



## Ford wins second consecutive world title with Focus RS WRC\*

Ford today won the manufacturers' title in the FIA World Rally Championship for the second straight season with the Focus RS World Rally Car. Fourth place for BP-Ford World Rally Team drivers Mikko Hirvonen and Jarmo Lehtinen in Rally Ireland was sufficient to ensure the crown with one round remaining next month in Great Britain. The team holds a 21-point lead with a maximum 18 available on the 16th and final event.

Rally Ireland's championship debut proved every bit as challenging as was expected. The narrow, bumpy asphalt lanes were full of crests and dips and presented the kind of test not found on any other round of the series. Rain during the opening two legs of the three-day event provided treacherous conditions as cars dragged mud onto the already shiny asphalt, and drivers likened the special stages to driving on ice.

This cross-border event was based in Sligo, and featured tests in the Republic of Ireland during the first leg before crossing the border into Northern Ireland on the second day. The final leg covered both countries, ending with a spectacular test hugging the Donegal Bay coastline which was broadcast live on television. Drivers tackled 20 stages in total, covering 328.72km of competition.

Hirvonen's target from the outset was to obtain the points necessary to ensure BP-Ford's second consecutive manufacturers' title. Sixth position or better would provide the three points required to do that and his role became even more important when team-mates Marcus Grönholm and Timo Rautiainen crashed out during Friday's opening leg. Hirvonen settled into fourth on the first morning and adopted a safety-first policy throughout the rest of the event, happy to keep an eye on the times of the cars behind rather than chase the drivers in front.

"It was a difficult weekend," he said. "I had to keep reminding myself to drive cautiously but I did the job that was required and it's fantastic for the team to win the title. I'm so pleased for everyone, they deserve it. It's hard to drive at less than flat out pace and find a rhythm but I had to do that because I wanted these points so badly. For some reason it feels better than our first win last year. I expected this to be a tough rally because the roads here are so narrow and bumpy. The rain made it even harder and this is definitely the most difficult asphalt round of the season," added Hirvonen, who has assured himself of third in the drivers' championship.

Grönholm, who is now six points behind Sébastien Loeb in the drivers' series, returned home yesterday morning to rest after his accident. "While I am naturally still disappointed not to have finished the rally, I'm so pleased for Mikko and Jarmo who really did a fantastically cool job in securing the vital points," said the 39-year-old Finn.

BP-Ford team-mates Khalid Al Qassimi and Nicky Beech finished 15th in another BP-Ford Focus RS on their last outing of the season. "Conditions here were incredible," said 37-year-old Al Qassimi. "The roads were more slippery than anything I have encountered before."





As BP-Ford team director Malcolm Wilson celebrated a second title, he said: "It's a fantastic feeling to win again. Nothing will surpass our 2006 title but back-to-back world championships sends out a message about how strong we are as a team. To win with one event remaining is amazing. We've had so much support from the drivers and the entire team, and thanks to Ford for its magnificent backing. Mikko did a perfect job this weekend. After Marcus' retirement, Mikko fully understood the role he had to play this weekend and he did it to perfection."

Ford TeamRS director Jost Capito said: "After last year's title success we knew we had to raise our game in 2007 if we wanted to defend it. The reigning champions become the target of all their rivals and it is an old adage in sport that is harder to defend a title than it is to win it in the first place. It gives me great pride to reflect on this achievement and see the confidence throughout the team. I would like to thank Marcus, Timo, Mikko and Jarmo for their leadership. Their passion has inspired everyone in the team to give their very best to help Ford take rallying's crown again."

### News from our Rivals

Sébastien Loeb (Citroen) survived a late scare to win his eighth rally of the season and take a six point lead in the drivers' championship. The Frenchman incurred a 10-second penalty at the final service this morning when an electrical problem caused him to check out late. Team-mate Dani Sordo finished 53.4sec behind his colleague. Jari-Matti Latvala (Ford) claimed a career-best third while Petter Solberg (Subaru) and private-entrant Guy Wilks (Subaru) completed the top six. Chris Atkinson (Subaru) failed to leave service this morning after engine problems.

### Next round

The final round of the championship will take place on fast gravel forest roads in Wales. Rally GB is based in Cardiff on 29 November - 2 December.

### Final positions

1. S Loeb/D Elena	F	Citroen C4	3hr 01min 39.2sec
2. D Sordo/M Marti	E	Citroen C4	3hr 02min 32.6sec
3. J-M Latvala/M Anttila	FIN	Ford Focus RS	3hr 03min 27.4sec
4. M Hirvonen/J Lehtinen	FIN	Ford Focus RS	3hr 03min 56.9sec
5. P Solberg/P Mills	N	Subaru Impreza	3hr 04min 35.0sec
6. G Wilks/P Pugh	GB	Subaru Impreza	3hr 07min 37.1sec
7. M Wilson/M Orr	GB	Ford Focus RS	3hr 11min 44.1sec
8. G MacHale/A Harryman	IRL	Ford Focus RS	3hr 12min 47.5sec
9. A Mikkelsen/O Floene	N	Ford Focus RS	3hr 14min 47.4sec
10 N McShea/M Clarke	GB	Subaru Impreza	3hr 18min 11.3sec

### Drivers

1. S Loeb	110pts
2. M Grönholm	104pts
3. M Hirvonen	89pts
4. D Sordo	61pts
5. P Solberg	42pts
6. H Solberg	34pts



Manufacturers

1. BP-Ford (champion\*) 194pts
2. Citroen Total 173pts
3. Stobart VK M-Sport Ford 80pts
4. Subaru 79pts
5. OMV Kronos Citroen 43pts
6. Munchi's Ford 14pts

\* Subject to the official publication of the results by the FIA

