

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

Condors, El Condor, southern hemisphere sunrise, parrillas, the Pampas Bull and, of course, a million fans watching, cheering, waving. It's Rally Argentina time.

The World Rally Championship departs Europe for the Atlantic's far side for the second time in as many months this week. With Mexico done, the crews are heading for Argentina and Villa Carlos Paz – the scene of one of the season's most popular rallies.

And the foothills of the Andes will provide a fitting backdrop to an event packed with intrigue and storylines. Can defending world champions Sébastien Ogier and Julien Ingrassia maintain their exceptional form to make it four from five wins? If they do, expect the Frenchmen to party that bit harder and longer – it'll be their first WRC win in South America. It's true, Argentina's the only one Séb and Julien are still missing.

Elsewhere, the game's all about catch-up. Citroën and Toyota showed pace and potential in Corsica earlier this month, while Hyundai's form dipped briefly last time out. But they're all chasing M-Sport Ford's #1 Fiesta WRC.

YPF Rally Argentina in detail

FIA World Rally Championship round 5/13

WRC – WRC2 – WRC3

Date: Thursday April 26 – Sunday April 29

Based: Villa Carlos Paz

Service: Villa Carlos Paz

Stages: 18

Competitive distance: 358.25 (222.61 miles)

Liaison distance: 942.40km (585.60 miles)

Total distance: 1300.65km (808.22 miles)

Shortest stage: SS1 Villa Carlos Paz Superspecial 1.90km (1.18 miles)

Longest stage: SS11/15 Cuchilla Nevada-Rio Pintos 40.48km (25.15miles)

Currency: Argentine Peso

Time difference: UTC-3

Sunrise: 0740

Sunset: 1852

Shakedown:

The 6.01km (3.73 miles) shakedown is located on the Villa Carlos Paz – Cabalango stage, 11.06km (6.87 miles) from the service park in Villa Carlos Paz. The stage runs from 0800-1130 on Thursday April 26.

YPF Rally Argentina itinerary

Thursday April 26

SS1 Villa Carlos Paz Superspecial 1.90km (1.18 miles) 1908

Friday April 27

SS2 Las Bajadas-Villa del Dique 1 16.65km (10.34 miles) 0813

SS3 Amboy-Yacanto 1 33.58km (20.86 miles) 0900

SS4 Santa Rosa-San 1 Agustin 23.85km (14.82 miles) 1013

SS5 Superspecial Fernet Branca 1 6.04km (3.75 miles) 1208

Service Villa Carlos Paz 1233

SS6 Las Bajadas-Villa del Dique 2 16.65km (10.34 miles) 1451

SS7 Amboy-Yacanto 2 33.58km (20.86 miles) 1538

SS8 Santa Rosa-San Agustin 2 23.85km (14.82 miles) 1651

Service Villa Carlos Paz 1831

Saturday April 28

SS9 Tanti-Mataderos 1 13.92km (8.64 miles) 0823

SS10 Los Gigantes-Cuchilla Nevada 1 16.02km (9.95 miles) 0908

SS11 Cuchilla Nevada-Rio Pintos 1 40.48km (25.15km) 0935

SS12 Superspecial Fernet Branca 2 6.04km (3.75 miles) 1138

Service Villa Carlos Paz 1203

SS13 Tanti-Mataderos 2 13.92km (8.64 miles) 1323

SS14 Los Gigantes-Cuchilla Nevada 2 16.02km (9.95 miles) 1408

SS15 Cuchilla Nevada-Rio Pintos 2 40.48km (25.15km) 1435

Service Villa Carlos Paz 1625

Sunday April 29

SS16 Copina-El Condor 1 16.43km (10.20 miles) 0908

SS17 Giulio Cesare-Mina Clavero 22.41km (13.92 miles) 0955

SS16 Copina-El Condor 2 16.43km (10.20 miles) 0908

Finish Villa Carlos Paz 1431

2017 YPF Rally Argentina result:

WRC: 1 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC) 3h38m10.0s; 2 Elfyn Evans/Dan Barritt (Ford Fiesta WRC) +0.7s; 3 Ott Tänak/Martin Jarveoja (Ford Fiesta WRC) +29.9s **WRC2:** Pontus Tidemand/Jonas Andersson (Škoda Fabia R5).

Running order:

1 Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Ford Fiesta WRC)

5 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)

8 Ott Tänak/Martin Jarveoja (Toyota Yaris WRC)

4 Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jæger (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)

10 Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (Citroën C3 WRC)

9 Esapekka Lappi/Janne Ferm (Toyota Yaris WRC)

7 Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Toyota Yaris WRC)

6 Dani Sordo/Carlos Del Barrio (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)

11 Craig Breen/Scott Martin (Citroën C3 WRC)

2 Elfyn Evans/Dan Barritt (Ford Fiesta WRC)

Leading WRC championship positions:

1 Ogier 84pts; 2 Neuville 67; 3 Tänak 45; 4 Mikkelsen 41; 5 Meeke/Lappi 36; 7 Latvala 31; 8 Sordo 30; 9 Breen 20; 10 Evans 18, etc

Leading WRC2 runners:

31 Pontus Tidemand/Jonas Andersson (Škoda Fabia R5)
32 Gus Greensmith/Craig Parry (Ford Fiesta R5)
33 Pedro Heller/Pablo Olmos (Ford Fiesta R5)
34 Marco Bulacia/Fernando Mussano (Ford Fiesta R5)
35 Kalle Rovanperä/Jonne Halttunen (Škoda Fabia R5)
36 Nil Solans/Miquel Ibañez (Ford Fiesta R5)

Leading WRC2 championship positions:

1 Jan Kopecky 50pts; 2 Tidemand 43; 3 Takamoto Katsuta 29; 4 Ole Christian Veiby 27; 5 Eddie Sciorsere/Greensmith 18, etc

Stuart Loudon's key stage: SS16 Copina-El Condor 2 16.43km (10.20 miles)

There's only one completely new stage on this year's route (Saturday's Tanti-Mataderos test – run as a road section in previous years), but plenty have been tweaked and turned around. Copina-El Condor is probably the most significant of those running in the opposite direction – especially the second shot at this classic test, which doubles as the Power Stage.

Depending on conditions on Sunday and who's running which tyres, it's possible the crews could get to one of the most technical and twisty sections of the whole route without much grip left beneath them – worth remembering who is the go-to-driver when it comes to looking after tyres, step forward Sébastien Ogier.

Coming from Copina, the cars will climb 746 metres in 16 kilometres. While the road is generally quite sandy, it can still be quite rough and rocky towards El Condor itself. That last part of the stage – where the guys are threading those beautiful, wide World Rally Cars between the rocks and the wooden bridges – is going to be stunning to watch.

Stuart will be watching... #11 Craig Breen/Scott Martin (Citröen C3 WRC)

Finally, the wait is over for Craig and Scott. Ever since those boys finished a superb second in Sweden they've been waiting for this moment. It was tough for them to step aside for the last two rallies, but if you've got to do it for anybody, doing it for a pair of nine-time world champions is probably as good as it gets.

Will they be able to get straight back up to speed? They should be. They've had a couple of days of testing in the car this week, but the other crews have done two more rallies than they have since February. The flip side is a favourable starting

position on the road... providing it doesn't rain.

I was with Scott in Austria last week, where we were training and skiing. He and Craig are so focused and ready to get back to what they do best.

Weather with you:

You know what we were saying about the rain... there are thunderstorms and heavy rain forecast in the days prior to the start. Once the event gets going it looks set to dry out bit and with temperatures knocking on the door of 30 degrees, the roads should dry out fairly quickly.

Most successful driver on YPF Rally Argentina:

Sébastien Loeb (8 wins)

2018 World Rally Championship stats...

Stages planned: 70

Stages run: 70

Longest stage of the season: Vero – Sarrola-Carcopino 55.17km (34.28 miles) Tour de Corse

Shortest stage of the season: Street Stage Leon 1.11km (0.68 miles) Rally Mexico

WRC fastest times in 2018:

1 Tänak 18; 2 Ogier 12; 3 Neuville 11; 4 Loeb/Lappi 6; 6 Meeke 6; 7 Breen/Sordo /Mikkelsen 3; 10 Evans/Hayden Paddon 2, etc

WRC stages led in 2018:

1 Ogier 38; 2 Neuville 18; 3 Sordo 8; 4 Loeb 3; 5 Tänak 2; 6 Meeke 1.

WRC2 fastest times in 2018:

1 Tidemand 22; 2 Kopecky 12; 3 Katsuta 10; 4 Suninen/Veiby 6; 6 Rovannerä 5; 7 Kevin Abbring 3; 8 Eric Camilli/Huttunen/Stéphane Lefebvre 2, etc

WRC2 stages led in 2018:

1 Kopecky 26; 2 Tidemand 24; 3 Katsuta 17; 4 Camilli 3.

JWRC fastest times in 2018:

1 Rådström 10; 2 Jean-Baptiste Franceschi 9; 3 Bergkvist 6; 4 Ken Torn 5; 5 Terry Folb 3; 6 Emilio Fernández/Luca Bottarelli 2, etc

JWRC stages led in 2018:

1 Rådström 17; 2 Franceschi 6; 3 Folb 5; 4 Bergkvist 3.

WRC3 fastest times in 2018:

1 Tom Williams 22; 2 Franceschi 18; 3 Lario Taisko 8; 4 Rådström 7; 5

Bergkvist/Torn, etc

WRC3 stages led in 2018:

1 Williams 21; 2 Rådström 17; 3 Franceschi 16; 4 Brazzoli 7; 5 Folb 5; 6 Bergkvist 3.

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Stuart Loudon is a semi-professional co-driver who has started 98 rallies, 20 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.

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.

Stats courtesy of ewrc-results.com