

The Loudon-clear guide to... Che Guevara Energy Drink Tour de Corse

This event conjures so many evocative and emotional memories: a Bernard Darniche-driven Lancia Stratos, incredible French dominance, Petter Solberg's unforgettable zero to hero fightback win in 2003 and, of course, Sébastien Loeb's perfect rally to win every single stage two years later.

The Tour de Corse is a special rally with a special place in the history of the World Rally Championship. And the good news is that this week's event goes a long way to really recreating what the original events were all about; this week is a real tour of Corsica including mileage from top to bottom of this beautiful island.

Granted, a round-island itinerary sets France's round of the championship aside from its fellow WRC qualifiers, but it's great to have a bit of variety, not to mention a huge challenge to the crews competing. And, for the first time, I'm delighted to say that includes me.

I'm co-driving Mohamed Al Mutawaa in an Abu Dhabi Racing Citroën DS 3 R3T. We tested together for the first time in France last week and everything went well – it's fair to say we're both very excited about getting into those 10,000 corners.

One thing everybody's hoping for this week is good weather; you really had to feel for the organisers last year, with so much rain falling in the run-up to the rally. This time we've enjoyed sunshine during the recce, but as the rally approaches there are some clouds gathering over the mountains...

The rally ahead...

FIA World Rally Championship round 10/14

WRC – WRC2 – WRC3 – Junior WRC

Date: Thursday September 29 – Sunday October 2

Based: Bastia

Service: Bastia airport

Stages: 10

Competitive distance: 390.92km (242.34 miles)

Liaison distance: 779.20km (484.19 miles)

Total distance: 1170.12km (727.11 miles)

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

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

Currency: Euro

Time difference: GMT +2

Language: French

Corsica population: 326,898

Capital: Paris (Corsica: Ajaccio)

Sunrise: 0717

Sunset: 1907

Shakedown:

The 5.40km (3.35 miles) shakedown stage is located at Sorbo Ocagnano, 10.71km (6.65 miles) from the service park. The stage runs from 0800-1400.

Tour de Corse Itinerary

Friday September 30

SS1 Acqua Doria – Albitreccia 1 49.72km (30.89 miles) 0858

SS2 Plage du Liamone – Sarrola – Carcopino 1 29.12km (18.09 miles) 1106

Service Porticcio 1216

SS3 Acqua Doria – Albitreccia 2 49.72km (30.89 miles) 1424

SS4 Plage du Liamone – Sarrola – Carcopino 2 29.12km (18.09 miles) 1632

Service Bastia airport 1927

Saturday October 1

SS5 La Porta – Valle di Rostino 1 53.72km (33.38 miles) 0922

SS6 Novella – Pietralba 1 30.80km (19.13 miles) 1103

Service Bastia airport 1223

SS7 La Porta – Valle di Rostino 2 53.72km (33.38 miles) 1520

SS8 Novella – Pietralba 2 30.80km (19.13 miles) 1701

Service Bastia airport 1821

Sunday October 2

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

Service Porto-Vecchio 1102

SS10 Porto-Vecchio – Palombaggia 10.42km (6.47 miles) 1208

Finish Porto-Vecchio La Marina 1236

Last year...

Despite the ever-changing conditions Sébastien Ogier and Robert Kubica made the perfect start to share the lead after the opening 18-miler. The first stage was as far as either of their challenge would go, however. The second test was lost to the weather and Ogier retired with transmission trouble in SS3, while Kubica dropped almost a minute to the leader Elfyn Evans. The Welshman splashed his way through with speed and precision to keep his Fiesta out front at the end of day one. Jari-Matti Latvala passed the M-Sport driver on Saturday morning and would go on to take the win, but Evans did a superb job of keeping Andreas Mikkelsen off the podium's middle step.

Result: 1 Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)

2h39m46.7s; 2 Elfyn Evans/Dan Barritt (Ford Fiesta RS WRC) + 43.1s; 3

Andreas Mikkelsen/Ola Fløene (Volkswagen Polo R WRC) +46.3s.

Top 10 running order

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

2 Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jaeger (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)

3 Hayden Paddon/John Kennard (Hyundai i20 WRC)

4 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 WRC)

5 Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)

6 Dani Sordo/Marc Marti (Hyundai i20 WRC)

- 7 Mads Østberg/Ola Fløene (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
- 8 Ott Tänak/Raigo Molder (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
- 9 Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (Citroën DS3 WRC)
- 10 Craig Breen/Scott Martin (Citroën DS3 WRC)

Leading WRC2 runners:

- 31 Elfyn Evans/Craig Parry (Ford Fiesta R5)
- 32 Jan Kopecky/Pavel Dresler (Škoda Fabia R5)
- 33 Quentin Gilbert/Renaud Jamoul (DS 3 R5)
- 34 Pierre-Louis Loubet/Vincent Landais (Citroën DS 3 R5)
- 35 Ghislain de Mevius/Johan Jalet (Škoda Fabia R5)
- 36 Yoann Bonato/Benjamin Boulloud (Citroën DS 3 R5)
- 38 Jose Suarez Miranda/Candido Carrera Estevez (Peugeot 208 T16)
- 39 Quentin Giordano/Thomas Roux (Peugeot 208 T16 R5)
- 40 Julien Maurin/Olivier Ural (Škoda Fabia R5)
- 42 Kevin Abbring/Seb Marshall (Hyundai i20 R5)

Leading Junior/WRC3 runners:

- 61 Simone Tempestini/Giovanni Bernacchini (DS 3 R3T)
- 62 Ole Christian Veiby/Stig Rune Skjærmoen (DS 3 R3T)
- 63 Martin Koci/Lukas Kostka (DS 3 R3T)
- 64 Terry Folb/Franck Lefloch (DS R3T)
- 65 Vincent Dubert/Alexandre Coria (DS 3 R3T)
- 66 Romain Martel/Vanessa Lemoine (DS 3 R3T)
- 67 Jordan Berfa/Damien Augustin (Peugeot 208 R2)
- 68 Enrico Brazzoli/Maurizio Barone (Peugeot 208 R2)
- 69 Igor Giusti/Dini Gilbert (Peugeot 208 R2)
- 70 Michael Burri/Anderson Levratti (Renault Clio RSR3T)
- 71 Mohamed Al Mutawaa/**Stuart Loudon** (DS 3 R3T)

Stuart Loudon's key stage: SS9 Antisanti – Poggio di Nazza 53.78km (33.41 miles)

If this one goes down to the wire, Sunday morning's opener is going to be pivotal. Not only is it the longest stage of the event, it's also the test that takes crews higher than any other on this year's Tour de Corse. After a long and twisty climb away from the start – all of which is new from last year – the crews reach the village of Vezzani. At 815 metres, this is the highest section of the rally. After that it's fast downhill to Pietroso and onto the narrow, bumpy Col de Cardo road. This narrow and windy section continues on Lugo di Nazza, a classic section of stage which has been retained from some of the classic routes through the Eighties.

Stuart will be watching... #31 Elfyn Evans/Craig Parry (Ford Fiesta R5)
Obviously I won't be giving Elfyn my full attention this week, but it's certainly going to be really interesting to see how last year's Corsican super-hero gets on in his final WRC2 outing of the season.

Weather with you:

After a lovely week of sunshine for pre-event tests and the recce, it looks like it's going to turn wet for the main event. Temperatures will range from 15-24 degrees.

The media week:

Wednesday September 28

0900-1900 accreditation open (media centre, Bastia airport)
0900-2000 media centre open (Rally HQ, Bastia airport)
1730-1815 Hyundai media lounge, (service park, Bastia airport)
1815-1900 M-Sport meet the team, (service park, Bastia airport)
1900 Volkswagen meet the team, (service park, Bastia airport)

Thursday September 29

0730-1900 accreditation open (Rally HQ, Bastia airport)
0730-2100 media centre open (Rally HQ, Bastia airport)
1145 meet the crews (top three from shakedown), service park
1230 FIA pre-event press conference (Media centre, Bastia airport)
1315 presentation of FFSA French Rally Team (Media centre, Bastia airport)
1845-1930 autograph session for P1 drivers (Place Miot, Ajaccio)
1930 ceremonial start (Place Miot, Ajaccio)

Friday September 30

0730-1900 accreditation open (Rally HQ, Bastia airport)
0700-2400 media centre open (Rally HQ, Bastia airport)
2030 autograph session (Parc Fermé, Bastia)

Saturday October 1

0700-2300 media centre open (Rally HQ, Bastia airport)
1930 autograph session (Parc Fermé, Bastia)

Sunday October 2

0600-0000 media centre open (Rally HQ, Bastia airport)
1330 FIA post-event press conference (Cinémathèque, Porto-Vecchio)
1430 podium finish (La Marina, Porto-Vecchio)

Stuart's restaurant recommendation:

For two towns we have two restaurants. In all honesty, you're not going to struggle to find good food in Bastia or Ajaccio. But in Bastia, try Brasserie L'Evidence (5, rue Pino, 20200 Bastia, +33 615 775102), while Ajaccio boasts a lovely place called A Merendella Citadina (19 rue Conventionnel-Chiappe, 20000, +33 967 789913) – best to book that one.

Recent winners:

2005: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citröen Xsara WRC)
2006: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citröen Xsara WRC)
2007: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citröen C4 WRC)
2008: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citröen C4 WRC)
2009: Pascal Trojani/Francis Mazotti (Peugeot 307 WRC)

2011: Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Peugeot 207 S2000)
2012: Dani Sordo/ Carlos del Barrio (Mini John Cooper Works RRC)
2013: Bryan Bouffier/Xavier Panseri (Peugeot 207 S2000)
2014: Stéphane Sarrazin/Jacques-Julien Renucci (Ford Fiesta RRC)
2015: Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)

Most successful driver on the Tour de Corse:

Bernard Darniche and Didier Auriol (9 wins)

World Rally Championship stat centre:

Rounds run: 9

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; Rally Argentina (April 21-24), winners: Meeke/Nagle; Rally of Portugal (May 19-22), winners: Paddon/Kennard; Rally Italy (June 9-12), winners: Neuville/Gilsoul; Rally Poland (June 30-July 03), Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jaeger; Rally Finland (July 28-31), winners: Meeke/Nagle; ADAC Rallye Deutschland (August 18-21), winners: Ogier/ Ingrassia

Stages completed: 167

Cancelled stages: 10

Accumulated winning time: 29h47m04.1s

Accumulated competitive distance: 3005.37km (1870.01 miles)

Accumulated liaison distance: 8712.11km (5416.19 miles)

Accumulated total distance: 12081.48km (7507.40 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 45
- 2 Latvala 30
- 3 Neuville 23

Most WRC stages led in 2016

- 1 Ogier 51
- 2 Meeke 45
- 3 Latvala 31

Most WRC2 fastest stage times in 2016

- 1 Teemu Suninen 33
- = Lappi 33
- 2 Evans 28
- 3 Fuchs 15

Most WRC2 stages led in 2016

- 1 Lappi 44
- 2 Suninen 38

3 Evans 28

Most Junior WRC fastest stage times in 2016

1 Tempestini 35

2 Veiby 19

3 Terry Folb 8

Most Junior WRC stages led in 2016

1 Tempestini 43

2 Veiby 26

3 Martin Koci 10

Most WRC3 fastest stage times in 2016

1 Michel Fabre 51

2 Tempestini 33

3 Veiby 27

Most WRC3 stages led in 2016

1 Fabre 59

2 Tempestini 40

3 Veiby 39

Eight drivers have led WRC rounds; 12 have led WRC2, four have led Junior WRC and eight have led WRC3 rounds.

WRC standings

1 Ogier 169pts

2 Mikkelsen 110pts

3 Paddon 94pts

WRC2 standings

1 Evans 95pts

2 Suninen 93pts

3 Lappi 82pts

Junior WRC standings

1 Tempestini 93pts

2 Veiby 56pts

3 Folb 48pts

WRC3 standings

1 Tempestini 93pts

2 Fabre 79pts

3 Veiby 69pts

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Stuart Loudon is a semi-professional co-driver who has started 85 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.

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.