**STAGE FLASH**

**Date: 21 April 2023**

**Day: 2 Flash N°: 7**

**Special stage: Stojdraga - Hartje 2 Distance: 25.67 km**

**Weather: Sunshine, overcast and light rain**

**Road conditions: Dry initially but damp in sections**

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

Ogier’s time is a 15m35.2s and elevates him to fifth overall, 1m15.4s off first place: “It was definitely a bit more tricky but so far so good with the tyres, there’s nothing really different you can do I believe. Let’s see later on. We had mixed tyres, soft and hard.”

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

Neuville, with a combination of soft and hard-compound Pirelli tyres, sets a time of 15m39.7s to maintain his rally lead. “It was hard to say, we didn’t know what was the stage like so we had to guess a bit. I got information from the team to take those tyres and I went for it. It was okay [in the last few kilometres], I don’t know what’s faster. I guess Seb was on three softs and one hard, which obviously would have been the best choice for it for this one but we did with what we thought was the best.”

**Car #69. KALLE ROVANPERÄ/JONNE HALTTUNEN (TOYOTA GR YARIS RALLY1)**

World champion Rovanperä registers a 15m45.6s. “It was pretty okay, the last section was tricky. When the road is wet and the cuts are wet the mud is coming on the road the road a lot and it will be more difficult with more cars coming through.”

**Car #8. OTT TÄNAK/MARTIN JÄRVEOJA (FORD PUMA RALLY1)**

Tanäk, on wet weather tyres, sets a 15m50.3s. Asked if he made the right tyre choice, the Estonian said: “Obviously not. It was like it was. All good, not too bad.”

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

Evans completes in a 15m34.0s and now trails leader Neuville by 8.0s. “I guess maybe it’s drying out a bit but the mud is then doing more damage than what it’s drying. It’s hard to judge against the others.”

**Car #4. ESAPEKKA LAPPI/JANNE FERM (HYUNDAI I20 N RALLY1)**

With a 15m33.3s, Lappi scores his first Croatia Rally 2023 stage win with his mix of hard and soft compound tyres and moves into third overall. “I am sure we had the best choice. Thierry had the same as me. Well not the best choice but better than wets. When you see Loubet is putting wet tyres, Tänak is putting wet tyres, Katsuta is putting wet tyres and we are just waiting, we don’t do anything. You feel a bit stupid but you believe what the team said and it was the right call.”

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

Katstuta goes for the wet-weather tyre option and is 47.8s slower than Lappi. “I expected more wet but the rain didn’t come. Anyway, on the last stage we lost time so we had nothing to do and that’s why we decided to do it like this. It was a mistake.”

**Car #7. PIERRE-LOUIS LOUBET/NICOLAS GILSOUL (FORD PUMA RALLY1)**

Loubet also opts for wet weather tyres and is 42.0s off the stage-winning pace. “It wasn’t working unfortunately, we tried. It wasn’t the choice to do but, okay it was something to try so we try it.”

**COMMENTS**

With damp sections and some rain, Lappi goes for a mix of hard and soft compound tyres and takes the stage win to move ahead of Tänak – on full wet tyres – in the battle for third. Evans goes second quickest and cuts Neuville’s overall lead to 8.0s. Katsuta and Loubet drop time by using wet weather tyres, allowing Ogier to move up from seventh to fifth.

**ENDS**

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