

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

The mountains are calling again. It's time for Rallye Monte-Carlo.

There are a few changes to the opening round of this year's FIA World Rally Championship – not least the absence of a ceremonial start in Casino Square. Thursday's action kicks off from Place Desmichels in the centre of Gap rather than the middle of Monaco. And we're then straight into two new stages on that evening.

While this year's route is 40% different from last year, the classics are still well and truly covered as the world's most famous rally runs through Drôme, Alpes-de-Haute-Provence, Isère, Hautes-Alpes and finally Alpes-Maritimes. After three days in Gap, the action shifts south to the principality and two of the most famous stretches of road in our world: Col de Turini and Col de Braus. Both final-day stages are run twice and both are run in precisely the same configuration as last season.

Looking further ahead into 2019, there's so much to look forward to, including expanded television coverage, the return of WRC All Live, an extra round on the calendar (Rally Chile) and, of course, a second Séb on six rounds.

It's going to be a great, great year.

The rally ahead...

FIA World Rally Championship round 1/14

WRC – WRC 2 Pro – WRC 2

Date: Thursday January 24 – Sunday January 27

Based: Gap/Monaco

Service: Gap/Monaco

Stages: 16

Competitive distance: 323.83km (201.22 miles)

Liaison distance: 1042.60km (647.87 miles)

Total distance: 1366.43km (852.65 miles)

Longest stage: SS9/11 Agnieres en Devoluy–Corps 1 29.82km (18.53 miles)

Shortest stage: SS14/16 La Cabanette–Col de Braus 13.58km (8.43 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, 4.44km (2.75 miles) from the service park in Gap. The stage runs from 1000-1400 on Thursday January 24.

Rallye Monte-Carlo itinerary

Thursday January 24

SS1 La Breole-Selonnet 20.76km (12.90 miles) 2008

SS2 Avançon-Notre Dame du Laus 20.59km (12.84 miles) 2111

Service Gap 2201

Friday January 25

SS3 Valdrome-Sigottier 1 20.04km (12.45 miles) 0911

SS4 Roussieux-Laborel 1 24.05km (14.94 miles) 1014

SS5 Curbans-Piegut 1 18.47km (11.47 miles) 1137

Service Gap 1217

SS6 Valdrome-Sigottier 2 20.04km (12.45 miles) 1423

SS7 Roussieux-Laborel 2 24.05km (14.94 miles) 1526

SS8 Curbans-Piegut 2 18.47km (11.47 miles) 1649

Service Gap 1734

Saturday January 26

SS9 Agnieres en Devoluy-Corps 1 29.82km (18.53 miles) 0858

SS10 St Leger les Melezes-La Batie Neuve 1 16.87km (10.48 miles) 1016

Service Gap 1116

SS11 Agnieres en Devoluy-Corps 2 29.82km (18.53 miles) 1247

SS12 St Leger les Melezes-La Batie Neuve 2 16.87km (10.48 miles) 1408

Service Gap 1508

Parc ferme Monaco 2006

Sunday January 27

SS13 La Bollene Vesubie-Peira Cava 1 18.41km (11.30 miles) 0820

SS14 La Cabanette-Col de Braus 1 13.58km (8.43 miles) 0908

SS15 La Bollene Vesubie-Peira Cava 2 18.41km (11.30 miles) 1055

SS16 La Cabanette-Col de Braus 2 13.58km (8.43 miles) 1218

2018 result:

WRC: 1 Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Ford Fiesta WRC) 4h18m55.5s; 2

Ott Tanak/Martin Jarveoja (Toyota Yaris WRC) +58.3s; 3 Jari-Matti

Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Toyota Yaris WRC) +1m52.0s. **WRC2:** Jan

Kopecky/Pavel Dressler (Skoda Fabia R5); **WRC3:** Enrico Brazzoli/Luca

Beltrame (Peugeot 208 R2).

Top 20 entries

1 Sebastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia Citroen C3 WRC

11 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC

8 Ott Tanak/Martin Jarveoja Toyota Yaris WRC

10 Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila Toyota Yaris WRC

4 Esapekka Lappi/Janne Ferm Citroen C3 WRC

89 Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jaeger-Amland Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC
33 Elfyn Evans/Scott Martin Ford Fiesta WRC
3 Teemu Suninen/Marko Salminen Ford Fiesta WRC
19 Sebastien Loeb/Daniel Elena Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC
5 Kris Meeke/Seb Marshall Toyota Yaris WRC
7 Pontus Tidemand/Ola Floene Ford Fiesta WRC
21 Gus Greensmith/Elliott Edmondson Ford Fiesta R5
22 Yoann Bonato/Benjamin Boulloud Citroen C3 R5
30 Kalle Rovannerä/Jonne Halttunen Skoda Fabia R5
23 Ole Christian Veiby/Jonas Andersson Volkswagen Polo GTI R5
24 Nicolas Ciamin/Yannick Roche Volkswagen Polo GTI R5
25 Guillaume de Mevius/Martijn Wydaeghe Citroen C3 R5
26 Adrien Fourmaux/Renaud Jamoul Ford Fiesta R5
27 Gregoire Munster/Louis Louka Skoda Fabia R5
28 Pedro/Emanuele Baldaccini Hyundai i20 R5

Leading WRC 2 runners:

21 Gus Greensmith/Elliott Edmondson Ford Fiesta R5
22 Yoann Bonato/Benjamin Boulloud Citroen C3 R5
30 Kalle Rovannerä/Jonne Halttunen Skoda Fabia R5
23 Ole Christian Veiby/Jonas Andersson Volkswagen Polo R5
24 Nicolas Ciamin/Yannick Roche Volkswagen Polo R5
25 Guillaume de Mevius/Martijn Wydaeghe Citroen C3 R5
26 Adrien Fourmaux/Renaud Jamoul Ford Fiesta R5
27 Gregoire Munster/Louis Louka Skoda Fabia R5
28 Pedro/Emanuele Baldaccini Hyundai i20 Coupe R5

Leading R-GT runners:

56 Enrico Brazzoli/Manuel Fenoli Abarth 124
57 Ian Crerar/Christina Kroner Porsche 911

Stuart Loudon's key stage: SS1 La Breole-Selonnet 20.76km (12.90 miles)

The first stage of every season is always special, but this one's even more so. There's so much to look out for: six-time Séb in a Citroën, nine-time Séb in a Hyundai, Kris and Seb in a Toyota, Pontus in a World Rally Car... And the first time any of them push the 'stage' button, they'll be doing it in the dark on a freezing Thursday night, ready for a stage they've never seen before.

OK, they've seen some part of it – there's a five-kilometre stretch of Selonnet-Brézières in 2014 which will be familiar to some – but otherwise it's a fast and uncompromising test which climbs sharply from the start to Col de Fillys at 1322m. After that, it's downhill pretty much all the way to the finish.

Eyes down, we're good to go.

Stuart will be watching... #5 Kris Meeke/Seb Marshall Toyota Yaris WRC

It's fantastic to see Kris Meeke back where he belongs – and really exciting to see him in the car which was, by the end of last season, reckoned to be the pacesetter.

We've seen fantastic speed from Kris on this rally in the past and it's going to be fascinating to see what he can do on his debut with the Toyota Gazoo Racing team. There's a wee bit more interest in this car for me this year, what with one of my best mates Seb Marshall in there co-driving for Kris. I'll have everything crossed for a solid start to the season for these boys.

But, can we discount Séb [Ogier] and Julien [Ingrassia]? Probably not. Actually, definitely not. When it comes to this event, those guys seem to have a sixth sense for what's needed to take the victory. I think it's fair to say there's more of a question mark over the Citroën machine than there is over the men aboard it!

Weather with you:

Snow is forecast on the recce and potentially into the opening day of the rally proper. Currently, the route is reckoned to be clear of sitting snow, but there is ice waiting in places like Peira-Cava on the run down from Col de Turini. Naturally, this being the Monte, anything can happen.

Recent winners Rallye Monte-Carlo:

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)

2017: Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Ford Fiesta WRC)

2018: Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Ford Fiesta WRC)

Most successful driver on Rallye Monte-Carlo:

Sébastien Loeb (7 wins)

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Stuart Loudon is a semi-professional co-driver who has started 104 rallies, 21 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.