



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

Press Release

2010 PIRELLI STAR DRIVER RALLYE DE FRANCE - ALSACE

24.09.2010

The five Pirelli Star Drivers will take part in the writing of a new chapter in the history of the Rallye de France, when they participate in the country's first ever FIA World Rally Championship event to run on the mainland next week. For 35 years the nation's WRC qualifier was staged on the island of Corsica. Despite the switch from Ajaccio to Alsace, the event will be just as tough as the legendary 'Rally of 10,000 corners' ever was. And, the potential for pan-European rally fans to attend the event is better than ever as the event sits within reach of numerous countries across the continent. Many of those cheering at the side of the stages, however, will have one man on their minds: Sébastien Loeb. The WRC's most successful driver was born in Haguenau, a town which forms Sunday afternoon's final spectator-pleasing stage. Running out of the Alsace city of Strasbourg, the stages go through some of the surrounding vineyards and mountain passes – with a similar nature to those tests included on ADAC Rallye Deutschland in August.

The rally ahead – Rallye de France

This event will provide the five Pirelli Star Drivers with a true measure of exactly where they are against the competition, as all of the Production Car World Rally Championship crews (against whom they are competing this season) have as much experience of the Alsace asphalt as Nick Georgiou, Peter Horsey, Hayden Paddon, Alex Raschi and Ott Tänak: none. This Strasbourg-based event is new to the FIA WRC, although it has run as a qualifier in the domestic French series for many years. The opening day of the event takes the crews down to the capital of the French automotive trade, Mulhouse, where the cars will be serviced in the middle of the day. The first day includes the 24.12 kilometre Grand Ballon stage which winds its way up the Route des Crêtes and the ski resort at 1,424 metres. Day two includes the longest test of the rally; the gruelling 35.48 kilometre Le Pays d'Ormont stage. This stretch of road includes 20 significant surface and road-type changes, making any kind of rhythm tough to find. Saturday is based out of Strasbourg and runs to the south in Bas-Rhin before moving west towards Vosges. The final day includes the only action north of Strasbourg and two runs around Sébastien Loeb's town of birth. The Haguenau test is the shortest on the itinerary, but, as with any town centre stage, it requires maximum concentration. Camp de Bitche, Sunday's other stage, runs through a military camp. With those stages complete, the drivers and co-drivers will make their way to the European Parliament building in Strasbourg, where the finish podium awaits them.

Event data

Start:	Friday 1 October, 07:30 hrs
Finish:	Sunday 3 October, 15:15 hrs
Stages:	Asphalt
Number of stages:	20
Day 1:	8 stages, 560.39 km (145.86 km competitive)
Day 2:	8 stages, 449.05 km (149.22 km competitive)
Day 3:	4 stages, 262.87 km (57.80 km competitive)
Longest stage:	SS11/15 Pays d'Ormont (35.48 km)
Shortest stage:	SS17/20 Haguenau (4.20 km)

hope it gives us the opportunity to be closer to the guys at the front of the Production Car World Rally Championship field. I'd like to be looking at a top-five finish and getting the difference under a second per kilometre off the fastest Production driver. I arrive in France with a little bit more time in the car on asphalt roads under my belt. I did my home event, the Rally of Lebanon, and I did a test before that event. While the roads on this Middle East Rally Championship round aren't too similar to the European roads we're driving on in France, it is good experience and I hope it will improve my pace in France. I need to be on the limit on every corner and every braking point from start to finish to be on the pace and, while I felt my driving was good in Germany, I felt it was a little bit on the safe side in other places. I need to push harder and take more risks. Germany was good from the recce perspective, though. That was an intense and character-building rally. We don't know too much about the roads we're going to be using on the Rally of France, but given that they're not too far away from those we drove on Rally Germany, there's a good chance they will be quite similar. The one thing we did get in Germany was stable weather. Given that we're into the autumn now, it's quite likely we could come up against some wet weather which would mean some more adventures if it's raining!"

Car 37: Peter Horsey/Calvin Coledge

Peter Horsey said: "Rallye Deutschland was a real eye-opener for me. It was my first event on asphalt and the car set-up was, of course, different to anything I had experienced before. The way the car handled on this set-up took a bit of getting used to. The grip level was very high and using it to good effect proved quite tricky. Given my lack of experience on asphalt, my aim in Germany was to get as much experience as possible of this difficult surface ahead of Rallye de France and I was disappointed that we didn't cover the full rally distance. On the other hand our times improved with every stage we covered and that gives me confidence ahead of Rallye de France. I'm looking to further my experience on asphalt in France and enjoy some more natural stages. I want to improve my stage times throughout the event, particularly on repeated stages. I don't know too much about the event itself, but I hope there are less hairpins than in Germany! I haven't done any asphalt testing between the two events, but I have done two rallies – two in one week almost. I did a Kenyan National Rally Championship round one week and the final round of the British Rally Championship the next – this gave me valuable seat time. This won't be my first visit to France; I spent some time there during my university years, rock climbing around Fontainebleau. My objective in France in a rally car is to make the finish and complete all the stages to get more experience."

Car 38: Hayden Paddon/John Kennard

Hayden Paddon said: "I'm going to the Rallye de France to fight for victory. I know it won't be easy, but I feel we can challenge after the way we were fighting for the win in Germany. Rally Germany was a huge learning experience for me. I'd never done a proper rally on asphalt before and we came into the event not really knowing what to expect. I worked on developing my driving style for asphalt, trying to learn the balance between carrying the speed and being smooth through the corners – that's crucial on asphalt and that's a balance we're still searching for. There's more speed to come from me on asphalt. Germany was also good in the way we were able to fine-tune the chassis through the rally and, if we can pick up in France where we left off in Trier, I think it's realistic to be fighting for the win. A good thing about France is that it's a new event for everybody, meaning none of the other guys will have any prior knowledge or pace notes which they can call on. Like Germany, I have never been to France before, so I don't know what to expect from the country or from the rally. It's great to be visiting these new countries, seeing different cultures and different countryside – although all we really see of the countryside is what passes the aeroplane window when we come in and go out of the place. But, I'm not here for the countryside, I'm here for the experience and I'm here to push for the win – it's coming to the time of the year when Championship points are being counted and nothing counts for more than a win."

Car 39: Alex Raschi/Silvio Stefanelli

Alex Raschi said: "I had done quite a lot of driving on asphalt before I got to Germany, but those roads were different. I hadn't ever driven the Mitsubishi on Tarmac before, though – except for the test before the season and the test before Germany. I liked Germany, sometimes the road was quite strange, and sometimes it was gravel and not asphalt. I know the Lancer on asphalt a little bit more, but since Germany I did not drive it again, so I will learn some more in France. I did the Monte Carlo Rally in 2008, so I have competed on the French roads, but not in this area."

Car 40: Ott Tänak/Kuldar Sikk

Ott Tänak said: "I've never been to France before, so I don't really know what to expect from this event. I'm told it's quite close to the roads we drove on Rally Germany, so maybe they will

be a little bit the same. One of the things I'm going to be working hard on in France is getting the pace notes absolutely right in the recce. I came away from Rallye Deutschland with a lot of experience and the biggest of these was probably how difficult it is to make notes on a new event like that. I really didn't know how it should be; hopefully that will be a little easier the second time around on asphalt. Germany was a difficult event for me, everything was new, which is why my aim for the Rally of France is to get through all of the stages and just to try to be closer to the drivers ahead. These asphalt rallies are very different from the fast gravel which I grew up on in Estonia, but they are part of the World Rally Championship, which makes it vital that we learn from them."

Q&A with Phil Short, Pirelli Star Driver Supervisor

Q: Going into the second asphalt event in the programme, what is the aim for the drivers in France?

A: The aim will be to build on what we learned in Germany. For some of the drivers, it was their first ever rally on Tarmac, and so they had to cope with different car set-up, tyre compound choice and that kind of thing, as well as learning a new surface. Even for those who had experience of this surface, Rallye Deutschland was very tough and quite different from anything else. But coming off the back of some good performances there, I think all the guys will be looking to push on from that experience and do better still.

Q: Do you expect this to be a more straightforward event than Germany?

A: More straightforward in terms of a more consistent type of stage, yes. No doubt this new rally will throw up a few new challenges, they always do. And whereas in Germany we enjoyed almost non-stop warm, dry weather, there is always the chance that changeable weather in France may set the guys a whole new set of challenges. I've seen the route for this year's Rallye de France on the map and we're guessing the roads may be something akin to the second day's country roads on Rallye Deutschland.

Q: What are the most important things to get right on a brand new rally?

A: Accuracy of pace notes, first of all; looking for the places which can catch you out, but also the places where you can make time. Getting a feel for the rhythm of the stages is important too.

Q: How much of a stress will this event be on the cars?

A: Tarmac always puts a greater stress on the transmissions than gravel does, as we found in Germany. However I feel our cars' basic reliability is much better this year and the more consistent, flowing stages should help with that.

Q: Have you ever competed in the Alsace area? If so, what did you think - and what will you miss about Corsica?

A: I've never competed there myself at all. However it will seem strange not being in Corsica for the French round. Corsica is staggeringly beautiful, but also with extremely tough stages and often quite tricky weather. It was always dramatic.

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 round one

retirees 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 Tänak Accident SS15, retired.

Rally Finland (round 3 of 6)

The most successful Pirelli Star Driver outing in the history of the FIA's young driver scheme as all five drivers collect Production Car WRC points and two of the five finished on the podium. Ott Tänak was in contention for PWRC victory throughout the event and, when he moved to the front of the field on the opening afternoon, he remained there for the rest of the event in what was a fast and consistent drive to take his first ever Group N victory at the highest level – having threatened it for the previous two rallies. Hayden Paddon's performance was almost as merit-worthy, taking third on his first attempt at Rally Finland was a major achievement for the New Zealander. Alex Raschi admitted he was struggling to find a rhythm on the fast and flowing Finnish roads, while Peter Horsey and Nick Georgiou rounded out the PWRC points after further consistent drives in their Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution Xs. 18th Ott Tänak (1st in PWRC); 21st Hayden Paddon (3rd in PWRC); 28th Alex Raschi (5th in Group N); 40th Peter Horsey (9th in PWRC); 41st Nick Georgiou (10th in PWRC).

Rallye Deutschland (round 4 of 6)

The first asphalt outing of the season was - in terms of weather, car set-up and tyre choice - a straightforward affair for the five drivers. Despite his absence of competing on this surface previously, New Zealand's Hayden Paddon turned out to be the star of the show. The Kiwi pushed reigning Production Car World Rally Champion Armindo Araujo for all three days, but eventually settled for second on his debut on the Trier-based event. By his own admission, Ott Tänak struggled to come to terms with the precise requirements of rallying on asphalt, but his natural speed carried him through to place him as the second quickest of the FIA's young drivers – the Estonian had never competed on a sealed surface before. Alex Raschi was well acquainted with asphalt, but the San Marino driver admitted the German roads bore little resemblance to the Italian stages he had competed on previously. Raschi was holding a PWRC points-paying position when he was forced into retirement with a differential problem on the final day. Nick Georgiou and Peter Horsey once again engaged in their own personal battle, with the Lebanese getting the better of his African counterpart in Germany. 19th Hayden Paddon (2nd in PWRC); 31st Ott Tänak (5th in PWRC); 43rd Nick Georgiou (7th in PWRC); 45th Peter Horsey (8th in PWRC); Alex Raschi Retired (SS18, differential).

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