



FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

2019 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

RALLY ARGENTINA

Post-event Press Conference
28 April 2019

FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Present:

Thierry Neuville (BEL), Hyundai Shell Mobis World Rally Team
Nicolas Gilsoul (BEL), Hyundai Shell Mobis World Rally Team
Andreas Mikkelsen (NOR), Hyundai Shell Mobis World Rally Team
Anders Jaeger (NOR), Hyundai Shell Mobis World Rally Team
Sébastien Ogier (FRA), Citroën Total World Rally Team
Julien Ingrassia (FRA), Citroën Total World Rally Team
Andrea Adamo, Hyundai Shell Mobis World Rally Team

Q:

Thierry Neuville, congratulations on your second win of the season. A tough challenge more than normal out there this weekend?

TN:

Yes, and no, because, I mean, the conditions made the rally very tough again this weekend. There was a lot of grip changes. The first stage of the rally also has been just a disaster. But on the other hand, I really can say my car was perfect all weekend. I felt like we had made progress compared to last year. I felt one hundred percent comfortable in the car to manage the whole weekend, and that was the key to success here, as we all know that the rally is very demanding. There are lots of tricky places, three different days, three different characteristics, weather changes, you can only do such a performance if you feel comfortable and if your team gives you the perfect car to do that.

Q

We could see you so comfortable because even when your nearest rival Ott Tänak retired, your pace didn't really slip. You just kept that momentum going.

TN:

Yes, it's a sign, as we have seen with other drivers on other events. When you have the flow and a good feeling with the car – and the car obviously needs to be competitive – then things are... maybe not easier, but more controlled, and that was what I was able to do all weekend. Me and Nicolas felt both comfortable and the car was exactly doing what I wanted, so that's why we had a quite safe but very fast drive throughout the whole weekend.

Q:

It seems that the Hyundai car and the team loves this event because it's been such a success over the years. The wins, obviously, double-podium as well last year, what is it about this event that suits you all so well?

TN:

Our car is very reliable. It's a very strong car in rough conditions, as we have seen in many other events. And, since Hyundai entered the FIA WRC, in rough events it has always been strong but I can just say it's very reliable and it was very fun to drive this weekend.

Q:

As we move onto the next event, we really are heading into the unknown, what can you tell me of what you know of Rally Chile?

TN:

I know very, very little, to be honest. I know where Chile is, I know also where I will fly to... Other than that, I don't have any information yet. As I always say, I do rally by rally, and that is why I will start focusing on the next event in a couple of days.

Q:

Nicolas Gilsoul, as Thierry mentioned, that opening stage on Friday morning, it was tough for the right to the front. Did you feel at that point a win, maybe, isn't impossible here?

NG:

Yes. In some ways, yes, because, for sure, when it is difficult, when it is challenging, and when you have quite a good experience from previous years, it is always a good help. We knew from prior to the recce that the weather would be tough so I think we anticipated quite a lot and quite well - different options and different strategies - and all in all, with the weather crew, the weather forecaster and the team, we were able to react stages after stages, to adjust the setting of the car, to take the right decision at the right time to fine-tune... but all is counting at the end. The battle was so close.

Q:

How much more is it going to be a challenge for the co-driver heading into a brand-new event? How much more preparation do you have to put in?

NG:

The feeling is a bit strange because we are so used to knowing everything in each location. When I check on the road book or on the map, I can close my eyes and see in my mind where it is. And there, in Chile, we need to discover everything because everything is new. But I like the challenge a lot so it is nice as well.

Q:

Andreas Mikkelsen, welcome back to the FIA World Rally Championship podium! We haven't seen you here since Sweden last year, but you've put in a brilliant performance this weekend, full of confidence out there on the stages, second position overall. You must be a very happy man at the end of it.

AM:

Yes, I am very glad. I am feeling much lighter. It's been a tough year, for sure, with a lack of results. But we have shown many times, proved a good speed and that we have what it takes. But we haven't really delivered a result so it's nice to come here to Argentina and do that for the team. One and two couldn't really be better - so maximum points - and it's looking good so far in the manufacturers' championship. But for me, personally, this second place really feels like a win. It's the second place I'm the most proud and happy of. We've been working really hard in the last months to understand why things don't go our way and worked hard. I felt that it was a matter of time before it would come, so it is nice that it came here in Argentina and it gives me a good feeling going to Chile. Luckily, that's only one week and I am really expecting that weekend.

Q:

We saw you battle against Meeke yesterday afternoon - successfully. You patted the steering wheel of the car when you finished the final stage, obviously you were very happy with the car this weekend!

AM:

Yes, I felt very comfortable. I have been feeling very comfortable lately in the car and especially on this rally as well. I have always enjoyed Rally Argentina since we have always had a good performance. But yes, something happened yesterday afternoon, we did some changes because I was losing a bit of time in the morning. I also changed my driving style a little bit and it really, really worked. We were really competitive, put some best times so then the feeling was really nice. So I would transfer that feeling to Chile and I'm sure we can get another great result.

Q:

Anders, does it feel the same for you? Does it feel like, as Andreas is just describing, a win?

AJ:

Not a win but it feels really great for sure. It's been a frustrating period to also sit on the right side of Andreas because I know his potential. And for sure, we want to be on the podium more often. We have been close and, for a lot of reasons, we haven't delivered. And so, today, we are really happy. First of all, for the team, for our teammates and for ourselves, of course.

Q:

Looking forward for the next event in Chile, what do you know and what can you tell us?

AJ:

Chile will be very exciting. I mean, we don't know a lot but I'm quite sure that we will have a good car there. I very much look forward to it.

Q:

Sébastien Ogier, when you arrived to the end of the final stage, you packed back your third position by a small margin. How does that feel after a struggle as you talked about the performance of the car?

SO:

I'm satisfied with the points I get today, for sure. But I am still not satisfied with the speed we had over the weekend. I have been struggling in many stages with the pace, especially in the first loop when it was slippery. That means we still need to work. Getting 20 points today is more than I expected to be honest. It was worth not to give up as we always do and be able to grab five points in the Power Stage and regain the podium.

Q:

What is it that isn't quite right in the car? Do you know?

SO:

If we knew exactly what we need to do, it would be easy. This is a tough sport, the level of competition is high and small things can make big differences. We have some ideas. I mentioned things that have to be changed but it takes time and it's also not easy. But at least we have scored the points with the car without it being perfect. So, it is something I will remember from this weekend. We have to push the team hard and get it even better for the next event.

Q:

It is a short space of time between events. The next event seems to have smoother roads. Will that benefit you?

SO:

I can only hope it can benefit. I know almost nothing from Chile. I'm not the kind of person who watches videos before and even less when it is only race videos made by someone else. Surely, I will have a little look maybe when I am on the flight to Chile. Then, we will have to do a good job during the race. We heard that it should be a faster profile and smoother roads. Let's hope that we can do better and be even more on the fight for the win. In the end, this weekend, we were not far away. We lost a lot of time with the power steering.

Q:

You have taken a good set of points from here. Still second overall in the Championship. How do you evaluate it all?

JJ:

This weekend I learnt something people know, that we have to make choices in life. All day long, every minute of your life, you have to make decisions. We need to work really hard to reach the pace we want to have with the car. But we know that we have a whole team behind us and we have to work together.

Q:

What are we going to see next week? What do you know from Chile?

JJ:

We know that the profile is different. But I like to discover new events. You can have the best job in the world but you make habits year after year. So, it is good to have new air, new blood coming. Next year also there probably be Japan and these are good things. I'm excited to discover a new environment and new profiles.

Q:

Andrea Adamo, Hyundai has done an exceptional job this weekend, it's a 1-2. You extend your advantage in the Manufacturers' Championship and Thierry extends his lead in the Drivers' Championship. We know you are notoriously hard to please Andrea. But I'm sure you are a happy man at the end of this event...

AA:

Everytime you tell me that I am hard to please! (He laughs). I am not as bad as you think I am. It is not a matter of being hard to please. It is a matter of being realistic. This weekend, Thierry, Nicolas, Andrea and Anders filled the gap that we had with the other cars with their hearts, they drove in an amazing way. We are all very aware that we are behind in performance, respect to the others. Of course I'm happy because we have seen much worse weekend in life. We are happy but we have to be realistic and consider that this 1-2 is a boost to keep working hard.

Q:

In which areas of the car would you say you still need improvements and where is the performance lacking?

AA:

I think I will discuss this with my engineers.

Q:

I will get an engineering degree so we can chat about that...

AA:

No, but I don't like to speak about these things with the press.

Q:

Moving forward in the season, where we will see improvements coming in the car?

AA:

We have improved and we are working all together. But as you know, due to the homologation session that the FIA is ruling, we cannot make changes every week with all the ideas that we have to make the car better. We have a limited number of test days, we have homologation sessions... So, we have to move step by step. We know that, until July, when hopefully we can homologate new components in the car, we have to do the best out of what we have and what has been homologated in March. We have to take the best out of it and use it 100 per cent. And also be always available: this is something that I stress very much to my people, because as we have seen even today, reliability is something that allowed us to be in this situation at the end of the rally.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Q: Roque Bello – Revista Análisis Paraná (Argentina)

Sébastien Ogier, in Argentina you were going after a dream. There are a lot of people who want to pursue dreams. What would you recommend to them?

SO:

That's a good question. It's very important to have dreams in life and to follow them. They can definitely happen. When I was a small kid, I used to go to see Rally Monte-Carlo and I was dreaming to be part of this one day. And finally it happened. It was not a straight-forward way, but everything is possible. You have to work for it and believe you can do it. For me, Argentina is not the place where the dream is happening actually, because I still didn't manage to win this rally. But it is actually a good time in my championship and it looks good for the end of the season.

Q: Santiago Berioli – La Voz del Interior

Thierry Neuville, you are the first driver to win two times in Argentina since Sébastien Loeb. What do you think is the key to win in these conditions, on these roads?

TN:

I think I am lucky to have a good team behind me with a good car. I also know that, on that kind of roads, I feel comfortable. When it's rough, you need to manage a bit your speed in some sections and go and push when it is smooth. Also my driving style is mostly quite clean. So, maybe that is part of the game also in this rally.

FIA WRC 2 PRO

Present:

Mads Ostberg (NOR), Citroën Total

Torstein Eriksen (NOR), Citroën Total

Q:

Congratulations on you winning the FIA WRC2 Pro this weekend! You are part of the fastest R5 in the rally as well, a brilliant result for you guys but a huge amount of experience here in Argentina. I know this is a rally you love but to get that win, how do you feel?

MO:

It's very good. Actually, I'm very pleased to get to the end of the rally first of all. I saw this rally as a huge challenge because to come here with a FIA WRC 2 car is what I'm used to. To be here in R5 is very difficult. Everyone kept telling me that I need to be careful and that I would break the car. I was convinced that I would break the car but I sort of did the whole week holding back and it was a little bit frustrating, as well, because you want to push, you want to drive as fast as you can and basically you can't. It's a little bit annoying when you do a rally and you just have to be careful all the time but I think we managed it quite well. I think I did five or six corners really, really fast and the rest was a bit nursing everything. We learned a lot and I learned more about how I can drive R5 and still I got too many punctures and many small problems. We'll try to learn from it as a team and also as driver and co-driver, we need to probably change things slightly for the upcoming events.

Q:

You are a big part of the development of this car moving forward. Do you feel it has moved on since you got behind the wheels?

MO:

Yes but of course, some of it is homologation so it's not happening so fast. But we already have a new upgrade coming for Portugal so I think we are moving as fast as we can. But of course, it's always a bit frustrating when you need two months to get the paperwork done. That is too long for us who want to compete in rallies, but that is just how it is. We need to work with what we have at the moment. We managed to do some steps since Sweden both on the suspension side and also making the car more reliable and we did an upgrade to the system as well. That was really, really helpful for this rally so it's going in a very good direction. I hope the new upgrades will make us even faster.

Q:

We know you had an intercom issue during this weekend. Anything else though? Because it seems to be kind of playing sailing for you or are there other issues?

MO:

No, it was definitely not playing sailing. It was hard work. We had some small issues there, we struggled a lot in the water splashes as the car just couldn't cope with it so we had quite a big engine trouble on the first day. Yesterday as well and also quite a big brake problem. We found the problem and solved it for today, so it was a few mechanical things here and there but we learned from everything. For sure we will change the intercom for the next rally because we had the problem yesterday: it was not changed and we had the same problem today so we definitely need to change that.

Q:

Definitively. We'll see you in action again in just two weeks in Chile. What can you tell us about what you know of what you are about to experience in Chile?

MO:

Well, I hear what people are saying and I've seen some onboard footage and the rally looks really good, to be honest. It's a new country for me and a new place and that is why I want to do the rally. It looks fast but also with some technical stages, much smoother than Argentina. So, maybe it will be a mix of Portugal and some other European events... It looks nice. I'm really looking forward to it.

Q:

Torstein Eriksen, Mads mentioned Chile looks a little bit more smooth and we could see the co-drivers just bouncing around in the car this weekend, holding on firmly to your pace-notes. Is the rally as rough to you as it is for the driver? Talk to me about the rally from your perspective. Are you a happy man at the end of it?

TE:

First of all, it was my first Rally Argentina and I can say that I really enjoyed the atmosphere out there. I have never done the rally with so many spectators. That gives us a special feeling.

Q:

I think everyone has special feelings, doesn't it? It's incredible to see how many there are, especially today in "El Cóndor". Did you have time to glance at from the road book?

TE:

I had time, and there was a hill so you can see up from there.

MO:

I actually disturbed him, when he was reading, I said to him "you have to watch. Look at all the people" and he answered "yeah, yeah, yeah".

TE:

And that was straight after our intercom problem. Ten seconds later (in a low volume): “look at the spectators” so we both enjoyed that.

Q:

It is a great experience here. One of you will want to come back and do it again I can presume.

TE:

For sure I'll come back to do this again.

FIA WRC 2

Present:

Pedro Heller (CHL)

Marc Marti (ESP)

Q:

Pedro Heller, let's turn to you now, winner in the FIA WRC 2 class. On the final stage today, we saw a heart-stopping moment when your car just stopped. Spectators had to start pushing and we were wondering whether it would start again and it did thankfully. Talk to me about that moment.

PH:

Actually, it was the worst moment of my life. We had a clean rally, no problems. Then in the final kilometer of the last stage, we had that problem, the car started showing me alarms, but whenever you have a yellow alarm, you can always continue. I was getting all the yellow alarms: pressure, engine, oil, temperature. But then, I had all the red alarms, the car went into a safe mode and it turned off. We had 1 kilometer or 400 hundred meters left to the end of the stage, I don't know, and I tried to turn on the car again but I wasn't able to do it. I reset the car twice and then I called people and I asked them to push me, and it worked. We could continue and get back on the road. We had a really bad moment there but in the end, we could finish the race.

Q:

I've never seen such a look of relief on a driver when you got to the stage end, as you said, it was the worst moment you've experienced out there. But thankfully, you've taken the win and it's been a good weekend for you and especially good considering now it's the event before your home event in Chile. Is it a bit of a confidence boost?

PH:

Yes, for sure. Obviously our goal is always to try to do all the kilometers and gain confidence, and work on the pace-notes because now there is a different way to do it. I'm working with Marc, this is our second round together so we are trying to improve in every kilometer. Now we have the results, which is a boost for Chile, for sure. It's going to be a difficult race. It's technical, it's fast and the conditions that the drivers saw on the video recce are different since they did the recce in the summer, which is very similar to Portugal. I think we are going to have rain, more like Rally Wales, we will see if the boost here will help us to go.

Q:

Will you feel more pressure, obviously being at home? Well, you won a rally recently at home, but this is a big FIA WRC event, the first time we go to Chile, and the Heller brothers front and center. It's going to be a lot of pressure on your shoulders?

PH:

No, it's not pressuring at all because we are with our people out there. Obviously, that could be a boost for us. We need to show people how to enjoy the rally because in Argentina, there is a different culture of motorsports. In Chile, it's a new event, we have a national rally there, but we need to learn a lot. I hope people behave well. I don't want to be critical but at this event, we had

some corners at which people were standing in dangerous places. So I hope that in Chile people will be informed and stay in the safe areas so we can have the rally as much as possible.

Q:

Okay, wise words, Pedro, thank you very much. Marc, let's turn to you now. Congratulations on the win in the WRC 2. As Pedro mentioned, it's a new partnership together, and he's talked about the way he is changing the notes. What influence are you bringing? How are you changing things in the car with all your experience?

MM:

I must say that Pedro did a great job. This is the third rally that we are together and for a driver, who is driving very fast, to change the notes at this point is really, really difficult. We did a great job, we worked a lot before the start of the season, we did two more rallies. Here we are, this is the result of a lot of hours in the car together working on the notes. I'm very happy because this is kind of another world for me, but I like a lot to show how can I explain things to him and he understands everything. We did a really good job.

Q:

So, are you seeing a progression in Pedro's performance already even after a few rallies together?

MM:

My job was to try to explain how to do good pace-notes to Pedro. I think he is doing a good job learning. Pedro has been driving for a few years only - just four. It's not a lot of time and he needs to go step by step. I think we are on the way. The next challenge is at his home so we are going to try to do a good performance. For sure the potential is here, we just need to work and be patient.