

LOEB STARS IN SARDINIA
REIGNING WRC CHAMPION CRUSHES THE OPPOSITION

WHELDON WINS AGA
LUCKY BREAK EXTENDS BRIT ACE'S IRL TITLE

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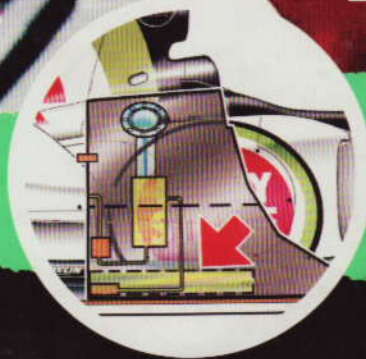
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McRAE PLAYS ESCORT ROLE IN KILLARNEY

Colin McRae ran his Ford Escort MkII as course car on last weekend's Killarney Rally, a round of the Irish Tarmac Championship. The 1995 world champion, who had to retire on SS15 with mechanical woes, said: "Killarney is one of the events in Ireland I remember dad talking about, and it's one of the events I've wanted to do for a while. The stages were fantastic, if a bit slippery in places."

MEEKE EYES TITLE THANKS TO 'FANTASTIC' NEW CAR

JUNIOR WORLD Rally Championship leader Kris Meeke says his new Citroën C2 Super 1600 is a car which is capable of winning all the remaining rounds of this year's JWRC series.

Meeke, who just missed out on backing up his Monte Carlo win with a similar result on last week's Rally Italia, was competing with the latest-specification C2 for the first time in Sardinia. He eventually finished the event third, but led until he beached the car after being unable to see a corner on the dusty 11th stage.

"The car is absolutely fantastic," said Meeke, who heads the title race by one point from a

quartet of drivers — including fellow Briton Guy Wilks, who finished sixth in Italy. Meeke's team-mate Daniel Sordo won the event, but Meeke said it could have been the perfect result for the Kronos/Citroën outfit.

"We could have given the team a one-two with this car," he said. "One small mistake is the only blemish on three months' hard work. This car has made massive steps from the old one, the engine being the biggest. The engine does everything better: it's got more torque, it revs faster through the range.

The geometry is superb; everybody has been scrubbing their tyres here, but our tyres have lasted exceptionally well."



Meeke

June's Acropolis Rally is the next outing for Meeke, followed by Finland, Germany, Corsica and Catalunya.

"The car is good enough to win everywhere, we just have to put it all together on each of the events," he said. "We have seen here that if you put a decent driver with an excellent team, everything is possible. It's fantastic for me to be able to show what I am capable of in a car like this."

SOLBERG CALLS FOR JWRC RULE CHANGES

FORMER WORLD champion Petter Solberg has called on the FIA to implement changes to the Junior World Rally Championship format, following the multitude of punctures which beset the leading 1600cc runners on last week's Rally Italia.

The Subaru driver said it was

unacceptable that they should have to compete on such rough stages without the run-flat tyres that are used in the main WRC.

"I feel sorry for them," said Solberg. "It's so hard to see who is the best driver and to get them in the WRC. Something has to be done."

PEUGEOT EXPERIMENTS

PEUGEOT WILL allow Marcus Grönholm and Markko Martin the chance to test new dampers, in order to prove to them that the current set-up is the best for the 307 WRC.

Both drivers have complained about the suspension on the car and, while team principal Jean-Pierre Nicolas didn't expect the 307's specification to alter, he

said he was willing to experiment with the new units. The test is expected to be carried out within the next month.

Grönholm, who led the Rally Italia early on before rolling his car, said: "At the moment everybody is talking about tyres, tyres, tyres, but we still have work to do on the car itself and testing the dampers is a good idea."

OZ RALLY SET FOR DATE SHIFT

RALLY AUSTRALIA'S shift in host city is also near-certain to require a move forward in the year and away from its position as the final WRC round.

The event's current base in Perth is the only place in Australia

where the event can use roads unaffected by a fire-hazard rule precluding this type of activity in the summer months.

Current favourites to replace the Western Australian city are Queensland or Canberra.

Should Australia move from its position as the final round, this would raise the possibility for Rally GB to move back to its traditional November date. It ran in September last year and is scheduled to do so again this year.

HIRVONEN FLIES IN SARDINIA

FORMER FORD and Subaru driver Mikko Hirvonen blasted back onto the WRC scene with a stunning leg-one performance on last week's Rally Italia.

The Finn, who was ditched by Subaru at the end of last season, said last Friday — when he ran as high as second overall, but finished third in a two-year-old Focus RS WRC — was the best day of his rallying career. He retired on the first Saturday stage after taking a wheel off. "I knew the risks of

how quickly I was pushing," he said. "I wanted to go as fast as possible until something happened. I proved my point."

Hirvonen's next outing is on the Acropolis Rally in June, where he says he will employ a similar risk-all strategy.

▶ The former Subaru driver ran in second place on Friday



WILSON: MORE SURGERY

MATTHEW WILSON was expected to undergo further operations earlier this week, following his 100mph crash on the recent International Rally of Wales.

Wilson's father, Ford BP World Rally Team boss Malcolm, confirmed the 18-year-old had been moved to the Nuffield Hospital in Newcastle, where he would have his left forearm plated and his right kneecap rebuilt.

Wilson's co-driver Scott Martin has completed all of his operations and is now starting a lengthy recuperation.

"They're both in good spirits," said Wilson Sr. "The original thought that Matthew would be in hospital for six weeks has been reduced. Providing the operation goes well, he should be in for a fortnight. Both of them were desperately disappointed to have missed Rally Italia this weekend and they're already talking about when they can come back."

The operation on Wilson's right wrist has been a success with the bones already knitting, meaning he won't require them to be wired.