



Press Office

THE RALLY D'ITALIA SARDEGNA 2009 KICKS OFF THIS EVENING

The start with a ceremony in the centre of Olbia. From tomorrow to Sunday the best drivers of world rallying will fight on the gravel roads of the Italian round of the World Rally Championship.

Olbia May 21st 2009 - The Rally d'Italia Sardegna 2009 will start this evening at 19.00 from Corso Umberto in Olbia with the Official Start Ceremony: The event organised by the Automobile Club d'Italia counts as the sixth round of the World Rally Championship and as the fifth of both the Production and Junior World Rally Championships. The event will really kick off tomorrow with the first of the three days of the race. Competitors will face an event route of 1,263 km comprising 17 special stages for a total of 347 km, all on gravel roads. A particularly demanding course which will put to the test both crews and their cars.

The stakes are all for Sébastien Loeb and Daniel Elena and their Citroen C4 of the Citroen Total WRC team, winners of the first five events of this year's championship. Amongst the main rivals of the World Champion, winner of the last five editions of the World Rally Championship, the two drivers of the BP Ford Abu Dhabi World Rally Team, Finnish Mikko Hirvonen and Jari-Matti Latvala. The first was the only one to show that he could keep the World Champion's pace in the first part of the season, while the latter has the occasion to make it up after a bad start to the year. These three will not be the only ones to target a victory. Other drivers have shown in the first rounds of the season to be able to aim for success. Amongst these is Spanish Daniel Sordo, Loeb's team mate, and Norwegian Petter Solberg, driving a 2006-spec Citroen Xsara WRC, winner of the first Sardinian edition of the Rally d'Italia. Amongst others, to be followed in particular the UAE driver Khalid Al Qassimi, driving a Focus of the Bp Ford Abu Dhabi World Rally Team, Englishman Matthew Wilson and Norwegian Henning Solberg again on Focus Wrc from the Stobart VK M-Sport Team, Argentina's Federico Villagra with a Ford Focus Wrc from Munchi's Team, and the three Citroen Junior Team drivers, with three C4 Wrc, young Russian Evgeny Novikov, Zimbabwe's Conrad Rautenbach and rising French star Sébastien Ogier. Other World Rally Cars will be driven by young Norwegian Mads Ostberg (Subaru Impreza) and Italian Peter Zanchi (Subaru Impreza). The Milan-born driver, with a great experience of gravel roads, is able to perform well in the event.

Amongst the starters is 22-year old German driver Mark Wallenwein, guest of the Automobile Club d'Italia thanks to an exchange which will see an Italian driver be guest of the Adac, the German Automobile Club, with a free entry for Rally Deutschland. In the sixty entries there also are nine participants in the Junior World Rally Championship, and thirteen in the Production World Rally Championships, both series of which Sardinia counts as the fifth round of the series. Amongst JWRC drivers, three Italian drivers will be aiming for a victory: Alessandro Bettiga, Simone Bertolotti and Luca Griotti. In PWRC the locals are Giovanni Bernacchini, codriver of Qatari driver Nasser Al-Attiyah currently second in the standings, Simone Campedelli, who does not hide his aims to success, and Gianluca Linari. Also at the start five crews taking part in Pirelli Star Driver. A championship inside another which allows some young drivers to take part in some events of the World series.

Amongst the other Italians entered are Manfrinato-Pisano (Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX), Bentivogli-Cecchi (Subaru Impreza), and 9 Sardinian crews, led by Dettori-Corda (Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX), Marrone-Piga (Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX), Liceri-Atzei (Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX), Catania-Pescali (Subaru Impreza Sti), Pisano-Cozzula and Serra-Serra (Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX).

Rally d'Italia Sardegna

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The shakedown, the test for cars in race setup, took place this morning. The best time was set by Sébastien Loeb , Citroen C4 Wrc, who beat Henning Solberg , Ford Focus Wrc , and Petter Solberg , Citroen Xsara Wrc.

The fastest stage times are as follows

1. Sebastien Loeb in 3'15"0;
2. Henning Solberg in 3'16"1;
3. Petter Solberg in 3'18"2;
4. Dani Sordo 3'18"9;
5. Hirvonen and Latvala 3'19"4;
7. Wilson 3'20"5

DRIVERS' QUOTES

"My intention is to win here in Sardinia – claims Sébastien Loeb – also because this is an event I like, the stages have improved year after year and are very technical and demanding. The most difficult stages are Fiorentini, which is very technical and could create important gaps, and number 7, Sa Linea, is full of rocks and very slippery".

"We found the correct set-up for the car – commented Mikko Hirvonen – improving a lot of small details, beginning with the differentials and going on to dampers and suspension. The car is fine, I am satisfied with our work. I am here to win, that is our only goal, as we need to steer the championship in another direction".

" I had a difficult start to the season – says Jari-Matti Latvala – and in Portugal I also had a bad accident, fortunately without consequences. I honestly would like to finish on the podium again, the fight here will be between Mikko and Sébastien, and I believe that my team mate Mikko Hirvonen must this time beat Loeb at any cost to keep the championship open".

Amongst the awaited actors is also Petter Solberg " I am here with an upgraded car – commented the Norwegian driver – from the one which I used in the previous events of the WRC. My goal is to finish on the third step of the podium, if the car responds accordingly and is faster I could do even better".

World Championship standings after five events

Drivers

1.Loeb (Citroen) 50 points; 2. Sordo (Citroen) 31; 3. Hirvonen (Ford) 30; 4. Solberg H. (Ford) 20; 5. Solberg P. (Citroen) 14; 6. Wilson (Ford) 12; 7. Latvala (Ford) e Villagra (Ford) 9; 9. Ogier (Citroen) 5; 10. Atkinson (Citroen) 4; 11. Rautembach (Citroen) , Ostberg (Subaru) and Al Qassimi (Ford) 3; 14. Aava (Ford) and Al Attiyah (Subaru) 1

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Manufacturers

1. Citroen Total World Rally Team 82 points; 2. Bp Ford Abu Dhabi World Rally Team 43; 3. Stobart Vukobratovic M-Sport World Rally Team 37; 4. Citroen Junior Team 13; 5. Munchi's Ford World Rally Team 12

Junior Wrc standings after four events:

1. Kosciuszko (Suzuki) 28 points; 2. Burkart (Suzuki) 24; 3. Prokop (Citroen) 18; 4. Abbring (Renault) 12; 5. Bettega (Renault) 10; 6. Bertolotti (Suzuki) 9; 7. Griotti (Renault) 8; 8. Weijs (Citroen) 6; 9. Bonato (Suzuki) 5

Production Wrc standings after four events:

1. Araujo (Mitsubishi) 23; 2. Al Attiyah (Subaru) 21; 3. Sandell (Skoda Fabia) 20; 4. Brynildsen (Mitsubishi) 18; 5. Prokop (Mitsubishi) 14; 6. Arai (Subaru) 11; 7. Neiksans (Mitsubishi) and Ligato (Mitsubishi) 8; 9. Pavdiles (Subaru) 5; 10. Tapper (Mitsubishi) and Mayer (Subaru) 4; 12. Linari, (Subaru), Tarabus (Grande Punto Abarth), Sauvan (Mitsubishi) and Timotheu (Subaru) 3, 16. Flodin (Subaru) and Gill (Subaru) 2; 18. Semerad (Mitsubishi) 1

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