



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

**2008 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP
RALLY D'ITALIA SARDEGNA**

Post event FIA Press Conference
18 May 2008

Present:

1st - Sébastien Loeb, Citroën Total World Rally Team
1st - Daniel Elena, Citroën Total World Rally Team
2nd - Mikko Hirvonen, BP Ford Abu Dhabi World Rally Team
2nd - Jarmo Lehtinen, BP Ford Abu Dhabi World Rally Team
3rd - Jari-Matti Latvala, BP Ford Abu Dhabi World Rally Team
3rd - Miikka Anttila, BP Ford Abu Dhabi World Rally Team
Olivier Quesnel, Team Principal, Citroën Total World Rally Team

Welcome to the pre-event FIA press conference.

Q:

Sébastien, congratulations. It's been an epic battle here in Sardinia; you picked up the lead from stage 2 after Jari-Matti dropped down the standings with a puncture. How tough has the fight been with Jari-Matti and Mikko throughout the weekend?

SL:

For sure it was really difficult. We had a good start on Friday and a good lead in the evening but on the second day Jari-Matti and Mikko were very fast and I could see my lead going down and down. All I could do is push to the maximum and hope it was enough.

Q:

This morning Mikko took 10 seconds out of you on the opening stage. Were you on the limit on that stage?

SL:

Well, I drove well and made no mistakes and was pushing hard so I don't really know how he took all that time. I couldn't think about the win before the first service today. But if I had no problems after that I thought it should be okay. The victory is enjoyable but the rally was not so much fun because when you are first on the road you try your hardest and then see everyone else going faster.

Q:

In comparison to other years in the Championship how is this year shaping up so far with regard to competition – is it tougher or not?

SL:

Well, people said it would be easy for me to win the Championship this year but it is never easy to win these rallies and the fight is always hard for me. I wouldn't like to say if it is easier or harder than last year, but it is exciting, for sure.

Q:

A fantastic battle on the final day Daniel, how confident were you and Sébastien that you could stay in front?

DE:

I was not confident at all because it was a very big fight. When you go first on the road and push 110 per cent, then you see Jari-Matti taking 10 seconds from you on each stage, it is not easy. It was only on stage 16 that we thought we might win because Seb was very fast on that stage and won back some time.

Q:

Congratulations Mikko, an incredible charge from you today, especially on the first stage, and a great battle with your team-mate Jari-Matti as you were equal second at the start of the day – but was your primary objective to try to catch Loeb?

MH:

Well, it's difficult to tell because we thought the gap to Seb was going to be too big and the main thing for us was to fight with Jari-Matti and keep him behind us. Then on the first stage today we went very well and got a bit excited about whether we might catch Seb. But on the second stage I made a little mistake and went off a bit so I thought I'd better slow down a bit or I'm not going to finish this rally.

Q:

You have a great fighting spirit, and were still determined after the second service to keep pushing - when did you realise that you couldn't quite catch Loeb?

MH:

We got some split times on the first stage after service this morning and we were flat out until about halfway through the stage. Then we eased off a bit.

Q:

Jari-Matti was putting the pressure on you this afternoon also, so you were not only watching the driver in front but looking over your shoulder too – was it quite a pressured afternoon?

MH:

Jari-Matti is always going very fast and yes, he has been flat out all the weekend so it has been a big, big pressure on us and a big stress.

Q:

You still lead the Championship and that means first on the road for the Acropolis Rally...

MH:

For sure I need to improve my first day times a lot when I am first on the road, and I am working on that. Hopefully I can learn to drive the first day like Seb and Marcus (Grönholm) did last year, but Greece will be very difficult.

Q:

We have seen you in battles with Jari-Matti before, what is it like being in a fight within your own team?

JL:

It is always a very enjoyable battle but for sure it always seems easier when you are behind and trying to catch up.

Q:

Another fantastic performance Jari-Matti. You led after the first stage before you picked up a puncture – it could have been a win here for you if it wasn't for that...

J-ML:

If you look at my times yesterday, we were very fast and I was pushing to the maximum. But we did gain a lot from our good road position yesterday. If I hadn't punctured we could have been first car maybe on Saturday so it is hard to say if I could have stayed in front and won from that position. However, we will never know the answer to that. But at least I had a very good result.

Q:

You won every stage yesterday and your progression up the leaderboard was ruthless. Does that make up for the mistake that you made?

J-ML:

Well, in the last two rallies in Argentina and Jordan I have made mistakes and lost very valuable points. So I did not want to let my team down again after my mistake on the second stage. This was a big boost to my speed and made me go that little bit faster on Saturday.

Q:

We know you are a very focused driver but I hear that in a bid to calm yourself before each day begins you are seeking the help of the team's physio. What does he do and is it helping?

J-ML:

Okay, last year I worked a bit with Christoph Treir, who was Marcus Grönholm's trainer, and he gave me some very good ideas for staying focused. Now our physio gives me the same sort of help. We just try to make my mental state better so I don't make a lot of silly mistakes like last year.

Q:

You have said it's consistency you are aiming to achieve; how can you move towards becoming more consistent?

J-ML:

At least we have now been able to get the speed right. That is now good. But you are always at the limit and when you try to keep that speed against guys like this it is so easy to make a mistake. I think that experience is very important to get consistency, especially on rallies like this one.

Q:

Yesterday you won every single stage, but Jari-Matti told reporters at one of the stage ends that you had told him to not take any more risks, was that true?

MA:

It was because there were a lot of rocks by the side of the road and we had already been very lucky a number of times. So yes, I did tell him not to take any more risks.

Q:

A good result for Citroën, Olivier: Dani Sordo was in second at the end of day one, but he slipped back. Did he have any problems or was it a lack of confidence?

OQ:

I think that Dani doesn't have the same level of experience that Seb has so for him the rally was a bit too difficult so he dropped back a little. But he is getting there.

Q:

It's been a great fight between the drivers this weekend, but BP Ford still leads the Manufacturers' Championship. What is it going to take to move ahead? And how important is it for Citroën to win the Championship this year?

OQ:

We will try to win both Championships but first what we need is the Drivers' Championship for Seb. I don't think it will be easy for either us, or for Malcolm (Wilson) to win either of the Championships.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR:

Markus Stier

Rallye das Magazin, Germany

Q:

After the rain earlier in the week, were the stages that bad?

SL:

No, the stages were good. There was no big damage from the rain and the roads dried completely.

Marco Giordo

La Nuova Sardegna, Italy

Q:

You have won here three times. Was this the hardest win?

SL:

I don't know, I always have some good fights here, like with Marcus last year. It is never easy to win here for sure but this year it was very close and getting closer and closer all the time so the pressure was very high.

FIA JUNIOR WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

1st – Michał Kosciuszko

1st – Maciej Szczepaniak

Q:

Your first win in the JWRC, congratulations. How do you feel?

MK:

It's been an incredible weekend for us. It is my first JWRC victory and we've been fighting with Martin (Prokop) all weekend. In the end it has been a great result for us, especially as all the best drivers are here.

Q:

It's been a fantastic battle between you and Martin Prokop over the weekend. How stressful has it been?

MK:

I have been trying to fight with him over every kilometre of every stage.

Q:

You and Prokop were swapping the lead throughout yesterday; how many risks were you taking to stay ahead of him?

MK:

For sure I took risks on all three days of the rally. It's impossible to lead the JWRC without taking risks. But I also tried to be safe and take a good line and not take too many big risks because it is always necessary to finish the rally and get the points.

Q:

You are now second overall in the Championship, how much has this result boosted your confidence for the rest of the season?

MK:

It is too early to think about the Championship. We need to score on every round and try to avoid making mistakes that could cost us points. For sure in Finland it will not be easy to win because the other drivers are all very fast.

Q:

It's your first year within the Suzuki team and just three rounds in you have achieved your best result. How important has Suzuki's support been?

MK:

The team have done an incredible job. I think they all want the victory as much as me. It has been amazing that I have such support from them. We will be doing some celebrating tonight but not too much because we have a very early plane to catch tomorrow morning and we test early next week!

Q:

Congratulations on your first win with Michał: it's been a tough weekend but has it been enjoyable?

MS:

Yes, we enjoy the battle on the stages but outside that we are all good colleagues so it is fun to be with all the other competitors.

Q:

How tense was the atmosphere in the car during the weekend?

MS:

We have no problems in the car. We can relax between the stages and be 100 per cent focused when we are on them. It is has been great that we can fight all three days.