



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

Press Release

2010 PIRELLI STAR DRIVER RALLY DE PORTUGAL

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The Pirelli Star Driver programme moves to its second event of the season, next week's Faro-based Vodafone Rally de Portugal. The Rally of Turkey proved to be a tough opener for all five Pirelli Star Driver crews and the fast, tricky Algarve roads will be just as unforgiving for those who venture from the straight and narrow – but enormously rewarding for those who get it right. Only Ott Tänak has competed on this event before; he made his FIA World Rally Championship debut here last season. For Nick Georgiou, Peter Horsey, Haydon Paddon and Alex Raschi, the next week will be another step into the unknown.

Prior to the start of the rally, all five Pirelli Star Driver crews will have attended a promotional road show for the Rally de Portugal in Porto, in the north of the country. This initiative was started by the organisers of the event in an effort to spread word of the event further from the Gulf of Cadiz where it is based. The crews will drive a super special stage through the streets of Porto on Sunday (23 May) before the recce.

The rally ahead - Vodafone Rally de Portugal

Portugal is fanatical about rallying; the passion and fervour for the FIA World Rally Championship is one of the features of the event itself. Thousands and thousands of fans will line the roads as they wind their way through the hills set back from the Algarve for the three days of the rally.

The modern-day Rally de Portugal is located in the south of the country, whereas the event's recent base was in the Porto area, further north, which is why the organisers of the event have taken the cars and drivers on a road show back to the port city. It was in the north of the country that this event made its name as a tough and uncompromising rally among the world's finest drivers. Given its location on the westerly edge of Europe, the incoming weather from the Atlantic made it one of the hardest rallies in the world to call conditions on. Clear skies and dry conditions could be shifted in favour of low mist and heavy rain in next to no time. Rally legend Walter Röhrl won the 1980 event with a stunning drive through the Arganil stage where the fog was so dense you could barely see beyond the end of the bonnet. Röhrl famously beat his Fiat team-mate Markku Alèn to victory on that event, but the Finn bounced back to win the following season and, to this day, remains the most successful driver on Rally de Portugal with five victories.

Another difference in the modern event is that the current Rally de Portugal is run completely on gravel, without any of the asphalt sections the crews used to face. While the roads used might be further south in the country, they are just as challenging as ever. The stages included on this year's route have often been described by the drivers as the best in Europe.

Before the drivers get to the dirt, however, they will face a capacity crowd in the Algarve Stadium for the curtain-raising super special on Thursday evening.

Event data

Start/SS1:	Thursday 27 May, 20:25 hrs
Finish:	Sunday 30 May, 14:05 hrs
Stages:	Gravel
Number of stages:	18
Day 1:	7 stages, 463.53 km (130.61 km competitive)
Day 2:	6 stages, 435.24 km (135.10 km competitive)

Day 3: 5 stages, 324.30 km (89.61 km competitive)
Longest stage: SS8/11 Almodovar (26.20 km)
Shortest stage: SS1/18 Estadio Algarve (2.03 km)

The drivers:

Car #36 Nick Georgiou/Joseph Matar

Nick Georgiou said: "My main aim for the Rally de Portugal is a trouble-free finish. I learned a great deal from the last event in Turkey and this next event provides a great opportunity to put that into practice. Probably the biggest thing I learned in Turkey was related to my pace notes: we had too many pessimistic angles for the corners and, with such wide roads, you could lose a lot of time because of this. I will have to make more accurate notes for Portugal. The other thing I'll be doing in Portugal is pushing harder. The pace was okay in Turkey, but we were a little behind some of the others, although that's reflected in the differing levels of experience we've all got. I'm really looking forward to Portugal; it's one of the most famous rallies around. The country is well known for the welcome the fans extend to the World Rally Championship and there's always a great atmosphere on the stages. The stages themselves look quite technical, with lots of blind corners. I'll bet there will be quite a few barbecues at the side of the stages as well; I have some Portuguese friends and they all seem to know how to make very good barbecues!"

Car #37 Peter Horsey/Moses Matovu

Peter Horsey said: "In many ways I will be treating the Rally de Portugal as a test for me in the Mitsubishi. I did so few miles on the first event that I need more time in the car to dial myself into it. Turkey was enormously frustrating; we lost so much valuable seat time because of a silly error and some subsequent bad luck. I feel I let the FIA, Pirelli and Ralliart Italia down, but that's in the past now and I'm looking forward. It was great to start working with a big team like Ralliart Italia in Turkey and that's something I'm looking forward to getting back to in Portugal. I'm also looking forward to working with Robert [Reid], Brian [Cameron] and the guys from Elite Sports Performance again in Portugal. I'm currently working on techniques to help maintain concentration in longer sections to ensure no silly mistakes. As well as that, fitness is my priority right now, which the ESP boys can help with. In an effort to maintain my fitness, I spent two weeks white-water rafting down the River Nile not long after Turkey. One of the disappointments after Turkey was that, because of the travel disruption, we couldn't fly back to the UK to get my own Mitsubishi ready for the second round of the British Rally Championship, which meant we missed that one. I want a clean run in Portugal next week, no mistakes and a good chance to settle into the car and forget what happened in Turkey."

Car #38 Hayden Paddon/John Kennard

Hayden Paddon said: "Like most of the events this year, Portugal is going to be a new one for me. I've watched some videos of the stages and the roads look nice, twisty in places and some big crests. The thing which will be a bit different to me will be the sandy surface on some of the roads – we don't really have anything like that in New Zealand. After John [Kennard, co-driver] and I have done the recce, we're going to target some stages we really enjoy in Portugal and try and measure ourselves against the rest of the Group N drivers with some good times. Again, this is not a round of the Production Car World Rally Championship, so I can't score points, but what I really do need is to get to the finish – that's the aim first and foremost. I was gaining good confidence in the car in Turkey and I'd like to continue where I left off. I'll be honest and admit getting used to the Lancer Evolution X has taken me a little longer than I thought it would. I thought there would be a stronger similarity with the Evolution IX I drive at home. Given that we hadn't done much testing before Turkey, there was always going to be an element of the extended test to the event. That said, things were really starting to click in a couple of stages on the last event, so I'm sure it will all come together in Portugal. This car [the Evolution X] is a fantastic machine, though!"

Car #39 Alex Raschi/Rudy Pollet

Alex Raschi said: "Turkey was a tough opening round for me. It was a tough rally all around, especially for a Group N car, the roads were really broken in places. I don't think I have seen such rough conditions before. I hope – and from what I am told – the Rally de Portugal will not be so much like this. I haven't competed in Portugal before, but I have watched many times from the cameras in the cars. The roads look nice and fast and interesting. I hear Portugal is also a big rally country where there is a lot of passion for the sport, I like this also. The thing I want to do in Portugal is get to the finish and make some good times. I was disappointed to

new and bigger team and driving this kind of car, but it is very interesting! Before I get to Portugal, I have been working more and more on my English lessons, so I can make more interviews on the rally.”

Car #40 Ott Tänak/Kuldar Sikk

Ott Tänak said: “I did the Rally de Portugal last year, so I have some idea of what is coming. It's a very nice rally – and a nice place for a holiday. I'm looking forward to the rally, the roads were good; the sort of roads we enjoy driving on. I hope it doesn't rain during the event as this can make the roads cut up a little bit and it obviously makes it more slippery. Dry conditions are the best for the Group N car. I think there will be more competition in Portugal for Group N as well. On the last rally in Turkey, I was a little bit on my own and there was a big gap behind us. My speed was good in Turkey and I want to carry on with this good pace in Portugal, but without any mistakes this time. The thing I'm hoping for in Portugal is that we have smoother roads than Turkey. I have never competed on such rocky roads, they were incredibly tough. I was really impressed with the tyres, given the punishment we were giving them on the rocks, it was incredible that we didn't have any problems. And finally, of course, it would be nice if we can fly home from Portugal in the conventional way. After the volcano problem, I drove from Turkey to Estonia in a Citroën C2, which wasn't very comfortable!”

Q&A with Phil Short, Pirelli Star Driver Supervisor

Q: After the drivers' first round in Turkey last month, how much do you think they have learned ahead of round two?

A: Firstly, I think they all learned quite a lot about stepping up into a bigger league. Clearly the Rally of Turkey didn't turn out too well for them and they now fully recognise that the World Rally Championship is a much bigger challenge for relatively inexperienced drivers. But I think most of them also gained good experience of the Turkish stages, which were quite tough and challenging. Obviously we are working with them to look at certain aspects and they will get a further training session from ESP, the company which ran the pre-season training in Scotland, ahead of Rally de Portugal, to focus minds and bodies on the challenges that round two will bring.

Q: Is the Rally de Portugal similar to the last event in Turkey?

A: There are similarities, but also some marked differences. Turkey was cooler than expected but in late May I expect Portugal will be rather warmer. This will bring the crews' physical fitness into play. The Portuguese stages may well be smoother generally, but I suspect they will cut up after the World Rally Cars and, on the second pass, they will become rough, much like Turkey did. Dust may also be an issue here.

Q: What's going to be the hardest thing about Portugal?

A: Judging the correct pace and getting into a good rhythm that preserves the car. Looking at the DVD of the stages, they seem quite fast, with deceptive crests, which may well catch out the crews. I would far rather they start out conservatively at first, rather than go in too hot, make mistakes and then have to SuperRally.

Q: What's your advice to the drivers in Portugal?

A: I've already told them all that they must think more about the result than looking to set top times in Group N. It's important that we get the cars to the end – important for the Pirelli Star Driver programme and the team, but also important for themselves to prove they can bring the car to the finish and get the full experience of the event. I'm sure they don't want to waste this great opportunity. Prospective team managers are looking at talented drivers, but they're not interested in guys who can't finish the full event. Malcolm Wilson [BP Ford Abu Dhabi Team Principal] has kindly agreed to give them a briefing of his own, as to what he looks for in a young driver. I hope they pay attention!

The season so far

Rally of Turkey (round 1 of 6)

For the first time, none of the Pirelli Star Driver crews completed the whole route of the event. Tänak had set the pace, holding eighth overall until he crashed heavily on the final morning. Paddon was the first home, but his event was spoiled when he beached his Mitsubishi on the opening stage and was forced to retire from day one. Raschi also went off the road on day one, his Lancer was out of contention on SS2. Horsey's car joined Raschi's in retirement, but the Kenyan's Mitsubishi caught fire and was burned out. Georgiou failed to reach the first stage; a power steering fault halted him in his tracks. He, Paddon and Raschi made it through the next two days to the finish. 26th Hayden Paddon, (7th in Group N); 27th Alex Raschi, (8th in Group N); 29th Nick Georgiou, (10th in Group N); Ott Tänak, accident SS20, retired; Peter Horsey, accident/fire SS2, retired.

Special focus: getting the famous five back on track

When Ott Tänak crashed his Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X on the final morning of the Rally of Turkey, few people would have been as disappointed as the Estonian. Mario Stagni was. Mario Stagni is the Team Principal of Ralliart Italia, the firm which prepares the five cars for the Pirelli Star Driver programme. Just two days earlier, Stagni had already gone through the pain of watching Peter Horsey's Mitsubishi burn out. The flip side of that was the pace and performance Tänak showed for the next day and a half. And then, it all turned sour.

Tänak's accident had wrecked another Lancer. In no way did Stagni blame the Pirelli Star Driver, accidents are part and parcel of the sport, but this one couldn't have come at a worst time. Ralliart Italia was now faced with building two brand new Lancer Evolution Xs for an event which started in little over a month's time. On top of that, Stagni's staff of 20 also had to re-prepare the other three Lancers running in the young driver programme, as well as two more private cars for the forthcoming Rally de Portugal.

The odds were already stacking up against Stagni and his team. The ash from Iceland's now famous volcano had delayed the departure of the cars from Istanbul and, to make matters worse, the Rally de Portugal would start earlier than any other World Rally Championship round as the organisers wanted the five Pirelli Star Drivers to take part in their road show super special stage in Porto, four days before the start of the event. "At first I didn't think it could be done," said Stagni. "I was sure. There was too much work to do. Okay, maybe I thought it was possible for the cars to be at the rally, but it was not looking good for Porto."

As a matter of course, Ralliart Italia had a spare Lancer Evolution X in the workshop, but it still had to be prepared to the perfect specification. While the team got started on that car, Stagni sourced another Lancer road car. Once the road car was delivered, the full magnitude of the task in hand hit the Italian. "Usually it takes two months to build a rally car from the beginning," said Stagni, "that's the time we would take to make the perfect car. But, of course, we didn't have this long. We only had some days - not many weeks - before the cars had to leave for Portugal."

The team got to work. All leave was cancelled and the 20 employees worked late into the night and through weekends. "The big part of the job was preparing the body shell," said Stagni. "This takes so long because you have to strip everything out from the road car, then put in the safety roll cage and then work on all of the strengthening in the body shell. This was what took us the longest time. But, luckily, we had all of the spare parts sitting ready to go onto the car. As soon as the body shell was finished, we started bolting the parts like the suspension, the transmission and these things into the car. We were working all of the time, but in the middle of the job, still I thought Porto was never possible."

Stagni divided his workforce up to ensure the cars of Hayden Paddon, Nick Georgiou and Alex Raschi weren't neglected. "There wasn't so much work to do on the other cars," he said, "so they didn't take so long, which meant we had more time for the other two."

Astonishingly, just 20 long days after the road car had been driven into the Ralliart Italia workshop, Tänak's brand new rally car was being driven out for a shakedown. "It was incredible," said Stagni. "I didn't believe it could be done, but I said to the team that the Pirelli Star Driver project was just too important to us not to make this happen. I have to say a big thank you to all of the team for their efforts to get the cars ready. After we had finished the work and done all of those hours, we went for a big meal together to celebrate. We had an email from Phil Short (Pirelli Star Driver supervisor) congratulating us on the job and that made us realise what we had done."

Short admitted he was impressed with what he had seen from the Ralliart team. "It's incredible to have turned two cars around in the time they have done that. Don't forget Peter Horsey's is a brand new car which needed a lot of work as well. We have to congratulate Mario and everybody for what they have achieved. For a while a few people thought there might only be four Pirelli Star Drivers in Portugal, but Ralliart Italia has ensured every one of the five drivers will have a rally car. Fantastic."

For the rest of the year, Stagni and his team will be looking to build on the competitive start they made to the season in Turkey. "Okay, the result did not look so good after Tänak crash," said Stagni. "But the cars were competitive with only one problem with power steering on Nick Georgiou's car. We have done a lot of testing and a lot of work through the winter to get the car reliable and I feel we are there now. We worked with the new homologation, which

included a new and more reliable conrod and this has helped us. Now, we want to show what the Evolution Xs can do. And we can start doing that in Porto this weekend.”

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