



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

## 2021 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP CROATIA RALLY

**Pre-event FIA Press Conference**  
**April 22, 2021**

**Present:**

Kalle Rovannerä (FIN) – Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT  
Craig Breen (IRL) – Hyundai Shell Mobis World Rally Team  
Adrien Fourmaux (FRA) – M-Sport Ford World Rally Team  
Pierre-Louis Loubet (FRA) – Hyundai 2C Competition

**Q:**

Kalle, we're going to start with you as championship leader heading into the Croatia Rally. Big event for everyone, it's a brand-new challenge out there. What can you say from what you've seen of the roads out there on the recce?

**KR:**

The rally is new for everybody and it's nice to be starting first car on the road on a Tarmac event. But it looks like the conditions are going to be really tricky on the stages. The stages are mainly quite technical and fast all the time. The condition is quite good in some places but then some places when it was raining before the recce there was a lot of mud and dirt on the road so it won't be so easy.

**Q:**

Is it like a gravel rally in parts or is it not that bad?

**KR:**

Some parts on Friday look like it's not going to help us so much to be the first car. There are some stages in parts that are full mud after the recce and those parts will not be a big benefit for us but hopefully in some places it can help us also.

**Q:**

Do you feel any different being the championship leader or do you just feel like the normal Kalle Rovannerä?

**KR:**

Not really, it is not changing anything for me. We are just first car on the road on Friday and that's it, nothing else for me.

**Q:**

Craig, let's turn to you, you have of course won a championship on Tarmac in Ireland, the Irish Tarmac Rally Championship. How much do the roads here compare to what you've experienced at home, any similarities at all?

**CB:**

Everyone has been saying the same thing that it looks like home. Back home is very bumpy, obviously, lots of jumps and crests and things. Not to knock the Croatians for building bad roads but the roads [back home] are built quite well but here they're broken and you have a lot

of gravel coming through in places, a lot of mud on the side of the road so it's a little bit different as we'll find out from Bobby Willis if we get the rally to go back to Ireland. Here it's much more challenging I have to say. The possibility of having mud on the road is around every corner. The weather conditions... it's obviously very unstable what it's going to do in the next 24 hours and it's going to be not so much of a racers' rally but if you can be clever and keep your nose clean it will be very important.

**Q:**

We're seeing jumps on a Tarmac event here, which is slightly odd, but what are they like?

**CB:**

We should have more jumps on a Tarmac rally! It's different I have to say. From that side it's something I can take from back home to be able to jump the car correctly on Tarmac because you have to be a lot more precise than you would be on gravel. Obviously the on gravel you have a little bit of a window, a little bit of leverage to let the car move left or right. But on Tarmac if you are landing after a jump onto a narrow road if you don't have the car placed exactly where it should be you're in trouble. Ultimately, I prefer it, I like the feeling of the car jumping on gravel, I really like this sort of rhythm of the roads when you have this undulating crests and jumps. But when you add in the factor of the mud and, I suppose this lack of abrasive stone on the Tarmac, it's quite a bit more challenging.

**Q:**

Two events back-to-back for you, we also saw you on Arctic Rally Finland and you've also just done Rallye Sanremo, are you feeling fresh and fully fit to go?

**CB:**

It's nice, it's the first back-to-back rally I've done in the world championship since 2018 so it's a welcome return in that regard. But the event in Sanremo was nice and to get another win there was nice but, honestly, it's a massive step every time you get into a World Rally Car. My last reference was the last stage on Sanremo in the R5 car and straight into shakedown this morning and I have to say the first couple of ks of the first run it does open your eyes because there's really not a lot of comparison between the two cars. But it's good to get kilometres behind the wheel of a rally car and it's nice to get a victory here and there but it's a different level here.

**Q:**

Turning to Adrien Fourmaux, your first WRC event in a World Rally Car. Are excited are you by this big step up and the challenge ahead?

**AF:**

Really excited to be honest because it's a new rally for everybody but it's also a new car for me so it will be a big challenge, especially with my pacenotes. That's the most challenging thing to do to use my pacenotes from the R5 to the WRC. But I'm quite confident that I will be able to improve my pace with my pacenotes so we will see. I am really looking forward to starting tomorrow morning.

**Q:**

What did it feel like on shakedown this morning because everything is so much quicker in a World Rally Car?

**AF:**

It was just fun. I was enjoying all the corners, you have everything, power, brakes, aero is another world compared to the R5. It's so enjoyable to drive and the feeling to drive inside. It's still a Fiesta but I can feel the difference of the speed."

**Q:**

Four years ago you began your career and here you are in a World Rally Car. What kind of pressure do you feel or do you not feel pressure at this time?

**AF:**

It don't give me pressure. Four years is quite early and I can be proud and happy to do that in only four years. I can just want to enjoy and I need to take time to learn so I don't want to push too hard at the beginning.

**Q:**

Turning to Pierre-Louis Loubet, what did you think of the stages from the recce, were you surprised at the stages?

**P-LL:**

It will be tricky like everybody said. It will be a new one for everybody but still you have some mud everywhere on the Tarmac and at sometimes in some places it's really hard to know how that will be so I am looking forward and I hope it will be okay for us, even if our road position is not the perfect one for the first day. It will be a super-long rally and it will be important to be clever and try to be here on Sunday.

**Q:**

The weather forecast is for sunshine for all of the rally days but maybe we will see a bit of rain tonight. Do you think we will see some interesting tyre tactics out there?

**P-LL:**

That does depend. If it's like this, no, but if tonight we will have some rain then tomorrow morning it will be tough to know so we will see.

**Q:**

Looking at all three days of the rally, which one is going to be the most challenging?

**P-LL:**

All three days are difficult. Every day you have some very difficult stages. Even the last one, the Power Stage, was very difficult during the recce. Every stage are very, very difficult and you need to have very good pacenotes. Like I said, every day are difficult.

### **Question from the floor**

**Fabrice Fosset, L'Equipe (FRA)**

**Q:**

What did you do during the long break and did you ever get bored?

**KR:**

Yeah, for sure I have been sometimes but, actually, I did not do anything special, normal training. For sure we had good time to prepare for this rally with a long break, but for sure I was just waiting for this event to start and driving with my simulator sometimes, but that's it.

### **FIA WRC2 CHAMPIONSHIP**

**Present:**

Nikolay Gryazin (RAF) – Movisport

Mads Østberg (NOR) – TRT World Rally Team

Tom Kristensson (SWE) – M-Sport Ford World Rally Team

**Q:**

We're going to start with our defending WRC2 champion Mads Østberg, it's great to see you back behind the wheel of a rally car because for the last two events you've been our expert commentator on All Live, you've been doing the media world but now it's back to the driving world. Is it good to be back?

**MØ:**

Yeah it is good to be back and of course I miss spending time with you (Rebecca Williams, press conference host). But it's good to be back behind wheel again. It feels almost half a year

now since I did a WRC event. It's one of the biggest breaks I've ever had. But it's really good to be back and good to be here in a new event and find some new roads and really unique roads, it's a nice thing.

**Q:**

The roads seem like a mixture of lots of different events Mads, tell us what you think?

**MØ:**

It seems like we always have to try compare it to something to bring some of the experience we have from the past but, I don't know, I haven't been able to compare it to anything. It looks like a mix of so many things. But what I can say is the stages are absolutely amazing. Half of the rally is on a bit more like main roads, quite wide, a little bit more like Monte-Carlo maybe but with lower grip. Then you have some special stages which is like in the fields, in forests between houses that are really fast, narrow and jumpy. It's just really spectacular in my mind. Trying to switch your head between the two types of roads can be very hard.

**Q:**

This is your first event of the season but on the last two events how much have you been watching your rivals to see what their strengths are?

**MØ:**

Well, I'm obviously trying to pick up as much as possible and I'm getting into the rallies now when the others have already started. But everyone has had some strong and some weak sides. Obviously, this is a new event. Like we saw in Arctic as well that was a new rally and like we saw it suits some drivers but not others. I don't know if we can learn anything from the previous rallies other than if you want to win you need to be on it and that's what we're trying to do. I'll be on it!

**Q:**

Turning to Nikolay Gryazin, I think this is your sixth event you've done in 2021 so you must be at one with the Volkswagen Polo now?

**NG:**

First of all, I want to say hello to everyone who is watching. For sure I start to feel the car really nice because we did some races and a test programme also. But compared to the previous years when I drove the Škoda even more but with the COVID it's not easy to make a schedule and things can happen to stop you from going to a rally. All the time you are like moving in the waves, trying to find where you can go and it's nice to manage it.

**Q:**

You were in action on the same event as Mads at the weekend in Hungary. Was that good preparation for here?

**NG:**

The roads were not so similar but we saw that fast guys are coming there too so we decided to go there and see our pace. It was nice to have some fight and it was nice to drive there as preparation for this race.

**Q:**

What's possible to achieve here?

**NG:**

We will see if there are no mistakes and try to have a good pace. If those things can be good then the result will happen.

**Q:**

Let's turn to Tom Kristensson, the Junior WRC champion from last season and we welcome you into WRC2. This must be an exciting experience right now?

**TK:**

Definitely! I am so, so happy and proud to be able to be here and it's a huge mission to take. I am learning so much the last weekends when I am doing testing and trying to get into the car and just to be able to start the season was a lot of hard work. I think I was counting I was sleeping eight hours all week after winning the Junior title. It was trying to figure it out, how I would do it and manage this big adventure. Finally, we are here, finally we are going to start and it feels really good working extremely good with M-Sport, the team, the car is working really nice and I'm enjoying every single minute that I'm sitting in the car so it will be really nice to do this now.

**Q:**

Obviously, it's a step up to WRC2 so how did the car feel in shakedown this morning?

**TK:**

Of course, it's a massive step. The good thing is I have been able to do some driving with the Rally3, which basically is also a four-wheel-drive car and that make it a little bit easier to take the step up to a Rally2 car. But for sure it's a massive thing to get into. The main thing is to get into the braking points and to be able to figure it out, how the car is working and so on. But as I said, I just love to drive it and there is a lot of opportunity, so I am working with that and it's really nice.

**Q:**

What are you hoping to achieve this weekend? Are you putting any pressure on yourself or just seeing how it comes?

**TK:**

No for sure, no pressure. No pressure from outside and now pressure on myself. I'm here to enjoy the ride and just to be here is unbelievable, it shouldn't happen to be honest. But I am here now and I'm enjoying it so much just to be able to compete with these kind of guys and also doing a good pace. It feels really good and I'm really looking forward for the rally and to see what it can be like. It's just a massive thanks for everybody that makes this possible.

### **Questions from the floor**

#### **Bo Christer Bofeldt, Worldrally.se (SWE)**

**Q:**

How was shakedown and how was the feeling with the car?

**TK:**

The car is working really good and for sure the biggest thing for me is to get into how the car is working if we're changing any set-up, changing the tyres. I have only driven the car properly three times now so I need some more time to get into it. But for sure I really enjoy it.

### **FIA WRC3 CHAMPIONSHIP & GUEST DRIVER**

**Present:**

Yohan Rossel (FRA)

Kajetan Kajetanowicz (POL)

Chris Ingram (GBR)

Viliam Prodan (HRV) - non-priority guest driver

**Q:**

We're going to start with Yohan, it's good to see you and it's been a good start to the season for you of course in WRC3 after Monte-Carlo. How confident are you coming to Croatia that you can repeat that?

**YR:**

I am confident but when I see the stages it's not an easy challenge. I am happy to be the leader in the championship, but this rally is very tricky condition and we will see. The level is high and I am happy to be here with Citroën and Saintéloc. It's our second round so we will see.

**Q:**

It is going to be a challenge because it's a new event but what have you been doing to get prepared for it?

**YR:**

Just before the rally only test, two days, and I look at the video of the stages. With the COVID I don't run in the French championship but for everybody it's the same. My car is good, my team is good and preparing very well for the rally and it's good to be here.

**Q:**

From the recce, is the amount of cutting more than you expected?

**YR:**

Yeah, it's very, very challenging. I don't have a gravel crew and it's very difficult for a driver to go on the stage without the information. But it's the same for everybody. We will see tomorrow and I need to not do a mistake and we will see after three days.

**Q:**

Turning to Chris Ingram, it's fantastic to see you here in WRC3, what made you chose this championship, I now you've put a huge amount of effort to be here?

**CI:**

It's a dream come true to be here, honestly, even to be sat next to legends like Kajto [Kajetanowicz] and getting interviewed by you is honestly a dream come true. I am so grateful. I've had so much experience in the ERC and it's been a great school but it's time to make the next step now and aim high, compete in WRC3 this year and WRC2 next year. We will do our very best. I've got a lot to learn but I'm hungry for it.

**Q:**

What have you been doing to get ready for this event and what were your thoughts of the stages when you saw them on the recce?

**CI:**

We've done a bit of testing, not as much as I would like and I'm a bit rusty still. I'm going to try to get into it on day one. My aim is to try to finish the rally and then build on that. From what I've seen on the recce they are some of the best Tarmac stages I've ever seen. I feel really positive about it and I just can't wait to drive them. They're way better than expected.

**Q:**

It's a great amount of competition in WRC3 and WRC2 as well. What's your strategy going to be this weekend?

**CI:**

I just want to finish and do my best. If I can do that I know I will get a good result as well.

**Q:**

Turning to Kajetan Kajetanowicz, tell us about your thoughts of the stages because you have a huge amount of Tarmac experience from around the world?

**KK:**

It's a big word huge experience but in my opinion Polish stages are similar in some parts if we compare Croatia but only in some parts because we have narrow roads with big cuts with many crests but not like that slippery. It's very slippery, like on ice. If it's damp or dry it's slippery Tarmac and it's going to be a big challenge. It's going to be difficult without a gravel crew because we have no information how it will be now, how it will be tomorrow, Saturday and

Sunday. It's a big challenge but I'm waiting for that, I've been waiting from Rally Monza so I am ready.

**Q:**

How much testing have you been able to do in preparation for this?

**KK:**

I did something about 200 kilometres but only on wet roads. We had a good set-up but on wet roads. We will see. It's not the first time this situation for me and I hope I can find the rhythm on dry Tarmac.

**Q:**

When you have such great rivals around you how much are you looking at them during the weekend or do you focus on your own rally?

**KK:**

I have big respect to my rivals and it's a big pleasure to be here with them. WRC3 is very strong, we showed that in the last two years. Chris, do you remember we did a test in ERC in the Azores Rallye?

**CI:**

I didn't have my helmet so Kajto leant me his helmet.

**KK:**

That was many years ago and it's a big pleasure to be here with Chris because he's a big talent and I keep my fingers crossed for him. But for this rally I want to focus on my job because it's a very big rally. I don't want to give my time to my rivals, if you know what I mean.

**Q:**

Finally let's go to Viliam Prodan, it's great to be here in your country for the first WRC event. What does that mean to you and how special is that?

**VP:**

Finally, finally! It's a big experience for us and all of Croatia. It's something new and we are happy because WRC is here. For us I hope the race will be good. It's very difficult special stages, difficult rally, our second experience this year of the WRC after Monte-Carlo. After 15 years Croatia has a crew in WRC, Croatia is a small, small rally country.

**Q:**

Monte-Carlo was your first experience in the WRC, what was that like?

**VP:**

Difficult, difficult but a big experience.

**Q:**

You more than anyone will know what we can expect out there this weekend so what do you think?

**VP:**

I don't know. I'm from Croatia and I've been driving for many years in the Croatian championship. But for us all the special stages are completely new. We are experienced only on the special stages of Sunday. The other special stages are completely new.

**Q:**

There is a little rumour that on the Power Stage there is a jump named after you because you had a crash on it. Is this correct?

**VP:**

Yes, in 2012 I had a big crash there and they named it Viliam.

**Q:**

What are you hoping for this weekend in terms of a result?

**VP:**

I don't know if we can be near the Juniors, I don't know, we will look.

## **FIA JUNIOR WRC CHAMPIONSHIP**

**Present:**

Martin Koči (SVK)

Raul Badiu (ROM)

William Creighton (IRL)

**Q:**

Let's start with William Creighton, welcome to the Junior WRC, it's your first year in the championship so how are you feeling, excited? Nervous?

**WC:**

Yeah, a little bit of both. Definitely excited, it's good to be part of the championship. I'm really looking forward to getting going. It's a new event for everybody so a really tricky event. But we had a good recce. I'm just super-excited to be here. We're here representing the Motorsport Ireland Rally Academy, which is nice. Everybody is following our progress back home so hopefully we can have an enjoyable rally.

**Q:**

How much is the experience from back home going to help you this weekend?

**WC:**

We've done quite a lot of competition on Tarmac and that will help this weekend. The Tarmac back home is a bit more abrasive I think, a lot more grip. Here it's quite tricky with a lot of cuts and mud will be dragged from one corner to the next. It's definitely going to be a tricky rally and our main aim is to get to the finish line and do our own race and see how we get on.

**Q:**

As well as Tarmac, you have experience on gravel from back home. Are you in with a shot of the title, do you have a chance do you think or are you not aiming that high in your first year?

**WC:**

I have no expectations, I'm just going to try to focus on my own rally, take it stage by stage and see how we go. It's a difficult championship, anything can happen and we can't set our expectations too high. We'll just see how it goes and try to improve stage by stage.

**Q:**

Turning to Raul Badiu, this is possibly your last year in the Junior WRC because you're getting a little too old to enter again. Does that put any extra pressure on your shoulders?

**RB:**

For sure I am here to win but it's the same for everybody. The Croatia Rally is where I can try a few things on a few sections of the stages. But as my colleague said previously it is incredibly tricky rally where even if you are going very carefully you can still make a mistake and lose a lot of time.

**Q:**

How difficult are the roads out there, did you expect it to be as challenging as it is before you got here?

**RB:**

No! I have seen the onboards that the organisers put on the internet and the roads seem to be quite fast and flowing. But I was already among the first cars onto the road in the recce and I already found a lot of mud. It's a big challenge for sure. There are sections similar to Romania,



especially the profile but in Romania we have rocks pretty much next to the stages so we don't have so many cuts and so much mud.

**Q:**

Do you feel a win is possible this weekend?

I don't think too much. I have my strategy, I will choose my battles on the stages where I can push hard. On the tricky stages I will go as quickly as I can and will see at the end of the stage if it's good enough or not. We will adjust during the rally. It would have been nice to have more kilometres before the rally, we only had 10 kilometres of testing on Sunday and then we had a technical issue. But we found pretty rapidly our speed. It's already a big thing to be here in the press conference but I aim to be at the end of the rally.

**Q:**

Turning to Martin Koči, welcome back to the JWRC and the WRC itself. We've seen you compete many times over the years so what's made you come back?

**MK:**

First of all, thank you for the warm welcome. I'm super-happy to be here. I've been in this championship before and I still want to fight for the better positions as we got in the past. I have done the last three seasons in the national championship, which was amazing for the experience, but to compete in a world level it's something for me and something I really enjoy and that's why we are here.

**Q:**

Have you competed on any roads that are similar to the roads here in Croatia?

**MK:**

From what I have seen on the recce, the grip here is so specific that it's very hard to say if anybody had some experience of something similar. Similar yes, but nothing like this exactly.

**Q:**

What's the hope for this weekend and for the championship in general?

**MK:**

We will try to do the best we can. We have our hopes and goals, but I don't think about that too much.

**Q:**

What's it like to be back in the JWRC, it's a great championship with lots of camaraderie? You've been doing lots of training in the last few days so is it good to be back in the fold?

**MK:**

It's like coming back to school but in a good way, I enjoy.