



Friday wrap: Loeb on top at home

Sebastien Loeb will start day two of Rallye de France Alsace leading the FIA World Rally Championship qualifier by 13.1s.

Loeb, who can become world champion for a ninth time by beating Citroen team-mate Mikko Hirvonen on the asphalt counter based in Strasbourg, has won four of day one's eight all-asphalt stages with second-placed Ford driver Jari-Matti Latvala claiming three stage bests to remain firmly in the fight for top spot.

"It's been a good day with no problems at all," said Loeb. "We've done the right tyre choices but it's been a big push because Jari has been pushing very hard."

Latvala said he lost ground on the day's penultimate stage on sections where mud and gravel had been dragged onto the road. Nevertheless the Finn revealed it had been one of his best performances on asphalt in the WRC: "We're still a bit up and down and not as consistent as it should be. But we are still in the fight and it's still going on."

Behind Latvala, Mikko Hirvonen, in the second works Citroen, holds a narrow advantage of 0.7s over Latvala's Ford team-mate Petter Solberg in the battle for third.

Dani Sordo's ultimate pace was masked by set-up and brake issues on his MINI John Cooper Works WRC. The Spaniard is fifth overall, one place ahead of Thierry Neuville, who showed plenty of pace in the morning but was slightly more circumspect in the afternoon following a spin in his Citroen Junior DS3 WRC.

Mads Ostberg is seventh in his Adapta Fiesta with M-Sport Fiesta pilots Ott Tanak and Evgeny Novikov eighth and ninth respectively. Sebastien Chardonnet, competing in a Citroen DS3 WRC in the world championship for the first time, demoted WRC Team MINI Portugal's Chris Atkinson for 10th overall on stage five.

Martin Prokop is 12th having been hampered by an engine misfire throughout the day. Nasser Al-Attiyah is 13th with Sebastien Ogier heading his Volkswagen Motorsport team-mate Andreas Mikkeslen in 14th overall. Frenchman Julien Maurin is 16th in his Fiesta RS WRC.

Romain Dumas heads Yvan Muller in the battle of the racers. They are 19th and 20th overnight respectively in their MINIs. A broken rear driveshaft has hobbled Brazil World Rally Team's Daniel Oliveira. Countryman Paulo Nobre is 28th overall.

While large chunks of the morning stages took place in damp conditions, making tyre compound choice a factor, the afternoon was dry and sunny with all leading crews opting for Michelin's hard-compound rubber. Saturday's action begins with the Masif des Grands Crus - Ungersberg stage at 08:38hrs local time.