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CITROEN LEADS FORD FOLLOWS BUT MINI IS NOT FAR

Olbia May 6th – Beautiful, charming, full of twists, very hard for everyone. Today was the first day of competition of the 2011 Rally d'Italia Sardegna, event organised by the Automobile Club d'Italia and valid for the World Rally Championship, for the Super 2000 World Championship and for the WRC Academy. At the end of the first eight stages, for a total of 131 km, the overall. Standings are led tonight by the two Citroen Ds3 Wrc of Loeb and Solberg. The leader is seven-time world champion Sebastien Loeb, together with Daniel Elena. The Frenchman, although he had to open the road, therefore sweeping the lines from gravel, managed to close the day with a substantial advantage over his opponents. Second place is for Norwegian Petter Solberg with a gap of 33 "2. On the bottom podium step tonight is Mikko Hirvonen. The Finnish Ford driver fought a close battle with Loeb until the fifth stage when he was a mere 1"2 behind the leader, to suffer an unlucky puncture which slowed him heavily. The Ford driver is now trailing by 53 "1. Behind him, by 2 "4 the other awaited star of the race, Frenchman Sebastien Ogier who on the very last stage lost more than 20" from his team mate. Out of contention by now, the other Ford driver Jari Matti Latvala, who hit something on the first stage due to a misunderstanding with his co-driver, having to stop as a result with a broken suspension.

Behind the leaders are norwegian Ostberg, Ford Fiesta Wrc, and Dani Sordo. The Spanish driver ends the first day in an excellent position at the debut of the new Mini Wrc 1600. Bad luck for the other works Mini driver, Kris Meeke, who went off without damage but also without any chance to rejoin the road, and who had posted extraordinary stage times in the beginning. In the top ten are also estonian Tanak, seventh overall and first in the Super 2000 World Championship, Matthew Wilson, eighth with his Ford, and the other two protagonists of the Super 2000 class, Prokop, Ford Fiesta Super 2000, and Hanninen, Skoda Fabia.

The first day was highly selective for what concerns the Wrc Academy. Only five of the eightenn starters ended the first day. Amongst the retirements, many will restart tomorrow under the Superrally formula, like the young Italians Andrea Crugnola and Matteo Brunello. The provisional leader is Riedman. Tomorrow will be the closing day for the young drivers of the world rallying.

Tomorrow in the second leg the protagonists of the rally will face another challenging leg. Six special stages for a total of 143 km, in a total route of 400 km. The first car will start at 08.00 from the Isola Bianca parc fermé in Olbia, and return to the same location at 20.48 in the evening.

Special stage winners: ss. 1 Solberg, ss. 3/4/6/7 Loeb, ss. 5/8 Hirvonen

First leg overall 1. Loeb – Elena (Citroen Ds3 Wrc) in 1h27'47"0; 2. Solberg – Petterson (Citroen Ds3 Wrc) at 33"2; 3 .Hirvonen – Lehtinen (Ford Fiesta Rs Wrc) at 53"1; 4. Ogier – Ingrassia (Citroen DS3 Wrc) at 55"5 ; 5. Ostberg – Andersson (Ford Fiesta RS Wrc) at 1'04"7 ; 6. Sordo – Del Barrio (Mini John Cooper Works) at 1'33"2; 7. Tanak - Sikk (Ford Fiesta S2000) at 2'36"0, 8. Wilson – Martin (Ford Fiesta RS Wrc) at 2'54"5; 9. Prokop – Tomanek (Ford Fiesta Super 2000) at 3'01"7; 10. Hanninen – Makkula (Skoda Fabia Super 2000) at 3' 19"8