



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

**2010 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP
RALLY JAPAN**

Pre-event Press Conference
Thursday 9 September

Present:

Sébastien Loeb, Citroën Total World Rally Team
Jari-Matti Latvala, BP Ford Abu Dhabi World Rally Team
Kimi Räikkönen, Citroën Junior Team
Bernardo Sousa, FIA Super 2000 World Rally Championship
Toshi Arai, FIA Production Car World Rally Championship

Q:

Sébastien, this is the first round in which you could win the 2010 Drivers' Championship - is this on your mind going into the event?

SL:

For sure, everybody is talking about that and for sure I know it's possible. I try not to think to that. My job is to do a good rally here. It will depend how I feel, we don't need to win. I will see how I feel. The most important is to finish and to take points.

Q:

This will be the second time the event is held in Sapporo, but it's earlier in the year this time, what do you think of the stages here?

SL:

I don't think the difference in the roads is because of the change of season. Some stages were destroyed last year (2008) and they are the same this year, with the ruts. There's some gravel where the ruts are, but with the WRC we drive in the ruts. I don't like this condition, but it's the same for everybody.

Q:

The Japanese fans have embraced rallying and are incredibly enthusiastic and dedicated; do you enjoy the attention and the atmosphere here?

SL:

It's quite incredible to see the people follow you everywhere, I saw people in Narita [airport] and then I saw the same people on the recce and in the hotel, they are everywhere - it's Japan.

Q:

Does that bother you, the people following you?

SL:

No it's okay. It's a special atmosphere. It's nice to get the gifts they give to us, they are fanatical about the sport. It's good.

Q:

This event does not have a place on next year's calendar - would you like to see it return?

SL:

For the manufacturer, it's good, but from my side I don't like the stages. If they want to continue [in the WRC] they would have to work on the stages, but otherwise it's okay.

Q:

Were the stages better in Obihiro?

SL:

I don't remember so much. The problem here is the gravel, it's so soft – they repaired it, but not very nicely, that's not so good.

Q:

What will your approach be on the opening day?

SL:

What's difficult is that if you try not to go too fast, you can start on the wrong rhythm, it's important to push. If I have the good feeling and everything is well, I will continue to push.

Q:

I hear you were in Tokyo for a while before the event, what were you up to?

SL:

It was good. It's totally different to Europe, we saw some nice things. We did something, I don't know what it is, but some fighting thing. It was good.

Q:

Jari-Matti, is it fair to say this season is a big improvement on 2009? You lie third in the Drivers' Championship with two wins under your belt; do you feel you have discovered the consistency you were seeking?

J-ML:

Okay it's going okay so far. I am very pleased where we are: third and fighting Sébastien Ogier for second. We need to keep it going this way. Okay, we had some difficult times in Portugal and Turkey, but then Rally New Zealand came and we got much more of a push. My role is the second driver for this year, so I was not expecting to be fighting for wins and so two victories is quite a big bonus. We need to get the full confidence for the rest of the year.

Q:

Do you feel comfortable ahead of this event?

J-ML:

I felt more comfortable in Germany after the win in Finland. Winning Finland gave me a relaxed feeling and good confidence for the next event. I feel more comfortable now.

Q:

Last Rally Japan was a Ford one-two and no doubt the team is keen to recreate that success; is it achievable?

J-ML:

We have a good performance from the car in Finland and I'm sure we can find that again – the car is good enough to fight for victory and we need to get the feeling. So we need the rhythm like we had two years ago. On the other hand, it's much harder to get that result this time than two years ago, because there is Sébastien Ogier, Petter Solberg, and Dani Sordo is here this year. For us to win, we need the perfect weekend.

Q:

Did everything go well at shakedown?

J-ML:

I did 10 runs, Loeb only four so maybe I should have had the best time when I did so much running. I needed to improve myself in this area, I don't feel my performance on the super special stage is as good as it could be and that's why I wanted to do some more running. I have set myself the target of the podium and will be very happy if I do that on this event.

Q:

Kimi, a bit of a drama at shakedown for you, can you tell us what happened?

KR:

It was just inside the corner – the front-right, it took off the front-right corner. I'm not too bothered about it. They will fix the car and we can go this evening,

Q:

A little bit steadier, maybe?

KR:

No, not really. I touched the edge of the concrete and broke the suspension, like I said I'm not worried.

Q:

Let's briefly look back to Rallye Deutschland, where you picked up your first WRC stage win on the final super special stage. A good end to the event for you?

KR:

I don't think so many drivers were pushing so hard, but it's a nice feeling. It's different to do this in one kilometre rather than doing it on a 20-kilometre stage through the forest. We still have a lot to learn about rally and hopefully we will learn more here in Japan.

Q:

This event is notoriously tough and it is another step into the unknown for you, what will be your approach?

KR:

Some of the stages are nice, but some are muddy and there are some ruts. It's going to be difficult to learn how fast we can drive on those. I drove on gravel in Finland, so that won't be so difficult, but we have to learn some more.

Q:

The fans here are very enthusiastic about rallying, is it similar to your experiences in Formula 1? And what do you think of this area?

KR:

The area, I don't know so much – I only see the hotel and this area. But it's normal, it's Japan. This is more lively than where I have been in Formula 1, so it's a normal thing here. It's similar with the fans, they're as crazy as ever. And the stages, some of them look pretty difficult, I'll try learn and do my best.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Eric Briquet

Auto Hebdo, France

Q:

Are you happy with the new rules for next year and the 3-2-1 points for the live stage?

KR:

I have nothing to say, they [Loeb and Latvala] have more experience.

SL:

I think to have points, if it brings some TV, why not? At the moment, the rally doesn't need more points but it needs more media – if it's the right solution, why not?

J-ML:

I think it's a great idea. We need more live TV, for the audience it's good. But for the points, if you are in the lead and opening the road, then you have no chance to get those [live TV stage] points. If we do this then we should reverse the order like we did in Finland for the last stage.

Note: Petter Solberg was unable to attend the press conference due to illness.

Toshi Arai, FIA Production Car World Rally Championship

Bernardo Sousa, FIA Super 2000 World Rally Championship

Q:

Toshi, you lie fourth in the PWRC standings, not out of the running for the title yet - do you feel a shot at the title is still realistic?

TA:

I cannot get the Championship, it's very difficult now. We have so many problems this year. I hope for a good result here and then France and GB. But this is a very important event for me at home.

Q:

What were the roads like on the recce?

TA:

The road will be destroyed on the second loop. There is some sand and gravel on top. Some of the roads are quite good, but in some places, after the recce, there are some deep ruts.

Q:

How much has it changed from last time (2008)?

TA:

It's hotter. I hope it stayed the same temperature [as last time]. Even me, I am surprised it's so hot. Usually it's maybe under 20 degrees, much more cooler. But this year it's been hot everywhere.

Q:

What do you think of the new stages?

TA:

I like them. The second stage on day three is the proper Rally Japan road. But it's going to be difficult for the European people, it's too much narrow and twisty, but I like it.

Q:

What's the difference?

TA:

It's too much narrow, it's like the Cyprus road.

Q:

Toshi, earlier this year you won the Asia Pacific Rally Championship round in Hokkaido - can you follow it up with a win here?

TA:

It's not so easy. The competition is very tough here, so I try my best.

Q:

There's no Rally Japan on the calendar for next year. How do you feel about that?

TA:

It's very difficult to say. Japanese people are a little bit strange compared to people from Europe. But the rally gets many rally fans and that is very important for the car manufacturer.

Q:

Do you have any news for next year yet?

TA:

Nothing is decided yet, but this event is very important.

Q:

Bernardo, it's your first time in Japan – what do you think of it so far? I believe you arrived quite late, has jet lag been an issue for you?

BS:

I'm not feeling the jet lag, so it's very good. The fans are crazy, very good. Until now I'm really enjoying the event.

Q:

It's been the first year of the SWRC, have you enjoyed the experience so far and do you feel you have performed well?

BS:

Sweden was not my best event – it's on snow and I'm not used to it. In Jordan I was leading and I was very fast, then we had some issues and I was excluded. In Portugal I was not able to show my pace and fight because I was driving for the Portuguese Championship. Then Germany was very hard, there was no test and I was not able to show my pace. Here, let's see. It's not bad, but it could be better. The experience counts a lot, the others have been here – they are in front, but when the rallies are new, like Jordan, I'm at the front. It could be better, but on the whole I am happy.

Q:

What do you think of the stages here; will they suit you?

BS:

They're okay, some are destroyed after the recce, but they are the same for everybody.

Q:

There is not a large field of SWRC cars here so a good opportunity to get on the podium...

BS:

I will try to fight for the podium and maybe the victory. First of all I need to finish the rally. Even if I'm last, it's a couple of points and I need them. I will try to do my best, but first I want to finish the rally for experience and points

Q:

Are these roads similar to anything you know?

BS:

Some of them are similar to Fafe in Portugal on the old Rally Portugal in the north and some are very similar to those on the Azores Rally in the IRC. It feels like I'm driving at home, they're similar to Portugal: some are very fast and you need good notes to have good pace. From what I can see, it's a very good rally. If it's not raining it's a very, very good rally.

Q:

What about the culture? Are you embracing Japanese culture?

BS:

I'm not using the chopsticks, I didn't go to a proper Japanese restaurant yet - although I'm not normally minding the food. This is a very nice country, I'm very pleased, they are very good people.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Eric Briquet

Auto Hebdo, France

Q:

Toshi, I saw a new Subaru in the service park - is it your new competition car?

TA:

I don't know. Subaru made road car with four door, the five-door car is the competition car.