

The Loudon-clear guide to... **Rally Italia Sardegna**

Sardinia's where this World Rally Championship season's really going to hot up – metaphorically and literally. Which is interesting, because the competition's already at boiling point after four different winners in six rallies.

Along with Rally Mexico, the Italian island event now rates among the season's toughest challenges with sunshine and searing temperatures beating down on rough, rock-strewn stages. Temperatures in the cars will head north of 60 degrees on some of the twistier roads and it's those more technical tests which will prove a real challenge for the tyres; push too hard too early and those covers could be cooked for the loop.

This year's route takes the cars back to Olbia for an overnight halt for the first time since the event was based on the east side of the island in 2013. That Thursday night coast-to-coast trek allows the return of a couple of classic stages on Friday with Terranova and Monte Olia back on the itinerary.

The rest of the schedule remains largely as it was last season, save for Monte Lerno, which has 0.89km tagged on the end and the Sassari power stage which has a similar distance added on to the start.

We can expect this event to be a real battle of attrition, especially the first full day of competition, which starts at 0630 and ends more than 13 hours later after eight stages and some long liaison sections on the run back to Alghero.

As ever, the absence of wet weather has left plenty of loose gravel around – much to the frustration of the driver running first on the hard-baked dirt roads. On day one, that onerous task falls to the World Rally Championship leader: M-Sport World Rally Team star Sébastien Ogier. Fortunately, the Frenchman's well-practised in the art of sweeping stages and will doubtless limit the time loss to his rivals. Those further down the order will have a golden opportunity to shine early on. Question is, who can hold that pace through the weekend to enjoy the honour of being first to jump in the Alghero harbour on Sunday afternoon?

There's no better way to wash the champagne off.

Rally in detail

FIA World Rally Championship round 7/13

WRC – WRC2 – WRC3

Date: Thursday June 8 – Sunday June 11

Based: Alghero

Service: Alghero

Stages: 19

Competitive distance: 321.06km (199.50 miles)

Liaison distance: 1172.23km (728.42 miles)
Total distance: 1493.29km (927.93 miles)
Shortest stage: SS1 Ittiri Arena Show 2.00km (1.24 miles)
Longest stage: SS12/15 Monte Lerno 29.10km (18.08 miles)
Currency: Euro
Time difference: GMT +2
Language: Italian
Sardinia population: 1.6m
Capital: Rome (Italy) Cagliari (Sardinia)
Sunrise: 0552
Sunset: 2056

Shakedown:

The 3.69km (2.29 miles) shakedown stage is located at Olmedo, 14.85km (9.19 miles) from the service park at Alghero. The stage runs from 0930-1330 on Thursday June 8.

Rally Italia Sardegna itinerary

Thursday June 8

SS1 Ittiri Arena Show 2.00km (1.24 miles) 1800

Friday June 9

SS2 Terranova 1 21.00km (13.04 miles) 0718

SS3 Monte Olia 1 15.00km (9.32 miles) 0749

SS4 Tula 1 15.00km (9.32 miles) 0914

SS5 Tergu-Osilo 1 14.91km (9.26 miles) 1020

Service Alghero 1157

SS6 Terranova 2 21.00km (13.04 miles) 1524

SS7 Monte Olia 2 15.00km (9.32 miles) 1555

SS8 Tula 2 15.00km (9.32 miles) 1720

SS9 Tergu-Osilo 2 14.91km (9.26 miles) 1826

Service Alghero 1943

Saturday June 10

SS10 Coiluna-Loelle 1 14.60km (9.07 miles) 0745

SS11 Monti di Ala 1 28.90km (17.95 miles) 0837

SS12 Monte Lerno 1 29.10km (18.08 miles) 0920

Service Alghero 1151

SS13 Coiluna-Loelle 2 14.60km (9.07 miles) 1508

SS14 Monti di Ala 2 28.90km (17.95 miles) 1600

SS15 Monte Lerno 2 29.10km (18.08 miles) 1643

Service Alghero 1914

Sunday June 11

SS16 Cala Flumini 1 14.06km (8.73 miles) 0837

SS17 Sassari – Argentiera 1 6.96km (4.32 miles) 0918
SS18 Cala Flumini 2 14.06km (8.73 miles) 1114
SS19 Sassari – Argentiera 2 6.96km (4.32 miles) 1218
Finish Alghero 1312

2016 Rally Italia Sardegna result:

WRC: 1 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC) 3h35m25.8s; 2 Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Volkswagen Polo WRC) +24.8s; 3 Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC) +1m37.8s **WRC2:** Teemu Suninen/Mikko Markkula (Škoda Fabia R5) **WRC3:** Fabio Andolfi/Manuel Fenoli (Peugeot 208 R2).

Top 10 running order:

1 Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Ford Fiesta WRC)
5 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)
10 Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Toyota Yaris WRC)
2 Ott Tänak/Martin Jarveoja (Ford Fiesta WRC)
6 Dani Sordo/Marc Marti (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)
3 Elfyn Evans/Dan Barritt (Ford Fiesta WRC)
8 Craig Breen/Scott Martin (Citroën C3 WRC)
4 Hayden Paddon/Sebastian Marshall (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)
7 Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (Citroën C3 WRC)
11 Juho Hänninen/Kaj Lindström (Toyota Yaris WRC)
9 Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jaeger (Citroën C3 WRC)

Leading WRC championship positions:

1 Ogier 128pts; 2 Neuville 106; 3 Latvala 88; 4 Tanak 83; 5 Sordo 66; 6 Evans 53.

Leading WRC2 runners:

32 Ole Christian Veiby/Stig Rune Skjaermoen (Škoda Fabia R5)
34 Jan Kopecky/Pavel Dresler (Škoda Fabia R5)
35 Johan Rossel/Benoit Fulcrand (Citroën DS3 R5)
36 Pierre-Louis Loubet/Vincent Landais (Ford Fiesta R5)
37 Hiroki Arai/Glenn Macneall (Ford Fiesta R5)
38 Takamoto Katsuta/Marko Salminen (Ford Fiesta R5)
39 Lukasz Pieniazek/Przemyslaw Mazur (Peugeot 208 T16)
40 Fabio Andolfi/Mauro Fenoli (Hyundai i20 R5)

Leading WRC2 championship positions:

1 Pontus Tidemand 100pts; 2 Teemu Suninen 54; 3 Eric Camilli 52.

Leading WRC3/JWRC runners:

61 Nil Solans Baldo/Miquel Ibanezsotos (Ford Fiesta R2)
62 Nicolas Ciamin/Thibault de la Haye (Ford Fiesta R2)
63 Terry Folb/Christopher Guieu (Ford Fiesta R2)

- 64 Julius Tannert/Jürgen Heigl (Ford Fiesta R2)
- 65 Dennis Radstrom/Johan Johansson (Ford Fiesta R2)
- 66 Robert Duggan/Tom Woodburn (Ford Fiesta R2)
- 67 Sebastian Careaga/Rodrigo Sanjaun de Eusebio (Ford Fiesta R2)
- 68 Dillon van Way/Dai Roberts (Ford Fiesta R2)
- 69 Miko Niinema/Martin Valter (Ford Fiesta R2)
- 70 Jakub Brzezinski/Robert Hundla (DS3 R3T)
- 71 Enrico Brazzoli/Enrico Ghietti (Peugeot 208 R2)
- 72 Francisco Name/Armando Zapata (DS3 R3T)

Leading WRC3 championship positions:

1 Ralph Astier 50pts; 2 Nils Solans 36; 3 Name 25.

Junior WRC

1 Solans 29pts; 2 Ciamin 20; 3 Folb 19.

Stuart Loudon's key stage: SS15 Monte Lerno 2 29.10km (18.08 miles)

I've gone for the second run of Monte Lerno, but the first one's hardly going to be a walk in the park either. The stage has been shortened from last season (44.26km/27.50 miles in 2016), but the crews come straight into Monte Lerno after the 28.90km (17.95 miles) Monti di Ala test. With just 500 metres of liaison between the two stages, if the drivers have any kind of an issue in the first of the pair they're going to struggle to do much in the way of running repairs before they start the next one.

This short liaison between SS11/12 and SS14/15 will likely be factored into the tyre strategy as well: it could be tricky to swap fronts for rears between the stages.

And then there's Monte Lerno's most famous attraction: Micky's Jump – that fantastic leap where cars seem to just hang in the hot, dusty, Sardinian air for an eternity.

Stuart will be watching... #4 Hayden Paddon/Seb Marshall (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)

Hayden and Seb could certainly count themselves among the unluckiest crews at the last round in Portugal. Had it not been for the electrical and powersteering problems, they would have been in with a shot at victory on round six. If they can carry on that rally-leading and scratch time-setting pace in Sardinia next week, they have to be among the favourites. Let's not forget how close Hayden came to winning in Sardinia a couple of years ago and let's not forget what a great place he's in on the road on the first day.

Stuart will also be watching... 9 Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jæger (Citroën C3 WRC)

It's impossible not to be watching Andreas Mikkelsen next week. Him and Anders

Jæger are back in the big time and not a moment too soon as they make their debut with the Citroën Racing team. Like Hayden, Andreas will enjoy a good place on the road on day one and if he's found a good feeling with the C3 WRC at the test then anything could happen!

Weather with you:

Hot, sunny and hotter and sunnier. Possibly with a bit of cloud later in the event. Otherwise, hot and sunny.

Recent winners Rally Italia Sardegna:

2007: Marcus Grönholm/Timo Rautiainen (Ford Focus RS WRC)

2008: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citroën C4 WRC)

2009: Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Ford Focus RS WRC)

2010: Juho Hänninen/Mikko Markkula (Škoda Fabia S2000)

2011: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citroën DS3 WRC)

2012: Mikko Hirvonen/Jarmo Lehtinen (Citroën DS3 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: Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)

Most successful driver on Rally Italia Sardegna:

Sébastien Loeb (4 wins)

2017 World Rally Championship stats...

Stages planned: 102

Stages run: 97

Total competitive distance travelled: 1975.48km (1227.56 miles)

Total distance travelled: 7752.43km (4817.36 miles)

Winners' total competitive time: 18h06m07.9s

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 29; 2 Ogier 14; 3 Evans 13; 4 Tänak 12; 5 Meeke 11; 6 Latvala 8; 7 Paddon 6; 8 Sordo 5; 9 Østberg 2; 10 Breen/Lefebvre/Hänninen 1

Most WRC stages led in 2017: 1 Neuville 28; 2 Meeke 23; 3 Evans 16; 4 Ogier 13; 5 Latvala 8; 6 Tänak 6; 7 Hänninen 2; 8 Østberg/Paddon 1

Most WRC2 fastest times in 2017: 1 Tidemand 35; 2 Mikkelsen 29; 3 Camilli 9; 4 Suninen 8; 5 Kopecky 5; 6 Benito Guerra 4; 7 Veiby 3; 8 Gustavo Saba/Bryan Bouffier; 10 Eyvind Brynildsen 1

Most WRC2 stages led in 2017: 1 Tidemand 45; 2 Mikkelsen 43; 3 Camilli 6; 4 Veiby 3.

Most JWRC fastest times in 2017: 1 Solans/Terry Folb 4; 3 Nicolas Ciamin 2.

Most JWRC stages led in 2017: 1 Solans 10

Most WRC3 fastest times in 2017: 1 Astier 18; 2 Solans/Louise Cook 14; 4 Brzezinski 9; 5 Ciamin 4; 6 Charles Martin 3; 7 Name/Brazzoli 2; 9 Luca Panzani

Most WRC3 stages led in 2017: 1 Astier 26; 2 Cook 14; 3 Brzezinski 11; 4 Name 7

Most R-GT fastest times in 2017: 1 Romain Dumas 17; Francois Delecour 6; Fabio Andolfi 2.

Most R-GT stages led in 2017: 1 Dumas 18; 2 Delecour 4; 3 Andolfi 3.

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Stuart Loudon is a semi-professional co-driver who has started 91 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.

Stats courtesy of ewrc-results.com