

## Rally d'Italia Sardegna – after stage 9, Su Filigosu

Fifty-four of the original 57 starters left Olbia this morning for a second day of competition on this sixth round of the FIA World Rally Championship. Fifteen of those are competing under SupeRally rules having retired yesterday, and all face two identical loops of three gravel speed tests over narrow roads south-west of the rally base in Olbia. It is the longest day of the event with 134.60km of action.

Early light rain cleared and the special stages were essentially dry, ensuring that BP Ford Abu Dhabi World Rally Team drivers Mikko Hirvonen and Jarmo Lehtinen and team-mates Jari-Matti Latvala and Miikka Anttila were in the perfect road positions to mount an attack through the opening loop in their Focus RS World Rally Cars.

With the loose gravel swept from the roads by the cars ahead, the Finnish pairings set a blistering pace, as Latvala won all three stages and Hirvonen claimed second on each. Hirvonen, fourth overnight, powered into second with Latvala charging up the order from seventh into third. Such was Latvala's speed that the 23-year-old recovered 36.7sec from leader Sébastien Loeb in 67.30km of competition.

"I looked at the data from my car last night and decided not to make any changes to the set-up," said 27-year-old Hirvonen. "Everything feels the same as yesterday but I'm setting much better times. Maybe my bad road position yesterday was a bigger issue than we originally thought. Second is good but Jari-Matti is also attacking hard and there will be a big fight this afternoon."

Latvala admitted he was surprised to be back in a podium position. "I attacked at 110 per cent on the first stage but before the next test we had a think about my pace and I eased back a little," said Latvala. "After my puncture yesterday, I didn't expect to be in the top three today. I have a great road position and that made a big difference this morning. I'll try to catch Mikko this afternoon."

Abu Dhabi's Khalid Al Qassimi and Michael Orr restarted under SupeRally rules in 33rd place after retiring yesterday when they went off the road in their Focus RS. They climbed to 24th this morning. "I made a couple of small changes after going off yesterday but in some of the fast sections the car is still not stable," said Al Qassimi. "Trying to find the right pace is difficult and I had a small spin on the first stage when I missed a corner. I'm trying different techniques to generate more speed in the fast sections but I've never driven on this surface and getting the feeling and confidence isn't easy."

### Leaderboard after stage 9 of 20

1. S Loeb/D Elena	FRA	Citroen C4	2hr 16min 01.7sec
2. M Hirvonen/J Lehtinen	FIN	Ford Focus RS	2hr 16min 43.7sec
3. J-M Latvala/M Anttila	FIN	Ford Focus RS	2hr 16min 56.1sec
4. D Sordo/M Marti	ESP	Citroen C4	2hr 16min 57.5sec
5. G Galli/G Bernacchini	ITA	Ford Focus RS	2hr 17min 16.9sec
6. C Atkinson/S Prévot	AUS	Subaru Impreza	2hr 17min 57.2sec
7. H Solberg/C Menkerud	NOR	Ford Focus RS	2hr 19min 20.0sec
8. U Aava/K Sikk	EST	Citroen C4	2hr 19min 26.1sec
9. T Gardemeister/T Tuominen	FIN	Suzuki SX4	2hr 20min 13.5sec
10 P-G Andersson/J Andersson	SWE	Suzuki SX4	2hr 20min 14.4sec