

The Loudon-clear guide to... YPF Rally Argentina

There's a real mystique about Rally Argentina, it's certainly one of the events I can't wait to experience for the first time myself.

Argentina is a sensory sort of rally; the roads are fantastic, but then there's that southern hemisphere autumn light, hugely enthusiastic fans and some of the best barbecues – asados, parrillas, call them what you will – cooking some of the best steak in the world.

What's not to like?

Certainly, this week's going to be a fascinating one within the Volkswagen team. The Polo R WRC stands on the verge of something incredible in South America – if Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia, Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila or Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jaeger win on Sunday afternoon, Volkswagen will have achieved the perfect trip around the world. Thirteen rallies, 13 wins. Nobody has ever done that in the World Rally Championship before.

Fortunately for Volkswagen, last year's Argentina winners Kris Meeke and Paul Nagle are busy back in Europe, building their dream 2017 return with Citroën.

M-Sport and Hyundai will both field strong entries, with last year's runners-up Mads Østberg/Ola Fløene leading the Fiesta charge, while any one of the three i20 WRCs could pose a threat to Volkswagen dominance.

There have been some changes to the route for this year, not least the inclusion of an all-new street stage in Cordoba on Thursday night. Once onto the dirt, there's a mix of old and new: only three of the 10 stages remain unchanged from 2015.

Sunday's route takes crews out west to the Traslasierra mountains, the foothills of the Andes, for the classic Rally Argentina tracks from Mina Clavero to Giulio Césare and, of course, El Condor to Copina.

El Condor is the live powerstage again this year and, given it'll be late Sunday afternoon in Scotland, it could be accompanied by a couple of empanadas, and nice piece of lomo and maybe even a drop of Malbec...

The rally ahead...

FIA World Rally Championship round 4/14

WRC – WRC2 – WRC3

Date: April 21-24

Based: Villa Carlos Paz

Service: Villa Carlos Paz

Stages: 18 (10 different stages)

Competitive distance: 366.10km (227.49 miles)

Liaison distance: 965.73km (600.10 miles)

Total distance: 1331.83km (827.59 miles)

Longest stage: SS11/14 Los Gigantes-Cantera El Condor 38.68km (24.03 miles)

Shortest stage: SS1 Cordoba 3.00km (1.86 miles)

Currency: Argentine peso

Time difference: BST -4 hours

Language: Spanish

Argentina population: 43.4 million

Capital: Buenos Aires

Sunrise: 0723

Sunset: 1821

Shakedown:

The 6.01km (3.73 miles) shakedown stage – Villa Carlos Paz-Cabalango – is 11.02km (6.84 miles) away from the service park. Shakedown starts at 0800 on Thursday April 21.

Itinerary

Thursday April 21

SS1 Cordoba 3.00km (1.86 miles) 1908

Friday April 22

SS2 Soconcho-Villa del Dique 1 24.71km (15.35 miles) 0818

SS3 Amboy-Santa Monica 1 20.40km (12.67 miles) 0909

SS4 Santa Rosa-San Agustin 1 23.85km (14.82 miles) 0952

SS5 Superspecial Parque Tematico 1 6.04km (3.75 miles) 1207

Service Villa Carlos Paz 1247

SS6 Soconcho-Villa del Dique 2 24.71km (15.35 miles) 1505

SS7 Amboy-Santa Monica 2 20.40km (12.67 miles) 1556

SS8 Santa Rosa-San Agustin 2 23.85km (14.82 miles) 1639

SS9 Superspecial Parque Tematico 2 6.04km (3.75 miles) 1909

Service Villa Carlos Paz 1934

Saturday April 23

SS10 Villabustos-Tanti 1 19.71km (12.24 miles) 0858

SS11 Los Gigantes-Cantera El Condor 1 38.68km (24.03 miles) 0956

SS12 Boca del Arroyo-Bajo del Pungo 1 20.52km (12.75 miles) 1049

Service Villa Carlos Paz 1244

SS13 Villabustos-Tanti 2 19.71km (12.24 miles) 1357

SS14 Los Gigantes-Cantera El Condor 2 38.68km (24.03 miles) 1455

SS15 Boca del Arroyo-Bajo del Pungo 2 20.52km (12.75 miles) 1548

Service Villa Carlos Paz 1728

Sunday April 24

SS16 El Condor-Copina 1 16.32km (10.14 miles) 0908

SS17 Mina Clavero-Giulio Césare 22.64km (14.06 miles) 1051

SS18 El Condor-Copina 2 16.32km (10.14 miles) 1209

Finish Villa Carlos Paz 1352

Last year...

Kris Meeke and Paul Nagle lead following a chaotic first morning, which included a rare mechanical problem for Volkswagen superstar Sébastien Ogier and a puncture for his team-mate Andreas Mikkelsen. DS 3 WRC driver Meeke drove brilliantly to clinch his and Britain's first world championship win since 2002. There were more Brit celebrations in third, with Elfyn Evans and Dan Barritt taking their first podium finish in an M-Sport Fiesta RS WRC.

Result: 1 Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (DS 3 WRC) 3h41m44.9s; 2 Mads Østberg/Jonas Andersson (DS 3 WRC) +18.1s; 3 Elfyn Evans/Dan Barritt (Ford Fiesta RS WRC) +3m27.4s.

Top 10 entries

- 1 Sebastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
- 2 Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
- 3 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 WRC)
- 4 Dani Sordo/Marc Marti (Hyundai i20 WRC)
- 5 Mads Østberg/Ola Fløene (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
- 6 Eric Camilli/Benjamin Veillas (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
- 9 Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jaeger (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
- 12 Ott Tanak/Raigo Molderr (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
- 16 Henning Solberg/Ilka Minor (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
- 18 Valeriy Gorban/Volodymyr Korsia (Mini Countryman WRC)

Leading WRC2 runners:

- 31 Elfyn Evans/Craig Parry (Ford Fiesta R5)
- 32 Hubert Ptaszek/Maciek Szczepaniak (Peugeot 208T16)
- 33 Radik Shaymiev/Mxim Tsvetkov (Ford Fiesta R5)
- 34 Abdulaziz Al-Kuwari/Killian Duffy (Škoda Fabia R5)
- 35 Khalid Al Suwaidi/Giovanni Bernarcchini (Ford Fiesta R5)
- 38 Didier Arias/Héctor Nunes (Škoda Fabia R5)
- 42 Nicolas Fuchs/Fernando Mussano (Škoda Fabia R5)
- 49 Augusto Bestard/Fernando Mendonca (Ford Fiesta R5)

Leading WRC3 runner:

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

Stuart Loudon's key stage:

SS18 El Condor-Copina 2 16.32km (10.14 miles)

We saw such drama on this stage last year, with both Andreas Mikkelsen and Thierry Neuville crashing out. It's an unbelievable stretch of road, starting with an incredibly tight and twisty section between the rocks before it opens out into a really fast and flowing stage. I can't wait to tune in for this one.

Stuart will be watching... Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila #2 Volkswagen Polo R WRC

Like the rest of the rally-watching world, I'm a huge fan of Jari-Matti and Miikka and it'll be fascinating to see if they can build on the momentum they gained from their Mexican win last time out. Equally, Sébastien Ogier and

Julien Ingrassia will likely be more fired up than ever – not least because the Frenchmen, incredibly, have never won in Argentina.

Weather with you:

Sunshine and temperatures in the early 20s for much of the week are expected to give way to rain and cooler conditions on Sunday.

The media week:

Wednesday April 20

0800-2000 media centre open

0800-1800 accreditation open

1700-1745 Hyundai Media Lounge

1745 Meet the Volkswagen Team

Thursday April 21

0800-2000 accreditation open

0800-2200 media centre open

1230 meet the top-three crews, service park

1330 FIA pre-event press conference

Friday April 22

0800-1200 accreditation open

0700-2200 media centre open

1950 (approx) meet the top-three crews, service park

Saturday April 23

0800-2200 media centre open

1750 (approx) meet the top-three crews, service park

Sunday April 24

0700-2200 media centre open

1440 podium finish

1530 post-event FIA press conference, media centre

1600 publication of final results

Accreditation desk/media office:

Auditorium of Hotel Portal del Lago, Villa Carlos Paz

Stuart's restaurant recommendation:

La Volanta (00 54 354 1437381). It's not complicated, just meat and lots of it. Beware the mollejas and probably not one for the vegetarians...

Recent winners:

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

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

2007: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citroën C4 WRC)

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

2009: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citroën C4 WRC)

2011: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (DS 3 WRC)
2012: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (DS 3 WRC)
2013: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (DS 3 WRC)
2014: Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
2015: Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (DS 3 WRC)

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

Sébastien Loeb (8 wins)

World Rally Championship stat centre:

Rounds run: 3

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.

Stages completed: 49

Cancelled stages: 9

Accumulated winning time: 10h15m37.9s

Accumulated competitive distance: 1003.78km (623.74 miles)

Accumulated liaison distance: 2950.98km (1833.73 miles)

Accumulated total distance: 3954.76km (2457.47 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 21
- 2 Latvala 14
- 3 Meeke 5

Most WRC stages led in 2016

- 1 Ogier 26
- 2 Latvala 18
- 3 Meeke 4

Most WRC2 fastest stage times in 2016

- 1 Teemu Suninen 13
- 2 Evans 11
- 3 Armin Kremer 5

Most WRC2 stages led in 2016

- 1 Evans 22
- 2 Suninen 17
- 3 Kremer 3

Most WRC3 fastest stage times in 2016

- 1 Fabre 33
- 2 Ole Christian Veiby 8

3 Fabio Andolfi 7

Most WRC3 stages led in 2016

1 Fabre 33

2 Veiby 14

3 Andolfi 2

Four drivers have led WRC; seven have led WRC2 and three have led WRC3.

WRC standings

1 Ogier 77pts

2 Østberg 42pts

3 Mikkelsen 33pts

WRC2 standings

1 Evans 50pts

2 Kremer 28pts

3 Suninen 25pts

WRC3 standings

1 Fabre 54pts

2 Veiby 25pts

3 Berfa 18pts

Stuart Loudon is a semi-professional co-driver who has started 60 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