



Rally Ireland (29 January – 1 February 2009) - Preview

## A new era with the Citroen Junior Team

**The Citroen Junior Team will make its competition debut on the opening round of the 2009 FIA World Rally Championship, the Rally Ireland. Three Citroen C4 WRCs will be entrusted to Chris Atkinson/Stéphane Prevot, Conrad Rautenbach/Daniel Barritt and Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia.**

Having claimed a fourth manufacturers' title last year, Citroen has now entered a second team in this category for the 2009 season. Complementing the Citroen-Total World Rally Team, the Citroen Junior Team will reinforce the marque's presence on the championship by providing a cradle for young talent.

Building on the foundations laid in 2008, the Citroen Junior Team will take the start of the first round of the year with three Citroen C4 WRCs. The crews of Australian Chris Atkinson and Belgian Stéphane Prevot (n.7), together with Zimbabwe's Conrad Rautenbach and Briton Daniel Barritt have been chosen to score team points in the World Championship for Manufacturers. The French crew of Sébastien Ogier and Julien Ingrassia will drive the third Citroen C4 WRC, which wears number 11.

Rally Ireland marks the start of a season that will take in 12 rounds, and just like last year the rally route will run on roads through both the Republic of Ireland and also the United Kingdom. The fast, narrow and bumpy stages are guaranteed to pose a real challenge for the crews. The local weather at the end of January could well take in ice and snow – so all the drivers will be forced to think on their feet!



Chris Atkinson is the only member of the Citroen Junior Team to have already competed on the Rally Ireland, but he will be making his debut in the Citroen C4 WRC. After a test session earlier in January, the young Australian was already impressed. "I had a good feeling with the car straight away and I felt more and more comfortable with every kilometre that went by," he said. "The Citroen C4 WRC is different to the other cars that I have driven before. The more I attack the better it seems to work."

The Australian is now looking forward to a welcoming but challenging event. "There's a fantastic atmosphere with a huge crowd," he said. "The event itself is really tricky. The roads are bumpy and often very dirty. At this time of year, we might even find some ice. We're going to start the event using settings that the team has already established from the past. Then, when it comes to the start of the rally, we will see how we are getting on. I've got no other aim other than just to score some points for the Citroen Junior Team and demonstrate our competitiveness compared to the other crews."

Following his debut season in the Citroen C4 WRC last year, Conrad Rautenbach is planning to up his game in 2009. "I learnt a lot from last year," he said. "That first season with Citroen Sport Technologies allowed me to gain a lot of experience. I now understand the C4 WRC and its behaviour a lot better. This year, I'll be able to push much harder in the places that I know well. Rally Ireland is certainly one of the most difficult events of the whole championship though. My primary objective will be to get to the finish with the aim of scoring points. I was able to see once more just how difficult the roads in Ireland were when I took part in national rally there in January, driving a Citroen Xsara WRC. The conditions were particularly difficult and I'm sure that will be the case again on the Rally Ireland next week. The event also allowed me to get up to speed with my new co-driver, Daniel Barritt. So everything went really well."

After clinching the 2008 Junior World Rally Championship in a Citroen C2 Super 1600, Sébastien Ogier will now tackle his first season at the wheel of a World Rally Car. "The 2009 season promises to be a nice one for me, thanks to a very good programme with the Citroen Junior Team," he said. "I took part in the Ulster Rally last year with a Citroen C2-R2 MAX. It was my first experience of Irish roads, even though the profile of the World Rally Championship event there looks somewhat different. I think this is going to be a very complex rally, with some ice and frost expected at this time of year. The roads are narrow and bumpy, plus they get dirty very quickly. By starting the first day around 10<sup>th</sup> on the road, we are sure to find some particularly delicate conditions. My key objective is to finish. I don't have any real pressure in terms of results: I just need to keep making progress and learning as the event goes on."

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## Three questions to...Benoit Nogier

Team Manager – Citroen Junior Team

### What is the thinking behind the Citroen Junior Team?

"This initiative is a natural continuation of the programme that we put in place last year. Our aim was to enter a genuine manufacturer team. This project led to the birth of the Citroen Junior Team. It's an opportunity to maximise our growing profile, even though we are very aware that we have different objectives to the factory team. The Citroen Junior Team is a programme with which to develop drivers. Thanks to this structure, we hope to find some future drivers for Citroen."

### How will the team operate throughout the course of the season?

"The exact programmes are still being finalised. We have entered the Citroen Junior Team onto all 12 rounds of the 2009 calendar with a minimum of two cars per event, which allows us to score points towards the World Rally Championship for Manufacturers on each round. Conrad Rautenbach will be present on all 12 rallies. Evgeny Novikov will start his eight-round programme on the Rally Norway. Sébastien Ogier will take part in the first six rallies, but he has a real opportunity to bulk out his programme as the season goes on. As for Chris Atkinson, he will drive one of our Citroen C4 WRCs in Ireland. As we already made clear when we signed the deal there are no plans currently in place beyond then, even though there's a strong will to do so from both sides."



### What is the team's goal on its World Championship debut?

We would like to prove that we can be competitive compared to the opposition. The average age of our four drivers – Chris Atkinson, Conrad Rautenbach, Sébastien Ogier and Evgeny Novikov – is just 22. They will all certainly want to demonstrate their outright speed, but the team's objective is for them to acquire as much World Rally Championship experience as possible and get to the finish of each event. That's our priority."

## Event information:

- **Rally Ireland** (January 29-February 1), round 1 of 12
- **Surface:** dry and damp asphalt, a possibility of ice and/or snow
- **Host town:** Sligo
- **Practical information:** Rally HQ is based at the Clarion Hotel in Sligo, while the service park uses the campus of the adjacent Technology Institute. The Media Centre is located in the service park. The time difference between Ireland and Continental Europe is one hour. When it is 8am in Paris, it is 7am in Dublin. Sunrise on Day 1 of the rally (Friday January 30) is at 8.24am. Sunset is at 5.12pm.
- **Technical matters:** The engines used in Ireland will be sealed and will go on to contest the rounds in Norway and Cyprus. One spare gearbox and one spare set of differentials are permitted per driver (although not paired with any other events). Steering racks and subframes will not be sealed in Ireland, unlike the turbos (one spare turbo per car, not paired with any other events).
- **Tyres:** Two types of tyre may be used: the Pirelli PZero (soft) and the SottoZero (non-studded). Competitors may carry two spares, but the 're-cutting' of tread patterns is not authorised. There are no restrictions regarding the quantity of PZero tyres teams can use, but only 16 SottoZeros will be available for the entire rally.
- **Recce:** Tuesday January 27 and Wednesday January 28 (8.00am to 7.00pm). Two runs authorised at a maximum speed of 70kph (or lower, depending on local restrictions).
- **Shakedown:** Thursday January 29 (8.00am to 12.00 noon). Uses a 2.87km stage near Lisduff (5.97km from the service park).

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- **Press conference:** Thursday January 29 (1.30pm), Media Centre.
- **Start ceremony:** Thursday January 29 (from 7.30pm), Enniskillen.
- **Route length:** 1,407.68km, including 366.94km divided into 19 stages (13 different).
- **Day 1 (Friday January 30):** 642.54km, including 164.57km divided into 8 stages (5 different). Starts from service park at 07.25am. SS1 (Glenboy 1, 22.25km), SS2 (Cavan 1, 15.09km) and SS3 (Aughnasheelan 1, 25.21km). Regroup (11.24, 20 minutes). Service A (11.44, 30 minutes). SS4 (Glenboy 2), SS5 (Cavan 2) and SS6 (Aughnasheelan 2). Regroup (16.16, 20 minutes). Service B (16.36, 30 minutes). SS7 (Murley, 24.70km) and SS8 (Fardross, 14.77km). Service C (21.39, 45 minutes). Last car due into parc ferme at 02.00.
- **Day 2 (Saturday January 31):** 515.76km, including 133.46km divided into 6 stages (3 different). Exit parc ferme/Service D (06.25, 15 minutes). SS9 (Sloughan Glen 1, 27.76km), SS10 (Ballinamallard 1, 25.51km) and SS11 (Tempo 1, 13.46km). Regroup (11.34, 20 minutes). Service E (11.54, 30 minutes). SS12 (Sloughan Glen 2), SS13 (Ballinamallard 2) and SS14 (Tempo 2). Service F (17.18, 45 minutes). Last car due into parc ferme at 21.30.
- **Day 3 (Sunday February 1):** 249.38km, including 68.91km divided into 5 different stages. Exit parc ferme/Service G (07.40, 15 minutes). SS15 (Geevagh, 11.48km), SS16 (Arigna, 27.90km) and SS17 (Lough Gill, 13.51km). Regroup (10.21, 20 minutes). Service H (10.41, 30 minutes). SS18 (Donegal Bay, 14.52km) and SS19 (Donegal Town, 1.50km). Service I (14.30, 10 minutes).
- **Podium:** Sunday February 1 (from 15.10), Sligo.
- **Post-rally press conference:** Sunday February 1 (16.30), Media Centre.
- **New:** Seven of the 13 different stages were run on the 2007 event. Aughnasheelan (SS3/6, previously 'Bencroy') has been lengthened by 9.77km after the former finish. Ballinamallard (SS10/13) has had an additional section added before the start, and a new loop has been added. Lough Gill (SS17) has been shortened to 13.55km and Donegal Bay (SS18) is run in the opposite direction. Two stages are new: Cavan (SS2) and Donegal Town (SS19).
- **Crew statistics before the Rally Ireland:**  
**Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena –WRC debut:** Catalonia 1999 (Saxo Kit-Car, retired). **WRC starts:** 113. **First WRC win:** Germany 2002 (Xsara WRC). **WRC wins:** 47. **WRC titles:** 5 (2004 to 2008).  
**Dani Sordo: WRC debut:** Catalonia 2003 (18<sup>th</sup>). **WRC starts:** 59. **Junior world title:** 2005 (C2 S1600). **Marc Martí: WRC debut:** Catalonia 1992 (21<sup>st</sup>). **WRC starts:** 125. **Junior world title:** 2005 (C2 S1600).
- **The crews' previous Rally Ireland records:**  
**Sébastien Loeb/Daniel Elena:** 2<sup>nd</sup> participation: **2007** (C4, 1<sup>st</sup>)  
**Dani Sordo/Marc Martí:** 2<sup>nd</sup> participation: **2007** (C4, 2<sup>nd</sup>)

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