time doing your home event. So you've seen different routes and it's changed this year. Everyone seems to be very positive about the changes. What would you say is the biggest challenge this year with the changes that have been made?

LJ:

I'm not sure. There is like really more change. I think Harju is a really nice stage and now we run it twice which is really good. But all the stages look really nice. We ran three years ago with a front-wheel drive car, last year we tried with a Rally2 car and now we are back in Rally3.

Q:

You were third last year so a good result...

LJ:

Yes, it was more than we expected. Now we can try to fight for the win in this class, so let's see.

Q:

Toni, you are a busy man. You have done an insane number of rallies in Finland and as part of the ERC in ERC4. You've had a lot of seat time. Are you feeling confident coming into your home event?

TH:

I feel very confident I think, but for sure it's my first time with a Rally3 car so it won't be easy. We had only one test day, so it's going to be fun I think.

Q:

It is. There's more power for you this weekend on a super-fast event. How many kilometres did you do in testing?

TH:

I did only 160 kilometres I think, we had some technical problems on the test. Not too much but I think it's enough.

Q:

Did you manage though to get a good feeling with the car?

TH:

I think, yeah.

Q:

So when you recced the stages what stood out for you in terms of those that will require big confidence?

TH:

I don't know yet, but the stages look really nice. It's going to be fun for sure. I did this rally last year but there are some different stages and some new stages.

Q:

Do you feel any pressure coming into your home event because we've seen good results from you in Finland and the ERC. Everyone is talking about who will be the next great Finn coming through. Is there pressure?

TH:

Not too much I think. It's my first rally in Rally3, so not too much. It will be really fast here, but we will see.

Q:

Justus, you are 17, I can't quite believe that! But here you are competing at your home event for the first time. Talk to me about how you are feeling. Are there nerves or excitement?

JR:

Of course, I'm so excited. I hope I have fun here because this is my first rally with this Rally4 car, my first rally here. I really hope I have fun. This was a big opportunity to drive here.

Q:

It's a huge opportunity, but it's a big challenge. But you have rallies under your belt and obviously with your name people are going to be asking are you getting advice from your dad? I think the last time your dad rallied was way back in the early 2000s, so maybe he can't give you so much. But Kimi, your uncle, was rallying relatively recently. Have you been asking them any questions to tackle various elements or do you just want to do your own thing?

JR:

Not really, I do my own thing and try to learn.

Q:

We kickstart tonight with Harju, which is a classic here, before you head into the forests tomorrow. What is the strategy. You've said you want to have fun but are there any targets you have set yourself?

JR:

I want to be fast but first of all I want to have fun and enjoy this rally. But I lie if I don't say I want to be fast.

Q:

What have you thought of the atmosphere so far because it's been lovely having spectators back in the service area. Are you feeling that, is it helping to boost confidence?

JR:

Yeah. It helps me. I'm ready. This is bigger than your own national championship so I like to be here.

Q:

So what's the dream for the future? You are so young in your career, do you want to stay in rallying and work your way up to be potentially a champion?

JR:

I don't want to look to the future. I want to go step by step.