

The Tunnock's guide to... Tour de Corse

Welcome from Tour de Corse organisers:

The Federation is going back to the roots of the World Rally Championship and it's with great pleasure that we will meet in Corsica this year.

On this occasion we wish to combine tradition and innovation by coming back to segments that have marked the history of the Tour de Corse, yet have not been used for almost 30 years. We propose a new layout with an experimental format, which has been praised by the FIA.

You will have the pleasure of revisiting the historical route which, in its 2015 version, meets the requirements of modern rallying and offers an amazing variety of landscapes that can only be found in Corsica. We worked hard on this version in order that all the drivers may take part in this rally, under the best possible conditions, and, of course, surrounded by the immense beauty of this island.

While the start and finish of the 2015 Tour de Corse is in Ajaccio, the rally will cover the island from Bastia to Porto-Vecchio by way of Propriano and the town of Corte, where the nerve centre of the event will be installed. I would like to thank all of the municipalities for their unwavering support and effort since the beginning of this project.

I would also like to underline the fact that endurance will be the key word of this new layout in which we designed long stages without service, pushing the limits of the FIA regulations as far as we could. This route, thought up specifically for the French round of the World Rally Championship, promises fantastic duels on the roads of the Haute Corse and Corse du Sud. It will be a gruelling test of both men and machines.

Dates and data:

FIA World Rally Championship round 11/13

WRC – WRC2 – Junior WRC – WRC3 – R-GT Cup

Date: October 1-4, 2015

Based: Aerdrome, Corte

Service: Aerdrome, Corte/Propriano Port

Stages: 9

Competitive distance: 332.73km (206.75 miles)

Liaison distance: 651.07km (404.57 miles)

Total distance: 983.80km (611.33 miles)

Longest stage: Muracciole – Col de Sorba (SS6) 48.46km (30.11 miles)

Shortest stage: Bisinao – Agosta plage (SS9) 16.74km (10.40 miles)

Currency: Euro

Time difference: BST+1/GMT+2/UTC+2
Language: French
French population: 66 million (Corsica population: 322,000)
Capital: Paris (Corsica regional capital: Ajaccio)
Sunrise: 0720
Sunset: 1900

Shakedown:

The shakedown stage is 3.44km (2.41 miles) long and runs on the D40 road at Poggio de Venaco. The start of the stage is 4.17km (2.59 miles) from the service park at Corte Aerodrome. Service park is at GPS: 42°17.375 N / 009°11.555' E

Itinerary:

Friday October 2

SS1 Plage du Liamone – Sarrola-Carcopino 29.12km (18.09 miles) 0923

Service Corte Aerodrome 1123

SS2 Casamozza – Ponte Leccia 1 43.69km (27.14 miles) 1339

SS3 Francardo – Sermano 1 36.43km (22.63 miles) 1447

Service Corte Aerodrome 1544

Parc Ferme Bastia 1827

Saturday October 3

SS4 Casamozza – Ponte Leccia 2 43.69km (27.14 miles) 0900

SS5 Francardo – Sermano 2 36.43km (22.63 miles) 1008

Service Corte Aerodrome 1221

SS6 Muracciole – Col de Sorba 48.46km (30.11 miles) 1352

Service Corte Aerodrome 1532

Parc Ferme Porto-Vecchio 1840

Sunday October 4

SS7 Sotta – Chialza 36.71km (22.81 miles) 0725

SS8 Zerubia – Martini 41.46km (25.76 miles) 0858

Regroup Propriano Port 1042

SS9 Bisinao – Agosta plage 16.74km (10.40 miles) 1208

Finish Ajaccio 1345

Changes from last year:

How long have you got? Everything has changed from last year, because last year's French round of the World Rally Championship was some way north and west in Alsace. It's seven years since the WRC was last on the island, so who better to show us around the stages than with French legend, former Tour de Corse runner up and factory Lancia driver Yves Loubet.

SS1 This special stage gathers several pieces of the Tour de Corse's history. In

the past, the beginning of the stage, when you climb towards the small village of Casaglione, was run in the other direction. From Casaglione, it's a section that the Tour de Corse used very often, especially in the Eighties. There were always a lot of people there. All Ajaccio will attend this special stage, since it is only a few kilometers away from the city. This starts and finishes the same way: with a large (wide) road. Between, it will be very twisty and narrow in some places; if a driver puts one wheel off the side of the road, he will be punished immediately with a stone, a rock or a parapet.

SS2/4 Even though the roads have been renovated, the layout of this stage remains narrow and tough to drive. A smooth road leads to the village of Prunelli-di-Casacconi. Shortly after, there is a tight bridge where the cars will arrive at mad speed. After an old, symbolic Corsican bridge – where you have to aim accurately – you'll find bumpy and coarse roads that climb towards Campile. At the end, the downhill run has a few traps at tremendous pace.

SS3/5 The third stage brings us to Francardo. It's a beautiful road, similar to those taken in the Sixties. When you reach the first pass, it's quite tense: grass appears in the middle of the path as well as significant bumps. From Aiti, it becomes very, very twisty, with lots of unbalanced curves and hairpin turns. It is tough to drive, because it's not possible to attack and the drivers will make good use of the front suspension. A bit further, the roads are lined up with chestnut trees, making them dirty and dusty. The hairpin-right at the entrance of Bustanico will offer an amazing view. To get out of SS2 and SS3, drivers will struggle, because they might not be used to this kind of pace. It's quite a challenge that they will have to repeat the next day. Physically, it will demand mad concentration, with few mistakes being allowed.

SS6 This stage contrasts with the two previous, because it's a track, almost from the beginning till the end. These are unforgettable moments, magical to take pictures with a rally road from the old days. The same enchanted ambience applies to Ghisoni, where the cars will pass for more than a kilometre, surrounded by old houses. The stage ends with a hill climb style road inside a marvelous forest. Despite this fairylike environment, the drivers will have to deliver a huge physical effort. This stage is a monument they will remember.

SS7 This is quite an interesting stage. Unfortunately, the road has been renovated and today it looks like a F1 track set up in the mountains – at least during the first kilometers. Afterwards, the road offers quick sections with flawless asphalt. However, it is not logical: the surface is excellent, but the road remains hard to drive. When you know it well, it can be magical. Otherwise, it can be quite painful. The downhill to Chialza is very spectacular, but beware of all the little rocks hidden on the side of the road. If a wheel gets out, the punctures are almost automatic. It's really a big boy stage.

SS8 I don't think the road at the start of this stage has been modified since the Fifties. It is cambered and bumpy as it can be. The downhill run, with its banked corners is pretty special – instead of cornering in second gear, you can pass in third or fourth! From the D69 to the Acoravo bridge, it's the craziest road on asphalt that exists. Past Arbellara, the road's widened and has lost a bit of its Corsican soul. The last kilometers, from Fozzano to the finish line, offer splendid and magical views. Quite a great stage.

SS9 The Tour de Corse used to pass by Agosta Plage from the end of the Seventies and during the Eighties. Once again, it's a nice tribute paid to the Tour de Corse history. At the Col de Belleval, there is the famous hairpin turn where thousands of fans always set a mad ambiance. Let's not forget about the abrasive road and its numerous changes of pace provoked by the small bridges. From Pietrosella, it's time for closing curves and an insane rhythm: very fast, stop, very fast, stop. This one is a very small, but magical stage.

Last year (in Alsace)...

A Volkswagen Polo R WRC won what would become Alsace's final Rallye de France, but it wasn't the result the locals really wanted. Jari-Matti Latvala made the most of his ever-improving asphalt pace to become the first Finn to the top of the podium on an all-Tar round of the WRC in 5,471 days. Latvala was on imperious form around Strasbourg, but the job was made slightly easier by heroic Frenchman Sebastien Ogier's demise on the second stage. The sister car from Hannover was slowed by an electrical fault. Any hope of making up the four minutes lost was forgotten when Julien Ingrassia made a mistake in clocking the car into service. The gap grew to eight minutes. Andreas Mikkelsen made it a Volkswagen one-two while Kris Meeke gave Citroen something to cheer on its home round of the series with a perfect drive to third. Kevin Abbring was first R5 car home in a Peugeot 208 T16.

Result: 1 Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Volkswagen Polo R WRC) 2h38m19.1s; 2 Andreas Mikkelsen/Ola Fløene (Volkswagen Polo R WRC) +44.8s; 3 Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (DS 3 WRC0 +1m05.3s

Top 10 running order (day one):

- 1 1 Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
- 2 2 Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
- 3 9 Andreas Mikkelsen/Ola Fløene (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
- 4 4 Mads Østberg/Jonas Andersson (Citroën DS 3 WRC)
- 5 7 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 WRC)
- 6 3 Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (Citroën DS 3 WRC)
- 7 5 Elfyn Evans/Daniel Barritt (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
- 8 6 Ott Tanak/Raigo Molder (Ford Fiesta RS WRC)
- 9 20 Hayden Paddon/John Kennar (Hyundai i20 WRC)

10 8 Dani Sordo/Marc Marti (Hyundai i20 WRC)

Championship positions...

1 Ogier 235 points; 2 Latvala 134; 3 Mikkelsen 111; 4 Østberg 90; 5 Neuville 86; 6 Meeke 71.

Leading WRC2 runners:

34 Quentin Giordano/Valentin Sarreaud (DS 3 R5)
38 Esapekka Lappi/Janne Ferm (Škoda Fabia R5)
39 Pontus Tidemand/Emil Axelsson (Škoda Fabia R5)
40 Armin Kremer/Pirmin Winklhofer (Škoda Fabia R5)
42 Eric Camilli/Benjamin Veillas (Ford Fiesta R5)
43 Craig Breen/Scott Martin (Peugeot 208 T16)
44 Julien Maurin/Nicolas Klinger (Ford Fiesta R5)
45 Teemu Suninen/Mikko Markkula (Ford Fiesta R5)

WRC2 positions...

1 Nasser Al-Attiyah 97 points; 2 Yurii Protasov 80; 3 Abdulaziz Al-Kuwari 72; 4 Lappi 70; 5 Jari Ketomaa 67; 6 Tidemand 61
Scoring from 6 of their first 7 registered rallies

Leading Junior WRC runners (all driving DS 3 R3-Max):

52 Simone Tempestini/Matteo Chiarcossi
53 Ole Christian Veiby/Anders Jaeger
55 Mohammed Al Mutawaa/Stephen McAuley
57 Yohan Rossel/Benoit Fulcrand
60 Quentin Gilbert/Renaud Jamoul
63 Federico Della Casa/Domenico Pozzi
66 Jean-René Perry/TBA

Junior WRC positions...

1 Gilbert 81pts; 2 Henri Haapamaki 48; 3 Tempestini 47; 4 Veiby 40; 5 Perry 22; 6 Della Casa 20.
Best score on 6 from 7 rallies

Tunnock's key stage (s):

Casamozza – Ponte Leccia 1 43.69km (27.14 miles)

Francardo – Sermano 1 36.43km (22.63 miles)

We're breaking our own rules this time around – we're having two key stages. With only a refuel and a short road section between these two, there's barely going to be time to swap fronts for rears and stick on whatever rubber's in the boot. A problem on the Casamozza test will surely spell the end for any kind of challenge. Run on Friday afternoon and Saturday morning, it's impossible to say which loop will be the most difficult. Friday afternoon, the ambient temperature

will be higher, making the hard tyre the obvious choice. The following morning there could be some mist and dampness still hanging in the higher sections of the stages, do you risk the soft? Tyre choice here could make or break the rally. Both times.

Weather with you:

Typically for Corsica, an accurate weather forecast is hard to come by (this is us covering ourselves...). The one thing most seem to be fairly sure about is some sunshine and temperatures in the mid-20s for the recce. When the rally starts, however, temperatures are expected to drop slightly with an increased threat of rain – potentially turning heavier over the weekend.

The media week:

Tuesday September 29

1200-1800 accreditation open

Wednesday September 30

0800-1900 accreditation open

0800-2000 media centre open

Thursday October 1

0730-1900 accreditation open (and 1000-2330 in Ajaccio)

0800-2100 media centre open (and 1500-2330 in Ajaccio)

0830-1130 shakedown

1230 FIA pre-event press conference (Rally HQ, Corte)

1730 Autograph session for regional drivers (Ajaccio)

1815 Autograph session for priority drivers (Ajaccio)

1845 Photos shoot for priority drivers (Ajaccio)

1900 Ceremonial start (Ajaccio)

Friday October 2

0715-1700 accreditation open

0715-2230 media centre open (and 1600-2230 in Bastia)

1615 (approx) meet the top-three crews (Corte Aerodrome)

Saturday October 3

0715-2230 media centre open (and 1600-2230 in Porto-Vecchio)

1615 (approx) meet the top-three crews (Corte Aerodrome)

Sunday October 4

0600 media centre open (and 0545-1800 in Ajaccio)

1345 podium finish ceremony

1430 FIA post-event press conference

1630 provisional final classification published

Where's the?

Accreditation... University of Corsica, 7 Avenue Jean Nicoli – 20250 Corte

Media centre in Ajaccio... Palais des Congrès, Quai l'Herminier – 2000 Ajaccio

Media centre in Bastia... Mairie, Avenue Pierre Giudicelli – 20200 Bastia

Media centre in Porto-Vecchio... Cinémathèque, Espace Jean Paul de Rocca Serra – 20137 Porto-Vecchio

Media Centre in Corte... Corte Aerodrome, RN 200, Corte

Rally HQ... Corte Aerodrome, RN 200, Corte

Tunnock's Restaurant recommendation:

A Nepita (4 Rue San Lazaro, 2000 Ajaccio Tel: +33 495 267568)

Tour de Corse... a potted history

First run in 1956, the Tour de Corse was one of the founding rounds of the World Rally Championship in 1973. The island's twists and turns remained a regular full WRC fixture (with the exception of 1996, which was missed due to the FIA's calendar rotation policy) until 2008. France's round then shifted to the mainland and Sébastien Loeb's backyard in Alsace before returning to Corsica this week.

The French island provides one of asphalt rallying's toughest challenges and this week is typical of that, with long, arduous stages, testing man, machine and tyres on its coarse, abrasive road surface. The Tour de Corse is, of course, a rally touched by tragedy. Attilio Bettega was killed when his Lancia Rally 037 hit a tree on this event 30 years ago, while Henri Toivonen and co-driver Sergio Cresto perished in the fire which engulfed their Lancia Delta S4 when it went off the road a year later.

After reducing the event's footprint in later years, when it was based solely out of Ajaccio, the organisers will return the Tour de Corse to being just that this week. The flat-chat, non-stop rallies of the Sixties and Seventies – where refueling in the middle of a selective wasn't uncommon – might have passed, but this week will still take the rally to the island's four corners via technical and uncompromising stages.

Recent winners Tour de Corse:

2003: Petter Solberg/Phil Mills (Subaru Impreza WRC2003)

2004: Markko Märtin/Michael Park (Ford Focus RS WRC)

2005: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citroën Xsara WRC)

2006: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citroën Xsara WRC)

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

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

2010: Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena (Citroën C4 WRC)

2011: Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Citroën DS 3 WRC)
2013: Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)
2014: Jari-Matti Latvala/Miikka Anttila (Volkswagen Polo R WRC)

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

Didier Auriol (6 wins)
Bernard Darniche (5)
Sébastien Loeb (4)

Stuart Loudon says...

I have some fond memories of France's round of the World Rally Championship. John MacCrone and I did Rallye de France in Alsace as part of the WRC Academy and showed some really strong pace, finishing on the podium in third place. A year later, I came back with Robert Barrable and, again, had a good run.

The FFSA (governing body of French motorsport) did a really good job of organising those two events in Alsace – but this week it's all change as the event goes back to Corsica.

I'm a big fan of rallying on an island, but my main experience is of the Inner Hebrides around this time of the year – especially a couple of years ago when John MacCrone and I won the Mull Rally in a Ford Fiesta S2400. Corsica, at the top of the World Rally Championship, is a slightly different kettle of fish...

It's going to be fascinating to see how the crews adapt to what's largely speaking a new event for them. And the roads and the terrain are one thing, but there's also the format to consider as well: just three stages each day, but with some really long ones which will take their toll on the car and the crew.

With the championships all sorted, we can look forward to more flat-out racing for the next three rallies; this is a real opportunity for drivers like Andreas [Mikkelsen] and Hayden [Paddon] to underline the statements they've been making throughout this year.

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

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