

The Loudon-clear guide to... **Neste Rally Finland**

Cleared for take-off, let's go with the gravel grand prix...

Tighten the belts and brace yourself, it's time to fly. It's time for Neste Rally Finland.

Last month's Rally Poland provided a qualifying run, but next week it's the real deal – Rally Finland is for the fastest of the fast and it's the one rally fans the world over have been waiting for. Those jumps, these cars. Crack on.

I've competed in Finland twice and I've worked on the rally on a further two occasions and every time I've absolutely loved it. From the moment you arrive in Jyväskylä, you can't help but notice you've landed in rally town at precisely the right moment. Depending on your hotel, even the key card for the room comes complete with a picture of last year's winner on it.

The place is all about the rally and the rally is all about the speed. And the air. And that's not only the air you fly through, but the air that's knocked out of your lungs when you land heavily.

Seriously. First time I did Rally Finland in 2012, John MacCrone and I had a much heavier landing than we'd expected and the wind was knocked clean out of me; I could barely speak to get the pacenotes out. Fortunately it was close to the end of the stage. John was fine, he saw it coming and had a wheel to hang on to. Me? I had no idea and just a book for company!

So much of this rally is about experience. People talk about a need to be able to read the road and the grip level on Rally GB or the need to understand the weather in Monte Carlo, but an accurate anticipation of when a crest becomes a jump and a jump becomes a long, long leap is crucial in Finland.

The pacenotes do more than just describe the road ahead, they instruct the driver where to place the car on the road before the jump to allow the perfect line, length and landing.

From the moment this event gets going with a street stage through Jyväskylä on Thursday night, there's no time to draw breath. It's absolutely frantic. The following day starts at 0605, runs 12 stages and the first car's in to final service just before nine at night. Time to play yourself in? Forget it. It's got to be flat-chat from the very start; such is the speed of this event, 10 seconds dropped here could be the decider come Sunday afternoon.

Fast is about to get faster.

Neste Rally Finland in detail

FIA World Rally Championship round 9/13
WRC – WRC2 – WRC3
Date: Thursday July 27 – Sunday July 30
Based: Jyväskylä
Service: Jyväskylä
Stages: 25
Competitive distance: 314.20km (195.24 miles)
Liaison distance: 1111.76km (690.84 miles)
Total distance: 1425.96km (886.09 miles)
Shortest stage: SS1/SS13 Harju 1 2.31km (1.43 miles)
Longest stage: SS16/19 Ouninpohja 24.38km (15.14 miles)
Currency: Euro
Time difference: GMT +2
Language: Finnish
Finland population: 5.268 million
Capital: Helsinki
Sunrise: 0347
Sunset: 2255

Shakedown:

The 4.62km (2.87 miles) shakedown stage is located in Ruuhimäki 34.12km (21.20 miles) from the Paviljonki Service Park. The stage runs from 0800-1330 on Thursday July 27.

Neste Rally Finland itinerary

Thursday July 27

SS1 Harju 1 2.31km (1.43 miles) 1900

Friday July 28

SS2 Halinen 1 7.65km (4.75 miles) 0712

SS3 Urria 1 12.75km (7.92 miles) 0745

SS4 Jukojärvi 1 21.31km (13.24 miles) 0848

SS5 Halinen 2 7.65km (4.75 miles) 1006

SS6 Urria 2 12.75km (7.92 miles) 1039

SS7 Jukojärvi 2 21.31km (13.24 miles) 1142

Service Jyväskylä 1317

SS8 Äänekoski-Valtra 1 7.39km (4.59 miles) 1500

SS9 Laukaa 1 11.76km (7.30 miles) 1613

SS10 Lankamaa 21.68km (13.47 miles) 1711

SS11 Äänekoski-Valtra 2 7.39km (4.59 miles) 1809

SS12 Laukaa 2 11.76km (7.30 miles) 1922

SS13 Harju 2 2.31km (1.43 miles) 2030

Service Jyväskylä 2050

Saturday July 29

SS14 Pihlajakoski 1 14.90km (9.25 miles) 0858
SS15 Päijälä 1 22.68km (14.09 miles) 1006
SS16 Ouninpohja 1 24.38km (15.14 miles) 1049
SS17 Saalahti 1 4.21km (2.61 miles) 1202
Service Jyväskylä 1252
SS18 Saalahti 2 4.21km (2.61 miles) 1455
SS19 Ouninpohja 2 24.38km (15.14 miles) 1608
SS20 Pihlajakoski 2 14.90km (9.25 miles) 1716
SS21 Päijälä 2 22.68km (14.09 miles) 1824
Service 2029

Sunday July 30

SS22 Lempää 1 6.80km (4.22 miles) 0925
SS23 Oittila 1 10.12km (6.28 miles) 1008
SS24 Lempää 2 6.80km (4.22 miles) 1147
SS25 Oittila 2 10.12km (6.28 miles) 1318
Finish Podium 1500

2016 Neste Rally Finland result:

WRC: 1 Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (DS3 WRC) 2h38m05.8s; 2 Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Volkswagen Polo WRC) +29.1s; 3 Craig Breen/Scott Martin (Citroën DS3 WRC) +1m41.3s **WRC2:** Esapekka Lappi/Janne Ferm (Škoda Fabia R5) **WRC3:** Ole Christian Veiby/Stig Rune Skjærmoen (DS3 R3T Max)

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)
4 Hayden Paddon/Seb Marshall (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)
8 Craig Breen/Scott Martin (Citroën C3 WRC)
11 Juho Hänninen/Kaj Lindström (Toyota Yaris WRC)
12 Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (Citroën C3 WRC)

Leading WRC championship positions:

1 Ogier 160pts; 2 Neuville 149; 3 Latvala 112; 4 Tanak 108; 5 Sordo 82; 6 Evans 57.

Leading WRC2 runners:

31 Ole Christian Veiby/Stig Rune Skjaermoen (Škoda Fabia R5)
32 Simone Tempestini/Giovanni Bernacchini DS3 R5
36 Quentin Gilbert/Renaud Jamoul (Škoda Fabia R5)
34 Gus Greensmith/Craig Parry (Ford Fiesta R5)
33 Pierre-Louis Loubet/Vincent Landais (Ford Fiesta R5)

35 Takamoto Katsuta/Marko Salminen ((Ford Fiesta R5)

Leading WRC2 championship positions:

1 Tidemand 118pts; 2 Ole Christian Veiby 68pts; 3 Suninen 54pts.

Leading WRC3/JWRC runners:

61 Nil Solans/Miquel Ibanezsotos (Ford Fiesta R2)
62 Nicolas Ciamin/Thibault De La Haye (Ford Fiesta R2)
64 Dennis Rådström/Johan Johansson (Ford Fiesta R2)
63 Terry Folb/Christopher Guieu (Ford Fiesta R2)
67 Julius Tannert/Jürgen Heigl (Ford Fiesta R2)
70 Jakub Brzezinski/Robert Hundla (DS3 R3T)

Leading WRC3 championship positions:

1 Solans 86pts; 2 Astier 50pts; 3 Nicolas Ciamin 45pts.

Junior WRC

1 Solans 96pts; 2 Ciamin 57pts; 3 Folb 50pts.

Stuart Loudon's key stage: SS16/19 Ouninpohja 24.38km (15.14 miles)

It kind of had to be, didn't it? This is a special place and this year it'll be a special challenge. It's not running to its full length, finishing this time at the famous Kakaristo junction. And that will alter the character of this stage quite a lot. After Kakaristo, the road gets narrower, more technical and generally a bit slower. One of the tricky things about the full length Ouninpohja was always getting the change in tempo right. You come into this section having been pretty much flat-out from the start. And I mean seriously quick, wide road, pedal-to-the-metal absolutely on it. Then you had to wind that back, totally tidy it up and trade some of the bravery for patience. Next week, it's the bravest of the brave and fastest of the fast that'll come out on top.

Stuart will be watching... #2 Ott Tänak/Martin Jarveoja (Ford Fiesta WRC)

I know I said Ott last time and he was so close... that's why we've got to watch him again this time around. He loves these roads and was born and brought up on quick stages like this in Estonia. Finland, as we know, favours the fast and the brave. Ott's both.

Weather with you:

Temperatures in the late teens and early 20s, with cloud, rain and occasional sunshine around.

Recent winners Neste Rally Finland:

2007: Marcus Grönholm/Timo Rautiainen Ford Focus WRC)
2008: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citroën C4 WRC)
2009: Mikko Hirvonen/Jarmo Lehtinen (Ford Focus WRC)

2010: Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Ford Focus WRC)
2011: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citröen DS3 WRC)
2012: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citröen DS3 WRC)
2013: Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
2014: Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
2015: Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
2016: Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (DS3 WRC)

Most successful driver on Neste Rally Finland:

Hannu Mikkola/Marcus Grönholm (7 wins)

2017 World Rally Championship stats...

Stages planned: 144

Stages run: 138

Total competitive distance travelled: 2608.76km (1621.08 miles)

Total distance travelled: 10668.35km (6629.31 miles)

Winners' total competitive time: 24h00m12.1s

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 40; 2 Tänak 17; 3 Evans 16; 4 Ogier 14; 5 Meeke/Latvala 12; 7 Paddon 11; 8 Sordo 9; 9 Lappi 6; 10 Østberg/Hänninen 2; 12 Breen/Lefebvre/Teemu Suninen 1

Most WRC stages led in 2017: 1 Neuville 40; 2 Meeke 25; 3 Tänak 19; 4 Evans 17; 5 Ogier 13; 6 Latvala 12; 7 Paddon 9; 8 Hänninen 3; 8 Østberg 1

Most WRC2 fastest times in 2017: 1 Pontus Tidemand 45; 2 Andreas Mikkelsen 29; 3 Jan Kopecky 19; 4 Veiby 16; 5 Eric Camilli 9; 6 Suninen 8; 7 Benito Guerra 4; 8 Gus Greensmith; 9 Yohan Rossel/Saba Gustavo/Bryan Bouffier/Pierre-Louis Loubet; 13 Eyvind Brynildsen/Katsuta Takamoto/Lukasz Pieniazek 1

Most WRC2 stages led in 2017: 1 Tidemand 46; 2 Mikkelsen 43; 3 Veiby 24; 4 Jan Kopecky 18; 5 Camilli 6; 6 Rossel 1

Most JWRC fastest times in 2017: 1 Solans 23; 2 Folb 13; 3 Rådstrom 9; 4 Ciamin 7; 5 Rob Duggan 5; 6 Emil Lindholm 2; 7 Sebastian Careaga/Julius Tannert/Dillon Van Way 1

Leading WRC3/JWRC runners:

61 Nil Solans/Miquel Ibanezsotos (Ford Fiesta R2)

62 Nicolas Ciamin/Thibault De La Haye (Ford Fiesta R2)

64 Dennis Rådstrom/Johan Johansson (Ford Fiesta R2)

63 Terry Folb/Christopher Guieu (Ford Fiesta R2)

67 Julius Tannert/Jürgen Heigl (Ford Fiesta R2)
70 Jakub Brzezinski/Robert Hundla (DS3 R3T)

Most JWRC stages led in 2017: 1 Solans 45; 2 Rådstrom 3; 3 Folb 2; 4 Lindholm 1

Most WRC3 fastest times in 2017: 1 Solans 31; 2 Raphaël Astier 18; 3 Louise Cook 14; 4 Brzezinski 11; 5 Ciamin 9; 6 Folb/Rådstrom 8; 8 Duggan 5; 9 Enrico Brazzoli/Charles Martin 3; 11 Francisco Name 2; 12 Luca Panzani/Julius Tannert/Dillon Van Way/Lindholm 1

Most WRC3 stages led in 2017: 1 Solans 34; 2 Astier 26; 3 Cook 14; 4 Brzezinski 12; 5 Name 7; 6 Rådstrom 3; 7 Folb 2; Lindholm 1

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 92 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