*PRESS RELEASE*

**Evans sets Croatia Rally shakedown pace**

*Zagreb, April 22, 2021* – Elfyn Evans and co-driver Scott Martin have got their bid to win the Croatia Rally off to the perfect start by going fastest in shakedown this morning.

In ambient temperatures of 16 degrees centigrade and under bright, blue skies, they clocked a best time of 2m45.1s over the 4.60-kilometre Medvedgrad stage in their Toyota Yaris WRC, which features an upgraded aero package for Croatia’s first FIA World Rally Championship event.

Although shakedown is traditionally used as an opportunity to fine-tune car set-up, the performance will serve as a useful confidence boost for British driver Evans, who arrived in Croatia for round three of the 2021 WRC season fourth in the title standings. “The car’s feeling good, all okay so far,” Evans said at the completion of his first shakedown run.

Belgian pair Thierry Neuville and Martijn Wydaeghe were second fastest in their Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC in a time of 2m45.8s, with Finns Kalle Rovanperä and Jonne Halttunen, the current World Rally Championship leaders, third quickest with a 2m46.4s effort in their Toyota Yaris WRC.

“It’s nice to be in this position for sure but after the recce it looks like the conditions of the roads on Friday are already dirty and for sure it will not help us so much to be first,” Rovanperä said of the fact he will be opening the road on tomorrow’s first leg. “But it’s a nice feeling.”

Estonians Ott Tänak and Martin Järveoja, who set a 2m46.6s best on their third run over the shakedown stage in their Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC, start the Croatia Rally on the back of winning the previous WRC event, February’s Arctic Rally Finland. “We are in a different part of the world now but for sure the target for this weekend is to continue the momentum,” Tänak said.

World champions Sébastien Ogier and Julien Ingrassia, from France, were fifth fastest in another Toyota Yaris WRC with their team-mates, Japan’s Takamoto Katsuta and Brit Daniel Barritt, sixth.

“The road looks fun with different sections,” Ogier said. “It could be everything to make a nice rally.”

Katsuta added: “It’s going to be a very challenging weekend. Of course, I try to be very sturdy and get even more confident. But it’s going to be very tricky. I try to build my confidence the entire weekend and try to learn a lot of things from this tricky rally.”

M-Sport Ford Fiesta crew Adrien Fourmaux/Renaud Jamoul, who are competing on a WRC event in a World Rally Car for the first time, were seventh fastest followed by their team-mates Gus Greensmith/Chris Patterson.

After three runs of shakedown, Teemu Suninen/Mikko Markkula headed the WRC2 order.

The Ceremonial Start is up next at 18:30 local time. Leg one begins with the 6.94-kilometre Rude – Plešivica stage from 08:39 tomorrow (Friday).