



BP-Ford starts new season with proven championship package

Reigning world rally champion BP-Ford will launch the defence of its 2006 title on the legendary Rallye Monte Carlo (18 - 21 January) in France next week with a proven winning squad. The team which lifted the FIA World Rally Championship manufacturers' title will begin 2007 with the same core structure firmly in place.

The driver line-up of Marcus Grönholm and Timo Rautiainen and team-mates Mikko Hirvonen and Jarmo Lehtinen, who spurred the team to its most successful season ever with eight victories en route to the title, remains unchanged. The Focus RS WRC will also begin the new campaign in the same specification that it ended the 2006 season. However, development of the car continues and upgrades are expected as the season unfolds.

Jost Capito, director of Ford TeamRS, who has overall responsibility for Ford's WRC programme, believes the team can capitalise on last year's title triumph. "Over the years I believe the team has developed into one of the best squads in motorsport," he said. "The title meant a great deal to so many people and Ford was extremely proud of the team's success. But it also meant we achieved our target of being in a position to start 2007 capable of being fully competitive on all 16 rounds and ready to launch a concerted bid for both the drivers' and manufacturers' titles this year."

BP-Ford World Rally Team director Malcolm Wilson is also confident for the season ahead. "Last season we proved that the Focus RS has both the speed and reliability to win rallies anywhere," he said. "In Marcus we have someone with the pace and experience to challenge for his third drivers' world title. As the season progressed Mikko improved to become one of the world's leading drivers and we expect him to mature further in 2007. The combination of driver and car line-up is hugely exciting and I'm really looking forward to the year."

Grönholm starts his second campaign with BP-Ford after finishing runner-up in the drivers' series in 2006 and the 38-year-old Finn is in a positive frame of mind. "Testing has gone well over the winter and I'm looking forward to the start of the season," he said. "I hope we can repeat our success of 2006 by winning the manufacturers' title again but I also want to win the drivers' crown – that's an important target for me this year."

Hirvonen has his sights set on continuing his impressive performances during the second half of 2006 that carried him to third in the drivers' standings. "I hope I can push harder this season and challenge people like Marcus, Petter Solberg and Sebastien Loeb on more rallies. It won't be easy to be up there but if I can be close enough to fight with them I'll be happy. It would be so good for us to win the manufacturers' title again. There is so much motivation from everyone within the team to defend it," said the 26 year-old Finn.

The Focus RS WRC will display a new colour scheme for 2007 and a new team logo has been designed to take the team into the future.



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Photographs of the Focus RS WRC in its new livery are available at www.worldrallypics.com/ford or www.media.ford.com