

Ford wins back-to-back titles



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Press Release Summary: The Castrol-Ford Team has won the WRC manufacturers title for the second successive season thanks to Mikko Hirvonen's fourth place on the inaugural WRC Rally Ireland

Press Release Body: **The Castrol-backed Ford Team** has won the **World Rally Championship (WRC)** manufacturers title for the second successive season thanks to **Mikko Hirvonen's** fourth place on the inaugural **WRC Rally Ireland**. **Marcus Grönholm** failed to score meaning the drivers' title will be decided in the final event of the season, Rally GB in two weeks time.

Rally Ireland was the newest event to enter the **WRC calendar** and the first time the 'Emerald Isle' has featured in the series. The bumpy nature of the roads was always feared as a danger area as **Castrol-Ford** driver **Marcus Grönholm** found out to his cost - the championship leader crashed heavily on the opening morning.

Having taken an early lead **Grönholm** had slipped to third and was fighting back when the Focus went off the road on SS4. *"The roads were like ice this morning,"* said the Finn. *"I braked for a bend near the end of the stage but the car slid sideways before hitting a wall hard. It was a big impact because we stopped immediately."*

Grönholm and co-driver **Timo Rautiainen** went to hospital where they were given the all-clear but the same could not be said of the Focus and, for the second event running, the damage was too severe to allow the Finn to rejoin.

With **Grönholm** out of contention, team mate **Mikko Hirvonen** turned his attention not to chasing victory but to ensuring he gained the three points necessary for **Castrol-Ford** to retain its manufacturers' World Championship crown. *"Friday was the hardest day of the season so far,"* he said. *"I couldn't find a good rhythm because I was trying to drive safely and when you do that you make mistakes."*

After opening in Southern Ireland, Saturday's route was concentrated in the north but heavy rain meant that caution was still the watchword. *"The stages in this area are good with jumps and crests like we have in Finland,"* said **Hirvonen**. *"If the weather had been dry they would have been incredibly fast."*

With just four stages on the final day, **Hirvonen** was taking no chances and duly brought the Focus home in a title-winning fourth place. *"This was a great result for the team but a difficult event for me as I couldn't risk pushing for a better overall place and risk not scoring the points the team needed,"* he said.

With the Manufacturers' title secure attention now turns to **Marcus Grönholm's** quest to steal the crown from under Sebastien Loeb's nose on the final round in Wales in two weeks' time.

Ford team manager **Malcolm Wilson** said: *'It's a fantastic feeling to win back-to-back championships. To win with one event remaining is amazing. Mikko did a perfect job this weekend and after Marcus' retirement, he fully understood the role he had to play this weekend and he did it to perfection.'*

About

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