

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

How often do things live up to the hype? Scottish football? Not so much; so much not so much that we've stopped hyping it up now. Teacakes and Caramel Wafers? Always. The next generation of the World Rally Championship? *Definitely*.

This new-era season is the season that just keeps on giving: three rallies and three different winners and we're still warming up... fantastic.

I'm back with the M-Sport World Rally Team for this event, co-ordinating the stream of information coming in from the weather crews in the stages and the gravel crews going through the stages ahead of the competitors. Given the mountainous terrain and notoriously fickle weather associated with this region, I'm sure that's going to keep me on my feet. I can't wait. Being on the inside of the team that's leading both the drivers' and manufacturers' WRC title races is something very special. It's the second best place in the world.

The best? That's one of three seats in a Ford Fiesta WRC – the ones just to the right of Mr Ogier, Mr Tanak and Mr Evans. Co-driving: there's nothing quite like it. I competed on this event six months ago, so I have an idea of the terrain and the roads and what's coming. One of the features of this event is the need to look after tyres and brakes. It's so easy to push too hard through the first half of a stage, maybe on an uphill section only to find you're compromised on the downhill or towards the end of the test.

Much as I'm working for another M-Sport win, it's just brilliant for the sport that we're coming to the fourth round with no idea who's going to win. The Ford Fiesta WRC, the Toyota Yaris WRC and Citroën's C3 WRC have all won, but the man who has led for the longest this year – and set the most fastest times – is Hyundai's Thierry Neuville. Will this event go the Belgian's way? Quite possibly. He is, don't forget, a former Tour de Corse winner – back in 2011 when it was a round of the Intercontinental Rally Challenge.

Anyway, time to look forward to the season's first full Tarmac round of the championship.

Rally in detail

FIA World Rally Championship round 4/13

WRC – WRC2 – WRC3 – JWRC - RGT

Date: Thursday April 6 – Sunday April 9

Based: Bastia

Service: Bastia airport

Stages: 10

Competitive distance: 316.80km (196.85 miles)

Liaison distance: 763.93km (474.70 miles)

Total distance: 1080.73km (671.56 miles)

Shortest stage: SS10 Porto-Vecchio-Palombaggia 10.42km (6.47 miles)

Longest stage: SS9 Antisanti-Poggio di Nazza 53.78km (33.41 miles)

Currency: Euro

Time difference: GMT +2

Language: French

Corsica population: 300,000

Capital: Paris (France); Ajaccio (Corsica)

Sunrise: 0657

Sunset: 1957

Shakedown:

The 5.40km (3.35 miles) shakedown stage is located at Querciolo, 10.71km (6.65 miles) from the service park at Bastia airport. The stage runs from 0800-1400 on Thursday April 6.

Tour de Corse itinerary

Friday April 7

SS1 Pietrosella-Albitreccia 1 31.20km (19.38 miles) 0922

SS2 Plage du Liamone-Sarrola-Carcopino 1 29.12km (18.09 miles) 1114

Remote service Porticcio 1224

SS3 Pietrosella-Albitreccia 2 31.20km (19.38 miles) 1411

SS4 Plage du Liamone-Sarrola-Carcopino 2 29.12km (18.09 miles) 1603

Service Bastia airport 2020

Saturday April 8

SS5 La Porta-Valle di Rostino 1 48.71km (30.26 miles) 0840

SS6 Novella 1 17.27km (10.73 miles) 1017

Service Bastia airport 1137

SS7 La Porta-Valle di Rostino 2 48.71km (30.26 miles) 1428

SS8 Novella 2 17.27km (10.73 miles) 1608

Service Bastia airport 1848

Sunday April 9

SS9 Antisanti-Poggio di Nazza 53.78km (33.41 miles) 0858

SS10 Porto-Vecchio-Palombaggia 10.42km (6.47 miles) 1218

Finish Porto-Vecchio 1330

2016 Rally Tour de Corse result:

WRC: 1 Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)

4h07m17.0s; 2 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 WRC) +46.4s 3

Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jæger (Volkswagen Polo R WRC) 1m10.0s.

WRC2: Elfyn Evans/Craig Parry (Ford Fiesta R5). **WRC3:** Laurent

Pellier/Benoit Neyret (DS 3 R3T Max). **JWRC:** Laurent Pellier/Benoit Neyret (DS 3 R3T Max).

Top 10 running order:

1 Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Ford Fiesta WRC)

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

- 3 Ott Tänak/Martin Järveoja (Ford Fiesta WRC)
- 4 Dani Sordo/Marc Marti (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)
- 5 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)
- 6 Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (Citroën C3 WRC)
- 7 Craig Breen/Scott Martin (Citroën C3 WRC)
- 8 Elfyn Evans/Dan Barritt (Ford Fiesta WRC)
- 9 Hayden Paddon/John Kennard (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)
- 10 Stéphane Lefebvre/Gabin Moreau (Citroën C3 WRC)

Leading WRC championship positions:

1 Ogier 66pts; 2 Latvala 58; 3 Tanak 48; 4 Sordo 30; 5 Neuville 28; 6 Meeke 27.

Leading WRC2 runners:

- 31 Eric Camilli/Benjamin Veillas (Ford Fiesta R5)
- 32 Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jæger (Škoda Fabia R5)
- 33 Jan Kopecky/Pavel Dresler (Škoda Fabia R5)
- 34 Teemu Suninen/Mikko Markkula (Ford Fiesta R5)
- 35 Emil Bergkvist/Joakim Sjöberg (Citroën DS3 R5)
- 36 Bryan Bouffier/Denis Giraudet (Ford Fiesta R5)
- 38 Ole Christian Veiby/Stig Skjaermoen (Škoda Fabia R5)
- 39 Yoann Bonato/Benjamin Boulloud (Citroën DS3 R5)

Leading WRC2 championship positions:

1 Pontus Tidemand 50pts; 2 Camilli 42; 3 Mikkelsen 25.

Leading WRC3 runners:

- 61 Raphael Astier/Frederic Vauclare (Peugeot 208 R2)
- 62 Enrico Brazzoli/Maurizio Barone (Peugeot 208 R2)
- 63 Louise Cook/Stefan Davis (Ford Fiesta R2)
- 64 Loic Astier/Loic Declerck (Citroën DS3 R3T)
- 65 Jakub Brezezinski/Szymon Marciniak (Citroën DS3 R3T)

Leading WRC3 championship positions:

1 Astier 25pts; 2 Luca Panzani 18; 3 Charles Martin 15.

Leading JWRC runners:

- 101 Nil Solans Baldo/Miquel Ibanezsotos (Ford Fiesta R2)
- 102 Terry Folb/Christopher Guieu (Ford Fiesta R2)
- 103 Julius Tannert/Jürgen Heigl (Ford Fiesta R2)
- 104 Nicolas Ciamin/Thibault de la Haye (Ford Fiesta R2)
- 106 Robert Duggan/Gerard Conway (Ford Fiesta R2)
- 107 William Wagner/Kevin Parent (Ford Fiesta R2)
- 108 Miko Niinema/Martin Valter (Ford Fiesta R2)
- 109 Dillon van Way/Dai Roberts (Ford Fiesta R2)
- 111 Dennis Radstrom/Johan Johansson (Ford Fiesta R2)

Leading R-GT runners:

21 Romain Dumas/TBC Porsche 997 GT3 RS
22 Francois Delecour/Dominique Savignoni Abarth 124 Rally

Stuart Loudon's key stage: SS10 Porto-Vecchio-Palombaggia 10.42km (6.47 miles)

Sunday's going to be a big day in Corsica. The 54-kilometre (33.41 miles) run from Antisanti-Poggio di Nazza is one heck of a way to start a final day which comes with a sting in the tail. It'll be really interesting to see how Kris Meeke and Paul Nagle go through here after their sensational time – 35 seconds quicker than anybody – last time out. Good as SS9 is going to be, the one to watch for me will be the Power Stage.

There's a tyre zone after that long final-day opener, which will give the guys the chance to set themselves up with the softest tyres they've got. There's plenty of time to bleed brakes, work on the suspension clicks, whatever they need to do. After that, they can all push like mad for those extra five points.

The stage itself isn't a particularly easy one. The first section is quite unrepresentative for Corsica: lots of blind crests and corners on crests all on really smooth asphalt – it's a bit of a rollercoaster. Then you turn up the hill, the road gets more abrasive and it all feels more like Corsica again.

Stuart will be watching... #1 Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Ford Fiesta WRC)

It might sound obvious and that's because it is. It's almost impossible to look past the Frenchmen on their home round of the championship. Séb and Julien know these roads and the conditions; more than that, they have really good experience of reading the conditions and translating that into tyre choice and car set-up.

Equally, I'll probably be keeping half an eye on Thierry Neuville and Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC) at the same time. As you can see from the season's statistics so far (see below), these two have been right on it through the first three rounds and it looks like they're due a result.

Weather with you:

This is early April in the mountains, expect a bit of everything. Temperatures will range from around 18-23 with the sun making an appearance most days. Cloud, rain and possibly a thunderstorm or two are also on the horizon. The problem we will face in Corsica is in the long stages – it's quite possible the crews will start and finish the stage on bone-dry asphalt, but it could be pouring with rain in the middle. This is where we have to trust in the information we have and accept that there's always an element of compromise on this rally.

Recent winners Tour de Corse:

2001: Jesus Puras/Marc Marti (Citroën Xsara WRC)

2002: Gilles Panizzi/Hervé Panizzi (Peugeot 206 WRC)
2003: Petter Solberg/Phil Mills (Subaru Impreza WRC 2003)
2004: Markko Märtin/Michael Park (Ford Focus RS WRC04)
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)
2015: Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
2016: Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)

Most successful driver on Rally Tour de Corse:

Bernard Darniche and Didier Auriol (6 wins)

Stuart's 2017 World Rally Championship stats...

Stages planned: 55

Stages run: 50

Total competitive distance travelled: 951.92km (591.52 miles)

Total distance travelled: 3724.71km (2314.53 miles)

Winners' total competitive time: 7h22m08.2s

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: Neuville 16; Latvala/Ogier/Evans/Tanak 6; Meeke 5; Sordo 4; Lefebvre/Hanninen 1

Most WRC stages led in 2017: Neuville 23; Meeke 16; Latvala 6; Ogier 5; Hanninen 4

Most WRC2 fastest times in 2017: Tidemand 23; Mikkelsen 9; Camilli 6; Kopecky/Veiby/Suninen 3; Bouffier/Eyvind Brynildsen 1

Most WRC2 stages led in 2017: Tidemand 29; Mikkelsen 16; Camilli 4; Veiby 3

Most WRC3 fastest times in 2017: Cook 14; Astier 11; Martin 3; Panzani 1

Most WRC3 stages led in 2017: Astier 16; Cook 15

Most R-GT fastest times in 2017: Dumas 10; Delecour 3; Fabio Andolfi 2

Most R-GT stages led in 2017: Dumas 9; Delecour 4; Andolfi 3

Rally Tour de Corse media contact:

Hélène Larivière

hlariviere@ffsa.org

+33 (0)607 379 115

Stuart Loudon media contact:

Sandra Evans

Sandra@wordspr.com

+ 44 7887 693993

Stuart Loudon is a semi-professional co-driver who has started 88 rallies, 19 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.