

The Loudon-clear guide to... **Tour de Corse**

Corner, corner, corner, welcome to Corsica...

Snow and ice? Done. High altitude? Sorted. And the gravel's all good. So... time for the Tar and the Tour de Corse.

The French island has a huge heritage in the sport and was a founding round of the World Rally Championship in 1973. Why? Simple: corners, corners, corners. Not for nothing is this event also known as the Rally of 10,000... corners.

I was fortunate enough to enjoy a few of those corners as a stand-in co-driver for Elfyn Evans, at the M-Sport Ford World Rally Team pre-event test. I've competed in Corsica before and I've co-driven in World Rally Cars, so I thought I had a reasonable idea of what to expect.

I didn't.

The car, the road and the driver combined to redefine what I'd previously thought physically possible in this sport. Everything about the car and what Elfyn managed to do in it was outstanding. We had some rain during the test and I mistakenly thought things might slow down a wee bit, did they heck! The team stuck on some softer tyres and Elfyn just kept on firing it at the corners – the grip and composure of the car was phenomenal. And don't get me started on the engine and brakes, both from another planet!

The topography and micro-climates of Corsica make this one of the most interesting rounds of the championship and picking the right tyres for a loop, if the weather's changeable, will be as tough here as anywhere else in the season.

Last year Citroën looked to have the legs on the others, but Hyundai emerged as winners with Thierry Neuville. What does next week hold? My money's on those M-Sport Ford boys, but I guess you kind of knew that anyway!

Tour de Corse in detail

FIA World Rally Championship round 4/13

WRC – WRC2 – JWRC – WRC3

Date: Thursday April 5 – Sunday April 8

Based: Bastia

Service: Bastia

Stages: 12

Competitive distance: 333.48 (207.22 miles)

Liaison distance: 786.62km (488.80 miles)

Total distance: 1120.10km (696.02 miles)

Shortest stage: SS2/4 Piedigriggio – Pont de Castirla 13.55km (8.41 miles)

Longest stage: SS11 Vero – Sarrola-Carcopino 55.17km (34.28 miles)

Currency: Euro

Time difference: UTC+2

Sunrise: 0712

Sunset: 1942

Shakedown:

The 5.45km (3.38 miles) shakedown stage is located at Sorbo Ocagnano, 10.76km (6.68 miles) from the service park in Bastia. The stage runs from 0800-1400 on Thursday April 6.

Tour de Corse itinerary

Friday April 6

SS1 La Porta – Valle di Rostino 1 49.03km (30.46 miles) 0950

SS2 Piedigriggio – Pont de Castirla 1 13.55km (8.41 miles) 1109

Service Bastia 1222

SS3 La Porta – Valle di Rostino 2 49.03km (30.46 miles) 1512

SS4 Piedigriggio – Pont de Castirla 2 13.55km (8.41 miles) 1631

Service Bastia 1851

Saturday April 7

SS5 Cagnano – Pino – Canari 1 35.61km (22.12 miles) 0737

SS6 Désert des Agriates 1 15.45km (9.60 miles) 0918

SS7 Novella 1 17.39km (10.80 miles) 1108

Service 1229

SS8 Cagnano – Pino – Canari 2 35.61km (22.12 miles) 1521

SS9 Désert des Agriates 2 15.45km (9.60 miles) 1702

SS10 Novella 2 17.39km (10.80 miles) 1839

Service Bastia 2000

Sunday April 8

SS11 Vero – Sarrola-Carcopino 55.17km (34.28 miles) 0923

SS12 Pénitencier de Coti-Chiavari 16.25km (10.09 miles) 1218

Finish Ajaccio 1500

2017 Tour de Corse result:

WRC: 1 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC) 3h22m53.0s; 2 Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Ford Fiesta WRC) +54.7s; 3 Dani Sordo/Marc Marti +56.0s. **WRC2:** Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jaeger (Škoda Fabia R5).

Running order:

1 Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Ford Fiesta WRC)

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

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

10 Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (Citroën C3 WRC)

7 Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Toyota Yaris WRC)
8 Ott Tänak/Martin Jarveoja (Toyota Yaris WRC)
9 Esapekka Lappi/Janne Ferm (Toyota Yaris WRC)
6 Dani Sordo/Carlos Del Barrio (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)
11 Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citroën C3 WRC)
2 Elfyn Evans/Dan Barritt (Ford Fiesta WRC)

Leading WRC championship positions:

1 Ogier 56pts; 2 Neuville 52; 3 Mikkelsen 35; 4 Meeke 32; 5 Latvala 31; 6 Tänak 26; 7 Lappi 23; 8 Craig Breen 20; 9 Sordo 18; 10 Loeb 11, etc.

Leading WRC2 runners:

31 Jan Kopecky/Pavel Dresler (Škoda Fabia R5)
32 Takamoto Katsuta/Marko Salminen (Ford Fiesta R5)
33 Ole Christian Veiby/Stig Rune Skjaermoen (Škoda Fabia R5)
34 Guillaume de Mavius/Louis Louka (Peugeot 208 R5)
35 Hiroki Arai/Glenn MacNeall (Ford Fiesta R5)
36 Nil Solans/Miquel Ibanez (Ford Fiesta R5)
37 Lukasz Pieniazek/Przemyslaw Mazur (Škoda Fabia R5)
38 Stephane Lefebvre/Gabin Moreau (Citroën C3 R5)

Leading WRC2 championship positions:

1 Pontus Tidemand 43pts; 2 Kopecky/Katsuta 25; 4 Eddie Sciorsere/Gus Greensmith 18; 6 Jari Huttunen; 7 Veiby/Suninen 15, etc.

Leading JWRC runners

61 Dennis Rådström/Johan Johansson (Ford Fiesta R2)
63 Emil Bergkvist/Ola Floene (Ford Fiesta R2)
64 Julius Tannert/Jürgen Heigl (Ford Fiesta R2)
65 Jean Baptiste Franceschi/Romain Courbon (Ford Fiesta R2)
66 Terry Folb/Christopher Guieu (Ford Fiesta R2)
67 Callum Devine/Keith Moriarty (Ford Fiesta R2)

Leading JWRC championship positions:

1 Rådström 34; 2 Bergkvist 23; 3 Tannert 15; 4 Jean-Baptiste Franceschi 12; 5 Folb 10; 6 Devine 8, etc

Leading WRC3 runner

62 Amaury Molle/Renaud Herman (Peugeot 208 R2)

Leading WRC3 championship positions:

1 Enrico Brazzoli/Denis Rådström 25pts; 3 Taisko Lario 19; 4 Amaury Molle 18; 5 Emil Bergkvist 18; 6 Julius Tannert 15, etc.

Stuart Loudon's key stage: SS11 Vero – Sarrola-Carcopino 55.17km (34.28)

miles)

This is classic, old-school Tour de Corse; it's the longest stage since a radical route re-think was delivered in 1986 (following the tragic deaths of Henri Toivonen and Sergio Cresto on the event the year before) and it's got a bit of everything.

Everything that is except for a long straight to offer the driver a breather and the co-driver time to catch his breath! Not only is this the longest stage of the rally, it's also the highest. Peaking at 885 metres, the weather up there could be very, very different to what it was at the start. Sunday morning will be well worth getting up for with this stage for breakfast!

Stuart will be watching... #2 Elfyn Evans/TBA (Ford Fiesta WRC) and #10 Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (Citroën C3 WRC)

I know I told you to watch Elfyn in Mexico, but you really, really need to watch him in Corsica. Having seen this fella from inside the car, he really is something special. Not that you need me to tell you that – remember 2015? Leading the Tour de Corse and then finishing second in some of the trickiest conditions imaginable. That's why the world's fastest Welshman's worth watching.

But then there's Kris and Paul, robbed of victory in Corsica last year, the two of them will be more than up for finishing the job next week. And that Citroën's shown some sort of pace on asphalt...

Weather with you:

Sunshine and temperatures in the high teens and low 20s is the long-range forecast for Bastia. There is, however, the chance of some rain on Friday or Saturday.

Most successful driver on Tour de Corse:

Didier Auriol (6 wins)

2018 World Rally Championship stats...

Stages planned: 58

Stages run: 58

Longest stage of the season: Thoard-Sisteron 36.69km (22.79 miles) Rallye Monte-Carlo

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

WRC fastest times in 2018:

1 Tänak 15; 2 Neuville 11; Ogier 9; 4 Meeke 6; 5 Breen/Sordo/Loeb/Mikkelsen 3; 9 Evans/Hayden Paddon/Lappi 2, etc

WRC stages led in 2018:

1 Ogier 26; 2 Neuville 18; 3 Sordo 8; 4 Loeb 3; 5 Tänak 2; 6 Meeke 1.

WRC2 fastest times in 2018:

1 Tidemand 22; 2 Katsuta 10; 3 Kopecky/Suninen; 5 Kalle Rovanperä 5; 6 Kevin

Abbring 3; 7 Veiby/Eric Camilli/Huttunen 2, etc

WRC2 stages led in 2018:

1 Tidemand 24; 2 Katsuta 17; 3 Kopecky 14; 4 Camilli 3.

JWRC fastest times in 2018:

1 Rådström 9; 2 Bergkvist 5; 3 Ken Torn 4; 4 Emilio Fernández 1.

JWRC stages led in 2018:

1 Rådström 17; 2 Bergkvist 3.

WRC3 fastest times in 2018:

1 Tom Williams 21; 2 Franceschi 9; 3 Lario Taisko 8; 4 Rådström 6; 5 Torn Ken/Bergkvist 4.

WRC3 stages led in 2018:

1 Williams 21; 2 Rådström 17; 3 Franceschi 10; 4 Brazzoli 7; 5 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