

# Rallying around the World

The WRC season is fully underway now, with three more events under our belts. Three events that are an exercise in contrast to one another. After leaving Monaco, the first stop is the Uddeholm Swedish Rally, the only all snow event in the circuit. Followed by the desert heat of the Corona Rally Mexico, and then the popular Propecia Rally of New Zealand.

The snow-covered stages in Sweden were challenging, as the fight for the title heated up early. Excited fans lined the stages to watch Marcus Grönholm and Petter Solberg challenge each other for first place. The battle moved into Special Stage 15, where Solberg started to extend his lead. Then, as Grönholm tried to make it up in SS16, he suffered a devastating setback, rolling his vehicle and losing a wheel. "The first I knew about the fact that I was leading was when I saw Marcus in front of me with a wheel hanging off," recounted the frustrated Solberg, who lost a lot of time trying to find a safe place to pass the crippled Peugeot car. Not to worry, he was still two minutes ahead of Sebastien Loeb, who was also to retire the event in SS19 due to engine problems. Solberg took Subaru to the podium in first, a great showing by Markko Märtin for Peugeot in second, and Toni Gardemeister in third, putting him in first place in the driver standings.

From the -27C temperatures of Uddeholm, the teams moved on to Mexico. The Corona Rally runs through mountain and plain near the cities of Guanajuato and Leon, about 400 miles north of Mexico City. As Petter Solberg and Marcus Grönholm set up to do battle again, the Citroën Team were concentrating on just finishing.

Sebastien Loeb's win in Monte Carlo gave the only points the manufacturer had so far, as Duval had so far failed to finish. "I explained to my drivers that the objective was to finish the rally" said Guy Frequelin. Unfortunately, Francois Duval went out on the Saturday with engine damage after a hard landing. However, by the end of the event, Loeb, starting from a difficult 14<sup>th</sup> place after suffering suspension damage, had fought his way all the way back to 4<sup>th</sup>. On the podium, Solberg managed to hold off the combined attack from

devastating roll on a 120kph right-hander during the final shakedown, destroying the car and forcing him to sit this one out. An intense battle took place during the stages between Loeb, Grönholm, Solberg and Duval. Each of the drivers posting some great times, but Loeb and Grönholm really pushed during the final stages to get the first and second positions, respectively. Citroën pleased with the result as Duval, posting his first points since joining the team, gains fourth place behind Solberg.



Photo by MGR.com

Peugeot, taking first place over Grönholm in second, and Markko Märtin in third.

Then off to New Zealand, and the Propecia Rally, with open, unpredictable stages around the city of Auckland on the North Island. Adrenaline running high in this fourth stop, as drivers and teams prepare to make a good impact on their standings. Duval, seriously in need of a finish, vows to aim for some points, while Loeb vows to push harder for a win. Ford's Roman Kresta suffers a

As the Championship heads over to the Supermag Rallye d'Italia, the driver standings are tight: P. Solberg (26), S. Loeb (25), M. Märtin (23), M. Grönholm (20), T. Gardemeister (20). Peugeot showing well so far in the Manufacturer's title: Peugeot (43), Citroën (31), Subaru (28), Ford (26), and Mitsubishi (24)

By Ken Jeffery