

The Loudon-clear guide to... Rally Poland

Two rallies stand head and shoulders ahead of the rest of the World Rally Championship when it comes to speed. The first one? That's easy, everybody knows about Finland and its 1,000 lakes. The second?

Sweden, maybe? No. Australia, that was fairly quick last year. Wrong again.

Poland. This week's race around the Masurian lakes, 250 kilometres (160 miles) north of Warsaw is not for the faint hearted. It's super-quick: Finland without the jumps. Last year, the average speed in Poland was 121.41kph (75.44mph) – just four kph (2.5mph) 'slower' than the stages around Jyväskylä.

Speed and spectators are what this Polish spectacle is all about as fans from across central Europe turn out to watch the fastest go faster.

These are the rallies where the crews really earn their stripes. With speeds so high, everything has to be 100 per cent perfect – particularly the relationship between driver and co-driver. Poland's a place which really sorts the men from the boys. Inside the car, it's eye-wateringly quick in places, and on the outside it's an absolute demonstration of what modern rallying at its pinnacle is all about: pace, precision and shocking performance.

The rally has been around for a very long time – some reporting it to be the second oldest in the world (after Rallye Monte-Carlo) – with local star Tadeusz Heyne guiding a Dodge to an inaugural *Rajd Polski* victory in 1921. A regular in the FIA European Rally Championship, this is only the fifth time it has been included in the World Rally Championship.

With the potential for heavy rain in the lead-up to the event, World Rally Championship leader Sébastien Ogier could be about to reap the reward for his early season efforts. The roads around Mikolajki are traditionally quite soft and sandy and, if the forecast runs true, the conditions should favour the road-opening Frenchman.

Predicting the winner of a world rally is becoming a precarious business, with five different winners in the last five events. If anybody other than Ogier, Jari-Matti Latvala, Hayden Paddon or Thierry Neuville (Kris Meeke, Rally Portugal winner definitely won't win this week – he's not there!) takes victory, then it'll be a sixth different winner in succession.

Away from the main WRC action, there's a field packed full of potential in WRC2, with all the main protagonists coming together for the first time. The WRC2 runners select seven rallies from the 14-round calendar and, because all the drivers chose different events, it's not often we get the full house. When we do, it makes for an exceptional race.

The rally ahead...

FIA World Rally Championship round 7/14

WRC – WRC2 – WRC3 – Junior WRC - DDFT

Date: Thursday June 30-Sunday July 3

Based: Mikolajki

Service: Mikolajki

Stages: 21

Competitive distance: 306.10km (190.21 miles)

Liaison distance: 947.19km (588.58 miles)

Total distance: 1253.29km (778.79 miles)

Longest stage: Stanczyki SS12/14 25.27km (15.70 miles)

Shortest stage: Mikolajki Arena (SS1/2/3) 2.50km (1.55 miles)

Currency: Polish Zloty

Time difference: GMT +2

Language: Polish

Polish population: 38.53m

Capital: Warsaw

Sunrise: 0406

Sunset: 2105

Shakedown:

The 3.38km (2.10 miles) shakedown stage is located at Lubiewo, 3.60km (2.23 miles) from the service park. The stage runs from 0800-1130.

Itinerary

Thursday June 30

Start Mikolajki main square 1600

SS1 Mikolajki Arena 1 2.50km (1.55 miles) 1908

Friday July 1

SS2 Chmielewo 1 6.52km (4.05 miles) 0715

SS3 Wieliczki 1 17.30km (10.75 miles) 0900

SS4 Swietajno 1 21.14km (13.13 miles) 1010

SS5 Stare Juchy 1 13.50km (8.38 miles) 1055

Service Mikolajki 1240

SS6 Chmielewo 2 6.52km (4.05 miles) 1355

SS7 Wieliczki 2 17.30km (10.75 miles) 1540

SS8 Swietajno 2 21.14km (13.13 miles) 1650

SS9 Stare Juchy 2 13.50km (8.38 miles) 1735

SS10 Mikolajki Arena 2 2.50km (1.55 miles) 1928

Service Mikolajki 1948

Saturday July 2

SS11 Goldap 1 14.75km (9.16 miles) 0955

SS12 Stanczyki 1 25.27km (15.70 miles) 1125

SS13 Babki 1 21.02km (13.06 miles) 1215

Remote tyre zone Goldap 1315

SS14 Stanczyki 2 25.27km (15.70 miles) 1450

SS15 Babki 2 21.02km (13.06 miles) 1540
SS16 Goldap 2 14.75km (9.16 miles) 1650
SS17 Mikolajki Arena 3 2.50km (1.55 miles) 1908
Service Mikolajki 1928

Sunday July 3

SS18 Baranowo 1 21.25km (13.20 miles) 0820
SS19 Sady 1 8.55km (5.31 miles) 0908
Service Mikolajki 0935
SS20 Baranowo 2 21.25km (13.20 miles) 1050
SS21 Sady 2 8.55km (5.31 miles) 1208
Finish Mikolajki main square 1400

Last year...

After much pre-event hype, Ott Tanak delivered a blistering, rally leading pace early on the first day. Unfortunately for the Estonian, a handbrake issue with his Ford Fiesta RS WRC cost him time and dropped him to third. He stayed in touch with the lead fight, but Sébastien Ogier and Andreas Mikkelsen found that extra gear to deliver a one-two result for Volkswagen. The Frenchman and his Norwegian team-mate were never that far apart, however, with Mikkelsen again equaling his best ever result. The same could be said for Ogier...

Result: 1 Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC) 2h26m11.5s; 2 Andreas Mikkelsen/Ola Floene (Volkswagen Polo R WRC) +11.9s; 3 Ott Tanak/Raigo Molder +23.0s.

Top 10 running order

1 Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
20 Dani Sordo/Marc Marti (Hyundai i20 WRC)
9 Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jaeger (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
5 Mads Østberg/Ola Fløene (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
4 Hayden Paddon/John Kennard (Hyundai i20 WRC)
2 Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
3 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 WRC)
12 Ott Tanak/Raigo Molder (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
6 Eric Camilli/Benjamin Veillas (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
16 Henning Solberg/Ilka Minor (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)

Leading WRC2 runners:

31 Elfyn Evans/Craig Parry (Ford Fiesta R5)
32 Nicolas Fuchs/Fernando Mussano (Škoda Fabia R5)
33 Pontus Tidemand/Jonas Andersson (Škoda Fabia R5)
34 Hubert Ptaszek/Maciek Szczepaniak (Škoda Fabia R5)
35 Armin Kremer/Pirmin Winklhofer (Škoda Fabia R5)
36 Teemu Suninen/Mikko Markkula (Škoda Fabia R5)
38 Marius Aasen/Veronica Engan (Ford Fiesta R5)
39 Yoann Bonato/Denis Giraudet (DS 3 R5)
40 Quentin Gilbert/Renaud Jamoul (DS 3 R5)

- 41 Esapekka Lappi/Janne Ferm (Škoda Fabia R5)
42 Quentin Giordano/Thierry Salva (Peugeot 208T16)

Leading WRC3 runner:

- 61 Martin Koci/Lukas Kostka (DS 3 R3T)
62 Simone Tempestini/Giovanni Bernacchini (DS 3 R3T)
63 Vincent Dubert/Alexandre Coria (DS 3 R3T)
64 Terry Folb/Franck Lefloch (DS R3T)
65 Michael Burri/Anderson Levratti (Renault Clio RSR3T)
66 Romain Martel/Vanessa Lemoine (DS 3 R3T)
67 Ole Christian Veiby/Stig Rune Skjærmoen (DS 3 R3T)

Leading Junior DDFT runners:

- 101 Bernardo Sousa/Hugo Magalhães (Ford Fiesta R2T)
102 Max Vatanen/Jacques Julien Renucci (Ford Fiesta R2T)
103 Osian Pryce/Dale Furniss (Ford Fiesta R2T)
104 Gus Greensmith/Alex Gelsomino (Ford Fiesta R2T)
106 Jon Armstrong/Noel O'Sullivan (Ford Fiesta R2T)

Stuart Loudon's key stage:

SS16 Goldap 2 14.75km (9.16 miles)

Saturday's supposed to be the scorcher, with some reckoning on temperatures heading north of 30 degrees. If that's the case, a soft tyre would be a huge risk for the afternoon loop. But somebody's bound to take it. When they do, getting through day two's final test will be the biggest challenge. And, don't forget, it's a tyre fitting zone only in Goldap – no service – so SS16 will be the final big challenge for anybody nursing a mechanical problem they might have had all day.

Stuart will be watching... Ott Tänak Ford Fiesta RS WRC #12

Ott and co-driver Raigo Molder head to Poland with new and improved DMACK tyres beneath them and undoubted speed from their Fiesta RS WRC. Third here last year, they're tipped to go one or two better this time around. A lot will depend on the weather – it'll definitely help if it stays dry. Regardless, the superstar Estonian's always worth watching.

Weather with you:

The one thing all the weather forecasters seem sure of is thunderstorms and heavy rain in the Mikolajki area on Friday. After that, it's generally agreed it'll be around 25 degrees over the weekend – but it might rain. And it might not.

The media week:

Wednesday June 29

- 0800-2000 accreditation open (Rally HQ, Hotel Golebiewski, Mikolajki)
0800-2000 media centre open (Rally HQ, Hotel Golebiewski, Mikolajki)
1715-1800 M-Sport meet the team, service park
1800 Volkswagen meet the team, service park
1800-1845 Hyundai media lounge, service park

Thursday June 30

0800-2200 accreditation open

0800-2300 media centre open

1200 meet the crews (top three from shakedown), service park

1230 FIA pre-event press conference, media centre

1530 autograph session, Mikolajki Main Square

Friday July 01

0630-2330 media centre open

2000 (approx) meet the top-three crews, service park

Saturday July 02

0700-2300 media centre open

1945 (approx) meet the top-three crews, service park

Sunday July 03

0700-1900 media centre open

1400 podium finish, Main Square, Mikolajki

1430 post-event FIA press conference, media centre

Stuart's restaurant recommendation:

This one's a bit off the wall, but when you're so close to the place it makes sense to take the trip. For something to eat in the strangest of surroundings, head north out of Mikolajki and north-west of the town of Gizycko you'll find *Wolfsschanze* (+48 752 4429 kontakt@wolfsschanze.pl), Wolf's Lair. Adolf Hitler's wartime base isn't known for fine cuisine, but it's not every day you get to eat lunch there. Saturday's the best day, do it on the way up to the remote tyre zone in Goldap.

Recent winners:

2006: Leszek Kuzaj/Maciej Szczepaniak (Subaru Impreza)

2007: Oscar Svedlund/Bjorn Nilsson (Subaru Impreza)

2008: Michal Bebenek/Grzegorz Bebenek (Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX)

2009: Mikko Hirvonen/Jarmo Lehtinen (Ford Focus RS WRC09)

2010: Kajetan Kajetanowicz/Jaroslaw Baran (Subaru Impreza)

2011: Kajetan Kajetanowicz/Jaroslaw Baran (Subaru Impreza)

2012: Esapekka Lappi/Janne Ferm (Škoda Fabia S2000)

2013: Kajetan Kajetanowicz/Jaroslaw Baran (Ford Fiesta R5)

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

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

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

Sébastien Ogier (2 wins)

World Rally Championship stat centre:

Rounds run: 6

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; Rally Italy (June 9-12), winners: Neuville/Gilsoul.

Stages completed: 105

Cancelled stages: 9

Accumulated winning time: 21h30m57.6s

Accumulated competitive distance: 2058.48 (1281.61 miles)

Accumulated liaison distance: 5838.56 (3630.58 miles)

Accumulated total distance: 8261.04 (5133.40 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 31
- 2 Latvala 24
- 3 Neuville 15

Most WRC stages led in 2016

- 1 Ogier 31
- = Latvala 31
- 3 Meeke 22

Most WRC2 fastest stage times in 2016

- 1 Suninen 25
- 2 Evans 20
- 3 Fuchs 14

Most WRC2 stages led in 2016

- 1 Suninen 31
- 2 Evans 22
- 3 Tidemand 17

Most WRC3 fastest stage times in 2016

- 1 Fabre 41
- 2 Andolfi 23
- 3 Veiby 12

Most WRC3 stages led in 2016

- 1 Fabre 41
- 2 Andolfi 20
- 3 Veiby 15

Six drivers have led WRC rounds; 11 have led WRC2 and six have led WRC3.

WRC standings

- 1 Ogier 132pts
- 2 Sordo 68pts
- 3 Mikkelsen 67pts

WRC2 standings

- 1 Evans 62pts
- 2 Fuchs 55pts
- 3 Suninen 50pts

WRC3 standings

- 1 Fabre 79pts
- 2 Andolfi 52pts
- 3 Damiano De Tommaso 38pts

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Stuart Loudon is a semi-professional co-driver who has started 84 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.