

Rally d'Italia Sardegna

Press Office



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Marcus Gronholm and Timo Rautiainen, Focus BP Ford World Rally Team, are in the lead at the end of the first leg of rally d'Italia Sardegna

The first leg of Rally d'Italia Sardegna, race organized by the Automobile Club Italy and valid as 7th round of the World Rally Championship, confirmed the prediction of the eve, that the duel was going to be between Sebastien Loeb, the actual World Rally Champion at the wheel of a Citroen Xsara Wrc of the Team Kronos Total and the Finnish driver Marcus Gronholm with a Focus of the BP Ford World Rally Team. The French driver of Citroen was the favourite, he won the last four races in a row of the WRC, but this evening at the end of the first leg the leader was the Finnish driver of Ford, that took in the first stage and kept it for the whole race. Gronholm finished the leg with 35"4 over his rival, winning 4 of the 6 stages of today. " We have to push hard tomorrow too – said Gronholm – We have to start well. Today it's been tough but the car went very well". Loeb won the other two stages of the day. The Alsatian driver had quite a few problems on the three stages of the first round of today. The set up of his car was not the right one for this kind of ground and he lost 40". Behind these two Mikko Hirvonen disputed a good race, wary but also fast, on a route difficult for all drivers. Among the "big drivers" Petter Solberg on his Subaru Impreza, was the one who paid more, he retired at the end of the last stage of the day. The Norwegian driver will restart tomorrow thanks to the Super rally rule.

Behind there were Henning Solberg, fourth with his Peugeot 307 Wrc, Daniel Sordo, Citroen Xsara Wrc and Gigi Galli, Peugeot 307 Wrc. The Italian driver, had a very bad start, he was 13th at the end of stage one, pushed hard afterwards climbing up the overall classification.

"It is a very tough race" said at the end of the last stage "The start was not good, we chose not the appropriate tyres. In the second part of the rally was better, I attack and we got good results". The last one to enter the score zone was the other Spanish driver Xavier Pons. Among the cars taking part in the fifth round of the FIA Junior World Rally Championship the best one so far has been Guy Wilks with a Suzuki Super 1600, in the back Patrick Sandell on Renault Clio Super 1600. Quite unlucky Luca Betti who stopped with his Renault Clio in the last stage. The driver from Piedmont will restart tomorrow too.

In the Ford Fiesta Trophy the protagonist of today was Alessandro Bettega, son of the unforgettable Attilio. In the Subaru Cup the protagonist was Anton Alen, the son of the famous rally Champion Marku Alen.

The race is still very long: tomorrow Saturday May 20th, the second leg, with three stages to be repeated twice, with a total of 137 timed kilometers, composed by the SS of Loelle and Monte Lerno, respectively of 25 and 31 km and the ss Filigosu 12 km long. The Loelle stage will pass near the Nuraghe with the same name, while at Monte Lerno the drivers will give spectators a big show on the jump with the same name and on the jump called "Camel's hump"

Provisional standing after Leg 1: Gronholm- Rautiainen (Ford Focus Wrc 06) total time 1h33'39"9; 2. Loeb – Elena (Citroen Xsara Wrc) diff. 35"4; 3. Hirvonen – Lehtinen (Ford Focus Wrc) diff. 1'04"2; 4. H.Solberg – Menkerud (Peugeot 307 Wrc) diff. 1'44"5; 5. Sordo – Marti (Citroen Xsara WRrc) diff. 2'04"3; 6. Galli – Bernacchini (Peugeot 307 Wrc) diff. 2'06"8; 7. Atkinson – MacNeall (Subaru Impreza Wrc) 2'14"1; 8. Pons – Del Barrio (Citroen Xsara Wrc) diff. 2'29"6

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