

The Loudon-clear guide to... Rally Italia Sardegna

Who's getting wet on Sunday? Road sweeping and swimming, that's what this rally is increasingly about – with the winner now traditionally taking a dip in the beautiful Alghero harbour on a Sunday afternoon.

Four winners in four rallies, is it possible for the World Rally Championship to get any more exciting? How about a fifth different winner this week?

Hyundai men Thierry Neuville and Dani Sordo have to be the favourites if we are to make it five from five. Thierry starts at eight on the road, three behind his Spanish team-mate and those are pretty good places to be on the Italian roads which will provide some of the loosest of loose gravel this season.

Championship leader Sébastien Ogier is increasingly wary of talking about unwinnable rallies, largely because he keeps winning them. On paper, this one must be unwinnable for him. There is some rain forecast for tomorrow, but it would take a downpour of biblical proportions to turn this one around in his favour.

Sweeping the road clear of small stones will allow those following him to find more grip from a cleaner line; rain would bind the loose gravel together more offering him better traction. But even if it does rain, temperatures rattling around the 30-degree mark will dry them out in no time.

Who's favourite? It's got to be Jari-Matti Latvala. Sixth in, he's won in Sardinia before, knows the roads and knows what's needed.

Away from the main field, it'll be fascinating to see how Esapekka Lappi fares on his first WRC2 outing with the Škoda team since Sweden in February. The flying Finn's had his winning wings clipped so far this season: he was ninth in Monte Carlo and third in Karlstad.

For me, it'll be a tough week at work... making biscuits. As a few of you might have noticed, I was out on the last round in Portugal, working with Becs [Williams] and Colin [Clark] on WRC Live. Thanks to those folk who sent me a note and apologies to those who struggled with my native tongue! I really enjoyed the radio work, but seeing those co-drivers at work at the end of every stage drove it home even harder just how much I miss this sport.

I'm working hard to get something sorted to get me back into a full-time co-drivers' seat as soon as possible. Every day that passes is a day too long without calling pacenotes.

In the meantime, don't forget your Speedos on Sunday...

The rally ahead...

FIA World Rally Championship round 6/14
WRC – WRC2 – WRC3

Date: June 9-12
Based: Alghero
Service: Alghero
Stages: 19
Competitive distance: 324.60km (201.70 miles)
Liaison distance: 965.95km (602.75 miles)
Total distance: 1290.55km (801.94 miles)
Longest stage: Monte Lerno SS12/15 44.26km (27.50 miles)
Shortest stage: Ittiri Arena Show SS1 2.00km (1.24 miles)
Currency: Euro
Time difference: GMT+2
Language: Italian
Population Sardinia/Italy: 1.6m/60.6m
Capital Sardinia/Italy: Cagliari/Rome
Sunrise: 0559
Sunset: 2057

Shakedown:

The 3.90km (2.42 miles) shakedown stage at Olmedo is located 15.43km (9.58 miles) north-east of Alghero and runs from 0800-1130.

Itinerary

Thursday June 9

Ceremonial start – Alghero 1700

SS1 Ittiri Arena Show 2.00km (1.24 miles) 1800

Friday June 10

SS2 Ardara-Ozieri 1 7.50km (4.66 miles) 0935

SS3 Tula 1 15.00km (9.32 miles) 1012

SS4 Castelsardo 1 14.02km (8.71 miles) 1110

SS5 Tergu-Osilo 1 14.91km (9.26 miles) 1151

Service Alghero 1308

SS6 Ardara-Ozieri 2 7.50km (4.66 miles) 1515

SS7 Tula 2 15.00km (9.32 miles) 1552

SS8 Castelsardo 2 14.02km (8.71 miles) 1650

SS9 Tergu-Osilo 2 14.91km (9.26 miles) 1731

Service Alghero 1900

Saturday June 11

SS10 Monti di Ala 1 22.20km (13.79 miles) 0810

SS11 Coiluna-Loelle 1 22.39km (13.91 miles) 0853

Tyre zone Buddusò 0926

SS12 Monte Lerno 1 44.26km (27.50 miles) 0959

Service Alghero 1249

SS13 Monti di Ala 2 22.20km (13.79 miles) 1601

SS14 Coiluna-Loelle 2 22.39km (13.91 miles) 1644

Tyre zone Buddusò 0926

SS15 Monte Lerno 2 44.26km (27.50 miles) 1750

Service Alghero 2040

Sunday June 12

SS16 Cala Flumini 1 14.06km (8.73 miles) 0827

SS17 Sassari-Argentiera 1 6.96km (4.32 miles) 0908

Regroup Palmadula 0928

SS18 Cala Flumini 2 14.06km (8.73 miles) 1104

Regroup La Pedraia 1130

SS19 Sassari-Argentiera 2 6.96km (4.32 miles) 1208

Finish Bastioni Magellano 1345

Last year...

This was the rally of two halves: Hayden Paddon drove brilliantly to lead early on, but when he was slowed by a gearbox problem late on Saturday, Sebastien Ogier pounced and moved to the front. The Frenchman had contained the inevitable time loss from running first on the road on the opening day brilliantly, playing himself into a position where he could carry the fight to the Kiwi. In the end the Polo man won by more than three minutes. Paddon was second with Hyundai team-mate Thierry Neuville a further minute back after what had been one of the most arduous WRC rounds for a while.

Result: 1 Sebastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC) 4h25m54.3s; 2 Hayden Paddon/John Kennard (Hyundai i20 WRC) +3m05.4s; 3 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 WRC) +4m22.5s. **WRC2 winner:** Yuriy Protasov/Pavlo Cherepin (Ford Fiesta R5). **WRC3 winner:** Teemu Suninen/Mikko Markkula (DS 3 R3T).

Top 10 running order

- 1 Sebastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
- 9 Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jaeger (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
- 5 Mads Østberg/Ola Fløene (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
- 2 Hayden Paddon/John Kennard (Hyundai i20 WRC)
- 4 Dani Sordo/Marc Marti (Hyundai i20 WRC)
- 2 Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
- 12 Ott Tanak/Raigo Molderr (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
- 20 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 WRC)
- 6 Eric Camilli/Benjamin Veillas (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
- 21 Martin Prokop/Jan Tomanek (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)

Leading WRC2 runners:

- 31 Hubert Ptaszek/Maciek Szczepaniak (Peugeot 208T16)
- 42 Nicolas Fuchs/Fernando Mussano (Škoda Fabia R5)
- 32 Armin Kremer/Pirmin Winklhofer (Škoda Fabia R5)
- 34 Teemu Suninen/Mikko Markkula (Škoda Fabia R5)
- 40 Quentin Gilbert/Renaud Jamoul (DS 3 R5)
- 35 Esapekka Lappi/Janne Fern (Škoda Fabia R5)
- 36 Quentin Giordano/Thierry Salva (Peugeot 208T16)
- 38 Yoann Bonato/Denis Giraudet (DS 3 R5)

Leading WRC3 runners:

- 61 Fabio Andolfi/Simone Fenoli (Peugeot 208 R2)
- 62 Damiano de Tommaso/Paolo Rocca (Peugeot 208 R2)
- 63 Enrico Brazzoli/Maurizio Barone (Peugeot 208 R2)
- 64 Igor Giusti/Gilbert Dini (Peugeot 208 R2)

Stuart Loudon's key stage:

SS12 Monte Lerno 1 44.26km (27.50 miles)

I know it might be a bit obvious to go for this stage, but if Ogier's going to have any chance on Saturday, this could be the one. There's a tyre zone just before the stage and he'll be on the start line before 10 in the morning. Do we dare think about a tyre gamble? He was given no chance when he gambled on softs in Mexico... If that's not reason enough to watch Monte Lerno, don't forget Micky's Jump in the middle. #carscanfly

Stuart will be watching... Sebastien Ogier #1 Volkswagen Polo R WRC
The reigning world champion is a man who loves a challenge – and he they don't come any bigger than this week. It's been three rallies since he won – the last time that happened was when he was in a Škoda Fabia at the end of 2012 – and he's hungrier than ever. At the same time, he's bound to be frustrated by sweeping the road clean at the front of the field for two days and possibly distracted by impending fatherhood.

Weather with you:

Sunny with occasional cloud and possible rain showers on Thursday. Daytime temperatures from 25-30 Celsius.

The media week:

Wednesday June 8

- 0800-2100 accreditation open (Rally HQ, Lu Qualte, Alghero)
- 0800-2000 media centre open (Rally HQ, Lu Qualte, Alghero)
- 1700-1720 Hyundai UEFA Euro 2016 photocall, service park
- 1720-1800 Hyundai media lounge 1720-1800, service park
- 1800 Volkswagen meet the team, service park
- 1845-1930 M-Sport meet the team, service park
- 1930-1950 Autograph session, service park

Thursday June 9

- 0700-2100 accreditation open
- 0730-2230 media centre open
- 1200 meet the crews (top three from shakedown), service park
- 1330 FIA pre-event press conference, media centre

Friday June 10

- 0700-1400 accreditation open
- 0730-2230 media centre open
- 1910 (approx) meet the top-three crews, service park

Saturday June 11

05000-0000 media centre open

2050 (approx) meet the top-three crews, service park

Sunday June 12

0730-2100 media centre open

1345 podium finish, Bastioni Magellano

1500 post-event FIA press conference, media centre

Stuart's restaurant recommendation:

Ristorante Mabrouk, via Santa Barbara 4, Alghero (+39 079 970000). It's a little bit down the back streets, but the sea food's fantastic.

Recent winners Rally Italia Sardegna:

2005: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citroën Xsara WRC)

2006: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citroën Xsara WRC)

2007: Marcus Gronholm/Timo Rautiainen (Ford Focus RS WRC06)

2008: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citroën C4 WRC)

2009: Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Ford Focus RS WRC09)

2011: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (DS 3 WRC)

2012: Mikko Hirvonen/Jarmo Lehtinen (DS 3 WRC)

2013: Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)

2014: Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)

2015: Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)

Most successful driver on Italy's Sardinian round of the WRC:

Sébastien Loeb (4 wins); Sébastien Ogier (3 wins)

World Rally Championship stat centre:

Rounds run: 5

Rallye Monte-Carlo (January 21-24), winners: Ogier/ Ingrassia; Rally Sweden (February 4-7), winners: Ogier/Ingrassia; Rally Mexico (March 3-6), winners: Latvala/Anttila; Rally Argentina (April 21-24), winners: Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (DS3 WRC); Rally of Portugal (May 19-22), winners: Paddon/Kennard.

Stages completed: 86

Cancelled stages: 9

Accumulated winning time: 17h55m31.8s

Accumulated competitive distance: 1733.88km (1079.91 miles)

Accumulated liaison distance: 4872.61km (3027.83 miles)

Accumulated total distance: 6970.49km (4331.46 miles)

Longest stage of the season so far: Guanajuato (Rally Mexico) 80.00km (49.71 miles)

Shortest stage of the season so far: Street Stage Guanajuato (Rally Mexico) 1.09km (0.67 miles)

Most WRC fastest stage times in 2016

1 Ogier 28

2 Latvala 21
3 Meeke 13

Most WRC stages led in 2016

1 Ogier 29
2 Latvala 28
3 Meeke 22

Most WRC2 fastest stage times in 2016

1 Elfyn Evans 20
2 Suninen 18
3 Fuchs 14

Most WRC2 stages led in 2016

1 Evans 22
2 Tidemand 17
= Suninen 17

Most WRC3 fastest stage times in 2016

1 Michel Fabre 41
2 Ole Christian Veiby 12
3 Simone Tempestini 9

Most WRC3 stages led in 2016

1 Fabre 41
2 Veiby 15
3 Tempestini 10

Six drivers have led WRC; nine have led WRC2 and five drivers have led WRC3 so far this season.

WRC standings

1 Ogier 114pts
2 Mikkelsen 67pts
3 Østberg 58pts

WRC2 standings

1 Elfyn Evans 62pts
2 Fuchs 55pts
3 Pontus Tidemand 43pts

WRC3 standings

1 Michel Fabre 79pts
2 Ole Christian Veiby 29pts
3 Andolfi 27pts

Stuart Loudon is a semi-professional co-driver who has started 62 rallies, 18 of which are rounds of the World Rally Championship and one of which was

with an Ashes-winning English cricketer. He makes biscuits in the family business when he's not working towards his dream of becoming a factory co-driver in the WRC.

Pictures courtesy of Red Bull Media House/Volkswagen Motorsport

Stuart Loudon and Words PR work their socks off to make sure every last dot and detail of the document is 100 per cent accurate – but we can't be responsible for any changes to the itinerary or stage distances.