*PRESS RELEASE*

**Croatia Rally set for thrilling Power Stage decider**

*Zagreb, April 25, 2021* – The Croatia Rally is set for a thrilling final-stage decider with eight seconds covering the top three drivers on round three of the FIA World Rally Championship.

Just the 14.09-kilometre Zagorska Sela – Kumrovec test, the Wolf Power Stage, remains from 13:18 local time as Croatia’s first WRC appearance builds up to a dramatic climax on the country’s spectacular countryside roads.

Elfyn Evans/Scott Martin, who snatched the lead from Toyota team-mates Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia on SS18, hold an advantage of 3.9s over the defending world champions, while Thierry Neuville/Martijn Wydaeghe, who completed leg one in front, are 4.1s further back in their Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC.

British pair Evans/Martin started Sunday’s opener 6.9s behind Ogier/Ingrassia, but cut that margin to 4.2s by going quickest of all through the 25.20 kilometres of Bliznec – Pila. Neuvillle/Wydaeghe, who were second fastest, closed to within 9.1s of the struggling Ogier/Ingrassia.

The French pair were involved in a road traffic accident on the liaison section heading to SS17. Although their Toyota Yaris WRC was fully roadworthy, damage to the passenger door and aerodynamic packaging was allowing excessive air into the car and affecting the handling and further precious seconds were lost on SS18 where Evans/Martin seized the initiative to move in front.

They outpaced Neuville/Wydaeghe by 3.5s and Ogier/Ingrassia by 7.0s to lead by 2.8s with Neuville reporting sliding wide on the exit of a slow corner. “Probably I have some gravel in the rear wheel because I have a lot of vibrations. I slide a little bit wide on a very slow corner on the exit but nothing major,” Neuville said afterwards.

After completing SS18 8.4s behind leaders Evans/Martin, Neuville/Wydaeghe were on full attack through SS19 to go quickest and narrow their deficit to Evans/Martin to 8.0s. “To be honest I gave it everything in there,” said Neuville. “The car was working nice, the pacenotes were good. I can’t do more, I can’t do more.”

Like Neuville, Evans is chasing his first win of the season and is in front with one stage left to run. “Obviously [I’m] pushing pretty hard,” he said after SS19. “It’s not so easy with all that downhill section trying to guess how much gravel there is but all okay.”

Despite being hampered by damage, Ogier isn’t giving up and starts the Wolf Power Stage 3.9s behind Evans and 4.1s ahead of Neuville. “With myself it’s been a tricky morning but it’s not over.”

Ott Tänak/Martin Järveoja hold a distant fourth overall with Adrien Fourmaux and Renaud Jamoul in fifth, albeit more than one minute further back than they should have been following a delay after the opening corners of SS18.

“It happened that we crossed the tyre and the hard one was quite cold because we were waiting at the start and I wasn’t enough carefully in this corner and the car was just sliding out of the road,” M-Sport Ford driver Fourmaux explained afterwards. “We were lucky, I have to say thank you to some spectators who pushed us on the road but we are still here that’s the most important.”

Takamoto Katsuta/Daniel Barritt are up to sixth after Gus Greensmith/Chris Patterson were slowed by a hydraulic system issue and a brake problem during the morning runs.

Craig Breen/Paul Nagle hold eighth position with WRC2 pacesetters Mads Østberg/Torstein Eriksen and Teemu Suninen/Mikko Markkula completing the top 10.

As well as deciding the outcome of the Croatia Rally, the Wolf Power Stage awards bonus points to the fastest five crews in the overall classification, in WRC2 and WRC3 meaning plenty is at stake for the event’s closing 14.09 kilometres.