

The Loudon-clear guide to... Rally Sweden

Hello. So, snow. Except this time the story's about the snow's Swedish no-snow.

It's a huge shame that the recent warm weather has conspired to take the edge off what has to be one of the biggest sporting spectacles of the season: World Rally Cars dancing on ice.

The World Rally Championship is full of stop-you-in-your-tracks moments and the sight of a World Rally Car on the lock-stops – front corner nibbling a snowbank at the apex while the opposite corner leans on a wall and fires powder 15 feet in the air – is right up there. *Right up there.*

But it's not to be this time. The warm weather has forced a complete rethink of the route and even blizzard conditions for the rest of the week wouldn't be enough to deliver the perfect winter rally. Recipe for perfect winter roads: heavy (like heavy, heavy) snow, semi-melt, deep-freeze, light snow shower.

The semi-melt puts moisture into the road and snow base which, when frozen hard, provides a rock-solid ice base for the studded tyres to dig into. The freeze will also pack the snowbanks really hard, allowing the guys to go a gear higher through some corners.

We're missing a couple of elements of that recipe this week!

This week will be about staying out of trouble and keeping as many studs in place as possible. That in itself provides an intriguing event, however. Let's see who can drive smart as well as super-quick in these compromised and challenging conditions.

It might not be perfect, but it's round two of the FIA World Rally Championship – what's not to get excited about!

Just before I go, you might notice a bit of a change around with these previews: it's more me than Tunnock's. Don't worry, I'm still engineering the best Snowballs (and the only Snowballs in the WRC this week...) in the world, but I'm also working my socks off to realise my dream of becoming a professional co-driver in the World Rally Championship. Tunnock's is pretty well known already; Stuart Loudon less so. Hence the new colours.

The rally ahead...

FIA World Rally Championship round 2/14

WRC – WRC2 – WRC3

Date: February 11-14, 2016

Based: Karlstad

Service: Karlstad

Stages: 13 (original route included 21)

Competitive distance: 241.48km (150.05 miles)

Liaison distance: 1155.31km (717.90 miles)
Total distance: 1396.79km (867.96 miles)
Longest stage: Vargåsen SS12/16 24.70km (15.34 miles)
Shortest stage: Karlstad (SS7) 1.90km (1.18 miles)
Currency: Swedish Krona
Time difference: GMT+1
Language: Swedish
Sweden population: 9.8m
Capital: Stockholm
Sunrise: 0759
Sunset: 1642

Shakedown:

Shakedown was scheduled for Thursday, but has been cancelled due to weather conditions.

Itinerary

Thursday February 11
Ceremonial start – Karlstad 2004

Friday February 12
SS2 Torsby 1 16.48km (10.24 miles) 0851
SS3 Rjörden 1 18.47km (11.47 miles) 0953
SS4 Svullrya 1 24.23km (15.05 miles) 1053
Tyre zone Kirkenær 1149
SS7 Svullrya 2 24.23km (15.05 miles) 1318
SS8 Rjörden 2 18.47km (11.47 miles) 1413
SS9 Torsby 2 16.48km (10.24 miles) 1528
Service Karlstad 1732

Saturday February 13
SS10 Fredriksberg 18.19km (11.30 miles) 0811
SS12 Vargåsen 1 24.70km (15.34 miles) 1008
Tyre zone Hagfors 1115
SS14 Rämnen 2 2.76km (1.72 miles) 1224
SS15 Vargåsen 2 24.70km (15.34 miles) 1338
SS17 Karlstad 1.90km (1.18 miles) 1811
Service Karlstad 1841

Sunday February 14
SS20 Lesjöfors 15.00km (9.32 miles)
SS21 Värmullsåsen 15.87km (9.86 miles)
Finish Karlstad 1500

Last year...

Dramatic powerstages didn't get any more dramatic than Sweden last year. Going into the final Värmullsåsen stage, just 4.6 seconds separated Thierry Neuville in third from Andreas Mikkelsen in first place. Sebastien Ogier was

second. And then, 8m05.6s later, the Frenchman was first. Half a minute in a snow bank ended Mikkelsen's dream and left the super-talented Norwegian in tears at the finish.

Result: 1 Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC) 2h55m30.5s; 2 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 WRC) +6.4s; 3 Andreas Mikkelsen/Ola Fløene (Volkswagen Polo R WRC) +39.8s

Top 10 entries

1 Sebastien Ogier/Juliene Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
2 Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
3 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 WRC)
4 Hayden Paddon/John Kennard (Hyundai i20 WRC)
5 Mads Østberg/Ola Fløene (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
6 Eric Camilli/Nicolas Klinger (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
7 Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (DS 3 WRC)
9 Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jaeger (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
12 Ott Tanak/Raigo Molderr (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
14 Khalid Al-Qassimi/Chris Patterson (DS 3 WRC)

Leading WRC2 runners:

31 Esapekka Lappi/Janne Ferm (Škoda Fabia R5)
32 Pontus Tidemand/Jonas Andersson (Škoda Fabia R5)
34 Eyvind Brynildsen/Anders Fredriksson (Ford Fiesta R5)
40 Sander Parn/James Morgan (Ford Fiesta R5)
44 Elfyn Evans/Craig Parry (Ford Fiesta R5)
45 Ole Christian Veiby/Stig Skjaermoen (Škoda Fabia R5)
46 Marius Aasen/Veronica Engan (Ford Fiesta R5)
47 Emil Bergqvist/Joachim Sjöberg (DS 3 R5)

Leading WRC3 runner:

61 Michel Fabre/Maxime Vilnot (DS 3 R3-Max)

Stuart Loudon's key stage:

All of them... It's impossible to pick out one individual stage this time around. With the weather so marginal, every one of them will be key. If the big freeze does come, then it's certain to favour the cars running at the front of the field; once a few cars start passing across the surface, the ice will be broken and disturbed, allowing gravel to come through.

Stuart will be watching... Craig Breen #15 DS 3 WRC

Craig's waited so long for this opportunity and he's one of those guys that really deserves his shot at the top flight. He and Scott Martin are two of the most talented guys around in the sport right now and, while this will be a bit of a baptism of fire, I have no doubt they'll do a fantastic job.

Weather with you:

Well, it's like this... winter hasn't really done its thing this year and that means the stages are far from wintry. The hope is that a big freeze from the middle

of the end of this week will save the roads and save the rally. Today (Tuesday) it's five degrees in Karlstad. Forecasts vary from it dropping to between zero and -6 in the coming days, with some snow and rain falling.

The media week:

Wednesday February 10

0800-2000 accreditation open, Rally HQ Press Centre, Karlstad CCC
0800-2000 media centre open, Rally HQ Press Centre, Karlstad CCC
1715 Photographers' briefing, photographers' room, press centre
1800-1845 Hyundai media lounge, service park

Thursday February 11

0700-2200 accreditation open
0700-2300 media centre open
1700 FIA press conference, press centre
1745 (approx) Volkswagen media event, press centre
1815-1845 autograph session, Karlstad
1900 ceremonial start

Friday February 12

0700-2200 media centre open
1800 (approx) meet the top-three crews (service park)

Saturday February 13

0700-2200 media centre open
1900 (approx) meet the top-three crews (service park)

Sunday February 14

0800 media centre open
1515 podium finish, Karlstad
1630 FIA press conference, press centre

Tunnock's Restaurant recommendation:

Ristorante Alfie, Karlstad (+46 (0) 54 216262). The best – and probably only – place for a pint (actually, it's just short of a pint) of lager and a plate of garlic snails.

Recent winners Rally Sweden:

2005: Petter Solberg/Phil Mills (Subaru Impreza WRC)
2006: Marcus Gröholm/Timo Rautiainen (Ford Focus RS WRC 06)
2007: Marcus Gröholm/Timo Rautiainen (Ford Focus RS WRC 06)
2008: Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Ford Focus RS WRC 07)
2010 Mikko Hirvonen/Jarmo Lehtinen (Ford Focus RS WRC 09)
2011 Mikko Hirvonen/Jarmo Lehtinen (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
2012: Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
2013: Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
2014: Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
2015: Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)

Most successful driver on Sweden's round of the WRC:

Stig Blomqvist, Marcus Gröholm (5 wins); Kenneth Eriksson, Jari-Matti Latvala, Tommi Mäkinen (3 wins).

Stuart Loudon is a semi-professional co-driver who has started 52 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 media enquiries

Sandra Evans

+44 7887 693993

Sandra@wordspr.com

To access the library of press releases please click the link: <http://www.wordspr.com/our-work/stuart-loudon>