**STAGE FLASH**

**Date: 19 April 2024
Day: 2
FlashN°: 5
Special stage: SS5 Platak 2
 SS6 Ravna Gora - Skrad 1
Distance: SS5 16.63 km
 SS6 10.13 km
Weather: Sunny and overcast by turns
Road conditions: Dry with melting snow in forested areas
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Car #11. THIERRY NEUVILLE/MARTIJN WYDAEGHE (HYUNDAI I20 N RALLY1)**

SS5: Overcast with snow flurries at the start of the stage, then weak sunshine at the bottom of the hill present myriad challenges. On fresh hard tyres Neuville logs 8m 47.4s – just 0.1s slower than his earlier run. “It’s very dangerous to be honest because we have no information from the gravel crew and, at that speed we are going, there are plenty of surprises so you have to trust your feeling and keep your eyes wide open but still it’s really dangerous. And also nobody told us it’s going to be snowing in there! It was even more difficult like this. You don’t know how quick is the grip and at that speed if the grip isn’t there you go off immediately so it’s a fine line between going off and going fast.”

SS6: Finishes the stage with the right front tyre off the rim after hitting a rock at around the 5km mark, dropping 10 seconds to Evans in second place and leaving them just 0.1s apart.

**Car #33. ELFYN EVANS/SCOTT MARTIN (TOYOTA GR YARIS RALLY1)**

SS5: Drops just 1.5 seconds to Neuville after a strong second half to the stage. “It was getting wet at one point in the middle of the stage there. It looked worse than it was but still not nice.”

SS6: A strong clean run to capitalise on Neuville’s misfortune.

**Car #16. ADRIEN FOURMAUX/ALEXANDRE CORIA (FORD PUMA RALLY1)**

SS5: A clean run but the Frenchman is finding the conditions tricky, dropping 8.5s to Neuville. “I had quite a big old moment for braking when it was snowing. The grip wasn’t so easy but you see the snow falling but then sometimes the grip was there and sometimes there was no grip so it’s not so easy. We didn’t expect the snow.”

SS6: Two seconds faster than their run through this stage in the morning loop, there were concerns for a front left puncture after clipping the kerb.

**Car #8. OTT TÄNAK/MARTIN JÄRVEOJA (HYUNDAI I20 N RALLY1)**

SS5: Increasing sleet and snowfall. “The middle part was strange it was snowing so much that I lost the temperature in the rear tyre and that was challenging and, yeah, there’s some changes we need as well. I think the tyre (choices) don’t really matter at the moment.”

SS6: Drops time in the middle of the stage but completes with “I think first time we are a bit more competitive this weekend. I found a little bit, we changed a little bit the diff balance so it behaved a little bit better so small improvements it was helping a little bit.”

**Car #18. TAKAMOTO KATSUTA/AARON JOHNSTON (TOYOTA GR YARIS RALLY1)**

SS5: The Japanese driver finishes without drama but is 18.7s down on the fastest time. “It started snowing so a few corners I felt it a bit tricky so yeah. Tyre choices are quite correct I would say.”

SS6: “At least it’s bit dryer. Not a big, big gap between the corners but it’s tricky enough.”

**Car #17. SÉBASTIEN OGIER/VINCENT LANDAIS (TOYOTA GR YARIS RALLY1)**

SS5: An upset Ogier drops 5.4s to the leader as the changeable weather continues to surprise the crews. “If it’s carry on like this of course we have no chance. Competing and driving on the dry (tyres) when you have a wet road is challenging. Now on this one it’s no problem but on the wet road was the problem.”

SS6: A big slide wide but no damage to maintain the gap to Tänak. “I think I’m pushing since the beginning of the rally. It’s not so much more we can do. Luckily the rain didn’t touch us this time because the first run this afternoon was terrible for us with the rain in the middle but we keep trying.”

**Car #9. ANDREAS MIKKELSEN/TORSTEIN ERIKSEN (HYUNDAI I20 N RALLY1)**

SS5: Just pips Katsuta’s time with another composed performance despite a lot of dirt to contend with in the cuts. “It was snowing in the beginning and it was actually a bit slippery so I was a bit on the safe side. But for the rest, yeah, I’m trying to find that confidence to really attack the corners, I’m fighting with the car so I’m struggling – I’m fighting too much with the car and it should be just smooth. Anyway we’re working on it. We’ll see, it will be a tricky afternoon loop, quite dry but with a lot of cuts and a lot of dirt on the road.”

SS6: Another solid run from the Norwegian, just 0.3s shy of Katsuta’s time. “It was a tricky stage, quite a lot of mud in the cuts but quite dry as well so it was tricky but we managed quite okay. Still not happy, we would like to be fast but we’re working on it.”

**Car #13. GRÉGOIRE MUNSTER/LOUIS LOUKA (FORD PUMA RALLY1)**

SS5: Still scoring highly for artistic impression but the time is not coming for Munster, who slips further behind Mikkelsen at the back of the Rally1 order. “It’s a bit annoying the feeling is the cloud is always following us but there we go. It doesn’t matter which country. It was hailing like hell 500 metres into the stage so I just had to take it careful.”

SS6: Both rear view mirrors knocked off but otherwise another solid drive. “It was better. I had I don’t know there was an impact and when I switched the gear it went down two gears and it distract me a bit and on the next corner we hit a slightly bit on the rear right so I just hope everything is still there.”