



Press Office

MIKKO HIRVONEN: THE EVENT HAS IMPROVED YEAR AFTER YEAR AND ALWAYS HAS BETTER STAGES.

The Finnish driver did a last test session yesterday with his Ford Focus Wrc from the BP Ford Abu Dhabi World Rally Team

Olbia May 18th 2009 – All the teams which will take part in Rally d'Italia Sardegna, round six of the World Rally Championship and counting for the Junior and Production World Championships, try to make the most of the few hours left before the start.

Yesterday Mikko Hirvonen tested on a road just outside the San Giacomo stage, away from the event route, to fine tune the set-up of his Ford Focus Wrc. The 29 year-old finnish driver, leader of the BP Ford Abu Dhabi Team, was followed in this test by the firm's chief engineer Christian Loriaux.

"We found the correct set-up for the car – was the comment of the Jyvaskyla-born driver – improving a lot of small details, beginning with the differentials and going on to dampers and suspension. The car is fine, I am satisfied with our work".

Q. With which state of mind will You start next Friday ?

A. I am here to win, that is our only goal, as we need to steer the championship in another direction. A twenty point gap from Loeb is too much, especially if Séb keeps having no issues events and winning. To change something I must now begin winning and he must lose points.

Q. Do You like Rally d'Italia Sardegna ?

A. I have a good feeling with this event, I know the island's gravel roads as I have done the event many team, and I would also like to remind You that last year I lost by only 10", this was the final gab between Sébastien and me. We therefore have a good opportunity to beat Loeb and we will give our best to do it.

Q. And what do You think of the Rally route ?

A. I have seen that it resembles to last year's, there are only two new stages which we will discover during tomorrow and Wednesday's recce. Last year I had liked both the first and second leg, while the stage mileage on Sunday was too short. The stages are fast and technical, with slightly narrow roads, if these were wider the event would be perfect for me.

Q. Rally d'Italia Sardegna has got to its sixth edition, can we now say that it has earned a place in the history of the WRC ?

A. I think so, it is an event similar to Portugal, Greece and Turkey, but it has an identity of its own given by the roads which are technical, narrow and difficult. The organisers always work with great attention, and the event has improved every year with always better stages.

Q. Finally, could You summarise your season so far ?

A. We have had a head-to-head fight with Loeb in some events, but in the end he always won. We hope that now it will be our turn to win, we are doing our best, but we must not forget that my team mate Jari-Matti Latvala also likes this event, he has always been very fast here in Sardinia.

The BP Ford Abu Dhabi Team tests took place over the whole weekend, with the two works drivers Mikko Hirvonen and Jari-Matti Latvala working a long time on the gravel roads of Monti Canu and Monte Moro. They were joined by Estonian Markko Martin, who returned behind the wheel of a Focus after nearly five

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years. "In order to find even the smallest improvement to the car – commented Ford's Team Principal Malcolm Wilson – we invited Markko to this session, to benefit from his ability as a test driver"

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