

News release
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Solberg takes the next step

- Oliver looks ahead to maiden four-wheel drive outing
- 17-year-old drives Volkswagen Polo GTI R5 at Rally Alūksne
- Successful Circle K Norge partnership continues into 2019

It's the moment Oliver has been waiting for.

On Friday (January 18) evening, Solberg Jr will build the boost, drop the clutch and feel all four wheels spin for the first time on a rally. Graduating from the sport's junior formulas, the 17-year-old Swede makes his debut in a Circle K-backed Volkswagen Polo GTI R5 at Rally Alūksne in Latvia.

While the car might be new – although it's not new to the family, it's the same machine his Dad Petter drove at Rally de España in October – the roads are more familiar. Oliver has competed at Rally Alūksne for the last two years, but he won't have ever driven as fast as he'll be going this weekend.

Oliver, who will be co-driven by Aaron Johnston (23, Great Britain), said: "This is so exciting to take this next step. I have really enjoyed my two seasons competing in the Latvian Championship driving the [Peugeot 208] R2, but this is what I've been waiting for."

Oliver will remain in the Latvian series this year, driving the Polo GTI R5, but he will look to compete on other rallies as the season progresses.

While Rally Alūksne will be Oliver's first rally in a four-wheel drive, it's certainly not his first time competing in four-wheel drive. He won last year's RallyX Nordic Championship in a DS 3 Supercar and, of course, made a huge impression on his World Rally Car debut when he beat M-Sport Ford World Rally Team driver Teemu Suninen in a Ford Fiesta RS WRC at Bettega Memorial 2017.

Q&A Oliver

How much testing have you done in the Volkswagen?

Three days. We went up to Anttila, north of Torsby, and found some good winter conditions which really helped me to get used to the car. I'm very happy with how quickly I got used to the speed and the feeling.

It must be very different to the Peugeot you've driven for the last two seasons?

It is. Actually, the Polo is really much easier to drive and straight away I was feeling comfortable with the car. Because it has more power and more grip, you can work with the car and keep it sliding, especially on this [snow]

surface. It's more predictable and controllable than the Peugeot; with the 208 being only a 1600cc engine and front-wheel drive, you had to keep the power all the time because if you let the speed drop a little bit then it took time to make it back up again. Honestly, I love this Polo. I am driving with a big smile all the time.

How much did your Dad help you with the set-up?

It's been really useful to have him around, you know he did this testing with Volkswagen when the car was really new and then, of course, he drove in Spain with the factory team – so he knows this car. But I wanted to find a little bit of my own way with the set-up, so I was in charge of the changes. When Dad got back into the car at the end of the test, he had no improvements to make. I thought this was really encouraging for me.

And you know Rally Alüksne quite well?

This will be my third time at this event and it's one I really enjoy. The roads are fast, but they're narrow and quite tricky in places.

What's the goal for the event?

I want the experience. This year is all about building up my knowledge of driving this kind of car, so I want to try to make sure I get to the finish. I have done two years getting to know rallying in competition and now it's about building the next step and learning about the four-wheel drive car.

Tell us more about the year ahead...

I will do the Latvian rounds – I know them from the last two years. It's going to be a big challenge, I know that. After we take some experience, maybe more in the second half of the season, then we will start to push some more and try to make some good performances. I want to say a very big thank you to Circle K Norge and all my partners for their support – and of course the team for their fantastic work with the car. Without them, none of this would be possible.

Turning back time with Petter...

Rally Hedemarken, September 28 1996

Solberg Sr's first rally in a four-wheel drive car

I was competing a lot in rallycross and it was going really well for me. I won 19 of the 21 events I started in 1995 and 15 from 19 the following year. But I wanted to go to rallying – just like Oliver does now.

I was a bit older than Oliver when I started rallying, I was 21. My first event was in a Volvo, it was also my only event in a Volvo! A few months after that, I had the chance to do the last round of the 1996 Norwegian Championship. I wanted to do the whole series the next year and I knew a good result on the last round would give me a good number for 1997.

I borrowed my brother's Toyota Celica GT-Four for this event which was using

the roads around Hamar and Elverum – where Norway's WRC round would be based a few years later – and everything started quite well, but then I crashed a little bit. I stayed with the Toyotas and won the Norwegian title in 1998.

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