

For immediate release: 30 May 2008

Acropolis Rally of Greece – after stage 3, Psatha 1

Large crowds gathered at the foot of Athens' historic Acropolis last night to view the start ceremony of this seventh round of the FIA World Rally Championship. The action switched to the north of the Greek capital this morning as 60 cars left the Tatoi service park to tackle the opening loop of three speed tests, covering 52.37km north and west of the city. Early morning sun indicated another blazing day in store, with temperatures forecast to reach 32°C – a slight drop on yesterday's 35°C.

BP Ford Abu Dhabi World Rally team drivers Jari-Matti Latvala and Miikka Anttila made a perfect start to the toughest round in the calendar. The Finns were fastest in their Ford Focus RS World Rally Car by 5.2sec on the sandy 11.57km Schimatari before claiming third in the 23.76km classic Thiva. They ended the morning by winning the rocky 17.41km Psatha to return to service with a 4.2sec lead.

"I tried to look after my tyres as it's important to keep them in good condition here," said 23-year-old Latvala. "On the last stage I was playing with the throttle on the uphill sections to preserve them and that's something I need to work on, because tomorrow will be really tough. I've not driven at 100 per cent so I hope I can be quicker this afternoon. If I finish today in first I need a lead of more than 20sec because I would be first on the road in slippery conditions tomorrow. My road position today gives me a small advantage over the drivers ahead, but they would have that advantage tomorrow."

Team-mates Mikko Hirvonen and Jarmo Lehtinen lie fourth in another Focus RS after finishing third, seventh and fifth on the morning's special stages. As championship leader Hirvonen is disadvantaged by being first in the start order, sweeping the slippery loose stones from the surface to leave a cleaner and faster driving line for those behind. However, the 27-year-old Finn dropped only 26.2sec to Latvala and should face an easier task when the same tests are repeated this afternoon.

"My road position wasn't easy and it was so slippery I slid wide on many corners, so it may not have been much better for Sébastien Loeb behind me," said Hirvonen. "It doesn't seem to matter whether I drive neatly or not, my speed is about the same. The third stage was very rough and I drove as hard as I could, but I dare not risk going flat out. The Focus is strong enough to take these conditions though and I have to try to stay as close to the leaders as I can this afternoon."

Abu Dhabi's Khalid Al Qassimi and Michael Orr are 15th in another Focus RS.

Leaderboard after stage 3 of 20

1. J-M Latvala/M Anttila	FIN	Ford Focus RS	39min 22.5sec
2. S Loeb/D Elena	FRA	Citroen C4	39min 26.7sec
3. D Sordo/M Marti	ESP	Citroen C4	39min 28.7sec
4. M Hirvonen/J Lehtinen	FIN	Ford Focus RS	39min 48.7sec
5. P Solberg/P Mills	NOR	Subaru Impreza	39min 49.9sec

6. H Solberg/C Menkerud	NOR	Ford Focus RS	39min 56.9sec
7. U Aava/K Sikk	EST	Citroen C4	40min 02.1sec
8. C Atkinson/S Prévot	AUS	Subaru Impreza	40min 08.2sec
9. P-G Andersson/J Andersson	SWE	Suzuki SX4	40min 25.9sec
10 F Villagra/J Perez Companc	ARG	Ford Focus RS	40min 26.9sec