



*Sampeyre (Cuneo), 15 September*

### **Bettega ranked first with his debut in Ford Focus WRC car**

Two stages (19 km) were enough in terms of time to reassure everybody that Alessandro Bettega needs no time at all to earn confidence with a new rally car. But Bettega's debut in his Ford Focus ended tragically and earlier than expected. Suddenly, after the third stage of the Valley Varaita Rally and Cuneo Valleys, the rally was called to a halt when Manuel Sossella (Ford Focus) went off of the road, and tragically killed a spectator.

The organisers issued a final ranking based on the stages completed and in which Bettega and co-driver Simone Scattolin ranked first in their Errepi Racing Ford Focus WRC 02.

This outing represented Bettega's first main step towards driving an M-Sport Ford Focus WRC 06 in Corsica on the Tour de Corse in October, which will form part of his prize for winning the 2006 Fiesta Sporting **Trophy** International championship. His debut started very well and, from what was possible to see, he showed all the skills necessary to achieve the victory against the other ten WRC on the event.

Bettega drove the Focus-Errepi rally car in the afternoon for the first time, during the shakedown. After some initial stage runs, he had his mind clear about the new car, understanding the new starting electronic technologies and adjusting to the new brakes, which require different skills to driving the Fiesta. His experience of the car was alternated between different tests on different compounds with Pirelli asphalt tyres.

Bettega was relaxed after his first runs in the car and was full of positive comments, as well as a fair dose of excitement. The first stage (8 km) was fast and demanding. His initial reference time was that of Luca Gulfi (Peugeot 20 WRC) of 6 minutes 8.1 seconds. Bettega's Errepi team mate, Sossella (Ford Focus WRC), then jumped ahead of everybody with a splendid time of 6 minutes 4.7 seconds. Then it was Bettega's turn. Walter Calcinotto, head of the TRT Team, waited anxiously at the end of the stage. After seeing the timing scored by Bettega, a bright smile spread across Calcinotto's face: 6 minutes 8.9 seconds and third place.

The next stage was Valmala, a slightly longer track measuring 10.26 km. Gulfi did well again, but he was beaten by Luca Betti, who attained best time of 6 minutes 34.3 seconds. Sossella could only manage 6 minutes 37.6 seconds, but the ranking changed when Bettega set the best time of 6 minutes 32.9 seconds.

Lamp pods were strapped onto the cars for the third stage, where a devastating uncertainty became reality when Bettega reached the end of the stage and reported that Sossella had had a bad accident. Sossella's car had hit a spectator who was not standing in a designated area and the rally was stopped.

Despite the fact that he did not manage to get much mileage under his belt, the fact that Bettega proved to be competitive in a Ford Focus is reassuring in advance of Corsica, and this was the main goal of the race in Cuneo.

Bettega will attend M-Sport in the UK later this month to test the 06 Focus and to meet with the team, who will be supporting him in Corsica.

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