



Rally Ireland – after stage 7, Lough Gill 2

BP-Ford World Rally Team drivers Marcus Grönholm and Timo Rautiainen are relaxing after being released from Sligo General Hospital following their accident on this morning's fourth special stage of Rally Ireland. Both had scans and were allowed to leave after being given a clean bill of health.

"The accident happened near the finish on a wide, right corner," said 39-year-old Grönholm. "I braked for the bend but it was extremely slippery and the car skated off the road. I managed to turn it sideways before hitting a stone wall hard. It was a big, big impact because the car stopped immediately. Both wheels on my side of the car were ripped off. We were taken to hospital where we were both given a scan but that showed no problems. My neck is sore but otherwise I'm OK. It will be hard to lift the drivers' championship if Sébastien Loeb wins, but there are a lot of kilometres remaining here and on the final round in Great Britain so I'm not giving up hope yet."

BP-Ford team-mates Mikko Hirvonen and Jarmo Lehtinen are fourth in their Focus RS World Rally Car after a second pass over this morning's three speed tests. The Finns took no risks on the narrow and bumpy roads, which were covered in dirt dragged onto the asphalt during the morning stages. Hirvonen produced his best performance on the rally on the last 20.57km Lough Gill test when third fastest time allowed him to close to within 0.2sec of third-placed Jari-Matti Latvala.

"There was a huge amount of gravel and mud on the roads," he said. "I wasn't flat out during that loop, just trying to find a good rhythm rather than chasing the cars ahead of me. There is no point in pushing too hard and risk making a mistake because third or fourth is good for me. Perhaps my tyre choice wasn't perfect but the car feels excellent."

Abu Dhabi's Khalid Al Qassimi and Nicky Beech emerged unscathed from the second loop of stages in their Focus RS. "It was extremely tricky. The roads were slippery and I took no risks on the first two stages. I felt more confident on the third stage so I pushed harder at the beginning, drove cautiously on the middle section which I knew was greasy, and attacked more towards the end. It felt better and that gave a boost to my confidence," said Al Qassimi.

Leaderboard after SS7

1. S Loeb/D Elena	F	Citroen C4	1h 07m 50.9sec
2. D Sordo/M Marti	E	Citroen C4	+6.9sec
3. J M Latvala/M Anttila	FIN	Ford Focus RS	+1m11.6sec
4. M Hirvonen/J Lehtinen	FIN	Ford Focus RS	+1m11.8sec
5. P Solberg/P Mills	N	Subaru Impreza	+1m51.3sec
6. H Solberg/G Bergsten	N	Ford Focus RS	+2m08.4sec
7. G Wilks/P Pugh	GB	Subaru Impreza	+2m52.5sec
8. M Stohl/I Minor	AUT	Citroen Xsara	+3m13.2sec
9. M Wilson/M Orr	GB	Ford Focus RS	+4m38.5sec
10. T McNulty/E O'Donnell	IRL	Subaru Impreza	+5m20.5sec