



FEDERATION INTERNATIONALE DE L'AUTOMOBILE

Press Release

2010 PIRELLI STAR DRIVER WALES RALLY GB

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For the sixth and final time this season, the five Pirelli Star Driver crews will line up in their Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution Xs for Wales Rally GB, the final round of this year's FIA World Rally Championship. After spending the season as part of the young driver training initiative, the five drivers and their co-drivers arrive in Cardiff considerably wiser and more experienced than they were when they started the programme with their first training session in Edinburgh nine months ago. And, for their final event of the year, the Pirelli Star Drivers and their co-drivers will join Britain's round of the series for a very special event.

The rally ahead – Wales Rally GB

Wales Rally GB is renowned the world over as one of the toughest events in the calendar; the mix of ever-changing weather conditions with some of the fastest and most technical gravel roads make for a real end-of-year work-out for the crews. And, making this year's rally even more special is the 50th anniversary celebration of the first ever forestry special stage being included in the route. The RAC Rally, as Rally GB was known prior to 1997, was first run in 1932 with 367 competitors – and it genuinely toured Britain. In 1960, a short stretch of gravel road in Scotland – known as Monument Hill – was included in the route. This was the first ever special stage on the route for the RAC Rally. It was so successful that more and more stages were included in the ensuing years, and quickly the event arrived at the format we know today.

Saturday's route for Rally GB includes a stage called Monument Hill. This is, of course, not the original Scottish test; it is a new stage for this year's event which has been renamed to remember the history-creating road from 50 years ago.

This year's Rally GB includes other new innovations, including a special stage right in the heart of the Cardiff Bay area of the city; this 1.7-kilometre test runs on Thursday and Saturday night. Another new feature is the asphalt content of Saturday's stages, bringing an intriguing mix of classic gravel and the exceptionally tricky sealed surfaces of the infamous Epynt military roads.

Event data:

Start:	Thursday 11 November, 18:20 hrs
Finish:	Sunday 14 November, 15:25 hrs
Stages:	Gravel/Asphalt
Number of stages:	20
Day 1:	7 stages, 595.10 km (130.26 km competitive)
Day 2:	9 stages, 570.16 km (138.56 km competitive)
Day 3:	4 stages, 376.56 km (76.14 km competitive)
Longest stage:	SS2/5 Hafren (32.14 km)
Shortest stage:	SS1/16 Cardiff Bay (1.70 km)

The drivers

Car #36 Nick Georgiou/Joseph Matar

Nick Georgiou said: "I've worked in London for several years now, so I have a fairly good idea of what the British weather is like. People talk about Rally GB weather being unpredictable, but I'm not sure it is – I think it is predictable: it will rain! Coming from the Middle East, you get used to the sun shining and always driving in warm conditions, so I'm not sure I will be used to the kind of conditions we'll be in for on Rally GB. Having said that, I'm certainly not going to be phased by whatever we see before us on the road. The year I have spent working in the Pirelli Star Driver scheme has really helped me with my approach to the sport. It's taught me to stay relaxed under pressure. When I came and did my home rally, the Rally of Lebanon, I could really see the difference in my thinking and stage times. For sure, the pace notes I am making now are better than they have ever been and this will help on Rally GB where I don't know the event so well. Everything I have learned is going to help me be more competitive next season for sure. At the moment, I am working flat out on trying to find a deal to contest the Production Car World Rally Championship next season; I want to build on what I have learned. Thanks to Pirelli Star Driver, we will have experience of most of the events next year. It would be nice if the weather stayed good on Rally GB, particularly as I have many family and friends coming out to watch the event, but it doesn't really matter – I'm going to enjoy it whatever the weather."

Car #37 Peter Horsey/Calvin Cooledge

Peter Horsey said: "I've spent quite a lot of time in Britain, so I have a good idea of what to expect from the weather and the conditions on this rally – I competed on the first round of this year's British Rally Championship in Wales. That was in March and it gave me an insight into what the roads will be like on Rally GB. Of course, they weren't the same stages, but they were similar in nature. It can be a tough event, but it's one I'm really looking forward to and one my co-driver Calvin Cooledge will know well. I have been competing since our last Pirelli Star Driver outing in France, driving on the Mombasa Rally in my own Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution IX. I set some fastest times on the event, but missed out on the podium after we got a puncture half way through a 59-kilometre stage. I've learned a lot from this year's Pirelli Star Driver programme, especially with things like the way my pace notes work. We'll need those to be working well on Rally GB."

Car #38 Hayden Paddon/John Kennard

Hayden Paddon said: "It would have been great to go to Rally GB fighting for the chance to win this year's Production Car World Rally Championship, but the problems we had on the last round in France cost us too many places and too many points. All we can do now is go to Wales and learn lots and enjoy our final event as part of the Pirelli Star Driver scheme. I'm looking forward to the roads, really looking forward to them. I haven't competed in those forests, but I've heard lots of stories about them. I think they could be quite similar to some of the roads we've competed on back home in New Zealand, certainly it's not going to be the same sort of learning curve we had an event like Germany where everything was completely new for us. It's been a great programme to be part of this year, we've learned so much and had such a good opportunity to compete on so many rallies. The important thing for me now is to build on what we've learned and move forward into next season. I don't really know about a result on Rally GB, the competition will be tough with lots of very good quality Group N cars in the field. We'll drive our own rally and see what we can do. Wales is a great place to end the season."

Car #39 Alex Raschi/Silvio Stefanelli

Alex Raschi said: "Everybody has heard of the RAC [Rally GB] in Italy, it's a very famous event and one of the rallies I was looking forward to from the start of the year. I don't know the roads so well, of course, but I have watched many films and remember many times what Colin McRae would be doing in these stages. It's going to be fantastic to get to drive through them. After driving in Italy, I know more about asphalt roads, but in France and Germany, they were

not so much like the asphalt I knew. But I really look forward to this gravel. I hope the weather is okay and not so wet. I think sometimes it's raining a lot in Wales, but maybe the sun will shine when we get there."

Car #40 Ott Tänak/Kuldar Sikk

Ott Tänak said: "Gravel is my favourite surface, so after two events on asphalt I am happy to be back on the loose again. I have never been to Cardiff or done the recce for this rally, so I don't know much at all about the Rally GB stages. But, they are gravel, so I'm hoping they will suit me. From what I have heard, the weather in Wales at this time of year can be quite wet, with some fog at times. It sounds like the weather is quite similar to what we have in Estonia. The fog is not nice and, for sure, nobody likes to drive in those conditions – but if the condition is the same for everybody, then no worries. If the rain does come, obviously it can make the road surface a little difficult: there could be some mud around, which would make this event quite like the last one in France! The last event in the Pirelli Star Driver scheme we did on gravel was Finland, where I won the Production Car World Rally Championship round – that was a fantastic result, probably my best of the season so far. Now I've won PWRC in Finland, I have to focus on winning the main event! Being part of the Pirelli Star Driver scheme has been fantastic for me this season. I've learned lots about the sport, particularly how to work with a new team. As well as anything, though, the people in the scheme have taught me lots about all aspects of the sport, not just driving, but about fitness and finding sponsors – many things which will be very useful for the future. Probably the biggest lesson I have learned through all of this year, though, is not to give any more of my victories away on the final day!"

Q&A with Phil Short, Pirelli Star Driver Supervisor

Q: How big a challenge is Rally GB?

A: This event is always a big challenge, because it can throw a wide range of weather and surface conditions at you. Judging the grip level will be crucial. Many of the stages are quite fast, so a mistake can be very costly.

Q: How ready do you think the crews are?

A: They should be well-prepared. Although the last two World Rally Championship events for them have been on tarmac, they have good gravel experience under the Pirelli Star Driver scheme – having done three WRC rounds on the loose – and most of them have done extra events in their own cars, which will stand them in good stead on this surface.

Q: What's going to be the toughest thing about the event?

A: Probably the weather. Fog, rain, cold and possibly icy conditions are always a possibility in November, plus the fact that they will need to do at least one full forest stage in the dark. These situations will definitely test their abilities, while running behind the top cars will almost certainly result in quite rough road surfaces, especially on the second pass through the stages.

Q: What are you expecting from each of the drivers?

A: Full commitment to getting the full trip and bringing the car home in a good position. I'd like to see a repeat of Rally Finland, where we put all five Pirelli Star Drivers into the top 10 in the Production Car World Rally Championship.

Q: Who do you think will be the quickest of the Star Drivers?

A: Ott Tänak and Hayden Paddon have both been superb this year, and both should go very well here. Alex Raschi is also improving well now, and he did the Rally GB recce last year.

Q: Five rallies down and one remaining, what advice do you give to the guys?

A: This is one of the world's greatest rallies and a real challenge. Make the most of this end-of-season opportunity to show the rally world what you can do.

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. Tänäak 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 Tänäak, accident SS20, retired; Peter Horsey, accident/fire SS2, retired.

Rally of Portugal (round 2 of 6)

For the second rally in succession, Tänäak 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 Tänäak 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 Tänäak 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 Tänäak (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 Araújo for all three days, but eventually settled for second on his debut on the Trier-based event. By his own admission, Ott Tänäak 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 Tänäak (5th in PWRC); 43rd Nick Georgiou (7th in PWRC); 45th Peter Horsey (8th in PWRC); Alex Raschi Retired (SS18, differential).

Rallye de France (round 5 of 6)

The five Pirelli Star Drivers were part of a history-creating Rallye de France, when the event ran on the mainland for the first time (instead of running on the island of Corsica). New Zealander Hayden Paddon looked well set to repeat his strong Rallye Deutschland performance, leading the PWRC early on. Unfortunately for Paddon, two punctures dropped him down the standings. Ott Tänak picked up where Paddon left off, but the Estonian was unable to match the Kiwi's pace. His consistency paid off and he ended the event second in PWRC. San Marino's Alex Raschi turned in another solid performance, posting a career-best fourth in the Production Car World Rally Championship. Nikolai Georgiou was the only other Pirelli Star Driver finisher, ninth in PWRC. Peter Horsey crashed on the opening day. 19th Ott Tänak (2nd in PWRC); 26th Alex Raschi (4th in PWRC); 35th Hayden Paddon (7th in PWRC); 48th Nikolai Georgiou (9th in PWRC); Peter Horsey retired (SS4, accident).

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