

September 29, 2013

Final Media Conference

APRC

PRESENT:

Gaurav GILL	(TEAM MRF)
Yuya SUMIYAMA	(CUSCO RACING)
Shuhei MUTA	(CUSCO RACING)

Question: Welcome to the host event Rally Hokkaido press conference. First of all, congratulations to all of you for a wonderful job. It was great to see you on the podium. We'll start with Gaurav. This is not the first time you came first on the podium in this event however, I'm afraid that this is the first time that this counts! Anyway, congratulations, and I think that this time you are very close to securing the championship. Mathematically there are still chances for Michael Young to win it in China, but the odds are quite positive aren't they? Please tell us what is your impression of the championship so far. It's been up and down for you this year. How important do you think it is for you to win here with just one event left.

Mr. GILL: Well this year has been quite good for me and for our team. We've had full factory support from Skoda, so that's a very important part of getting our team forward in terms of technical advancements and technical knowledge, and of course getting a young Finnish driver who is very fast is good for the championship and for me. My team mate is very good. I learn to push myself harder and try matching and beat him through the year. We've been exchanging top times through the year. It's good to see somebody from that part of the world coming here and driving against us. Good for the championship. We've had a championship which so far has been full of ups and downs for me. In Indonesia I came second and in New Caledonia I won the rally. In Australia I was leading but I had a puncture and then I had suspension failure. After that in Malaysia I was again leading very comfortably where I made a small mistake with my pace notes and I hit a bank and we damaged the radiator so we had to sit out for the rest of the day and then continue on the next day to get some points. Today in Japan it has been a great weekend. Yesterday we were fastest in the morning but in the afternoon we decided to hold back and save the car because it was getting very rough. Petter was going flat out. We thought that we might just hold back and maybe cruise and hold

positions but we decided all to race against each other and we came back to race and attack the stages and we matched his times. I think he broke his suspension later on in the day, because as I said it was very rough. It's good that our experiences are helping us here. At the same time it's good to compete against Lappi because he is very fast. To match his times is very good. Overall it's been a great rally but unfortunately he had to retire like this which was not good for the team; for the team manufacturer's points. As far as our points is concerned, yes, we are quite strong in the championship now. Strongest that I have been so far these years, but yes, there is a mathematical chance for Michael Young to take the championship away from us, but it cannot be so easy. We are all professionals and we are run by good, strong teams. We have a job to do and I'll make sure that that happens.

QUESTION: I think that this is the second year that Skoda has been rallying in the Asia Pacific Championship and that you have been with them. It's very good to see a European manufacturer being involved in this championship. However, maybe it's a little bit too early at this point to talk about it, but maybe you are aware or could share some plans for next year? Do you think that next year MRF team will be with Skoda?

Mr.GILL: Well, these decisions are made by the management. I'm a driver and my job is to get as many wins as possible for the team. Well, yes, it does make sense for Skoda to come here. Asia is becoming one of the largest markets for them; China and India are obviously one of the biggest markets for Skoda sales. We need to make sure that we give them the win so that they have a reason to come back next year. Why not? It does make sense and I hope we will come back.

QUESTION: Thank you. Just one last question on the event that you just won. Did it feel any different from the years before? This is, I think, this is your 4th or 5th time here.

Gill: Yes, fourth.

QUESTION: So did you feel any different because this year we brought back one of the stages that we haven't used for a while. Some people like Toshi at the pre-event conference was commenting that would be good, he was actually quite excited about today, the day that he actually ran, about running in the opposite direction in Otofuke. What was your impression on the event overall in terms of how it felt for you?

Gill: I think it's a great idea to have new stages introduced every time. It gives everyone a level playing field from the start so nobody can say that they know the stages. It doesn't really matter to me or to anyone else because if you go to the world championship there are stages that have been run for the last 25 years so you should not complain. Anyway coming to your point, it's good that they have this 23 kilometer stage. It's very, very technical I think. One of the most difficult stages of the year that I have done. It's very technical, very fast, very narrow, very slippery. Physically the stages are the same like last year, but they are reversed so they are new for everybody yet again, as you mentioned. They were quite exciting. The other way around is quite exciting and fast. I actually quite like them. They are going downhill more now this time, I believe, so it's even faster. But, yeah, in some places, this year I go very fast; faster than I have been driving for the last 2 or 3 years. I really enjoyed myself. It's quite dangerous in places I would say, because running the stages so many times over and over again does expose a lot of those causeways and gutters which cause damage, and I would say is a little dangerous at those speeds that we were doing yesterday. We were going over 170km sideways over those gutters in some places so you never know where you are going to land. We are all in for the sport and the risk is there. It's all calculated risk.

QUESTION: As a professional you should know where you are going to land.

Mr.GILL: That's what I said; it's calculated risk!

QUESTION: Mr. Sumiyama, congratulations. You have many experience of Rally Hokkaido. In this event many cars retired at leg 1. What do you think was the key of your success in this event?

Mr. Sumiyama: Well, roads condition was changing by the minute and cars retired at the third loop, that had deep ruts. So I think the key was keeping the car in the center of the road.

QUESTION: What is the impression of this season so far?

Mr. Sumiyama: As a team, we have three events for Asia cup, which are Malaysia, Hokkaido and then Thailand in this December. In Malaysia we ended up with retiring due to mechanical failure, thus we needed to win points in this event. I am hoping to success in Thailand and then the battle will be between myself and Muta, and then the team will be able to win the Asia Cup. I hope to win , but it depends on the result of the next rally.

QUESTION: Then, do you have the points that you focus on about the runoff?

Mr. Sumiyama: We are in the same team and driving almost the same cars. So the key for the victory will be the teamwork with a co-driver. But you never know what happens in rally. So we will do our best to achieve good result, not ending up with retiring.

QUESTION: Now let me ask Mr. Muta. What do you think about your result?

Mr. Muta: As an event of Asia Cup series, I think we did fairly good. However some of non-APRC registered competitors did better than us, so I think there's still room for improvement.

QUESTION: Did you have any specific strategy for the Rally Hokkaido?

Mr. Muta: I competed in this event for 4 or 5 times but I always felt the stages were difficult. So I did not have any specific strategy but I just tried hard to be within the ranking where we can win points for the tile.

QUESTION: You still have Thailand event for the Asia cup. What are you going to do as preparations for that?

Mr. Muta: I do not plan to do any specific preparations but I think it will still be hot there so I will do more training to finish the rally, hoping to win the cup.

QUESTION: Let me ask you the same question I asked to Mr. Sumiyama. What is your strategy to beat Mr. Sumiyama?

Mr. Muta: He has lots more experience on the team more than me, and he has been very kind to me, so, I don't know which of us will win, but while I know he is far better than me. I will try and see how well I can do.