

The Loudon-clear guide to... **Kennards Hire Rally Australia**

M-Sport and Ogier set for an Australian lap of honour

Down under for a dead rubber. The World Rally Championship titles might well have been decided last time out at Wales Rally GB, but these are the fastest, most competitive rally drivers and co-drivers in the world. Make no mistake, every one of them wants to win next week's Kennards Hire Rally Australia.

And everybody has a little something to prove. Except Sebastien Ogier, of course. Not that will stop the five-time World Rally Champion desperately trying to overcome the laws of physics by leading at the end of day one. First on the road, the Frenchman's M-Sport Ford Fiesta WRC will be a high-speed road-sweeper as he cleans the surface of the loose gravel, exposing a faster line with more grip for those following.

But what about the British and Irish contingent? Kris Meeke (Citroën) and Elfyn Evans (M-Sport) have won the last two rounds and chase a hat-trick for British drivers in Australia.

Then there's Hyundai and the need to close out a season which promised so much on a high note. Thierry Neuville has been at the sharp end throughout 2017. He's won more rounds than anybody else (three) and has won more stages than anybody else (48 compared with the next best, Ott Tänak on 27), but he has missed out on the title. Victory in Australia would cement a silver medal for him this season.

Despite the tricky time difference, Australia's always a classic with great roads and backdrops. I'm not working with the M-Sport team this time, but I remain in the loop with all the communciations, which is a fantastic way for me to keep in touch with what's happening on what's become the team's victory parade.

While I'm not flying to Australia, I will be making a longhaul trip the following week, to tackle the Barbados Rally Club Winter Rally in a Ford Focus RS WRC with Paul Bird. 'Winter Rally' might be slightly misleading... The event runs from November 23-25 and is a great way to close out the competitive side of the season.

Kennards Hire Rally Australia in detail

FIA World Rally Championship round 13/13

WRC – WRC2 – WRC3

Date: Thursday November 16 – Sunday November 19

Based: Coffs Harbour

Service: Coffs Harbour

Stages: 21

Competitive distance: 318.33km (197.81 miles)

Liaison distance: 629.22km (390.99 miles)

Total distance: 947.55km (588.80 miles)
Shortest stage: SS7/8/15/16 1.27km (0.78 miles)
Longest stage: SS9 Nambucca 48.89km (30.38 miles)
Currency: Australian Dollar
Time difference: GMT +11
Sunrise: 0542
Sunset: 1923

Shakedown:

The 5.02km (3.11 miles) shakedown stage is located at Boyds Deviation, 28.03km (17.41 miles) from Coffs Harbour Service Park. The stage runs from 0800-1330 on Thursday November 16.

Kennards Hire Rally Australia itinerary

Friday November 17

SS1 Pilbara 1 9.71km (6.03 miles) 0813
SS2 Eastbank 1 19.05km (11.83 miles) 0836
SS3 Sherwood 1 26.68km (16.57 miles) 0939
Service Coffs Harbour 1104
SS4 Pilbara 2 9.71km (6.03 miles) 1237
SS5 Eastbank 2 19.05km (11.83 miles) 1300
SS6 Sherwood 2 26.68km (16.57 miles) 1403
SS7 Destination NSW SSS 1 1.27km (0.78 miles) 1654
SS8 Destination NSW SSS 2 1.27km (0.78 miles) 1702
Service Coffs Harbour 1722

Saturday November 18

SS9 Nambucca 48.89km (30.38 miles) 0718
SS10 Newry 1 20.87km (12.96 miles) 0856
SS11 Raceway SSS 1.37km (0.85 miles) 0944
Service Coffs Harbour 1014
SS12 Welshs Creek 33.49km (20.81 miles) 1222
SS13 Argents Hill 12.24km (7.60 miles) 1308
SS14 Newry 2 20.87km (12.96 miles) 1416
SS15 Destination NSW SSS 3 1.27km (0.78 miles) 1654
SS16 Destination NSW SSS 4 1.27km (0.78 miles) 1702
Service Coffs Harbour 1722

Sunday November 19

SS17 Pilbara Reverse 1 9.93km (6.17 miles) 0738
SS18 Bucca 31.90km (19.82 miles) 0756
SS19 Wedding Bells 1 6.44km (4.0 miles) 0908
Service Coffs Harbour 1003
SS20 Pilbara Reverse 2 9.93km (6.17 miles) 1146
SS21 Wedding Bells 2 6.44km (4.0 miles) 1318

Finish 1530

2016 Kennards Hire Rally Australia result:

WRC: 1 Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jæger 2h46.05m.07s; 2 Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC) +14.9s 3 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 WRC) +1m12.6s **WRC2:** Esapekka Lappi/Janne Ferm (Škoda Fabia R5) **WRC3:** Michel Fabre/Maxime Vilmot (DS3 R3T Max)

Top 10 running order:

1 Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Ford Fiesta WRC)
5 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)
2 Ott Tänak/Martin Jarveoja (Ford Fiesta WRC)
10 Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Toyota Yaris WRC)
3 Elfyn Evans/Dan Barritt (Ford Fiesta WRC)
9 Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (Citroën C3 WRC)
8 Craig Breen/Scott Martin (Citroën C3 WRC)
4 Hayden Paddon/Seb Marshall (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)
6 Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jæger (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)
11 Esapekka Lappi/Janne Ferm (Toyota Yaris WRC)

Leading WRC championship positions:

1 Ogier 215pts; 2 Neuville 183pts; 3 Tanak 169pts; 4 Latvala 136pts; 5 Evans 118pts; Sordo 95pts.

Leading WRC2 runner:

31 Kalle Rovanpera/Jonne Halttunen (Ford Fiesta R5)

Leading WRC2 championship positions:

1 Tidemand 140pts; 2 Camilli 91pts; 3 Suninen 85pts.

No WRC3 entries.

Leading WRC3 championship positions:

1 Solans 129pts; 2 Astier 111pts; Ciamin 88pts.

Stuart Loudon's key stage: SS9 Nambucca 48.89km (30.38 miles)

Slightly shorter than in recent years, this stage will remain a real challenge first thing on Saturday morning. Starting just after seven, the crews will have to be right on it; if you're not completely awake and pushing hard you can easily ship a chunk of time in a 30-miler like this. The stage flows beautifully, without too many junctions, but there are still some tough, technical and narrow sections which will bring the average speed down. Expect the lead guys to be getting through here in a time just short of 27 minutes.

Tyre management will come into play here, with the Nambucca stage starting what

will be the longest loop on the entire event at 71.13km (44.20 miles).

Stuart will be watching... #6 Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jæger (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)

Given that he'd not competed in a Hyundai previously, it was hard not to be impressed with the speed Andreas showed last time out in Wales. Obviously, he and Anders won in Australia last year and will arrive back in Coffs Harbour with a good feeling for the three days to come.

But, the factor that could really play into their hands is their place on the road. They start ninth on stages that, unless the weather takes a real turn for the worst, will clean significantly through Friday. Question is: can Andreas make the most of that advantage and, then, can he hold on through the weekend? Twelve months ago in Australia, he was on superb form to beat Sébastien Ogier – let's see if he can deliver more of the same.

Weather with you:

The forecast for New South Wales isn't too dissimilar to last month in Wales: sunshine and showers. The difference is, it's looking like being twice as warm down under with temperatures topping at around 29 degrees.

Recent winners Kennards Hire Rally Australia:

2002: Marcus Grönholm/Timo Rautiainen (Peugeot 206 WRC)
2003: Petter Solberg/Phil Mills (Subaru Impreza WRC)
2004: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citröen Xsara WRC)
2005: François Duval/Sven Smeets (Citröen Xsara WRC)
2006: Mikko Hirvonen/Jarmo Lehtinen (Ford Focus RS WRC)
2009: Mikko Hirvonen/Jarmo Lehtinen (Ford Focus RS WRC)
2011: Mikko Hirvonen/Jarmo Lehtinen (Ford Fiesta RS 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)
2016: Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jæger (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)

Most successful driver on Kennards Hire Rally Australia:

Juha Kankkunen (4 wins)

2017 World Rally Championship stats...

Stages planned: 230

Stages run: 224

Total competitive distance travelled: 3848.51km (2391.46 miles)

Total distance travelled: 16045.28km (9970.53 miles)

Winners' total competitive time: 35h25m31.5s

Longest stage of the season: El Chocolate 1 54.90km (34.11 miles) Rally Mexico

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

Mexico

Most WRC fastest times in 2017: 1 Neuville 48; 2 Tänak 27; 3 Latvala/Evans 26; 5 Ogier 21; 6 Meeke 20; 7 Lappi 16; 8 Dani Sordo 15; 9 Paddon 11; 10 Juho Hänninen 7; 11 Mikkelsen 5; 12 Teemu Suninen 4; 13 Mads Østberg/Breen 2; 15 Lefebvre/Jan Kopecky 1

Most WRC stages led in 2017: 1 Neuville/Tänak 40; 3 Meeke 38; 4 Evans 37; 5 Latvala 22; 6 Ogier 14; 7 Lappi 12; 8 Paddon 9; 9 Mikkelsen 6; 10 Hänninen 3; 11 Østberg 2; 12 Kopecky/Sordo 1

Most WRC2 fastest times in 2017: 1 Pontus Tidemand 58; 2 Kopecky 45; 3 Mikkelsen 29; 4 Ole Christian Veiby 19; 5 Suninen 17; 6 Jari Huttunen 15; 7 Eric Camilli 13; 8 Gus Greensmith 9; 9 Benito Guerra/Juuso Nordgren 4; 11 Yohan Rossel/Saba Gustavo/Bryan Bouffier/Pierre-Louis Loubet/Umberto Scandola/Yoann Bonato 2; 17 Eyvind Brynildsen/Katsuta Takamoto/Lukasz Pieniazek/Quentin Gilbert/Jon Armstrong/Matt Edwards/David Bogie/Tom Cave 1

Most WRC2 stages led in 2017: 1 Tidemand 67; 2 Mikkelsen 43; 3 Kopecky 32; 4 Veiby 24; 5 Huttunen 23; 6 Suninen 19; 7 Camilli 13; 8 Greensmith/Rossel/Scandola 1

Most JWRC fastest times in 2017: 1 Nil Solans 42; 2 Nicolas Ciamin 35; 3 Terry Folb 25; 4 Denis Rådström 14; 5 Rob Duggan 5; 6 Emil Lindholm 3; 7 Julius Tannert 2; 8 Sebastian Careaga/Dillon Van Way 1

Most JWRC stages led in 2017: 1 Solans 60; 2 Ciamin 32; 3 Tannert 13; 4 Rådström 8; 5 Folb 2; 6 Lindholm 1

Most WRC3 fastest times in 2017: 1 Raphaél Astier 49; Solans 43; 2 Ciamin 34; 4 Folb 19; 5 Louise Cook 14; 6 Rådström 13; 7 Jakub Brzezinski 11; 8 Duggan 5; 9 Enrico Brazzoli 4; 10 Charles Martin 3; 11 Lindholm/Francisco Name/Tannert 2; 14 Luca Panzani/Dillon Van Way/Sebastian Careaga 1

Most WRC3 stages led in 2017: 1 Solans 49; 2 Astier 47; 3 Ciamin 32; 4 Cook 14; 5 Tannert 13; 6 Brzezinski 12; 7 Rådström 8; 8 Name 7; 9 Folb 2; 10 Lindholm 1

Most R-GT fastest times in 2017: 1 Romain Dumas 48; 2 Andrea Nucita 8; 3 François Delecour 6; 4 Fabrizio Andolfi Jr 4; 5 Andrea Modanesi/Fabio Andolfi 2

Most R-GT stages led in 2017: 1 Dumas 52; 2 Fabrizio Andolfi Jr/Delecour 4; 4 Fabio Andolfi 3; 5 Nucita 2

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Stuart Loudon is a semi-professional co-driver who has started 96 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