

The Tunnock's guide to... the 2016 FIA World Rally Championship

It's back to school time for the WRC class of 2016

Sixty-five days after the World Rally Championship departed Deeside, it's arrived in Gap for the start of the new season.

It's the beginning of the end for the current crop of World Rally Cars – and what a finale we have in store.

Here are Stuart Loudon's 16 reasons for looking forward to 2016...

1 Fourteen's better than 13. If it was up to you and me, we'd rarely have a week without a World Rally Championship round – so an extra one from last season's fine by me.

2 China. I competed in the Chinese Rally Championship with Alister McRae last season and, trust me, it's an experience you won't forget in a hurry. It's a fantastic – and crazy – place.

3 Even closer competition. The championship leader running first on the road on Friday and Saturday, regardless of who's retired and returning under Rally 2 regulations means this year's events will be closer than ever.

4 Warmer in Wales. It's statistically less likely to rain in October than it is in November. And statistics are always, *always* right. #binthebrolly

5 A full Hyundai season for Hayden Paddon. Like everybody, I was really excited to see the pace coming from Hayden last year and it'll be fascinating to see how he goes in his first full year in the World Rally Championship in 2016.

6 Talking of Hyundai, another reason to be cheerful is the work my mate Seb Marshall will be doing with Kevin Abbring in testing and developing Hyundai's third new World Rally Car in as many years!

7 Talking of mates, we can't go any further without mentioning Craig Breen and Scott Martin. I can't think of two more deserving fellas to get a go at the top of the World Rally Championship tree.

8 While we're on the subject of heroes from around these parts, let's not forget Kris Meeke, Paul Nagle, Elfyn Evans and Craig Parry; they're sure to light the World Rally Championship up every time they tighten their belts this season.

9 Mads Ostberg back at M-Sport. Mads always looked more at home in a Ford Fiesta RS WRC than he did in a DS 3. Potential winner this year? You bet.

10 M-Sport on top of the podium again. See above.

11 Toyota. Not long now until the world's biggest carmaker comes back to

the World Rally Championship. #welcomehome

12 No more false starts. Bravo to the FIA for handing a time of 10 minutes to any driver jumping the start at shakedown. This, we're told, was becoming increasingly common as some crews tried to get an early upper hand over their rivals. The little tinkers. #illegallyeagerbeavers

13 Fifty miles in Mexico. How cool is that new Guanajuato stage on the final day of Rally Mexico. It's going to be epic.

14 DMACK and Ott Tanak. For the first time, DMACK will contest the entire World Rally Championship with a Ford Fiesta RS WRC. And the car will be driven by the super-talented Tanak.

15 Better telly than ever in Britain. Channel 5, BT Sport and S4C will combine to show stacks of coverage of this year's series. It'll be wall-to-wall WRC. #forgetDownton

16 Finally, my 16th reason for looking forward to this year is the opportunity the World Rally Championship affords the world's fastest rally drivers and most dedicated co-drivers. If, by the way, anybody's looking for a dedicated co-driver with WRC experience, a working knowledge of Chinese food and a plentiful supply of Caramel Wafers... you know where I am.

The year ahead...

Rallye Monte Carlo

January 20-24

Based: Monaco/Gap

Surface: snow/ice/asphalt (wet and dry)

Last year's winners: Sebastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia

Good: Awe-inspiring and massively challenging place to start the season

Bad: Double-figure temperatures (without a minus sign) and no snow; it becomes an out-of-season Sanremo. The other bad thing is the horrific Chinese restaurant discovered on rally route last year.

Rally Sweden

February 11-14

Based: Karlstad

Surface: snow/ice (gravel if we're unlucky)

Last year's winners: Sebastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia

Good: Snow.

Bad: No snow.

Rally Mexico

March 03-06

Based: Leon

Surface: gravel

Last year's winners: Sebastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia

Good: 80km/50-mile Guanajuato stage on Sunday (not to mention going underground on Thursday night at the downtown Guanajuato street stage).
Bad: Only running the Guanajuato stage once.

Rally Argentina

April 21-24

Based: Villa Carlos Paz

Surface: gravel

Last year's winners: Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle

Good: Memories of Meeke's mighty win 12 months ago.

Bad: The long left-hander on the way into Villa Carlos Paz – especially in the wet and especially, especially in a largely brakeless hire car on slicks.

Rally of Portugal

May 19-22

Based: Matosinhos

Surface: gravel

Last year's winners: Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila

Good: Portuguese haddock (it might have been cod, and the fish's nationality can't be completely confirmed), but it was very delicious. Beyond the food, the Fafe jump – obviously.

Bad: Indoor service park. Full of fumes and teams scattered all around the place in different halls.

Rally Italy

June 09-12

Based: Alghero

Surface: gravel

Last year's winners: Sebastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia

Good: Along with Mexico, this event is fast-becoming one of the true challenges of the WRC. A hot, rough and rocky rally – think of it as an Italian Acropolis.

Bad: Too hot: Sardinian summers are biscuit-bakingly boiling.

Rally Poland

June 30-July 3

Based: Mikolajki

Surface: gravel

Last year's winners: Sebastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia

Good: Gazillions of fans cheering on WRC heroes.

Bad: Gazillions of fans. Traffic on the roads and through hotel reception is a nightmare.

Rally Finland

July 28-31

Based: Jyvaskyla

Surface: gravel

Last year's winners: Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila

Good: Air-time for World Rally Cars. And, well, just Finland.
Bad: Nothing. Oh, apart from pickled Herring for breakfast. That's not right.
Who wants to start their day with pickled Herring breath?

Rally Germany

August 18-21

Surface: asphalt

Based: Trier

Last year's winners: Sebastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia

Good: Panzerplatte. It's mad. Never has one stage had so many junctions; a real tough test to try to find any kind of rhythm.

Bad: Having to walk through the toilets to go from the media centre to the service park. Enough said.

Rally China

September 08-11

Based: Huairou

Surface: asphalt

Last winners: Didier Auriol/Denis Giraudet (1999)

Good: The WRC being back in Asia. It's been away for far too long.

Bad: Not enough Teacakes on sale in the People's Republic.

Rally of France

September 29-October 2

Based: Ajaccio

Surface: asphalt

Last year's winner: Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila

Good: The corners, all 10,000 of them. Corsica's an island where the straightest stretch of Tarmac is the one the aeroplanes land on in Ajaccio.

Bad: Traffic in Ajaccio. If ever a town needed a by-pass, it's this one. Get it built. Preferably before the end of September.

Rally Spain

October 13-16

Based: Salou

Surface: gravel/asphalt

Last year's winners: Andreas Mikkelsen/Ola Floene

Good: The Montjuic crowd in Barcelona on Thursday night. Awesome atmosphere.

Bad: Fake Tia Maria. Is there anything worse?

Rally GB

October 27-30

Based: Deeside

Surface: gravel

Last year's winners: Sebastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia

Good: Everything.

Bad: Nothing (apart from the lack of a Harrogate start/finish and overnights in Glasgow and Chester).

Rally Australia

November 17-20

Based: Coffs Harbour

Surface: gravel

Last year's winners: Sebastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia

Good: Season-ending sunshine and great stages.

Bad: Inevitably, lots of moaning about running order and chirpy Aussies going on about whingeing Poms.

Fancy something more Monte specific?

Rallye Monte Carlo kicks off this season with its usual nerve-tingling mix of snow, ice (blue and black), sunshine, slush, rain, mist, fog and super-racey asphalt all in as many corners.

Dates and data:

Rallye Monte Carlo

FIA World Rally Championship round 1/14

WRC – WRC2 – WRC3 – JWRC

Date: January 20-24, 2016

Based: Monaco, Monte Carlo

Service: Monaco/Gap

Stages: 16

Competitive distance: 377.59km (234.63 miles)

Liaison distance: 1111.40km (690.623 miles)

Total distance: 1488.99km (925.25 miles)

Longest stage: Lardier et Valencia – Faye (SS9/11) 51.55km (32.03 miles)

Shortest stage: Col de L'orme – St Laurent (SS14/16) 12.07km (7.50 miles)

Currency: Euro

Time difference: GMT+1

Language: French

Principality of Monaco population: 37,800

Capital: Monaco

Sunrise: 0759

Sunset: 1723

Shakedown:

Shakedown is a 3.35km/2.08-mile all-asphalt stage on the outskirts of Gap.

Shakedown runs on Wednesday January 20 from 1600-2000.

Itinerary

Thursday January 21

Ceremonial start – Monaco 1815

SS1 Entrevaux-Rouaine 21.25km (13.20 miles) 2018

SS2 Barles-Seyne 20.38km (12.66 miles) 2211

Service Gap 2343

Friday January 22

SS3 Corps-La Salle en Beaumont 1 14.65km (9.10 miles) 1021
SS4 Aspres les Corps-Chauffayer 1 25.78km (16.01 miles) 1104
SS5 Les Costes-Chaillol 1 17.82 km (11.07 miles) 1140
Service Gap 1255
SS6 Corps-La Salle en Beaumont 2 14.65km (9.10 miles) 1501
SS7 Aspres les Corps-Chauffayer 2 25.78km (16.01 miles) 1544
SS8 Les Costes-Chaillol 2 17.82km (11.07 miles) 1620
Service Gap 1735

Saturday January 23

SS9 Lardier et Valenca-Faye 1 51.55km (32.03 miles) 0804
SS10 St Leger les Melezes-La Batie Neuve 1 17.13km (10.64 miles) 0952
Service Gap 1042
SS11 Lardier et Valenca-Faye 2 (32.03 miles) 51.55km 1203
SS12 St Leger les Melezes-La Batie Neuve 2 17.13km (10.64 miles) 1351
Tyre zone Tallard 1441
SS13 Sisteron-Thoard 36.60km (22.74 miles) 1548
Parc ferme Monaco 1948

Sunday January 24

SS14 Col de L'Orme-St Laurent 1 12.07km (7.50 miles) 0908
SS15 La Bollene Vesubie-Peira Cava 21.36km (13.27 miles) 1057
SS16 Col de L'Orme-St Laurent 2 12.07km (7.50 miles) 1208
Finish Monaco 1500

Last year...

Sebastien Ogier reigned supreme. After a tricky start in some typically testing Monte conditions, the Volkswagen star eased his way past returning rallying royalty Sebastien Loeb. The nine-time world champion was back in a one-off Citroen drive and stole the early headlines by leading early on before sliding wide and damaging the left-rear wheel on his DS 3 WRC. When Kris Meeke suffered a similar fate, the way was left clear for Volkswagen's perfect start to the season with a podium lock-out. Twelve months on from leading the Monte on his World Rally Championship debut in a Ford Fiesta RS WRC, Robert Kubica starred again in the Alps, setting four fastest times. Unfortunately his hopes of a big result had been spoiled after he crashed on the event's opening evening.

Result: 1 Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC) 3h36m40.2s; 2 Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Volkswagen Polo R WRC) +58.0s; 3 Andreas Mikkelsen/Ola Fløene (Volkswagen Polo R WRC) +2m12.3s

Top 20 entries

1 Sebastien Ogier/Juliene Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
2 Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
3 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 WRC)
4 Dani Sordo/Marc Marti (Hyundai i20 WRC)

- 5 Mads Ostberg/Ola Floene (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
- 6 Eric Camilli/Nicolas Klinger (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
- 7 Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (DS 3 WRC)
- 8 Stephane Lefebvre/Gabin Moreau (DS 3 WRC)
- 9 Andreas Mikkelsen/Anders Jaeger (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
- 10 Hayden Paddon/John Kennard (Hyundai i20 WRC)
- 12 Ott Tanak/Raigo Molderr (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
- 16 Robert Kubica/Maciek Szczepaniak (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
- 17 Bryan Bouffier/Victor Bellotto (Ford Focus RS WRC)
- 37 Lorenzo Betreli/Simone Scattolin (Ford Focus RS WRC)
- 32 Armin Kremer/Pirmin Winklhofer (Skoda Fabia R5)
- 33 Julien Maurin/Benjamin Veillas (Skoda Fabia R5)
- 34 Quentin Giordano/Valentin Sarreaud (DS 3 R5)
- 35 Elfyn Evans/Craig Parry (Ford Fiesta R5)
- 36 Simone Tempestini/Matteo Chiarcossi (Ford Fiesta R5)
- 38 Alain Foulon/Gilles Delarche (Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X)

Leading WRC2 runners:

- 32 Armin Kremer/Pirmin Winklhofer (Škoda Fabia R5)
- 33 Julien Maurin/Benjamin Veillas (Škoda Fabia R5)
- 34 Quentin Giordano/Valentin Sarreaud (DS 3 R5)
- 35 Elfyn Evans/Craig Parry (Ford Fiesta R5)
- 36 Simone Tempestini/Matteo Chiarcossi (Ford Fiesta R5)
- 38 Alain Foulon/Gilles Delarche (Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X)
- 39 Jourdan Serderidis/Frédéric Miclotte (DS 3 R5)
- 40 Quentin Gilbert/Renaud Jamoul (DS 3 R5)

Leading WRC3 runners:

- 61 Ole Christian Veiby/Anders Jaeger (DS 3 R3-Max)
- 62 Fabio Andolfi/Manuel Fenoli (Peugeot 208 R2)
- 63 Damiano de Tommaso/Massimiliano Bosi (Peugeot 208 R2)
- 64 Jordan Berfa/Damien Augustin (Peugeot 208 R2)
- 65 Martin Koci/Lukas Kostka (Ds 3 R3-Max)
- 66 Michel Fabre/Maxime Vilmot (DS 3 R3-Max)

Tunnock's key stage:

SS13 Sisteron-Thoard 36.60km (22.74 miles)

It has to be. This is a genuine Monte classic that starts in the valley, tears along a straight stretch into the village of St Geniez before heading through the famous hairpins, up and over the Col de Fontbelle. Then it's downhill as fast as you dare to the finish. After which, it's a slightly more sedate 100-odd mile run into Monaco.

Weather with you:

Cold and very, very sub-zero temperatures have given way to warmer weather this week. Much of the heavy snow will be melting on the lower stages, but starting top freeze soon after sundown.

The media week:

Wednesday January 20

0900-2100 accreditation open, Gap

0900-2200 media centre open, Gap

1245 Volkswagen media event, service park, Gap

1430-1500 M-Sport media event, service park, Gap

1600-2000 shakedown

1500-1530 autograph session

1800-1845 Hyundai media event, service park, Gap

1815 meet the crews, Gap service park

1845 FIA pre-event press conference

Thursday January 21

0900-2100 accreditation open

0900 media centre opens, Gap/Monaco

1130 car photo shoot, Monaco

1245 crews photo shoot, Monaco

1300 WRC season opening, Monaco

1815 ceremonial start, Monaco

0000 (approx) meet the crews

Friday January 22

0830 media centre open, Gap

1000 media centre open, Monaco

1800 (approx) meet the top-three crews (service park)

Saturday January 23

0700 media centre open, Gap

0800 media centre open, Monaco

1800 (approx) meet the top-three crews (service park)

1930 Volkswagen media event, 6 Quai Antoine 1er, 98000 Monaco (above Stars 'N' Bars)

Sunday January 24

0700 media centre open, Monaco

1500 podium finish ceremony, Monaco

1630 FIA post-event press conference, Monaco (media centre)

1700 provisional final classification published

Tunnock's Restaurant recommendation:

La Maison du Caviar, Monaco (+377 93 308006). Understated (for Monte Carlo) but perfectly rated. The stroganoff in this place is arguably the eighth wonder of the world.

Recent winners Rallye Monte Carlo:

2003: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citroën Xsara WRC)

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)

Most successful driver on Monaco's round of the WRC:

Sébastien Loeb (7 wins), Tommi Mäkinen/Walter Rohrl (4 wins)

Stuart Loudon says...

"The Monte. Just saying those two words conjures all kinds of romantic and snowy pictures of Paddy Hopkirk in a Mini, Sandro Munari in a Lancia Stratos and Sebastien Loeb in whichever Citroen he was winning in that particular season.

"Rallye Monte-Carlo is, however, one of the toughest events in the world. When the weather's dry, it's benign; a pretty straightforward run through the mountains, but when the weather adds some spice, it can become a total lottery. More often than not, you find you're on the wrong tyres for the wrong surface – everything is a compromise. But when you succeed, when you emerge from the mountains into the beautiful principality of Monaco, there's a massive sense of achievement.

"I've done the event twice, taking a WRC2 podium and 13th overall in a Ford Fiesta R5 with Rob Barrable in 2014. Last year, I saw it from the other side and worked as an ice-note crew with Matthew Wilson. We had to go through the stages before the competitors, marking up pacenotes with additional information on which corners had ice and which didn't. It was a fascinating insight into this invaluable task and great to work with Matthew and the M-Sport World Rally Team."

Stuart Loudon is a semi-professional co-driver who has started 52 rallies, 18 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.

Pictures courtesy of Red Bull Media House/Volkswagen Motorsport

Stuart Loudon media enquiries

Sandra Evans

+44 7887 693993

Sandra@wordspr.com

To access the library of press releases please click the link: <http://www.wordspr.com/our-work/stuart-loudon>