**Press release**

**Meet the Crews at Croatia Rally: Saturday**

**Zagreb, 22 April 2023** – The team principals of Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT, Jari-Matti Latvala, M-Sport Ford World Rally Team, Richard Millener and Hyundai Mobis Shell World Rally Team, Cyril Abiteboul, spoke to the fans gathered in the Zagreb Fair service park following leg two of Croatia Rally 2023. Shortly afterwards, the leading three drivers after SS16, Elfyn Evans, Ott Tänak and Esapekka Lappi took their turns on the stage. Transcripts from both sessions follow.

**Q:**

Jari-Matti, with Elfyn Evans leading the rally you must be satisfied at the end of today?

**J-ML:**

Yes, we can be definitely satisfied because we are leading the rally. Of course we didn’t hope for problems for the other drivers so it’s a shame Thierry went off but as Elfyn was gaining the first position for sure it’s very nice for Elfyn but, at the same time, Kalle Rovanperä and Sébastien Ogier have been able to lift up their positions and now they are fourth and fifth. It’s good for the Manufacturers’ championship if we can hold these positions tomorrow.

**Q:**

But the Drivers’ championship is being cooked up a bit here in Croatia?

**J-ML:**

Of course, it’s been a little bit different, let’s say this way we only launched two cars for the rally. But the target was to be fair with everybody and at the end of the day here in Croatia it’s important we can bring all the cars to the finish inside the top five then we are satisfied with that.

**Q:**

You had damage to two cars at the same corner yesterday. Did you investigate what happened?

**JM-L:**

It was quite a nasty hole and the edge of the Tarmac was sharp so basically a high-speed place and we came to the conclusion that it probably was just the wrong place to go over. It was a line that should have not been driven over because the impact was so hard that even the wheel got damaged quite heavily. There is nothing that could have taken that impact.

**Q:**

We had Kalle crashing at the very same place where Ogier was driving sideways over the ditch with the rear-left wheel in the first Croatia Rally. Now they had punctures at the very same place this year are they using the same pacenotes?

**J-ML:**

I hope so not! It’s funny how they are having these moments at the same places, but we have seen this also earlier that the tricky places can cause the same problems for drivers like in Monte-Carlo we saw this one place where there was ice that caught out many drivers. It’s not unusual the spots that are difficult can catch out the same drivers.

**Q:**

Turning to Richard Millener, are you satisfied to be holding P2?

**RM:**

I think we can be very satisfied with second, we made some progress after yesterday but it’s clear Ott wasn’t comfortable with the car on the last two stages of the loop, on both loops to be honest. But he was making very good gains on Elfyn and making the gap go down a lot. But the last two stages were not so good and we dropped back a bit. Although there are still some stages tomorrow a driver of Elfyn’s talent is going to be very difficult to catch but one thing is for sure we will be trying our best to give Ott a slightly different set-up that he’s more comfortable with and can push with and all we can do is put the pressure on and see what’s possible. It will be interesting but I think if we were a little bit closer it will be maybe achievable to get really close for the victory but I know Ott will try and let’s see what happens.

**Q:**

We had rain last year at SS19 giving Ott the possibility to win the rally, did you see the forecast for tomorrow?

**RM:**

I think if you can organise some rain it will be helpful! But I think it’s looking a bit drier than last year. But that’s good as well because when the conditions are dry the drivers are pushing hard. Like I say if we can make some gains in the morning, any kind of spin or overshoot – and we’ve seen how tough the stages have been – puts us right back into position. You can never back off and we have to score as many points as possible and the Power Stage is an opportunity to score another five. We will definitely be trying because we really want to get as many points and we’d love to get another victory.

**Q:**

The drivers were not so confident regarding the last two stages today, there was the new stage and Platak was only driven once last year, but they do know the area they will be driving in tomorrow so can they change something in the overall classification?

**RM:**

When you’ve done the stages for a couple of years you are always refining the pacenotes, especially in the Power Stage. But it’s very difficult to make huge gains because all these guys are at the top of their games and they’re all driving so close if we look at their stage times. We are used to seeing differences of seconds and it’s very difficult to get a huge gap. Ott has pushed today and taken eight or nine seconds out of Elfyn on one stage and that’s a really hard thing to do. It’s not like you can do that on every stage but the guys are working very hard with him to try to find a solution that he’s comfortable with and hopefully we can get a bit closer tomorrow and see what happens.

**Q:**

Coming to you Cyril, you entered leg two as the rally leader with Thierry but unfortunately for you he crashed?

**CA:**

Yes, unfortunately, as you say, he from hero to zero in one blink of a second, which is a rule of rally. It’s a tough rule at any point in time when that arrives, I guess maybe it’s bit more tough for us this weekend for obvious circumstance. We were all keen to get a good result and fighting for the win at least until the end was something that would have cheered up the whole team. But don’t estimate that participating to a rally like this takes up a lot of energy so everyone from the winner to the loser, everyone is putting the same amount of energy. So when all the chances of fighting for the win are suddenly going away it’s tough, it’s tough for everyone, particularly in the circumstance. But concrete doesn’t care, concrete is concrete and it doesn’t give a shit about the circumstance. Today concrete was stronger than Thierry.

**Q:**

It’s such a big amount of bad luck for Thierry because he was the rally leader in 2021, 2022, 2023 and now he’s in the worse position?

**CA:**

It’s a good summary, it’s a rally he was particularly keen on doing and highly motivated on the back of the story and the statistics and the statistics really do not lie. They were not lying until stage 11. He knew a good result could be possible, even though we had a bit of a deficit of performance against Toyota on Tarmac and maybe that’s why he was battling a bit too much with his car today and maybe that led to this driver mistake because at the end of the day it’s not just bad luck, it’s also a mistake. But maybe that was forced by the fact Evans was pushing, they were both pushing very hard and maybe a bit too hard for what the car was capable of doing today.

**Q:**

What will be the Hyundai team tactics for tomorrow?

**CA:**

Tomorrow we all know there is this opportunity of the Power Stage to score a bit more points for Thierry in particular and we’ve got that in mind. But there is also an interesting stage before so we need to get for that. But nothing better than that will be possible. For Esapekka, on his side, he’s had an interesting afternoon and he was a bit more satisfied than in the morning by getting familiar with the new stages and also by finding a better set-up on his car. He’s feeling good this evening and we hope we can have him on the podium tomorrow.

**Q:**

Turning to Elfyn Evans, you are leading at the end of leg two but how hard has it been today?

**EE:**

It was a long and tough day out there. It was a pretty okay morning for us overall, but the afternoon we struggled a bit more to be honest and didn’t drive as well as I would have liked. Ott was on a big push so not perfectly happy with the day. But we are stil here.

**Q:**

It’s a lead of more than 25s but can you sleep easy tonight or are you still worried about Ott’s threat?

**EE:**

I can sleep anyway, that’s not a problem, but definitely that’s not a huge advantage. We know these roads are not easy and it’s very easy to pick up a puncture or have a small spin or something and then of course it’s no advantage so we have to keep focused and keep driving well.

**Q:**

After missing out on winning by 0.6s here in 2021 how badly do you want this victory?

**EE:**

Let’s say it’s been a while since I won a rally now so of course I will try to win, that goes without saying. The past doesn’t matter so much but we want to try to focus and try to win the rally tomorrow if we can.

**Q:**

Turning to Ott Tänak, you got to within 12.5s of Elfyn with two stages to go today but what happened to the car during the last two stages? You referred to some problems but what were they?

**OT:**

Actually we had quite a good start for the afternoon, the feeling definitely improved in the car and we were able to push a bit more and, at the same time, I was feeling nice in the car. Then, unfortunately, we picked up a couple of technical troubles so we are happy to be here.

**Q:**

It’s a 25s gap to Evans, what are the chances of catching him tomorrow?

**OT:**

Hopefully we will get everything sorted and for sure we keep going in the morning and doing all we can. Obviously 25 seconds is quite a lot if you think what the gaps have been through all the weekend, they have always been small so let’s see. There is still a long way to go.

**Q:**

Victory is always the aim but how much thought are you giving to finishing second?

**OT:**

Definitely I would be happy to finish second as well but there are still four stages to go and it’s not coming for granted. There is plenty to do.

**Q:**

Finally coming to Esapekka Lappi, it’s fair to say you weren’t the happiest driver today – what was the problem with the car?

**EL:**

I wouldn’t say there was any problem but I just struggled on the dirty places to find confidence on the dirt. I was just too slow, that’s the reason.

**Q:**

What were your thoughts when Thierry crashed – that must have been disappointing for the team?

**EL:**

I think it’s a big shame for sure. I think our team needed the best result as possible this weekend more than ever before. Hopefully we can survive tomorrow and keep this position and at least bring good points to the team.

**Q:**

The fans have been out in force today – what do you think of the Croatian supporters?

**EL:**

I’ve just seen a lot of people but I don’t have soe much time to watch. But also here, there’s a big amount of people so it’s very important for us that you come to see us. We are doing this also for you so thanks for coming, thanks for coming.

**ENDS**

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