

News release

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Rallyday: Toivonen's coming to town

The Toivonen name remains one of the most evocative and emotional names in world rallying – not to mention being one of Finland's fastest. It's for that reason that Rallyday is delighted to announce Harri Toivonen's third visit to September's Castle Combe event.

Son of Monte Carlo and 1,000 Lakes Rally winner Pauli and brother of Lancia superstar Henri Toivonen, Harri has spent his professional career driving some of the world's fastest cars. And not always in rallies; a regular at Le Mans, he tackled France's famous 24-hour race in a variety of cars which he shared with a wide variety of drivers.

In 1991 he joined Manuel Reuter and countryman JJ Lehto aboard Porsche Kremer Racing's stunning 962 for a top-10 finish. A decade down the road and Harri was still taming *La Sarthe*, this time in an Ascari which he shared with Ben Collins – a racer who would later be uncovered as *Top Gear's* famously shy tester Stig.

All of the above makes Harri a spellbinding interview on one sort of stage, while his outrageous speed and talent makes him entirely unmissable on the other, more familiar, sort of stage.

Harri admitted he couldn't wait to make the trip to Wiltshire on September 23.

"I have been to Rallyday twice already," he said. "The first time I was driving a Metro 6R4, this was the car I was familiar with from when I was competing and then last year I was driving in a Hyundai Accent WRC.

"The Hyundai was really a fantastic car from the early era of the World Rally Car; I was having the awesome feeling from the car. I hope I get to drive this one again this time. As well as that, I think I will be in a Proton [Satria] S2000, which is really nice. Proton has around 270 or 280bhp and the asphalt suspension – this will also be a really interesting one.

"Since I came here for the first time, I like this event. I like the passion from the fans and there are so many fans coming on this day – it's really a big number and a very nice atmosphere. One of the good things is that we all go to this event for the same reason, because we are the big rally fans. The Finns are coming to Rallyday quite a lot now: I was in here with Juha Kankkunen last year as well."

Much as Toivonen will celebrate his own career, he will also remember the success his family shared and tragedy when Henri was killed along with his co-driver Sergio Cresto, while competing on the 1986 Tour de Corse.

While Rallyday offers Toivonen the opportunity to demonstrate the skills he has retained from his time at the forefront of world rallying in the Eighties, he's still a committed competitor.

"I love to drive and I want to do it as much as I can," he said, "that's something which has never changed and it never will! As well as Rallyday I am also doing a hill climb in Italy, driving [Lancia] 037 one day and [Delta] S4 next day and I'm talking to Hyundai about driving one of its i20 R5s on the Tuscan Rewind. Like I said, I enjoy to drive all types of rally car and that's what makes Rallyday so special."

Rallyday organiser Tom Davis is well aware of what the Toivonen name means to rally fans.

"You only have to say the name Toivonen and you can see it in people's eyes," said Davis. "Few if any names generate the sort of emotion associated with this Finnish family. Pauli was a supremely fair and firm competitor and, for many, Henri would undoubtedly have become the 1986 World Rally Champion had it not been for that tragic accident on Corsica. And Harri's cut from the same cloth – which is why we're absolutely delighted to see him coming back.

"He's had a great day the last couple of times he's been here and we're sure it'll be the same story this time around."

Harri Toivonen joins other heroes of the sport including current Toyota Gazoo Racing star and winner of this year's Rally Sweden Jari-Matti Latvala (Finland); 1984 World Rally Champion Stig Blomqvist (Sweden) and Colin McRae's co-driver, Welshman Nicky Grist.

As well as the day-long rally festival, September's Rallyday offers plenty to keep both the hardcore fan and the family entertained.

Tickets are available from rallyday.com, priced at £18 for adults. Under-17s get in free and rally car rides are available for £25 (when purchased with an entry ticket). If you fancy starting Rallyday early, camping permits are available at Cast Combe circuit for £10.

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Flying Finn Harri Toivonen will be back at Rallyday again in September