

The Loudon-clear guide to... **Rallye Monte-Carlo**

I'll be honest, at times it seemed like this season was never coming. All those pictures, all those video clips we were seeing of these 2017 World Rally Cars just served to build the excitement towards this moment. It's a new dawn for the World Rally Championship.

And what a year we're in for: new driver-team combinations and, of course, those very new and very fast cars.

I'm fortunate enough to have done some testing, co-driving for Matthew Wilson in M-Sport's prototype Ford Fiesta WRC, and it's fair to say the excitement and anticipation on the outside is more than matched from the inside of the car!

Testing with Matthew couldn't have made me more determined to fulfill my dream of becoming a professional co-driver in the World Rally Championship. And working with M-Sport has really opened my eyes to what it takes to win at the highest level of our sport. I'm looking forward to more insight this week when I work with the team as weather crew co-ordinator.

Probably more than any other in the championship, weather is at the heart of what makes this event tick – which means this week's going to be a fascinating, if slightly nervy affair for me. I like to put myself under pressure and challenge myself; this job on this event certainly ticks that box.

The chance to work in such close proximity with world champions like Sébastien Ogier, Julien Ingrassia and all of the M-Sport team is a truly golden opportunity and one which offers so much experience in a sport where experience and knowledge mean so much. I have to say a very big thank you to Malcolm and Matthew Wilson for bringing me into the team at such an exciting time.

The rally ahead...

FIA World Rally Championship round 1/13

WRC – WRC2 – WRC3

Date: Thursday January 19 – Sunday January 22

Based: Gap/Monaco

Service: Gap/Monaco

Stages: 17

Competitive distance: 382.65km (237.77 miles)

Liaison distance: 1029.20km (639.54 miles)

Total distance: 1411.85km (877.32 miles)

Longest stage: SS4/7 Aspres les Corps-Chaillol 38.94km (24.19 miles)

Shortest stage: SS14/16 Luceram-Col St Roch 5.50km (3.41 miles)

Currency: Euro

Time difference: GMT +1

Language: French

Monaco population: 37,800
Capital: Monte Carlo
Sunrise: 0758
Sunset: 1726

Shakedown:

The 3.35km (2.08 miles) shakedown stage is located on the Route de la Garde and RD503, 6.55km (4.07 miles) from the service park in Gap. The stage runs from 1600-2000 on Wednesday January 18.

Rallye Monte-Carlo itinerary

Thursday January 19

Start Monaco 1811

SS1 Entrevaux-Ubraye 21.25km (13.20 miles) 2014

SS2 Bayons-Breziers 1 25.49km (15.83 miles) 2257

Service Gap 2352

Friday January 20

SS3 Agnieres en Devoluy-Le Motty 1 24.63km (15.30 miles) 1011

SS4 Aspres les Corps-Chaillol 1 38.94km (24.19 miles) 1041

SS5 St Leger les Melezes-La Batie Neuve 1 16.83km (10.45 miles) 1147

Service Gap 1247

SS6 Agnieres en Devoluy-Le Motty 2 24.63km (15.30 miles) 1428

SS7 Aspres les Corps-Chaillol 2 38.94km (24.19 miles) 1501

SS8 St Leger les Melezes-La Batie Neuve 2 16.83km (10.45 miles) 1604

Service Gap 1704

Saturday January 21

SS9 Lardier et Valencia-Oze 1 31.17km (19.36 miles) 0808

SS10 La Batie Montsaleon-Faye 1 16.78km (10.42 miles) 0858

Service Gap 0952

SS11 Lardier et Valencia-Oze 2 31.17km (19.36 miles) 1113

SS12 La Batie Montsaleon-Faye 2 16.78km (10.42 miles) 1208

Service Gap 1302

SS13 Bayons-Breziers 2 25.49km (15.83 miles) 1503

Service Gap 1623

Sunday January 22

SS14 Luceram-Col St Roch 1 5.50km (3.41 miles) 0922

SS15 La Bollene Vesubie-Piera Cava 1 21.36km (13.27 miles) 1012

SS16 Luceram-Col St Roch 2 5.50km (3.41 miles) 1100

SS17 La Bollene Vesubie-Piera Cava 2 21.36km (13.27 miles) 1218

2016 Rallye Monte-Carlo result:

WRC: 1 Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
3h49m53.1s; 2 Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jæger (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
+1m54.5s; 3 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai New Generation i20)

WRC) +3m17.9s. **WRC2:** Elfyn Evans/Craig Parry (Ford Fiesta R5); **WRC3:** Ole Christian Veiby/Jonas Andersson (DS 3 R3T Max).

Top 20 entries

- 1 Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Ford Fiesta WRC)
- 2 Ott Tänak/Martin Jarveoja (Ford Fiesta WRC)
- 3 Elfyn Evans/Dan Barritt (Ford Fiesta WRC)
- 4 Hayden Paddon/John Kennard (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)
- 5 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)
- 6 Dani Sordo/Marc Marti (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)
- 7 Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (Citroen C3 WRC)
- 8 Stephane Lefebvre/Gabin Moreau (Citroen C3 WRC)
- 10 Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Toyota Yaris WRC)
- 11 Juho Hanninen/Kaj Lindstrom (Toyota Yaris WRC)
- 14 Craig Breen/Scott Martin (DS3 WRC)
- 20 Jourdan Serderidis/Frederic Miclotte (DS 3 WRC)
- 31 Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jæger (Skoda Fabia R5)
- 32 Jan Kopecky/Pavel Dresler (Skoda Fabia R5)
- 33 Max Rendina/Emanuele Inglesi (Skoda Fabia R5)
- 34 Armin Kremer/Pirmin Winklhofer (Skoda Fabia R5)
- 35 Quentin Gilbert/Renaud Jamoul (Hyundai i20 R5)
- 36 Yoann Bonato/Benjamin Boulloud (DS 3 R5)
- 37 Quentin Giordano/Thomas Roux (Peugeot 208 T16)
- 38 Emil Bergkvist/Joakim Sjöberg (DS 3 R5)

Leading WRC2 runners:

- 31 Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jæger (Škoda Fabia R5)
- 32 Jan Kopecky/Pavel Dresler (Škoda Fabia R5)
- 33 Max Rendina/Emanuele Inglesi (Škoda Fabia R5)
- 34 Armin Kremer/Pirmin Winklhofer (Škoda Fabia R5)
- 35 Quentin Gilbert/Renaud Jamoul (Hyundai i20 R5)
- 36 Yoann Bonato/Benjamin Boulloud (DS 3 R5)
- 43 Quentin Giordano/Thomas Roux (Peugeot 208 T16)
- 38 Emil Bergkvist/Joachim Sjöberg (DS 3 R5)
- 39 Eric Camilli/Benjamin Veillas (Ford Fiesta R5)
- 40 Bryan Bouffier/Denis Giraudet (Ford Fiesta R5)

Leading WRC3 runners:

- 61 Cédric Althaus/Jessica Bayard (Renault Clio RS)
- 63 Charles Martin/Mathieu Duval (Renault Clio RS)
- 65 Surhayen Per尼亞/Penate Rogelio (Renault Clio RS)
- 67 Luca Panzani/Federico Grilli (Renault Clio RS)
- 69 Enrico Brazzoli/Maurizio Barone (Peugeot 208)

Leading R-GT runners:

- 21 François Delecour/Dominique Savignoni (Abarth 124)
- 23 Romain Dumas/Gilles de Turckheim (Porsche 911)
- 25 Fabio Andolfi/Manuel Fenoli (Abarth 124)

27 Gabriele Noberasco/Daniele Michi (Abarth 124)

Stuart Loudon's key stage: La Bollene Vesubie-Piera Cava 21.36km (13.27 miles)

Is there a more classic Monte Carlo stage? In short, no. This one starts low, maybe in dry or damp conditions, but then it climbs, possibly through the cloud towards the Col. As the road rises, the temperature falls and damp can turn to ice, possibly black ice. Higher still and the snow arrives and that's where the fun starts. I've been on the top of the Turini both as a competitor and a spectator – or should I say I've thrown the snowballs and had them thrown at me! The atmosphere is just incredible, you can hear the fans cheering and smell the barbecues cooking something to accompany the beer and gluhwein being consumed so enthusiastically.

It's a genuine motorsport experience to be up there and that experience will never be better than this Sunday.

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

All 10 of the 2017-spec World Rally Cars in action this week will be watched like never before, but special focus will be reserved for car number one – more so than for a very long time. Sébastien Ogier in a Ford Fiesta WRC is not something we thought would be happening this year, but it is.

Sébastien and Julien's arrival at the M-Sport World Rally Team has generated a huge buzz around the sport. But, trust me, it's even bigger within the walls of Dovenby Hall. M-Sport HQ was a very special place to be while the finishing touches were being put to WRT 1 earlier this month.

Can Séb, Julien and M-Sport win Monte? Of course they can.

Weather with you:

Cold nights and sunny days is about the size of it. But really cold, like -10 and lower some nights – ensuring any ice will be hard packed and lingering, particularly on north-facing slopes. There's the chance of some cloud coming in later in the event, possibly Saturday night and into Sunday, which could deliver rain, sleet and or snow, depending on the altitude.

Recent winners Rallye Monte Carlo:

2004: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citroën Xsara WRC)

2005: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citroën Xsara WRC)

2006: Marcus Gröholm/Timo Rautiainen (Ford Focus RS WRC 06)

2007: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citroën C4 WRC)

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

2012: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (DS 3 WRC)

2013: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (DS 3 WRC)

2014: Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)

2015: Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)

2016: Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)

Most successful driver on Rallye Monte-Carlo:

Sébastien Loeb (7 wins)

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Curious to know more about the incredible year that lies before us – including details of all the key regulation changes in World Rally Championship for 2017? Then click here for my guide to 2017.

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.