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Rally de España – after stage 4, El Montmell 2

BP-Ford World Rally Team maintained its hold on third and fourth places as drivers repeated the morning speed tests north-east of Salou. Conditions had improved as the sunshine dried the wet roads, although dark clouds gathering in the skies suggest that more rain may be on its way for the final group of special stages west of the rally base later this afternoon.

Marcus Grönholm and Timo Rautiainen opted for BF Goodrich's medium soft compound tyres on their Ford Focus RS World Rally Car, with additional cuts hand-carved into the rubber. It was a choice the 39-year-old Finnish driver was to regret as he was fifth through the 25.43km Querol and sixth in the 24.14km El Montmell to retain third, 25.0sec behind new leader Dani Sordo.

"Everything was too soft – the car set-up, the tyres and even the driver!" said Grönholm. "I expected the roads to be damp in the shade but they were totally dry and the tyres were moving around all the time. I knew after just a few hundred metres of the first stage in the group that it was the wrong choice. The compound was OK but there were too many cuts. Now we have to do better in the final two stages to regain some time."

BP-Ford team-mates Mikko Hirvonen and Jarmo Lehtinen were third in Querol and fourth in El Montmell to reduce the gap between themselves and Grönholm to 12.9sec. The 27-year-old Finn opted for the same rubber as Grönholm, but with just a single cut on the inside of the tyre.

"I felt more comfortable with my driving on the drier roads and I had a better feeling, although maybe the tyres were a little too soft. It was half wet, half dry in the third stage and totally dry in the last one. It's tricky to choose the right set-up when conditions are mixed like this. We made the settings a little harder but they were too soft for the last stage and the whole package has to be exactly right to set the best times," he explained.

Abu Dhabi driver Khalid Al Qassimi and Nicky Beech climbed five places to 14th in their Focus RS as they slashed their times by 30sec per stage compared to the morning. "I'm pleased with my times although my tyres were too soft as I thought the roads would be wetter. The grip was superb for the first part of stage four but they started to overheat and I lost grip and precision," said Al Qassimi.

Leaderboard after stage 4 of 18

1. D Sordo/M Marti	E	Citroen C4	53min 23.8sec
2. S Loeb/D Elena	F	Citroen C4	53min 24.5sec
3. M Grönholm/T Rautiainen	FIN	Ford Focus RS	53min 48.8sec
4. M Hirvonen/J Lehtinen	FIN	Ford Focus RS	54min 01.7sec
5. F Duval/P Pivato	B	Citroen Xsara	54min 13.2sec
6. P Solberg/P Mills	N	Subaru Impreza	54min 27.8sec

7. C Atkinson/S Prévot	AUS	Subaru Impreza	54min 48.3sec
8. J-M Latvala/M Anttila	FIN	Ford Focus RS	54min 51.9sec
9. X Pons/X Amigo	E	Subaru Impreza	54min 52.6sec
10 H Solberg/C Menkerud	N	Ford Focus RS	57min 07.3sec