



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

## Press Release

### 2010 PIRELLI STAR DRIVER RALLY FINLAND

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The tag line for Neste Oil Rally Finland is 'More than a rally.' The organisers are absolutely right. This is more than a rally: it's a flying lesson. For four of the five Pirelli Star Drivers, this event will provide them with an insight into what it's like to fly without wings. Estonian Ott Tänak has been here before, but, prior to this season, for Nick Georgiou, Peter Horsey, Hayden Paddon and Alex Raschi, Rally Finland has been the stuff of legends.

Having set the Pirelli Star Driver pace on the first two rounds of the 2010 young driver programme, Tänak is likely to repeat that form in Finland. On his first visit to the rally last season, he was fastest of the conventional Group N cars until mechanical failure forced his car off the road. Tänak also has the added bonus of a certain Markko Martin to count on as a mentor; Martin is one of just eight non-Finns to have won from the previous 59 starts.

The five drivers had some insight into what sort of speed they can expect from their Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution Xs on the faster sections of stages in Turkey and Portugal, but nothing compares with a quick section in the forests around the event's base in Jyväskylä, north of the country's capital Helsinki.

And this event is not just popular with the drivers either. Georgiou, Horsey, Paddon, Raschi and Tänak can count on seeing more spectators than ever before on Neste Oil Rally Finland – with around half a million expected to line the roads for the ever-popular eighth round of the FIA World Rally Championship.

#### **The rally ahead - Neste Oil Rally Finland**

This year's event has undergone some significant changes, with the route being compacted from three to two days. But, if the drivers think they're in for an easy ride, they can forget it. Those two days of sport will be flat out, with barely time to think between the rapid-fire runs through the world's fastest stages.

Finland is the rally everybody loves; it's the rally where spectators come to watch their heroes with their right feet buried on the throttle. If you don't believe cars can fly, this is the event for you.

This is the 60th anniversary of one of the World Rally Championship's most celebrated events. Finland is all about speed and bravery, not for nothing was it known locally as the Finnish Grand Prix. And not for nothing is local domination treasured in Finland like nowhere else. From the first event in 1951 until 1990, just four non-Finnish drivers won the rally. In 1990, Carlos Sainz shattered Scandinavian dominance to collect his first win on the event. When, two years later, Didier Auriol won for Lancia, it was thought the key to Finland's Great Race (which was the name of the original event) had been unlocked. They needn't have worried: there were another 11 years of home rule before Estonian Markko Martin won and another five before anything other than Maamme (Finland's national anthem) was heard booming out over the Jyväskylä victory parade – when Sebastien Loeb edged Mikko Hirvonen in 2008.

With the shift from a three to two-day route, there have been changes to the stages. The Urria stages (SS2/4), Jukojärvi (SS3/5), Kolonkulma (SS12 – known as Kavala last year),

Väärinmaja (SS13) and Leustu (SS15/18) remain identical to last season, but the rest of the roads have had new sections added. There is just one completely new stage: Sirkkämäki (SS7/9). While the crews will get Sunday off this season, they will have tackled two 14-hour days, comprising 1,307.87 kilometres, 310.05 kilometres of which will be competitive, and 19 stages to get to the Saturday night finish and ensuing party.

### **Event data**

Start/SS1: Thursday 29 July, 18:00 hrs  
Finish: Saturday 31 July, 19:18 hrs  
Stages: Gravel  
Number of stages: 19  
Day 1: 11 stages, 661.73 km (147.27 km competitive)  
Day 2: 8 stages, 646.14 km (162.78 km competitive)  
Longest stage: SS13 Väärinmaja (29.29 km)  
Shortest stage: SS1/11 Laajavuori (4.19 km)

### **The drivers**

#### **Car #36 Nick Georgiou/Joseph Matar**

**Nick Georgiou said:** "I've never been to Finland before, but I have some friends from there who tell me what a beautiful place it is. I'm looking forward to exploring some of that countryside flat-out in fifth gear! I had hoped to do a small national event – or just the recce for the national event – before the start of Rally Finland, but that wasn't possible. Instead, I talked to everybody I knew who had done this event before and then settled down to watch as much on-board footage as I could get my hands on. Since the last outing on the Rally of Portugal, I have done some testing and a rally, both on asphalt. I finished second overall on the Cedars Rally in Lebanon, so I have managed some seat time. But I can't wait to get to Finland and get into the recce to have a look at just how quick these stages really are. From what I've seen, Finland is fast with lots of crests and jumps – and lots of crests on the jumps, which make it really tricky. For a result, I'm aiming to be in the top eight of the registered Production Car World Rally Championship crews. Equally, I want to continue the learning process I have been through on this programme this season; one of the key areas I feel I have improved is in making pace notes – and that's going to be vital on Rally Finland."

#### **Car #37 Peter Horsey/ Calvin Cooledge**

**Peter Horsey said:** "While the scenery and backdrop might not look the same, there are some similarities between Finland and my native Africa: the stages are generally quite fast and wide. I've been to Finland before, but not to the rally. From the footage I've seen, the roads do look quite wide, which should suit our style. I did a day testing after Rally of Portugal and then finished fourth on a round of the Kenyan National Championship – I was happy with that after a puncture ruled us out of fighting for a podium position. My aim for the event is, like Portugal, to get to the end without using SuperRally. I'm looking forward to the fast stages, but I'm quite nervous about some of the big jumps. As the rally progresses into the second day, I will identify some stages where I will push harder and attack. I also have a new co-driver for this event, with Calvin Cooledge joining me in the Mitsubishi. Calvin and I did the Rally Estonia earlier this month as a test event and we got on really well. I'm sure Calvin's experience in the co-driver's seat will help me through Rally Finland, particularly in the narrow twisty sections where getting the pace notes is so important."

#### **Car #38 Hayden Paddon/John Kennard**

**Hayden Paddon said:** "Rally Finland is one of the events we have been really looking forward to from the start of the programme. My co-driver has a summer cottage in Finland – and he has competed there in the past – so his knowledge of the place will be invaluable to me. I was brought up on fast roads in New Zealand, so Finland should suit me and they're the kind of stages I prefer. One of the things I have to do when we get there is to work out how long the car is going to stay in the air over those jumps; that's really important for the notes. At the end of the day, I'm not going to get too worked up over the character of the rally or what challenges lie in wait, ultimately my aim is the same: to be fastest. The first two rallies in the programme have been good learning events for us, but now it's time for me to put the foot down and show some more speed as I know we have a lot left in the tank. After spending the first couple of stages getting used to the conditions and the jumps, we want to target Ott [Tänak] as we know

he'll be extremely fast on the event – and we're also targeting a PWRC podium. Achieving this kind of result will set us up well for the rest of the year. Since the Rally of Portugal we won the Asia Pacific Rally Championship event at home, the International Rally of Whangarei, which helped us keep our eye in over the summer.”

#### **Car #39 Alex Raschi/Rudy Pollet**

**Alex Raschi said:** “I haven't driven a rally car since the last event in Portugal, but I did do some training in go-karts. This is my first time ever in Finland and it looks quite different to Italy, there are nothing like the jumps where I come from! I think the rally is going to be good fun, the stages are really fast. We will have to look after the car well on Rally Finland as Rallye Deutschland is coming just 15 days after this one, but that's something I have learned from this season – that and the importance of making very good pace notes. Without having been there, Rally Finland is one of my favourites, I'm sure going over those jumps will confirm this. I am aiming for a place in the top seven of the Production car drivers.”

#### **Car #40 Ott Tänak/Kuldar Sikk**

**Ott Tänak said:** “After the mistakes I made in the first two rallies [of the Pirelli Star Driver programme], there's definitely a little bit more pressure on me than before, but I have to deal with that. I will be changing the way I approach the event, I will not be looking to drive so quickly. Some people have asked me if there is anything which is the same between the two accidents this year: is it something to do with the concentration? I don't think it is. The two accidents were quite different: in Turkey, I didn't hear correctly what my co-driver said to me, but then in Portugal I was just going too fast. At the time I didn't feel I was too quick, but obviously I was. I need to learn to control the gap once I have opened it up. But, in Finland, for me, I have to make the finish, this is so important. I learned so much already in the programme and I look forward to learning more as the season progresses. I did some small rallies in the summer to make sure I had been in the car before I got to Rally Finland and this helped me as well. Rally Finland is one I enjoy; I did the event last season and the roads are really fast and quite similar to those I know from home.”

#### **Q&A with Phil Short, Pirelli Star Driver Supervisor**

**Q:** How does Finland differ from the other rallies in the 2010 programme?

**A:** The higher speeds and the jumps are the main differences. For most of the drivers and co-drivers this will be a completely new experience, and something quite different from rallying in their own regions. This is one of the world's most iconic events and one that the Pirelli Star Drivers all want to do.

**Q:** What will be the biggest challenge for the drivers in Finland?

**A:** To come to terms with the unique features of the event. We started the education for this back at our pre-season Edinburgh Training, re-commenced it at our post-event de-brief immediately after Rally de Portugal, and have continued the process since then, with on-going advice from the team engineers and myself. Some of the guys have made plans to do extra events or training in Finland and Estonia prior to the rally in order to familiarise themselves, but it will still be a tough outing for them all.

**Q:** What's the plan for the drivers, what do you expect from each one of them in Finland?

**A:** We certainly made progress with our drivers in Portugal compared with Turkey and our plan is to continue the same progression for all of them. Once again, our over-riding principle will be to aim to get the full distance, so that they derive the full benefit of this fantastic rally. One of the first principles of Pirelli Star Driver is to give these young guys experience of FIA World Rally Championship events, and they wouldn't get that if they retired on day one. With only two days of rallying here, they could easily miss out on 50 per cent of the event, which is not what any of us want. So if each driver goes one step better than they did in Portugal - be that by avoiding retirement or SuperRally or by increasing the pace by a notch – we're all making progress. ESP Ltd is also in attendance for this event and its people, including Robert Reid, will be closely monitoring the performances during the event, as well as holding a day-long session with the guys on the Sunday immediately after the event.

**Q:** We've seen some great speed from Ott Tänak, in particular; do you think he could win Group N on this event?

**A:** Ott has certainly impressed everyone with his speed, much as Jarkko Nikara did last year in the Pirelli Star Driver programme. However Ott's retirements on day three of both events so far

have not impressed at all, and I know both crew members are deeply disappointed by that. However, Ott has experience of this event and the roads are not dissimilar to his home events in Estonia, so I'm sure he'll go well. Perhaps it will help him that there is not a day three here! However, while I'm sure he is capable of winning Group N in Finland that should not be his first priority. He really has to learn to find a speed to bring the car to the finish and to concentrate hard to eliminate late errors. His adviser Markko Martin and myself have both been working with the crew to try to achieve that finish. We should also not fail to notice the speed which Hayden Paddon has shown so far, though Finland will be something quite new to him.

**Q:** How hard is this event on the car?

**A:** It's true that last year the team had some issues with the car, but they have been working very hard on those and I believe the basic reliability is much improved in 2010. Of course, Finland does throw up some new challenges, but the team is confident the car can meet those, with several improvements coming directly from problems which cropped up in Finland last year. On the other hand, the nature of the event does require a certain level of mechanical sympathy from the drivers to achieve survival and again we have been advising them on that. We shall do the PWRC test on the Monday before the event to help with that and [former Mitsubishi test driver] Lasse Lampi has kindly agreed to come and speak with the crews there to advise them on car set-up and driving on Finnish roads.

**Q:** What advice do you offer the co-drivers?

**A:** Full concentration is the key here. One brief lapse can be terminal, because the speeds are so high. But we have a very experienced group of co-drivers who should all be able to cope with the high-pressure environment well. Again, control of the pace and the situation will be crucial for the co-drivers also. So principally my advice to the co-drivers would be to enjoy the roller-coaster ride, but make sure your guy comes to the finish!

### **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. Tänäk 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 Tänäk, accident SS20, retired; Peter Horsey, accident/fire SS2, retired.

#### **Rally of Portugal (round 2 of 6)**

For the second rally in succession, Tänäk set the pace among the Pirelli Star Drivers but then went off the road on the final morning. His crash was less spectacular than in Turkey, but the resulting retirement was the same. He had been leading Group N at the time. Also like round one in Turkey, Paddon was first Pirelli Star Driver home, despite retiring from the opening afternoon with broken steering. Alex Raschi took a more considered approach to the Portuguese stages and, despite his co-driver struggling with illness, brought his Lancer home second. Like Paddon, Raschi also hit steering trouble, the San Marino driver retiring from Saturday afternoon after his collision with a rock. A measured approach from Nick Georgiou and Peter Horsey brought them to a largely trouble-free finish on the Algarve. 20th Hayden Paddon (9th in Group N); 30th Alex Raschi (16th in Group N); 33rd Nick Georgiou (17th in Group N); 35th Peter Horsey (19th in Group N); Ott Tänäk Accident SS15, retired.

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