

PRESS RELEASE 3

59th Rallye International du Valais A hearty menu for a strong field

With 93 crews registered, including 15 in the R5 premier class and five in the RGT one, a hard-fought and spectacular battle is expected in all categories of the Rallye International du Valais. The entry list is available on the official rally website.

Bearing n° 1 on his Ford Fiesta R5, Kevin Abbring will be among the favourites for the overall victory. At 29, the Dutch driver has already taken part in about 40 World Championship rallies, including nine at the wheel of a work Hyundai i20 WRC as an official driver of the Korean team. He also has two victories to his name in the Junior World Rally Championship and won last year in Ypres. With Belgian Pieter Tsjoen as his co-driver, they will form one of the 19 foreign crews at the start.

Winner of the 2017 Rallye International du Valais, Italian Giandomenico Basso (Škoda Fabia R5) will pit himself against Belgian Joachim Wagemans (Peugeot 208 T16 R5) within the framework of the Tour European Rally, in which they are respectively lying in first and second. Another Belgian driver, Filip Pyck (Mitsubishi Lancer) will try and take the opportunity to climb on the championship's final podium.

The three drivers in contention for the Swiss national title will battle it out at loggerheads. Current leader Ivan Ballinari (Škoda Fabia R5), from Ticino, can still be dethroned by Jura's Steeves Schneeberger (2nd, Ford Fiesta R5) and Vaud's Cédric Althaus (4th, Ford Fiesta R5). Furthermore, Schneeberger only needs two points to be crowned champion in the 2018 FIA Alpine Rally Trophy. Third in the Swiss championship, Jonathan Scheidegger already has three class victories under his belt this year. He will start with a Citroën DS3 R3T.

Although the 2018 FIA RGT cup has already been awarded to Raphaël Astier, the Frenchman will do justice to his title on the roads of Valais with his Abarth 124 Spider Rallye. A similar car will be entrusted to the RGT Cup second placed driver, Italian Andrea Nucita. Three more drivers are entered in this class, including Canada's Ian Crerar (Porsche 911 Carrera).

Olivier Burri, 8-time winner of the Rallye International du Valais, will be faithful to the event, as well as his son Michaël (both with a Škoda Fabia R5). Seven contenders of the Swiss Rally Cup will also be present, led by Vaud's Julien Schopfer (Peugeot 106 S16), the 2018 champion. As regards the Junior Swiss Rally Championship, in which the outcome remains wide open, 11 competitors heeded the call. With their Peugeot 208 R2s, Jonathan Michellod will aim at trying to pip leader Thomas Schmid at the post, while Sacha Althaus can still target second place. The seven participants of the Clio R3T Alps Trophy complete this top quality field, headed by Olivier Courtois, Ismaël Vuistiner and Styve Juif, who are currently first, second and third.

All the competitors will take on the usual challenges of the route. On the menu, classic special stages such as Chalais-Nax, Hérémece-Vals des Dix, Veysonnaz and Nendaz on Friday, Anzère and Champex on Saturday. Among the new features, the SS of "Les Cols" will be run in the opposite direction for the first time since 2011, and Chamoson-Ovronnaz, which has not been used since 1993. Another innovation is a small spectacular detour the competitors will make in the SS of Veysonnaz, in a space specially prepared for the purpose close to an area destined to the spectators. The lot will be completed by a daily passage in the inescapable stage of "Casernes".

Before the passage of the competitors entered in the modern rally, the fans will be able to cheer at the 14 cars entered in the Rallye Historique du Valais. Julien Camandona and Eddy Bérard (BMW M3), Florian Gonon (Ford Escort MK1), Stéphane Poudrel (Opel Ascona 400) and Hervé Taverney (Ford Sierra Cosworth) top the bill of this historic event, which will continue growing in the future.

Rallye International du Valais website <http://riv.ch>

Tour European Rally website <http://www.terseries.com>

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