



CITROËN TOTAL WORLD RALLY TEAM

2009 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

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Neste Rally Finland (July 30-August 2, 2009) – Day 1

The clash at the top lives up to its promise

The anticipated duel between Mikko Hirvonen and Sébastien Loeb lived up to its promise throughout the opening day of the 2009 Rally Finland. Following today's visit to the Killeri super-special, the Finn leads the five-time World Champion by just 3.3 seconds. The situation as it stands is particularly positive for the Citroën Total World Rally Team, since Dani Sordo follows in a strong third place, 20 seconds behind the leading pair.

True to tradition, the event kicked off with a first visit to the Killeri super-special which saw Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena and Dani Sordo/Marc Marti hit the ground running to secure the top two places on Thursday evening. This morning, crews pulled out of the service area in Jyväskylä for an early start, heading north for the first attempt at the day's loop of four stages: Jukojärvi, Kruununperä, Mökkiperä and Palsankylä. The majority of the roads were typical of the Finnish classic – wide and fast, plus the famous jumps and blind crests – but other parts were narrower, twisty and even rocky in places, which led to numerous changes in rhythm for the drivers.

The first two stages saw Sébastien Loeb drop around 10 seconds to Mikko Hirvonen, but the Citroën driver had no intention of allowing his rival to pull out a gap and he responded with fastest times on the next two tests: "The early part of the morning was quite difficult. I didn't feel 100 per cent confident in my car. We made some changes to the suspension and differential settings on the road section after SS3 and, after that, my C4 WRC handled just how I wanted it to. I felt far more comfortable and I was able to claim two fastest times." Seb turned up at the lunchtime service halt a mere 3.6s behind the leader and confident that he would be able to fight Hirvonen for top spot.

Dani Sordo followed in third place, 11.6s down, and was justifiably pleased with his morning's run: "I felt confident in my car from the start and I was able to push hard on the first three stages. However, on Palsankylä, which was narrower, and covered in a coating of loose gravel, I preferred to lift a little so as not to risk going off."

The fight at the top turned out to be every bit as fierce during the afternoon's attempt at the same four stages. After posting the quickest times once again on Jukojärvi and Kruununperä, Hirvonen was outpaced by Loeb on Mökkiperä and Palsankylä, and the difference between the two drivers after the afternoon's loop increased from 3.6 to 4.0 seconds! "Like Mikko, I am on the limit from the start to the finish of every stage," reported



Seb. "The gap is still extremely close and nothing is by any means over yet. We won't be able to afford to give anything away tomorrow!"

Dani Sordo emerged from the afternoon's loop still in third place, some 20 seconds off the lead. He, too, could be pleased with his day's work: "It's nice to be ahead of Jari-Matti Latvala on the tonight's leaderboard. I am very happy with my car and notes, and that gave me the confidence I needed to drive at my own rhythm. It's been a good day, but I'm already looking ahead to tomorrow. We will need to keep up the same sort of pace."

The first leg ended with the weekend's second visit to the Killeri super-special which saw the two Citroën drivers gain a few tenths of a second on Mikko Hirvonen.

RALLY FACTS

	Sébastien Loeb / Daniel Elena		Dani Sordo / Marc Marti	
	Stage	Overall	Stage	Overall
SS1 : Killeri 1 (2,06 km)	1st	1st	2 nd +0''1	2 nd +0''1
SS2 : Jukojärvi 1 (22,29 km)	2 nd +2''9	2 nd +2''0	3rd +5''2	3rd +4''4
SS3 : Kruununperä 1 (13,51 km)	6th +7''1	4th +9''1	4th +3''5	3rd +7''9
SS4 : Mökkiperä 1 (13,64 km)	1st	2 nd +6''5	2 nd +2''1	3rd +7''4
SS5 : Palsankylä 1 (13,92 km)	1st	2 nd +3''6	4th +7''1	3rd +11''6
SS6 : Jukojärvi 2 (22,29 km)	2 nd +1''6	2 nd +5''2	3rd +2''3	3rd +13''9
SS7 : Kruununperä 2 (13,51 km)	3rd +2''4	2 nd +7''6	4th +3''1	3rd +17''0
SS8 : Mökkiperä 2 (13,64 km)	1st	2 nd +6''5	3rd +1''9	3rd +17''8
SS9 : Palsankylä 2 (13,92 km)	1st	2 nd +4''0	4th +5''0	3rd +20''3
SS10 : Killeri 2 (2,06 km)				

Stage wins

Day 1 – SS1 : Sébastien Loeb (Citroën C4) – SS2 and 3 : Mikko Hirvonen (Ford Focus) – SS4 and 5 : Loeb – SS6 and 7 : Hirvonen – SS8 and 9 : Loeb – SS10 : Loeb

Best performers : Loeb, 6 fastest times – Hirvonen, 4 fastest times.

Leader : SS1 : Loeb – SS2 to 10 : Hirvonen

Leaderboard after day one :

1.	Hirvonen / Lehtinen	Ford Focus	1h04min 12'3
2.	Loeb / Elena	Citroën C4	+ 3,3 s
3.	Sordo / Marti	Citroën C4	+ 20 s
4.	Latvala / Antilla	Ford Focus	+ 30,1 s
5.	Rantanen / Lukka	Ford Focus	+ 1 min 14,1 s
6.	H. Solberg / Menkerud	Ford Focus	+ 1 min 16,7 s

7. Östberg / Andersson	Subaru Impreza	+ 1 min 36,5 s
8. Ketomaa / Stenberg	Subaru Impreza	+ 1 min 38,4 s
9. Ogier / Ingrassia	Citroën C4	+ 2 min 14,6 s
10. Wilson / Martin	Ford Focus	+ 2 min 18,1 s

Day 2 (Saturday, August 1): 644.89km, including 166.87km divided into 9 stages (6 different). Service D (06.15, 15 minutes). SS11 (Leustu 1, 21.35km), SS12 (Himos 1, 20.94km) and SS13 (Surkee 1, 14.95km). Regroup (10.11, 13 minutes). Service E (10.24, 30 minutes). SS14 (Leustu 2, 21.35km), SS15 (Himos 2, 20.94km) and SS16 (Surkee 2, 14.95km). Regroup (14.35, 13 minutes). Service F (14.48, 30 minutes). SS17 (Urria, 12.75km), SS18 (Kavala, 10.35km) and SS19 (Väärinmaja, 29.29km). Service G (19.57, 45 minutes). Last car due into parc ferme at 23.00.

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