

Grönholm snatches victory for Castrol Ford in NZ thriller



Released on = September 3, 2007, 8:27 am

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Industry = [Automotive](#)

Press Release Summary = **Grönholm clinched victory by just 0.3 seconds for Castrol-Ford in New Zealand thriller**

Press Release Body = **Marcus Grönholm** clinched victory in New Zealand by just 0.3 seconds after a nail-biting finale to arguably the best event of the season. Meanwhile **Mikko Hirvonen** took third to further cement the **Castrol-Ford** team's position at the head of the **World Rally Championship**.

Rain before the start mean that **Grönholm** would not have face the kind of loose gravel that could scupper his chances of victory before they began. However, a hefty dose of 'long-haul flu' didn't help. *"I didn't feel 100% but I knew I had to attack this morning,"* said **Grönholm**. He won the opening pair of tests and hung on to his lead for the rest of the day as Loeb and the rest launched their attack.

Meanwhile team mate **Hirvonen**, who had accepted the traditional Maori challenge on behalf of all the crews at the ceremonial start, lost his tyre gamble and ended the day third. *"I chose a slightly harder compound than Marcus but they didn't give me 100% feeling on these heavily cambered roads,"* he admitted.

Saturday morning saw the honours shared between **Grönholm and Loeb**. **Grönholm** only relinquished his lead after hitting a big hole and easing off when the car felt unusually nervous. **Hirvonen** produced another solid day at the wheel of the second Focus RS to maintain his podium slot but all eyes were now on the battle for victory. *"It's going to be a great finale,"* said **Grönholm**. *"The stages around Raglan are*

some of the most spectacular in the series. We've made some set-up changes for the final push and it'll be a good battle I hope..."

Grönholm regained the lead on the opening stage before Loeb hit back over the next two. Following a service in Raglan, **Grönholm** launched a final attack and regained the lead by 0.7 seconds after Whaanga Coast. Neither driver could relax on the superspecial at Mystery Creek but while Loeb won the stage it was not enough and a famous victory was secured...those 0.3 seconds equating to just over seven metres between the two protagonists at the finish of the 353kms event.

"This was the closest and best battle of my career and I'm delighted to have won it!" said the Finn after securing his 30th career victory. *"The nice thing was that the whole team could watch the final stage and so they all shared in this result at the same time."*

BP [Castrol](#) team manager Malcolm Wilson said: *"I've never seen a finish like that in my career. When I saw Marcus jumping up and down on the top of the car I knew he'd done it but maybe I'll send him a bill for the dents!"*

"The finale to this rally was as dramatic as any sporting event in the world and shows how exciting the WRC is," added **Ford Team RS director Jost Capito**.

Rally	New Zealand	top six	finishers
1.	Grönholm/Rautiainen		(Ford)
2.	Loeb/Elena		(Citroen)
3.	Hirvonen/Lehinen		(Ford)
4.	Atkinson/Prevot		(Subaru)
5.	Latvala/Antilla		(Ford)
6.	Sordo/Martin (Citroen)		

About

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Castrol-Ford:

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