

Castrol-Ford wins as Grönholm flies into the record books



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Press Release Summary = **Victory in Finland on the debut event for the new Ford Focus further extended the Castrol-Ford team's lead in both the Manufacturers' and Drivers' Championships**

Press Release Body = Victory for **Marcus Grönholm** and a close second for **Mikko Hirvonen** in Finland on the debut event for the new **Ford Focus** further extended the **Castrol-Ford team's** lead in both the **Manufacturers' and Drivers' Championships**.

Grönholm's win makes him the first driver ever to win a single event seven times but, crucially, it gives him a greater cushion in his quest for the title.

The **Castrol-Ford team** lived up to its status as pre-rally favourites by dominating the opening leg, **Grönholm** taking eight stage wins and **Hirvonen** two with the **Ford duo** also claiming both the top two places on stages seven from 11. **Hirvonen and Grönholm** swapped places over the opening handful of tests before the championship leader took command on stage five as average speeds topped 132kph at times.

Despite this crushing performance the time gaps were still very close and just 4.4s separated the **Ford** pairing after 133.49kms with third placed **Sebastien Loeb** just 16 seconds further adrift.

*"I knew it would be difficult to lead from first on the road," said **Grönholm**. "I had a good feeling with the notes and my lead over Seb*

is double this year what it was last so we can see the performance difference in the new car."

Hirvonen was also delighted with the **2007-spec Focus**. *"It is much easier to drive and has good grip and handling on the crests. I'm much more confident with it."*

Ford added a further eight stage wins from a possible nine on day two as **Grönholm** tightened his grip on a rally he'd won six times before, effectively securing his place at the top with two blistering times through Ouninpohja. *"I had to drive flat out to beat Mikko and was hitting 200kph on the long straight there. We're jumping in the new car at places where we didn't before – it's so fast."*

Hirvonen admitted to taking risks. *"We were nearly off the road in Ouninpohja and if we'd gone off, all we could have done was take a bow to the fans! I'm not pushing so hard now as I need to secure a finish for the team but I'm really satisfied with my performance. One day I'll win this rally but maybe this year isn't the time to try too hard."*

Just three stages remained on Sunday's final leg but **Grönholm** won all three with **Hirvonen** second, thereby securing an historic seventh win on his home event. The series heads to Germany in two weeks, traditionally a stronghold event for **Loeb**, but **Grönholm** knows that whatever happens there he and his team will still lead the series into New Zealand at the end of the month.

Castrol-Ford team manager Malcolm Wilson said: *"I've got two diamonds in my team and this was one of the best 1-2 finishes we've ever had. There was huge pressure on Marcus especially but both he and Mikko drove superbly."*

Rally Finland top six finishers

- 1. Grönholm/Rautiainen (Ford)**
- 2. Hirvonen/Lehinen (Ford)**
- 3. Loeb/Elena (Citröen)**
- 4. Atkinson/Prevot (Subaru)**
- 5. H Solberg/Menkerud (Ford)**
- 6. Pons/Amigo (Subaru)**

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