



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

## 2010 FIA WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP RALLY NEW ZEALAND

**Pre-event Press Conference**  
**Thursday 6 May 2010**

**Present:**

Sébastien Loeb, Citroen Total World Rally Team  
Petter Solberg, Petter Solberg World Rally Team  
Jari-Matti Latvala, BP Ford Abu Dhabi World Rally Team  
Sébastien Ogier, Citroen Junior Team  
Martin Prokop, FIA Super 2000 World Rally Championship  
Richard Mason, FIA Production Car World Rally Championship

Welcome to the pre-event FIA press conference.

**Q:**

Rally New Zealand returns to the city of Auckland, which means we can now utilise the roads to the north as well as the south. What do you think of the new route?

**SL:**

For sure, for us, they are like new stages, a few are the same but you know the rest are like new and the stages are really nice. The stages will be really different to drive.

**Q:** This event has always delivered exciting rally action with the most memorable battle between you and Marcus Grönholm resulting in the smallest-ever winning margin. Why do you think this event consistently delivers exciting action?

**SL:** It is difficult to say. It is difficult to make a big (time) difference on these roads – all the drivers like these roads and so everybody is going very fast. I will be happy if I can finish close in this rally from the lead, because it is gravel the first day and so maybe difficult.

**Q:** At the start of the week you and the rest of the team took to the waters in Auckland harbour in an America's Cup boat where you performed all sorts of tasks and competed against Ford. What was the experience like?

**SL:** It was good for Ford, but I hope Citroen will win the rally. It was my first experience on a sailing boat and it was interesting to see how everything was working and all the work you have to do on the boat to make it fast, so it was an interesting day.

**Q:** Petter, you lie second in the Championship after four events. For a privateer team with a very small amount of people making it all happen, you are giving the manufacturer crews a real run for their money!

**PS:** Well I can only do whatever I can. It's been working very well with some good fights. It's been good to go fast and match the stage times with the other guys. The car is working very well and all the things are going almost like planned really. Sébastien has a big points' lead and whether we can do something with that. But we will see.

**Q:** You tested at the start of the week, something the manufacturers are not allowed to do outside of Europe – how did it go and do you feel it gives you an advantage?

**PS:** No. First of all I was talking to Sébastien about it. I don't have any other options, you know. If I had the chance I would rather test in Europe. It cost more to do the test, to use the car you use for the rally is not a good idea. So, it's rather like a shakedown of the car because it was brand-new rebuilt and just to check and recheck everything. But I am sure all the other teams have done a proper job before the rally, you know, testing on a similar type of roads in Europe. You know I take my only choice but I am happy.

**Q:** You will start from second on the road; from what you have seen from the recce with regard to the level of gravel do you think you will still be at a disadvantage?

**PS:** This is a little bit different type of rally with the gravel. This is more sticky gravel. We always have a chat about it all, the rally guys before we came here already. Maybe the top four or five cars, it is a disadvantage on all the cars but of course much more on Sébastien. But driving will be very slippery.... But the second loop it will be difficult for Loeb and better for us very quickly. I think it will be the same guys who will be up there fighting again anyway. It's not nice to be first on the road, that's for sure.

**Q:** In Turkey we did not see any slowing tactics at the end of each day's competition, but do you think here will be a different story?

**PS:** No, I don't think so. They are very good at strategy. I think if they have the chance to try do something [they will]. If it's dry on the first day, I think maybe we could have same starting positions, first and second. If it's raining, on Saturday and Sunday, well...

**Q:** Jari-Matti, you have said that the car feels like it is 'dancing on the road' here in New Zealand; can you explain what you mean by that?

**J-ML:** Obviously here, you have big camber on the road so many times you have places where you have go left and then over the road to the right. You go over the camber basically. The car might go a little bit in the air from the left to the right. It's a bit of a feeling like dancing but because it's turning all the time. It's a little bit like Rally Finland but on the surface but it's turning all the time. Finland is much, much faster and flat roads. Here it's just like it's turning all the time somewhere and that's why I say the car is moving all the time, a bit like dancing.

**Q:** This year has seen you deliver a more consistent performance than in 2010; are you happy with the way the season is going so far?

**J-ML:** It's been good but we got the little minus in Turkey. But least we got some points from there for the team and even a couple of points for myself. But generally, yes, it's been a good start of the season. We need to just concentrate to carry on and try to get those things that happened in Turkey out of the way. I need to just keep concentrating on my own driving and see how the times will be against these guys. Obviously Marcus Grönholm would say that I want to concentrate on my own driving.

**Q:** What will be the approach from you this weekend? You have a good road position on the opening day...

**J-ML:** I need to just keep continuing with my own driving and see how the times will be against these guys. And see if we get the benefit [from road position]. But, well, I don't want to start pushing too hard. I just want to keep concentrating on my own driving and see how the times come.

**Q:** This event marks the 25<sup>th</sup> World Championship start for you and Julien (Ingrassia). New Zealand was a late addition to your rallying programme, you have never competed here before. What are your thoughts so far? As it is your first time in New Zealand, how are you coping with the jetlag?

**SO:** I'm very happy to be here; it was not my plan to come here with Citroen, so it's like a bonus for me. It is a rally I wanted to do in the future so it is important for me to learn the rally here and as the other drivers say there are some fantastic roads here. So I think it is going to be a privilege to drive here this weekend.

**Q:** You have had a strong start to the season with many impressive performances, how do you evaluate your season so far?

**SO:** For the moment I am happy with the start to the season and I think we did a good job with no mistakes at all and some good results. I think my score on the championship could be better actually, but, okay, but it doesn't really matter for me so much – the most important thing is to get the experience to finish with maximum points of the rally. Now I am closer and closer to my rivals.

**Q:** Tactically, you have helped Citroën, sometimes spoiling your own chances of getting on the podium. How frustrating is that to lose out after working so hard during an event?

**SO:** For sure. At that moment it was a very big deal, as for certain I was very close to fighting for my first victory or maybe fighting for a podium. It was very special to us at that moment, but after a few days I understand that it was important for me to respect Citroen as a team and it is quite normal to help the team, so maybe it is part of learning.

**Q: Coming back to you now, Sébastien to talk about the championship calendar, because that was released just after we came away from Turkey. What do you think of the inclusion of the rallies next year and are there any missing things from the 2011 calendar?**

**SL:** To be honest I didn't check – and I don't know what rally we do next year so I can't tell you.

**J-M L:** Well, it looks good. Good rallies. I was maybe hoping for a second winter rally as well. It would be good to have two winter rallies.

**Martin Prokop, FIA Super 2000 World Rally Championship**  
**Richard Mason, FIA Production Car World Rally Championship**

**Q:** Martin, it was success in New Zealand for you in 2008, this time around it's a very different car in the Ford Fiesta S2000 and a very strong field to compete against!

**MP:** In Mexico it was quite well. The engine of the car was quite different. Last time we raced was Sweden, now I think it will be first race since so we will see how well [we go] and I think everybody will show their speed because we are just six very fast [SWRC] drivers. Everybody will see I would like to do as well as possible, as our car is ok. We check it after Mexico and [the team] did a good job.

I have been looking forward to do this event because the car going good from Mexico and haven't sat in the car for a long time. Last year I did all championship, one half Citroen, one half Mitsubishi, so I had plenty of 'seat time'. This year it's different so I hope I will be confident. I have tested a lot so I know something about this car and don't know the car like I knew the Citroen or Mitsubishi. This car is better and I want to keep getting it to work better.

**Q:** New stages this time around for you, what have you thought of the stages to the North?

**MP:** It's wonderful stages, nice stages, but I will expect them to be quite similar to last time I was driving here. All of Sunday is the same, Saturday few stages the same, Friday new to me. Similar to Finland for me, very fast over crests so I hope my pace notes are okay because on this race you have to trust them a lot because it is long race and there a lot of parts the stages or sections you can't remember so you have to trust your co-driver and trust your pace notes. My feeling during reece was not too bad but we will see how we go on the high-speed stages. The surface is like in Finland, very hard on the bottom but on the top it's very soft. After the WRC drivers make the normal line, so you don't want to miss this line or make your own line.

**Q:** Richard, you take the wild card entry in the PWRC and will compete on what will be the second round of NZ Rally Championship – it's a big weekend for you!

**RM:** It's a big weekend for us, had rough start to the New Zealand championship a month ago at Otago, suspension not that flash, car was maybe a bit underpowered. We've made lot of changes to the car and really feel we can be a lot faster here and want to be on PWRC podium. We've had to seconds in the past; a third ideally want to be on the top. Roads have been good to me so I'm very happy.

**Q:** Now in the first round of the NZ championship you had a different co-driver other than your wife Sara as she was busy with a new baby, but she returns for this one?

**RM:** I normally have my wife sitting with me the as co-driver. We've recently had baby, little Khalid, who's now seven weeks. Sara thought it would be a little hard getting back in the car for Otago, so she's here in the car; she couldn't stay away and will do her best job. Recce went very well and we always gel very well and work well together in the car – it felt very nice.

**Q:** There is strong field of PWRC drivers out there this weekend, including some fellow Kiwis; it looks like it will be a tough battle in both Championships?

**RM:** Sara and I have discussed that a lot – it is going to be hard to find the balance. Obviously the PWRC only counts at the end of the weekend, whereas for the New Zealand championship every day of Rally New Zealand counts for points. So we need to keep a close eye on our New Zealand competitors during the rally and not worry so much about PWRC until probably the last day. We'll aim to a good position with New Zealand Championship and then see where we are with the PWRC. As I said before we'd dearly like to be on top of the podium and think it's clearly possible. We've had good speed at Rally New Zealand in past and it's about time to get a good final result – we are quite confident.

And both of them [the other Kiwis entered in PWRC, Emma Gilmour and Hayden Paddon] are entered in to the New Zealand championships, so I'm sure the same things will be playing on their minds, maybe not so much Hayden, as he didn't go to the first round and is supposed to miss the last round so I'm sure his true goal will be worrying about PWRC. He's an incredibly fast competitor here in New Zealand and a difficult person to beat at any time. But I do think we will have the upper edge here, the roads are just tight enough to suit us in the car. I wouldn't want them any faster but I think they will be just about right.

**Q:** The rally base has now shifted from Hamilton which enables us to use the stages to the North – good to see them back on the event?

**RM:** I think it is good to see the Northland stages back on the event; I really like the camber up there. The undulation and change in the camber is quite amazing once you start driving the road. You don't really notice it in reece – it feels normal, but at pace you realise you're jumping the camber and that's quite nice. We've used a lot of those roads up there in the APRC rally [International Rally of Whangarei] in the past, but I do feel they are quite different when they are with the WRC. The World Rally Cars take a much better line than the Asia Pacific competitors and you really end up with a really nicely swept road and it's much easier to drive the line.

**Q:** It is apparently winter time here but the temperatures have been pretty good this week. What can expect to happen weather wise on the event and if we see rain how will this effect competition?

**RM:** Autumn in New Zealand tends to be quite settled, we don't get a lot of rain in the autumn. It tends to come in early winter so it feels sort summery, it's sort of in between – warm during the day and cold at night. Not sure about rain, both areas are quite drought stricken over the last few months and I'd think that rain is not far away, so if we don't see it during rally then maybe straight after the rally. For me, if it rains, then it's the same for everyone else that I'm competing against. Okay, if I was at the front of the field with the WRC cars then I'd be thinking I don't have to sweep the gravel. Where we are, there is already a line on the road and it's going to be very slippery if it's raining but [then] we all have the same deal.