FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

**2022 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP**

**CROATIA RALLY**

Pre-event Press Conference

21 April 2022

**FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP**

**Present:**

Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT – Kalle Rovanperä (FIN)

Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT – Ott Tänak (EST)

M-Sport Ford WRT – Gus Greensmith (GBR)

M-Sport Ford WRT – Pierre-Louis Loubet (FRA)

**Q:**

Kalle, you lead the championship as we head into Rally Croatia. Last year you were not able to get as much experience of this event as you would have liked after the early retirement. Will you be able to get a little further than last year and are you ready for competition?

**KR:**

“Yeah, I of course feel good. The break has been good, nice to have a bit of holiday and hopefully we are much more prepared than last year.”

**Q:**

Do you think it will be a disadvantage not having much experience of the stages in competition?

**KR:**

“Yeah, I think so. Many of the stages are from last year and the guys did all of them, and actually I didn’t do any of them. So yeah, I think it’s going to be quite a big challenge. Hearing all the comments from last year and that the grip changes are big, with a lot of slippy places, for sure they know them a bit better than me.”

**Q:**

You have recently completed the team test and the Pirelli development test. What did you learn from both?

**KR:**

“It was nice to test some other tyres also because it was not the same tyre we use here, so in that sense it was not so much testing for here, but it was good to drive anywhere in this moment and have a different day of testing.”

**Q:**

Will we see that wet weather tyre being used tomorrow with the rain that’s forecast, do you think?

**KR:**

“It is not decided which we will take, but it seems the weather is going to be really tricky and I think the tyre choice will be really hard to get right.”

**Q:**

Ott, you have good experience from last year where you came fourth. Give me a memory of Croatia last year, how did you find the stages?

**OT:**

“Actually, the characteristic is really good for a Tarmac. We’ve had many Tarmac rallies before, Corsica and Catalunya are the most spectacular ones. This one is a bit like the Finnish rally: up and down, a lot of crests and jumps. For Tarmac it’s not so difficult and it’s quite special. The material of the Tarmac is quite different as well to other Tarmac rallies we’ve done, so the grip is first of all really changeable, but secondly in general low and in some places really low. With all this to prepare it’s quite a big challenge.”

**Q:**

How much cutting will we see tomorrow and how messy could it get if it does rain?

**OT:**

“It’s a big chance it will get very messy. The stages are still quite a lot in the forests, so there are a lot of cuts. More of less every corner.”

**Q:**

A difficult start to the season for you, is the pressure now on to score good points here?

**OT:**

“It’s difficult to say about pressure, but the last couple of years have been quite difficult and now this year a fresh start with the new generation has been tricky. Different things have happened, maybe some of them out of our hands. It’s a bit tough, but anyway it’s still a long year, many things can happen and we just try to do as well as we can and the rest we will see.”

**Q:**

Gus, we’ve had two events now with hybrid technology, how do you feel it’s going so far? Have you fully adapted to this new way of competition?

**GG:**

“Yeah, you understand how it’s working. Ott had the misfortune in Sweden and in both rallies I’ve had problems with the hybrid. It can end up costing you and causing quite a lot of problems, but when it’s working well it’s very enjoyable to drive.”

**Q:**

You picked up your first stage win at Monte and seem at home on a Tarmac surface. Ott mentioned it’s a bit like Finland. Could this be a good combination for you?

**GG:**

“Yeah, I really enjoy Croatia. The stages are beautiful to drive, but I think the determining factor this weekend will be the conditions and even tomorrow we’re pretty sure it’s going to be wet. But even if it dries on Saturday the cuts are still going to be wet, so it could be just as tricky on Saturday as well.”

**Q:**

We were talking about hybrid strategy and you said maybe there’s no room for it when it’s wet out there. Describe what you meant by that.

**GG:**

“It’s fast enough to use the hybrid, but using and not wasting it with wheelspin will be key, not giving away a massive amount of time with wheelspin. It depends on the grip levels, sometimes it’s very high here in Croatia, sometimes it’s extremely low.”

**Q:**

What are you hoping to achieve out there this weekend?

**GG:**

“For once I’ve got a pretty good road position so making the most of not so much mud on the road will be a good start.”

**Q:**

Pierre-Louis, welcome back to the championship! Brand new team and car for the 2022 season, firstly how is the Puma feeling?

**PL:**

“First of all I am very happy to be back in rallying after a long stop. We did some testing and the feeling with the car was nice and this morning everything was going well, so I hope we will find this feeling back tomorrow.”

**Q:**

You were also the course car at the South Belgian Rally. Did that give you more of a feeling and understanding of the car?

**PL:**

“Yeah, for sure it was important because it was not possible to do some tests with the car. It was important for us to understand the and in Belgium the grip was very high, so a bit different from here .But to understand the car it was a good start.”

**Q:**

You are in Loeb’s Monte winning car, you used his recce car and you have his engineer this weekend! Can you bring some Loeb magic to the stages?!

**PL:**

“I have to do well for sure. It’s great to have all these people behind me, to work with. Normally with a car like that he would be flying so hopefully we will do the same.”

**Q:**

And co-driver-wise, Vincent is back alongside you, yes?

**PL:**

“Yes, it was really important to find the confidence and to have such a good co-driver. I’m very happy to see him back with me.

**Q:**

And what have the team said, what’s the plan of attack?

**PL:**

“Last year the biggest issue was the micro systems. It will be important to start from zero, to make the confidence the maximum during the season, to prove my potential step by step without some mistakes like last year.”

**Questions from the floor:**

Question to Ott. After Monte Carlo you developed the car. What have you changed on the car and have you homologated new parts?

**OT:**

“I was actually sitting at home for two months and I homologated nothing. It’s all out of my hands. So far nothing new has been homologated. On the Monte we had quite a lot of troubles. The main priority has been to get reliability right and the next steps will come from there.”

You showed good pace in the shakedown so will we see a consistent attack?

**OT:**

“I think as we discussed before, first of all the weather will be quite key and normally if it is dirty like this and wet as well it can get quite muddy. Tomorrow it will be a bit tough to challenge for first place. The main priority will be to stay in the game and we’ll see after that.”

Question for Kalle, is it an advantage for you that Ogier and Loeb aren’t here? Last year you weren’t so lucky, but this year you have the biggest advantage, right?

**KR:**

“Yeah, for sure it will be good for us tomorrow to be the first car on the road. If it’s raining it should be good. So in that sense hopefully we can start well and the rest of the guys will be pushing hard as well and I will try to keep up with them.”

**FIA WRC2 CHAMPIONSHIP**

**Present:**

Yacco ACCR Team – Erik Cais (CZE)

Mikołaj Marczyk – Mikołaj Marczyk (POL)

Niko Pulić – Niko Pulić (HRV)

**Q:**

Erik, we saw you at Rallye Monte Carlo this year where you achieved a great result. What are your thoughts on the stages here at Rally Croatia?

**EC:**

“First of all I don’t know what to expect because it’s different to what I know from the Czech Republic. The Tarmac is completely different. We need to see how it will be because on the recce it was wet and the recce car was sideways… It was quite interesting. But after Monte Carlo for sure I want to score good points so we need to think about it and don’t overcook the start.”

**Q:**

As the WRC drivers said the weather will be key. Last year it was difficult in the dry. Put some rain on to these stage and it will be very tricky. But you have great experience on various Tarmacs, so you should be fine, yes?

**EC:**

“Yes, especially when you are 22! No just kidding. I really like the wet because you need to feel the car and this is what I like. Let’s see here. It’s more difficult also with the Tarmac.”

**Q:**

How was shakedown this morning?

**EC:**

“For me, amazing. If you look for the onboard from shakedown every 50 metres there was a Czech flag. There’s a million people from my country!

**Q:**

Does that support help?

**EC:**

“50-50 because first of all you get the confidence because you know there are loads of people watching, but my job is to do the best time as possible and I need to focus for that.”

**Q:**

Miko, you make your debut into the WRC this weekend, welcome! How are you feeling ahead of starting Rally Croatia?

**MM:**

“Good afternoon, hello everyone. It’s really nice to be hear after one and a half seasons in the European Rally Championship we have decided to come here, develop more and improve. It’s important for us. This Croatia event will be tricky regarding the surface but also with the weather changing – wet conditions, or mixed or dry. But I’m happy. I know some guys, like Eric from ERC and I am happy we will compete with the best WRC2 drivers because at this level is a little bit higher and more consistent than the ERC. But I also hope we will use some experience from ERC because my development over these past one and a half years was big and I would like to make the next step. This is my target.”

**Q:**

I believe Mads Ostberg has been helping you to prepare? Tell us a little about that….

**MM:**

“I’m trying all the time to get some good information from the best rally drivers. At the start it was easy because I had some experienced drivers in the Polish championship, but then we go to the ERC and now make the next step and now it’s much harder to find someone who knows the right technique, why someone is fast and what is best and good. Mads is a factory driver, he won last year here in Croatia. We had contact from Rally Hungary in 2021 because we competed against each other. On some stages we had some small competition and I just asked in October last year in Hungary if it was possible to get his number. We had some contact and some coaching. Before Croatia we had contact and talked to each other on video. He showed me how he prepares for rallies and told me crucial points for Croatia. We worked on similar things like pacenotes, the settings of the car and of course it’s a lot of detailed notes for me, but it’s not easy to use it after two or three days. It’s a process and I will use it throughout the whole season. But I’m happy that he helped with the test and also he checked some video from the recce. This is something special for me but I’m not sure I can use all this experience on this rally.

**Q:**

Yes, it all relies on you and I’m sure you will be checking the times of other drivers with more experience than you of WRC2.

**MM:**

“Yes, I like that, it’s great fun and it’s a great pleasure to be on the finish line checking the times of the top young guys in the WRC. I will get a lot of information from this rally I’m sure because first we do the recce and I hope all of the rally. Then there is WRC+ where I can really improve and compare. That was like this in ERC in 2020. I used some pacenotes from Oliver Solberg and we go through the stages and analysis how he is looking through the stages. I will develop step by step.

**Q:**

Niko, your home WRC event which must feel special and I believe this will be the last event of your competitive career? What are your hopes for this event?

**NP:**

“First and foremost I’d like to express my hope that this is perhaps not my last major event. But I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the WRC, the promoter, for allowing Croatia to host this event. It’s a great stage for everyone to see this country and what it has to offer. My career spans 40 years and it is the highest level a driver can achieve to finish his career on this stage. Rallying is perhaps not my first category. I’m more of a hillclimb person and have won three European championships in that sport. But moving forward to Sunday and see how it ends and it is a great pleasure to be here.

**Q:**

How special is it to compete in a WRC event in your home country?

**NP:**

“I used to watch WRC on TV and not a lot of time has passed and now I find myself driving in it. Especially in my home country it’s definitely a special feeling. My aim this weekend is just to cross the finish line. We will see what will happen on Sunday. But to be among all the greats of this sport, a lot of people have done great things, it’s an honour. After 40 years of various categories, of F3 and of hillclimbs, I’m happy to say it’s enough.

**Questions from the floor:**

Niko, how special will this final rally be and will there be a party afterwards?

**NP:**

“One mark of a great athlete is to recognize when another is better than you and congratulate them. But the second great mark of a great athlete is to be able to look at yourself in the mirror and realise when it’s time to be finished. After 40 years this is my last major event, I will drive in three more hillclimb races – one in Portugal, one in France and one in Czech Republic – and then I want to dedicate my time to helping the younger generation of the sport and help them get better.”

**FIA WRC3 CHAMPIONSHIP / FIA JUNIOR WRC CHAMPIONSHIP**

**Present:**

Jon Armstrong (GBR) – Junior Championship

Jean-Baptiste Franceschi (FRA) – Junior Championship

Ivica Siladic (HRV) – Open Championship

**Q:**

Jon, your season got off to a great start in Sweden with a win and of course you won here last year in the Junior category. You are the man to beat this weekend!

**JA:**

“Yes, I guess on paper it seems that way, but Croatia is a very difficult rally. The stages are demanding and there are a lot of different types of surfaces and grip levels. Also all the cutting. It’s difficult to follow your mind on last year because when you get there the conditions could be different. For sure, last year went pretty well on the strategy I had. To be honest a similar strategy this year will be fine, stay out of trouble and then try and pick up as many points as possible that will be more than good enough. Of course to win the rally would be nice but there’s lot of great drivers who maybe will go a bit crazier than I will. Saying that, when I put my helmet on and get in a good rhythm I can also go pretty crazy! We’ll see.

**Q:**

A lot of people are going to look at you, a guy from Northern Ireland, and think this is going to be his territory. Is it? How may rallies have you done on really wet Tarmac?

**JA:**

“It’s been a while, for sure. I remember doing the Ulster Rally in 2013, that was wet on the first day. So I’ve got some experience. We feel quite comfortable but the Tarmac here is quite different. Some of it is like ice when it’s dry, so if it is wet tomorrow there could be some surprises on grip level. We’ll see what happens. It’s just a matter of trying to get confidence with the car and the conditions and try to keep a rhythm. I’m not feeling any pressure to do any special performance, I’ll focus on myself and try to do the best job I can.”

**Q:**

Some alterations to the route this year and the weather could be a little different - what are your thoughts heading in?

**JA:**

“The stages are very good and it’s easier come back because of course we know a bit more what to expect from the stages and how to drive them to get the most pace. The new stages are a little bit different. There’s a lot of variation, both of them have very fast wide roads and then narrow sections as well so they are almost like two stages in one. They could be quite demanding and when you go from a skinny road to a big road you need to quickly switch your brain and figure out how to drive on them. It should be really good. The stage that’s really far away is Patak (??) is very narrow at the beginning and a bit like Monte Carlo, it should be quite interesting.”

**Q:**

JB, you were the FIA ERC Junior champion from 2021 and this event marks the first of your prize package from that result. Firstly, how are you feeling after a difficult spell last year when you were seriously injured in a huge accident?

**JB:**

“I feel like new now. Of course it was like a nightmare but now it is the past and I really want to focus myself on this season now and make an amazing season as well in the ERC. So let’s start this weekend in Croatia and see what we can do.”

**Q:**

You have good experience on Tarmac. How successful do you think you can be this weekend?

**JB:**

“It’s difficult to say because of course the weather will be a point to take. Of course I love Tarmac, I love this kind of road. But here there are a lot of different sections, so we will see. For sure it will not be easy especially if the rain is coming.”

**Q:**

What have you been doing to prepare yourself for this event?

**JB:**

“I’ve watched some onboards, sometimes too much. I had the chance to do a rally in France two weeks ago to focus myself to find the confidence and the feeling to push, and that was the case. I am feeling very good and so was the car in the shakedown. It won’t be easy, but OK, the car is nice and the feeling is very good.”

**Q:**

It’s a different car from the last time you were in the junior championship…

**JB:**

“Yes, four-wheel drive, so it is better. The car is amazing.”

**Q:**

Ivica, you are competing in the Rally3 Fiesta this weekend, how are you finding the car?

**IS:**

“We have done one gravel rally and one sharing stages on roads we are going to drive tomorrow, so I will have a huge advantage over all of you! It’s the first four-wheel drive car I’ve raced so I’m very happy because the car is completely amazing. It’s a new thing for me and really amazing. I can’t compare it to the Fiesta Rally3 we had before, these are two different cars. I’m really looking forward to it.”

**Q:**

Everyone talks about the stages here. It’s a special kind of rallying isn’t it?

**IS:**

“This is a normal Croatian situation. We have even slipperier rallies down the coastline, so it’s quite normal for us. The grip changes, yes, of course. That’s Croatian roads, get used to it. OK, we do rallies in surrounding countries like Italy and Austria, but Croatian rallies are very different. We don’t find it so much tricky. We’re going slower of course, but it doesn’t matter, it’s normal for us.”

**Q:**

As you are Croatian, is it going to rain tomorrow?

**IS:**

“Last year they were interviewed and said the rally stages are tricky. Now I think they will have a bit more salt on it, but with rain everything will be triple tricky. So just to have fun.”

**Q:**

What are you hoping to achieve and how special is it for the WRC to be here?

**IS:**

“It is very special. To have a WRC event here in my home town is absolutely spectacular. From every aspect just to be a part of it is fantastic. This huge event driving with such amazingly fast drivers. Just to see how far from them sometimes you are… Or maybe not!”