

2017 FIA World Rally Championship (WRC)

Round 6: Rally de Portugal

## ***The performance and strength of the MICHELIN LTX Force H4 and S5 play key role in Portugal victory***

For the third year running, Portugal's round of the FIA World Rally Championship was based in the north of the country, near Porto, where competitors faced cool, windy conditions, but were spared rain. The organisers had meticulously prepared the stages which were recently regraded, but their efforts finally went unrewarded after heavy rain caused significant damage to the local dirt roads in the days before the start. Despite this setback, the first European gravel fixture of the 2017 campaign still lived up to its promise by producing another fierce fight for victory. Indeed, the gap between winner Sébastien Ogier (M-Sport) and second-placed Thierry Neuville (Hyundai) was only 16.8s at the last morning's re-start, with 306.24 competitive kilometres completed and 42.93km still to come.

Michelin's partners were able to choose between the hard-compound MICHELIN LTX Force H4 and the new, softer S5. The latter, which was first available for March's Rally Mexico, gets up to its ideal working temperature just as quickly as its predecessor – which is vital in order to be competitive from the very start of stages – but it is also more consistent and, above all, delivers competitive performance even longer. With wear-rates down 20 percent in identical conditions, the MICHELIN LTX Force S5 is increasingly becoming the drivers' preferred choice, while the H4 continues to be the favoured fitment for hot, dry weather and/or rough, hard-wearing ground.

"Tyre strategy for this year's Vodafone Rally de Portugal was pretty straightforward," observed **Jacques Morelli**, manager of Michelin's FIA WRC programme. "For the mornings' first passes, the stages were relatively dirty, with quite a thick top-coating of dust. To benefit from the best possible grip, the drivers unsurprisingly opted for the soft-compound MICHELIN LTX Force S5 which delivers a competitive compromise between strength and performance. For the afternoons' repeat loops – when the conditions were rougher, with unearthed stones and hotter temperatures of up to 32°C – a combination of hard and soft tyres emerged as the best option in order to benefit from quick times while minimising the risk of air loss. Much of the secret on this type of rally is to select the optimal trade-off between performance and strength. These two qualities are seen as contradictory but Michelin has made a point of taking both forward at the same time, with no detriment to each other, and this week's competition was a perfect illustration of that. We never sacrifice strength for outright performance and this means our partners are able to reach stage finishes safely, which is an absolute priority for us, as testified by our 307<sup>th</sup> world class victory today."

The 2017 Rally de Portugal was won by M-Sport's French pair Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Ford Fiesta WRC), ahead of Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 WRC). The Belgians' Spanish team-mates Dani Sordo/Marc Marti made it an all-Michelin podium.

The WRC2 victors were Swedes Tidemand/Andersson who steered their Skoda Fabia R5 to the class's top spot, ahead of Finns Suninen/Markkula (M-Sport Ford Fiesta R5). Romania's Tempestini and his Italian co-driver Bernacchini came third to make it an all-Michelin top-three in this category, too.



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## THE MICHELIN LTX Force H4 and S5

The MICHELIN LTX Force H4 (hard compound) and MICHELIN LTX Force S5 (soft) were designed to cover the broad range of conditions encountered on the FIA World Rally Championship's gravel rounds and their specification was registered with the FIA (Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile) prior to the start of the season. Because of the exceptional spectrum of temperatures, types of ground (soft, hard, rough, smooth, etc.) and weather (rain, dry, dust, mud) drivers can expect to face in the course of the year, the MICHELIN LTX Force H4 and S5 have to be extremely versatile. They consequently combine strength, resistance to wear and the consistent delivery of performance over even the longest loops of stages on events that range from hot and sunny, such as Rally Australia, to muddy Wales Rally GB. Michelin Motorsport's engineers benefited from the company's long and successful association with the FIA World Rally Championship to design these latest-generation gravel tyres. The lessons learned on the stages provide invaluable data for the development of Michelin road tyres, in keeping with the brand's policy of using motorsport as a proving ground for new technologies.



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