

58th Rally Finland (July 31–August 3, 2008): Citroën Sport on unconquered ground

The second half of this year's World Rally Championship kicks off with the former 'Great Race' of

Jyväskylä', later known as the 1000 Lakes Rally from 1954 until 1996, and now officially called the Rally

Finland. Citroën Total has entered two C4 WRCs for this year's event which is not only the ninth round of

the 2008 WRC but also home soil for the team's main opponents in the series. The two crews are Dani

Sordo/Marc Martí and Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena, while Conrad Rautenbach/David Senior and Estonians

Urmo Aava/Kuldar Sikk who will practically be competing on home soil will be competing in privately entered

C4s run by PH Sport with the support of technicians from Citroën Sport Technologies.

After the six-week summer break, the WRC regulars return to serious business with one of the season's

most demanding fixtures. This year's format features 342.08km of competitive action divided into 24 stages, twelve of which will be run just once, while there are 80km that are new to the drivers.

Recce

consequently promises to play a key role, and Marc and Daniel face the prospect of having to copy out

copious pages of notes.

Today, there are fewer of the celebrated jumps that helped forge the legend of the 1000 Lakes in the

past, but the subtleties of the Finnish gravel roads are as complex to grasp as ever. It takes several visits

to get a real feel for their unique difficulties&

"It's not just the drivers who need experience of this event; the engineers also need a certain understanding of the roads before they can really hope to find the most suitable compromises when setting up the cars," observes Citroën Sport's Technical Manager Xavier Mestelan-Pinon. "The ideal set-up

isn't easy to find for these ultra-fast roads, but a nicely balanced car is vital. We are pleased with the

results of our pre-event testing in July and also by the job Dani and Marc did on the event they contested.

Citroën has yet to win here and it would be nice if we could succeed at last this year. But we are taking

things one step at a time; our past experience of Rally Finland tends to make us particularly wary of this

event.

Following their recent break, Sébastien Loeb and Daniel Elena are particularly fired up as they prepare to

tackle the last seven rounds of the season, beginning with Finland. "We have never won this event and

that is one of the targets I set myself for 2008," recalls Seb. "But however dearly I would love to win it,

and despite the ground that would enable us to make up in the Drivers' standings, I have no intention of

taking any more risks than usual just to add a fresh line to my personal record.

"This time last year, we were nine points down. This year, the gap is just three points," he continues. "We therefore can't afford to make any mistakes, yet it is so easy to put a foot wrong in these forests where you're constantly driving on a knife edge, with all the concealed bends and the trees so very close! This event will also allow us to see how the Pirelli Soft tyre performs. We won't be allowed to re-cut its pattern if there's mud about, so that could cause a few surprises.

Dani Sordo and Marc Martí resume world class action with their morale boosted by their recent success on the Kouvola-based O.K. Auto-Ralli. "It was first my win in a WRC car, and on gravel, too, so that was particularly pleasing," says Dani. "I am aware that the competition wasn't all that strong, though, and that we will face stiffer opposition on the Rally Finland. I have felt comfortable over these fast stages and long jumps on all my previous visits. I enjoy them, and the work we did in July should enable us be even more competitive against the local specialists. I am pleased with the settings we have found for the different types of surface we could well face, and I think we should be competitive with our C4. Our aim is to finish as high up the order as possible with a view to scoring points for Citroën.

Event notes: 2008 Rally Finland

- 58th Rally Finland (July 31–August 3): round 9 of 15.
- Surface: gravel.
- Base: Jyväskylä.
- Technical matters: after the Acropolis and Turkey, the Rally Finland is the last of its series of three events to be contested with the same engine. Finland is not paired with any other event regarding the chassis. Two gearbox/differential packages are authorised per driver. Five sets of dampers and five hub carriers are authorised per event.
- Tyres: only one type of tyre is available: the Scorpion WRC 205/65R15 Soft. It is possible to carry two spares, but the 're-cutting' of tread patterns is not permitted. 48 tyres may be used during the event (including shakedown).
- Recce: scheduled for Tuesday July 29 and Wednesday July 30 (07.00 until 19.00). Two passes are authorised at a maximum speed of 80kph (except for the Killeri super-special).
- Shakedown: Thursday July 31 (08.00 until 12.00). Uses the same 3.76km stage as in previous years, situated 6km north of the service park.
- Press conference: Thursday July 31 (from 13.30), Paviljonki press office.
- Rally Show: Thursday July 31 (between 16.00 and 16.45).
- Route: the total distance is 1,461.58km, including 340.42km divided into 24 stages (18 different).
- Day 1 (Thursday July 31 and Friday August 1): 607.50 km, including 131.70km divided into 11 stages (7 different). Thursday: rally starts from service park (19.00). SS1 (Killeri super-special 1, 2.06km). Parc ferme from 20.15. Friday: start from parc ferme. Service A (06.30, 15 minutes). SS2

(Vellipohja 1, 17.16km), SS3 (Möckkipera 1, 11.38km) and SS4 (Palsankylä 1, 13.90km). Regroup (10.19, 13 minutes). Service B (10.32, 30 minutes). SS5 (Vellipohja 2), SS6 (Möckkipera 2) and SS7 (Palsankylä 2). Regroup (14.36, 13 minutes). Service C (14.49, 30 minutes). SS8 (Urria, 12.65km), SS9 (Lautaperä, 7.87km), SS10 (Jukojärvi, 22.18km) and SS11 (Killeri super-special 2). Service D (20.30, 45 minutes).
Last car due into parc ferme at midnight.

• Day 2 (Saturday August 2): 657.87km, including 168.25km divided into 10 stages (8 different). Starts from parc ferme. Service E (06.00, 15 minutes). SS12 (Himos, 15.35km), SS13 (Hirvimäki, 10.67km) and SS14 (Surkee 1, 14.80km). Regroup (09.20, 13 minutes). Service F (09.33, 30 minutes). SS15 (Leustu, 21.43km), SS16 (Kakaristo 1, 20.09km), SS17 (Kaipolanvuori, 13.64km) and SS18 (Surkee 2). Regroup (14.17, 13 minutes). Service G (14.30, 30 minutes). SS19 (Kakaristo 2), SS20 (Juupajoki, 21.13km) and SS21 (Väärinmaja, 16.25km). Service H (19.55, 45 minutes). Last car due into parc ferme at 23.00.

• Day 3 (Sunday August 3): 196.21km, including 40.47km divided into 3 stages (3 different). Starts from parc ferme. Service I (08.20, 15 minutes). SS22 (Lankamaa, 23.09km). SS23 (Hannula, 10.92km). SS24 (Ruuhimäki, 6.46km). Podium ceremony from 13.30.
• Finish ceremony: Sunday August 3 (Paviljonki service park), from 13.30.
• Post-rally press conference: Sunday August 3 (Paviljonki press office) from 14.10.
• New: While Möckkipera (SS3/6), Urria (SS8), Himos (SS12) and Lankamaa (SS22) have been modified, the 'new' kilometres added this year have mostly already been used in the past. Hirvimäki (SS13), Kakaristo (SS16/19), Väärinmaja (SS21) and Hannula (SS23) are nonetheless brand new stages. Finally, the majority of Juupajoki (SS20) uses roads that were used for the last time in 2001. There is no final 10-minute service park.

• The crews statistics (before this rally):

Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena: WRC debut: Catalonia, 1999 (Saxo Kit-Car, retired).

WRC starts: 106. First WRC win: Germany, 2002 (Xsara). WRC wins: 41.

WRC world titles: 4 (2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007).

Dani Sordo: WRC debut: Catalonia, 2003 (18th). WRC starts: 52. Junior title: 2005 (C2 S1600).

Marc Martí: WRC debut: Catalonia, 1992 (21st). WRC starts: 118. Junior title: 2005 (C2 S1600).

• The crews' Rally Finland records:

Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena: ninth participation: 2007 (C4, 3rd), 2006 (Xsara, 2nd), 2005 (Xsara, 2nd), 2004 (Xsara, 4th), 2003 (Xsara, 5th), 2002 (Xsara, 10th), 2001 (Saxo Kit-Car, 28th) and 2000 (Saxo Challenge, retired).

Dani Sordo: fourth participation: 2007 (with Marc Martí/C4, retired), 2006 (with Marc Martí/Xsara, retired) and 2005 (with Marc Martí/C2 Super 1600, 15th).

Marc Martí: tenth participation: 2007 (with Dani Sordo/C4, retired), 2006 (with Dani Sordo/Xsara, retired), 2005 (with Dani Sordo/C2 Super 1600, 15th), 2004 (with Carlos Sainz/Xsara WRC, 3rd), 2003

(with Carlos Sainz/Xsara WRC, 4th), 2000 (with Jesus Puras/Mitsubishi, retired), 1999 (with Jesus Puras/Subaru, retired), 1998 (with Oriol Gomez/Seat, retired) and 1997 (with Oriol Gomez/Seat, 23rd).

· Conrad Rautenbach/David Senior and Urmo Aava/Kuldar Sikk will drive privately-entered Citroën C4 WRCs. The two cars are prepared and run by PH Sport with the support of technicians from Citroën Sport Technologies.

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