

The Loudon-clear guide to... **Vodafone Rally of Portugal**

Port and Scotch... that could be a fairly troublesome combination. But this story's not about your choice of digestif, it's about two of the world's most famous rallies running on one weekend: Rally of Portugal and the Scottish Rally.

Both of these have a Scottish connection for me – that's obvious for the third round of the British Rally Championship, but for Portugal it's the memory of Colin McRae winning the 1999 event in the Ford Focus WRC just before my 11th birthday. Like so many, I'd grown up rooting for the blue and yellow Subaru, but now it was the Blue Oval and Martini's red, white and blue.

From then on, Portugal has stuck in my mind as a real special one. I competed here with John MacCrone in 2012 and Robert Barrable for the next two years. Robert and I took our best result, finishing second in WRC 2 in 2013.

I actually arrived in Portugal to do the event in 2015, but my stay was shorter than I'd hoped. Keith Cronin and I had a fairly big crash at PH Sport's pre-event test on the Monday before the start and that was the end of that. It goes without saying, we were gutted not to be doing the rally – particularly because it was the first year in the north of the country. I was back the following year reporting with WRC Live and got the chance to drive most of the stages though, so I have a fairly good idea of what's going on.

I'm working with the M-Sport World Rally Team in Portugal and, with those memories of Colin and Nicky [Grist, co-driver] it's incredible for me to be with these guys on this rally.

It's just a shame these two great events are clashing next weekend. The history of the Scottish is amazing, with my home event having been won by some of the true greats; not just three McRaes, but Ari Vatanen, Hannu Mikkola, Stig Blomqvist – they all came and conquered our roads. So, it'll be Portugal with an eye on Scotland next week.

Rally in detail

FIA World Rally Championship round 6/13

WRC – WRC2 – WRC3

Date: Thursday May 18 – Sunday May 21

Based: Matosinhos

Service: Exponor Exhibition Centre, Matosinhos

Stages: 19

Competitive distance: 349.17km (216.93 miles)

Liaison distance: 1179.84km (733.15 miles)

Total distance: 1529.01km (950.12 miles)

Shortest stage: SS8/9 Braga Street Stage 1.90km (1.18 miles)

Longest stage: SS12/15 Amarante 37.55km (23.33 miles)

Currency: Euro

Time difference: GMT

Language: Portugese

Portugal population: 10m

Capital: Lisbon

Sunrise: 0621

Sunset: 2044

Shakedown:

The 4.60km (2.85 miles) shakedown stage is located at Baltar in the district of Paredes, 43.82km (27.22 miles) from the service park at Matosinhos. The stage runs from 0730-1300 on Thursday May 18.

Vodafone Rally de Portugal itinerary

Thursday May 18

SS1 Super Special Lousada 3.36km (2.08 miles) 1903

Friday May 19

SS2 Viana do Castelo 1 26.70km (16.59 miles) 1009

SS3 Caminha 1 18.10km (11.24 miles) 1106

SS4 Ponte de Lima 1 27.46km (17.06 miles) 1146

Service Exponor 1425

SS5 Viana do Castelo 2 26.70km (16.59 miles) 1609

SS6 Caminha 2 18.10km (11.24 miles) 1706

SS7 Ponte de Lima 2 27.46km (17.06 miles) 1746

SS8 Braga Street Stage 1 1.90km (1.18 miles) 1903

SS9 Braga Street Stage 2 1.90km (1.18 miles) 1928

Service Exponor 2030

Saturday May 20

SS10 Vieira do Minho 1 17.43km (10.83 miles) 0908

SS11 Cabeceiras de Basto 1 22.30km (13.85 miles) 0946

SS12 Amarante 1 37.55km (23.33 miles) 1104

Service Exponor 1245

SS13 Vieira do Minho 2 17.43km (10.83 miles) 1508

SS14 Cabeceiras de Basto 2 22.30km (13.85 miles) 1546

SS15 Amarante 2 37.55km (23.33 miles) 1704

Service Exponor 1845

Sunday May 21

SS16 Fafe 1 11.18km (6.94 miles) 0908

SS17 Luílas 11.91km (7.40 miles) 0930

SS18 Montim 8.66km (5.31 miles) 1020

SS19 Fafe 2 11.18km (6.94 miles) 1218

Finish Matosinhos 1420

2016 Vodafone Rally de Portugal result:

WRC: 1 Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (DS3 WRC) 3h59m01.0s; 2 Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jæger (Volkswagen Polo R WRC) +29.7s; 3 Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC) +34.5s 3 **WRC2:** Pontus Tidemand/Jonas Andersson (Škoda Fabia R5). **WRC3:** Simone Tempestini/Giovanni Bernacchini (DS 3 R3T Max).

Top 10 running order:

1 Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Ford Fiesta WRC)
10 Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Toyota Yaris WRC)
5 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)
2 Ott Tänak/Raigo Molder (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/John Kennard (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)
7 Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (Citroën C3 WRC)
11 Juho Hänninen/Kaj Lindström (Toyota Yaris WRC)

Leading WRC championship positions:

1 Ogier 102pts; 2 Latvala 86; 3 Neuville 84; 4 Tanak 66; 5 Sordo 51; 6 Evans 42.

Leading WRC2 runners:

31 Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jæger (Škoda Fabia R5)
32 Pontus Tidemand/Jonas Andersson (Škoda Fabia R5)
33 Eric Camilli/Benjamin Veillas (Ford Fiesta R5)
34 Teemu Suninen/Mikko Markkula (Ford Fiesta R5)
35 Emil Bergkvist/Joakim Sjöberg (Citroën DS3 R5)
36 Johan Rossel/Benoit Fulcrand (Citroën DS3 R5)
38 Benito Guerra/Daniel Cué (Škoda Fabia R5)
39 Simone Tempestini/Giovanni Bernacchini (Citroën DS3 R5)
40 Pedro Heller/Pablo Olmos (Ford Fiesta R5)
41 Quentin Gilbert/Renaud Jamoul (Škoda Fabia R5)

Leading WRC2 championship positions:

1 Tidemand 75pts; 2 Mikkelsen 50; 3 Eric Camilli 46.

Leading WRC3 runners:

61 Raphaël Astier/Frédéric Vauclore (Peugeot 208 R2)
62 Nils Solans/Miquel Ibáñez (Ford Fiesta R2)
63 Nicolas Ciamin/Thibault de la Haye (Ford Fiesta R2)
64 Jakub Brzezinski/Robert Hundla (Citroën DS3 R3T)
65 Enrico Brazzoli/Maurizio Barone (Peugeot 208 R2)

66 Francisco Name/Armando Zapata (Citroën DS3 R3T)

Leading WRC3 championship positions:

1 Astier 50pts; 2 Panzani 18; 3 Solans 18.

Stuart Loudon's key stage: SS19 Fafe 2 11.18km (6.94 miles)

It might seem a bit clichéd to talk of the power stage being the key stage again, but after the last couple of rallies I'm sure you'll agree it's hard to ignore the second run of Fafe. I remember talking to the drivers at end of the penultimate stage in Portugal last year and the conversation seemed to centre pretty much on one thing: who's going flat over the jump?

There's a whole lot more to this test than just the jump; it's a very, very technical stage and – like the second run of all the roads next week – there will be a real risk of rocks being pulled onto the line. But all eyes will be on the long flight close to the finish. It's iconic, but as Jari Ketomaa showed a couple of years ago, get the line wrong and it bites hard.

Could it be the sting in the tail? Maybe. Talking of stings in the tail, I feel I should apologise to Elfyn [Evans] and Dan [Barritt] for my prediction last time out. I'll remind you: "... those narrow rope bridges provide a proper sting in the South American tail."

Unfortunately, so it turned out...

Stuart will be watching... #7 Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (Citroën C3 WRC)

Forget Argentina, Kris Meeke's a man on form right now. He's got confidence and speed and a car which showed for much of Argentina and most of Mexico that it has very good pace on the gravel. Kris and Paul won in Portugal last year and they've certainly got the pace and potential to repeat that result next week.

Weather with you:

After a fairly wet end to this one in and around Matosinhos, rally week is expected to dry out quite nicely. There's a bit of cloud hanging around, but it should be mainly sunny. Wednesday's looking like the rally week peak at around 27 degrees and once the stages start the forecast is for that to tumble towards the 20 degree mark.

Recent winners Vodafone Rally de Portugal:

2001: Tommi Mäkinen/Risto Mannisenmaki (Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VI)

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

2009: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citroën C4 WRC)

2010: Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Citroën C4 WRC)

2011: Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Citroën DS3 WRC)

2012: Mads Ostberg/Jonas Andersson (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)

2013: Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
2014: Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
2015: Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
2016: Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (DS 3 WRC)

Most successful driver on Vodafone Rally de Portugal:

Markku Alén (5 wins)

2017 World Rally Championship stats...

Stages planned: 83

Stages run: 78

Total competitive distance travelled: 1626.31km (1010.58 miles)

Total distance travelled: 6223.42km (3867.23 miles)

Winners' total competitive time: 14h23m12.2s

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: 1 Neuville 25; 2 Evans 13; 3 Meeke 10; 4 Ogier/Tänak 9; 6 Latvala 7; 7 Sordo 4; 8 Paddon 2; 9 Lefebvre/Hänninen 1

Most WRC stages led in 2017: 1 Neuville 27; 2 Meeke 22; 3 Evans 16; 4 Latvala 6; 5 Ogier 5; 6 Hänninen 2

Most WRC2 fastest times in 2017: 1 Tidemand 34; 2 Mikkelsen 17; 3 Camilli 7; 4 Kopecky 5; 5 Benito Guerra 4; 6 Ole Christian Veiby/Suninen 3; 8 Bryan Bouffier/Gustavo Saba 2; 10 Eyvind Brynildsen 1.

Most WRC2 stages led in 2017: 1 Tidemand 44; 2 Mikkelsen 25; 3 Camilli 6; 4 Veiby 3.

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

Most JWRC stages led in 2017: 1 Solans 10.

Most WRC3 fastest times in 2017: 1 Raphael Astier 15; 2 Louise Cook 14; 3 Jakub Brzezinski 5; 4 Charles Martin 3; 5 Solans/Luca Panzani 1.

Most WRC3 stages led in 2017: 1 Astier 25; Cook 14.

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 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