

# Rally d'Italia Sardegna

Press Office



Olbia, May 18<sup>th</sup> 2006

## The start of the Rally d'Italia Sardegna First Leg will be tomorrow in Olbia.

The enchanting scenario of Marina Vecchia in Porto Cervo will give the start to the Rally d'Italia Sardegna 2006.

With the spectacular background of a Mediterranean sunset, tomorrow at 20.00 the 79 crews will parade on the ramp to receive the welcome by authorities and fan for the seventh round of World Rally Champ and fourth one of Junior World Rally Cup. After the Ceremonial Start and a precious night of rest, tomorrow, at the 8.00 a.m., a thrilling challenge between the major protagonists of the international scene will start in an itinerary that will make much more tough and selective the sporting and technical competition.

In fact this is what world rally aces think after the practice and shakedown of today on the 4,3 km in Sant'Antonio di Gallura. A precious test just because it was at the wheel of the car set for the race.

Sébastien Loeb, world champion and winner in the past edition, has no doubts.

*"Here it is always very easy to make some mistakes and to compromise everything - says the 32 years old driver assisted by Daniel Elena on Citroen Xsara WRC of Kronos Total team – I've to see which position I'll have after the three first stages, but obviously we'll push very hard from the first kilometre. I like very much the Rally d'Italia Sardegna for stages, people and scenario too. I've seen a lot of good changes and now I want to see how the Siniscola stage will be. It is very sinuous and there are a lot of changes in the drive's rhythm. My goal is to lengthen my list of consecutive wins in this championship".*

Gigi Galli, with Giovanni Bernacchini on the Peugeot 307 WRC in the Pirelli colors, is the only Italian at the wheel of a WRC car and after the shakedown was trusting.

*"Rally d'Italia Sardegna is very improved compared with the 2004 edition – the 33years Italian driver said - The organization made an extraordinary job in this two years and the stages are beautiful. Also in this morning we've made a good job in the shakedown on setting the car and tyres. I'm sure we'll be competitive and my goal is getting on the podium. In Argentina I've seen it's a very nice place to be...".*

Marcus Gronholm, winner of two races in 2006 champ in couple with Timo Rautiainen on Ford Focus run by BP-Ford World Rally Team, aspires to the major goal. *"In Sardinia I have to race for the win - the Finnish explains – In four races I didn't do better than Loeb, so now I have not alternatives. I've found a lot of dust in the shakedown. I hope I'll not find it anymore, differently it could be a big problem because two minutes between the cars could be few. I like very much this rally and the stage are better than the one of the past years. The organization made a very good job".*

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Meanwhile the shakedown was only a prologue of a spectacular three days of race that will be at the start in Olbia tomorrow.

The first leg will take place on the gravel roads of Monte Acuto and will have three special stages (Terranova, Mamone and Siniscola) to be repeated twice for a total of 129 timed kilometers, a total of 137 timed kilometers. The Siniscola stage is a new one. The second leg will take place on Saturday May 20th and will have six stages (three to be repeated twice). Two long ones Loelle (25 km) and Monte Lerno (31 km) and Filigosu (12 km). The Loelle special stage will once again pass near the nuraghe (a special archeological Sardinian monuments) with the same name, while at the Monte Lerno stage drivers will go over two spectacular jumps one of them known as "The camel humps". The third leg on Sunday May 21st will start with the classic special stage of San Giacomo and will go on in the area of Gallura on the gravel roads of La Prugnola and Campovaglio. The last leg will be composed of three stages to be repeated twice, two of them new, for a total of 78 timed kilometers and there will be no Service Park, only a Regrouping at Arzachena. The Service Park in Olbia (Porto industriale Località Cala Saccaia) will be the logistical centre of the event where cars and drivers will return in the first two Leg after the first passage on the special stages (13.00-13.50 tomorrow and 12.30-13.20 on Saturday) as well as in the closing of the three race-days (18.50 on Friday; 17.40 on Saturday; 13.14 on Sunday, before the transfer to Porto Cervo). Only the third Leg of Sunday doesn't see the return in Olbia at the middle of the day, but only a regrouping in Arzachena. Service Park and Special Stages (in specific safety area) will be in free entry for spectators.

## **The interviews of the other protagonists at the end of Shakedown.**

### **2 XAVI PONS (KRONOS CITROEN)**

There was a lot of dust in the shakedown and we couldn't do the best. It's a very difficult rally and I hope to get some luck and make a good job for me and my team.

### **4 MIKKO HIRVONEN (FORD)**

I'm very happy for the car and its set-up. I would like to be protagonist in Sardinia where I always made good races. My goal is the podium.

### **5 PETTER SOLBERG (SUBARU)**

The special stages are very difficult, but they are typical of Sardinia round. Today we have tested a lot of solutions for the race set-up and I think that everything is going well. I hope this time could be the right one, we need to win because the

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championship has been dominated by Loeb. Only if he'll make some mistakes we'll be in the conditions to fight for the championship. In Argentina we was competitive and here we hope to be protagonists of the race.

### **6 CHRIS ATKINSON (SUBARU)**

Everything is going well and the set-up is good. It will be a very tough rally and I will try to arrive in the first five positions. I like very much this rally and it will be a very strong fight between all the drivers.

### **7 MANFRED STOHL (OMV PEUGEOT)**

It should be fantastic getting on the podium, but this is a very tough rally. I'll try to do my best and I would be very happy to finish in the first six positions. The car goes very good but it's too much long to make some show.

### **11 HARRI ROVANPERA (RED BULL SKODA)**

I've found a good grip. This is a confirmation of all the tests we've already done last week-end. I hope to arrive at least sixth. Obviously a better position should be a brilliant result for me. It's the first time that SKoda Fabia WRC RedBull Team is on the gravel and it is also the first time that we use mechanical differentials.

### **12 ANDREAS AIGNER (Red Bull Skoda)**

This is my debut in Sardinia. It's a rally with very difficult stages, with a lot of changes in the drive's rhythm. Thinking about all the rocks near the route, we've to be very careful. My goal is finishing the race.

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