

Rally Mexico – after stage 11, Derramadero 1

Thirty-three of the original 39 starters departed León this morning under cloudless skies for the second day of this third round of the FIA World Rally Championship. Nine of those are competing under SupeRally rules after retiring yesterday and all face another 157.32km of competition during today's longest leg of the three-day event. Two identical loops of three speed tests north and east of the city test competitors before two further passes over the super special stage on the edge of León tonight.

Overnight leaders Jari-Matti Latvala and Miikka Anttila had the dubious privilege of being first in the start order in their Ford Focus RS World Rally Car. It meant the 22-year-old Finnish driver had to cope with the same slippery loose stones on the road surface that hampered BP Ford Abu Dhabi World Rally Team colleagues Mikko Hirvonen and Jarmo Lehtinen in the same position yesterday.

Latvala's disadvantage was typified on the opening 29.90km Ibarra special stage when he was only sixth fastest, 9.5sec behind closest challenger Sébastien Loeb, and the margin between the two on the leaderboard closed to just 0.1sec. Latvala got to grips with his start position on the following 23.27km Duarte test and was third fastest before ending the morning with fourth through the 23.28km Derramadero. He returned to service 5.8sec behind the Frenchman.

"The first stage was slippery and I couldn't find the right way to drive," he said. "I understand how difficult it was for Mikko yesterday. I was cleaning the corners and that's the difference between first in the start order and second, where I was yesterday. There were many different grip levels on the loose stones and it was hard for braking. In the final stage I did everything I could, and maybe too much, because I had a close escape after a crest when the car was totally off the road. I think I have to cool down a bit now and drive more cleanly. I would like to keep the gap to Loeb like this because second in the start order tomorrow would be better for me with less gravel on the surface."

Hirvonen climbed from an overnight fifth into fourth and while the 27-year-old Finn was happier, he felt there was more to come. "I made some small changes last night and the car isn't sliding as much but I'm driving too cautiously," he said. "It's better but I don't deserve a 'well done' yet. It's better not being first on the road but they're not cleaning as much as I thought. I started this morning with the intention of driving flat out and while I'm driving fast, improvements are needed. I'm at the same pace as last year and it's not enough. I want to find more speed and try to catch Chris Atkinson in third."

Leaderboard after stage 11 of 20

1. S Loeb/D Elena	FRA	Citroen C4	2hr 14min 48.6sec
2. J-M Latvala/M Anttila	FIN	Ford Focus RS	2hr 14min 54.4sec
3. C Atkinson/S Prévot	AUS	Subaru Impreza	2hr 15min 16.8sec
4. M Hirvonen/J Lehtinen	FIN	Ford Focus RS	2hr 16min 00.4sec
5. H Solberg/C Menkerud	NOR	Ford Focus RS	2hr 18min 23.6sec
6. M Wilson/S Martin	GBR	Ford Focus RS	2hr 19min 18.0sec
7. P Solberg/P Mills	NOR	Subaru Impreza	2hr 24min 58.6sec
8. R Trivino/C Salom	MEX	Peugeot 206	2hr 28min 54.7sec
9. F Villagra/J Perez Companc	ARG	Ford Focus RS	2hr 30min 15.2sec
10 S Ogier/J Ingrassia	FRA	Citroen C2	2hr 30min 48.0sec