

The Loudon-clear guide to... **Rally RACC Catalunya-Costa Daurada Rally de España**

Welcome to the business end of the World Rally Championship

You did it: you survived almost seven weeks without a round of the World Rally Championship. Your reward? Three of the best to decide 2017 once and for all.

The next seven weeks take us right around the world to three countries and two continents for nine full legs of flat-chat rallying of the highest possible calibre. Forty-nine days later, having been through Spain, Wales and New South Wales, world champions will be crowned and a stunning chapter of World Rally Championship history completed.

This week, it's Salou, Spain and one of my absolute favourites.

RallyRACC Catalunya-Costa Daurada Rally de España, to give it its full title, is the year's only mixed surface event, with a loose surface Friday giving way to a full-bore racetrack-ready weekend. The service park at the end of the opening day in Spain is always one of the year's highlights as the mechanics work harder, faster and with more intensity than at any other time in the season to transform gravel rally cars into hunkered-down Tar-snorting racers.

I've done this event three times and finished on the WRC2 podium on two of those occasions. First time out, John MacCrone and I slipped off the road on the gravel while we were leading the WRC Academy in 2012. If we'd stayed there, I'd have been in with a shot at the WRC Academy co-drivers' title.

Nevermind...

This event is so accessible from Britain, it's amazing how many fans come out to watch and, being set along the side of the sea, there's always a real holiday atmosphere at this one. Not that anybody from the M-Sport World Rally Team will have any ideas about holidays, everything is getting that bit more serious for the team now we're really entering the business end of the championship.

Nobody's talking titles right now, there's still three rallies and a lot of work to be done. And Spain's a really big one in terms of weather, tactics and tyres – everything that rules my world when I join Cumbria's finest. Calling the weather's never easy, but Spain in the autumn is a particularly tricky one, especially being so close to the coast and the hills and mountains of Tarragona.

Day-to-day, for me, I work to keep a multi-million-pound biscuit-making show on the road, so it's not like I'm not used to pressure, but nothing compares to that short window when the cars come into service and the drivers want constant

updates on what's happening and what's coming. It's an unbelievable buzz, not to mention a real privilege, to be in the middle of it. But it's little wonder I've got no nails left when I leave these rallies...

Rally RACC Catalunya-Costa Daurada Rally de España in detail

FIA World Rally Championship round 11/13

WRC – WRC2 – WRC3

Date: Thursday October 5 – Sunday October 8

Based: Salou

Service: PortAventura

Stages: 19

Competitive distance: 312.02km (193.88 miles)

Liaison distance: 985.60km (612.45 miles)

Total distance: 1297.62km (806.34 miles)

Shortest stage: SS13 Salou 2.24km (1.39 miles)

Longest stage: SS3/6 Terra Alta 38.95km (24.20 miles)

Currency: Euro

Time difference: GMT +2

Language: Spanish

Germany population: 7.5 million

Capital: Madrid

Sunrise: 0757

Sunset: 1929

Shakedown:

The 2.97km (1.84 miles) shakedown stage is located at Salou 3.02km (1.87 miles) from the PortAventura Service Park. The stage runs from 0800-1300 on Thursday October 5.

Rally RACC Catalunya-Costa Daurada Rally de España itinerary

Friday September 6

SS1 Caseres 1 12.50km (7.76 miles) 0953

SS2 Bot 1 6.50km (4.03 miles) 1021

SS3 Terra Alta 1 38.95km (24.20 miles) 1056

Service PortAventura 1251

SS4 Caseres 2 12.50km (7.76 miles) 1519

SS5 Bot 2 6.50km (4.03 miles) 1547

SS6 Terra Alta 1 38.95km (24.20 miles) 1622

Service Salou 1822

Saturday September 7

SS7 El Montmell 1 24.40km (15.16 miles) 0800

SS8 El Pont d'Armentera 1 21.29km (13.22 miles) 0907

SS9 Savallà 1 14.12km (8.77 miles) 0954

Service PortAventura 1135

SS10 El Montmell 2 24.40km (15.16 miles) 1308
SS11 El Pont d'Armentera 2 21.29km (13.22 miles) 1415
SS12 Savallà 2 14.12km (8.77 miles) 1502
SS13 Salou 2.24km (1.39 miles) 1700
Service Salou 1720

Sunday October 8

SS14 L'Albiol 1 3 6.28km (3.90 miles) 0700
SS15 Riudecanyes 1 16.35km (10.15 miles) 0738
SS16 Santa Marina 1 14.50km (9.01 miles) 0838
SS17 L'Albiol 2 6.28km (3.90 miles) 1014
SS18 Riudecanyes 2 16.35km (10.15 miles) 1053
SS19 Santa Marina 2 14.50km (9.01 miles) 1218
Podium 1401

2016 Rally RACC Catalunya-Costa Daurada Rally de España result:

WRC: 1 Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC) 3h13m03.6s; 2 Dani Sordo/Marc Martí (Hyundai i20 WRC) +15.6s; 3 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 WRC) +1:15.0s **WRC2:** Jan Kopecky/Pavel Dresler (Škoda Fabia R5) **WRC3:** Fabio Andolfi/Manuel Fenoli (Peugeot 208 R2)

Top 10 running order:

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

Leading WRC championship positions:

1 Ogier 177pts; 2 Neuville 160pts; 3 Tanak 144pts; 4 Latvala 123pts; 5 Sordo 89pts; 6 Evans 87pts.

Leading WRC2 runners:

31 Jan Kopecky/Pavel Dresler (Škoda Fabia R5)
32 Teemu Suninen/Mikko Markkula (Ford Fiesta R5)
33 Simone Tempestini/Giovanni Bernacchini (Citroën DS3 R5)
34 Benito Guerro/Daniel Cué 36 (Škoda Fabia R5)
35 Gus Greensmith/Craig Parry (Ford Fiesta R5)
36 Yohan Rossel/Benoit Fulcrand (Citroën DS3 R5)

Leading WRC2 championship positions:

1 Tidemand 133pts; 2 Camilli 77pts; 3 Veiby 68pts.

Leading WRC3/JWRC runners:

61 Raphaël Astier/Frédéric Vauclore (Peugeot 208 R2)
62 Nil Solans/Miquel Ibanezsotos (Ford Fiesta R2)
63 Nicolas Ciamin/Thibault De La Haye (Ford Fiesta R2)
64 Julius Tannert/Jürgen Heigl (Ford Fiesta R2)
65 Terry Folb/Christopher Guieu (Ford Fiesta R2)
66 Dennis Radström/Johan Johansson (Ford Fiesta R2)

Leading WRC3 championship positions:

1 Solans 119pts; 2 Ciamin 80pts; 3 Tannert 70pts.

Junior WRC

1 Solans 141pts; 2 Ciamin 118pts; 3 Tannert 75pts.

Stuart Loudon's key stage: SS3/6 Terra Alta 38.95km (24.20 miles)

If the sun's up, this stage can be a real scorcher, especially for the tyres. It starts on the gravel, then goes onto asphalt before coming back onto the loose. The first stretch is no bother, you can push on with the car set-up for the dirt and obviously running gravel tyres.

But when you come to the Tarmac, the road climbs with a series of slow corners, then you come over the top and down the other side through similar-style bends; it's here that you have to be so careful. Coming downhill it's so easy to lean on the tyres too much, braking that bit later – suddenly you get back to the gravel and there's zero bite left in the tyres, the brakes are too hot and you're losing stacks of time. Terra Alta demands patience and a sensible, joined-up approach.

Stuart will be watching... #6 Dani Sordo/Marc Marti (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC)

Dani has to be one of the most popular guys in the service park and I doubt there's one person around who would deny him the joy of a first ever home win in the World Rally Championship.

That's a small part of the reason I'll be watching him. The main reason is that he's able to find so much speed at home. If he hooks everything up, he'll absolutely fly on the asphalt – and coming off the back of a very, very strong position on the road on Friday (providing it stays dry – if it rains, generally speaking the first car on the road has the best of the conditions) he could be in pole position for the weekend.

Weather with you:

Early indications are of plenty of Spanish sunshine with temperatures in the mid-20s.

Recent winners Rally RACC Catalunya-Costa Daurada Rally de España:

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

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

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

2010: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citröen C4 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: Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)

2015: Andreas Mikkelsen/Ola Fløene (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)

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

Most successful driver on Rally RACC Catalunya-Costa Daurada Rally de España:

Sébastien Loeb (8 wins)

2017 World Rally Championship stats...

Stages planned: 190

Stages run: 184

Total competitive distance travelled: 3232.13km (2008.44 miles)

Total distance travelled: 13259.56km (8239.49 miles)

Winners' total competitive time: 29h27m09.8s

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 42; 2 Tänak 24; 3 Latvala 23; 4 Evans 17; 5 Lappi 16; 6 Ogier 15; 7 Sordo 14; 8 Meeke 12; 9 Paddon 11; 10 Hänninen 5; 11 Suninen 4; 12 Breen/Østberg/Mikkelsen 2; 15 Lefebvre/Kopecky 1

Most WRC stages led in 2017: 1 Neuville 40; 2 Tänak 38; 3 Meeke 25; 4 Latvala 22; 5 Evans 17; 6 Ogier 13; 7 Lappi 12; 8 Paddon 9; 9 Hänninen/Mikkelsen 3; 11 Østberg/Sordo/Kopecky 1

Most WRC2 fastest times in 2017: 1 Tidemand 47; 2 Kopecky 31; 3 Mikkelsen 29; 4 Veiby 16; 5 Jari Huttunen 15; 6 Camilli 12; 7 Greensmith/Suninen 9; 9 Guerra/Nordgren 4; 11 Rossel/Bonato/Saba/Bouffier/Loubet/Scandola 2; 17 Brynildsen/Takamoto/Pieniazek/Gilbert/Armstrong 1

Most WRC2 stages led in 2017: 1 Tidemand 46; 2 Mikkelsen 43; 3 Kopecky 32; 4 Veiby 24; 5 Huttunen 23; 6 Camilli 13; 7 Greensmith/Rossel/Scandola 1

Most JWRC fastest times in 2017: 1 Solans 32; 2 Ciamin 28; 3 Folb 24; 4 Rådström 13; 5 Duggan 5; 6 Lindholm 3; 7 Tannert 2; 8 Careaga/Van Way 1

Most JWRC stages led in 2017: 1 Solans 48; 2 Ciamin 26; 3 Tannert 13; 4 Rådstrom 7; 5 Folb 2; 6 Lindholm 1

Most WRC3 fastest times in 2017: 1 Solans 40; 2 Ciamin 30; 3 Folb 19; 4 Astier 18; 5 Cook 14; 6 Rådstrom 12; 7 Brzezinski 11; 8 Duggan 5; 9 Brazzoli/Martin 3; 11 Lindholm/Name/Tannert 2; 14 Panzani/Van Way/Careaga 1

Most WRC3 stages led in 2017: 1 Solans 37; 2 Astier/Ciamin 26; 4 Cook 14; 5 Tannert 13; 6 Brzezinski 12; 7 Rådstrom/Name 7; 9 Folb 2; 9 Lindholm 1

Most R-GT fastest times in 2017: 1 Dumas 39; 2 Delecour 6/Nucita; 4 Andolfi Jr 3; 5 Andolfi/Modanesi 2

Most R-GT stages led in 2017: 1 Dumas 39; 2 Andolfi Jr/Delecour 4; 4 Andolfi 3; 5 Nucita 2

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Stuart Loudon is a semi-professional co-driver who has started 95 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