



Rally Ireland – after stage 13, Tempo 1

Seventy-nine of the original 84 starters left Sligo this morning for the second leg of this penultimate round of the FIA World Rally Championship. Eight of those are competing under SupeRally rules having retired yesterday. After an 85km liaison across the border into Northern Ireland, competitors tackled three speed tests near the town of Enniskillen, in the County Fermanagh lakelands.

Conditions were expected to be little easier than yesterday, and rain began to fall as drivers entered the opening test, the shortened 20.95km Sloughan Glen. BP-Ford World Rally Team drivers Mikko Hirvonen and Jarmo Lehtinen opted for BFGoodrich's intermediate tyres for their Focus RS World Rally Car, with heavy cuts carved into the rubber to cope with the dirty asphalt roads.

Hirvonen, lying fourth overnight, had his mind firmly fixed on obtaining the points necessary to secure BP-Ford's second consecutive manufacturers' title in the championship. Sixth position would provide the three points required to do that, so the 27-year-old Finn was happy to keep an eye on the split times of fifth-placed Petter Solberg and resist the temptation to chase Jari-Matti Latvala in third.

He was fourth in Sloughan Glen before setting fifth fastest time in the following 17.96km Ballinamallard. He ended the loop with fifth quickest time through the 13.46km Tempo to return to service in Sligo still in fourth, 12.6sec clear of Solberg. "I don't need to attack, I just need to finish and take those three points for Ford," said Hirvonen. "I'm driving so steadily that I can't find a rhythm but I guess that doesn't matter. There wasn't so much rain, just a little bit in all three stages but the roads were damp rather than wet. But now it's raining hard and I need to be more awake because there will be a lot of mud and water. It will be quite a challenge. They were good stages, and in the dry they would be really fast."

BP-Ford team-mates Khalid Al Qassimi and Nicky Beech have climbed from 27th overnight to 20th in their Focus RS, but the 35-year-old Abu Dhabi driver continues to find conditions tricky. "I've never seen weather like this, even the local drivers are finding it difficult," he said. "Where there is grip, or it is drier, I pushed harder but I spent a lot of time trying to find that grip. I'm getting information from the safety crew that there will be a lot of standing water this afternoon so we will have to be careful, especially under braking. That will make it even harder to find grip."

Leaderboard after stage 13 of 20

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. S Loeb/D Elena | F | Citroen C4 | 2h 02m 01.1sec |
| 2. D Sordo/M Marti | E | Citroen C4 | +50.7sec |
| 3. J M Latvala/M Anttila | FIN | Ford Focus RS | +1m38.2sec |
| 4. M Hirvonen/J Lehtinen | FIN | Ford Focus RS | +2m29.1sec |
| 5. P Solberg/P Mills | N | Subaru Impreza | +2m41.7sec |
| 6. G Wilks/P Pugh | GB | Subaru Impreza | +5m02.3sec |
| 7. M Wilson/M Orr | GB | Ford Focus RS | +8m19.8sec |
| 8. G MacHale/A Harryman | IRL | Ford Focus RS | +8m53.0sec |
| 9. M Higgins/S Martin | GB | Mitsubishi Lancer | +11m19.4sec |
| 10. A Mikkelsen/O Floene | N | Ford Focus RS | +12m13.3sec |

