

2020 FIA World Rally Championship
Round 2/14: Rally Sweden

***The MICHELIN X-Ice North 3 stands up to exceptional
Rally Sweden conditions***

Despite having precious little snow and icy dirt to bite into, Michelin's Rally Sweden tyres played a big part in allowing the normally wintry event to go ahead safely. They helped the WRC stars keep up their intense fight until the end, even though the format had been significantly shortened compared with the originally planned route.

The conditions were something of an unknown for everyone and the drivers were forced to find the most effective driving style for the stages which alternated from bare gravel to portions of ice, with no sign of the snow walls on which they tend to lean most years. In the end, though, spectators were treated to an entertaining week in Sweden's Värmland and Norway's Finnskog region.

Given that a single tyre type is authorised for each class at Rally Sweden (WRC: MICHELIN X-Ice North 3 / WRC2: MICHELIN Ice North NA 01), tyre strategies proved relatively straightforward and chiefly involved choosing whether to carry one or two 'spares' for the unfamiliar terrain.

Indeed, instead of the usual wintry blanket of snow and thick ice that competitors usually face on this fixture, recent mild weather meant that many of the event's trademark features were missing, causing the organisers to make big changes to their plans. Compared with the 19 stages totalling 319.17 kilometres that were contested in 2019, only 11 (171.64km) were scheduled this time around, and two of those were eventually dropped, shortening the final competitive distance to just 148.55 kilometres.

First victim was the super-special at Karlstad's horse-trotting track which traditionally kicks off proceedings. However, Friday's Finnskogen stage in Norway – which was back on the menu for the first time since 2012 – survived, as did the new Nyckelvattnet test on the Swedish side of the border. Crews then tackled the same loop of stages the next day, but Sunday's programme was deprived of the morning's attempt at the final test which was kept on to serve as Power Stage.

"It goes without saying that this year's Rally Sweden was a little different to the norm," observes **Arnaud Rémy**, the manager of Michelin's rally programmes. "What with all the last-minute changes and the various questions raised by the crews, we ended up with plenty of work on our hands. That said, we were sure our studs would survive the ordeal and that confidence proved completely justified. The MICHELIN X-Ice North 3 is designed above all to compete on ice and snow, but its studs stood up well to all the different types of conditions that were thrown at them. We noted the same strong performance in all the classes, including in WRC2 where the drivers matched the times posted last year by their WRC colleagues."



“Meanwhile, a number of privateers running on Michelin rubber went faster than some of the factory drivers equipped with rival tyres. In the WRC class, the times marked an improvement of a second per kilometre. For sure, this was due to the lack of ice, but I believe it says a great deal about the drivers’ confidence as they explored alternative racing lines in the exceptional circumstances.”

A bespoke studding technique

The X-Ice North 3 and X-Ice North NA01 tyres which star in Sweden are not equipped with studs when they leave the factory in Clermont-Ferrand, France. The task of inserting the studs into the covers is performed by Michelin’s longstanding partner Däckproffsen in Växjö, Sweden. This entirely manual operation is divided into three phases: drilling of the tread blocks, placing glue in the resulting holes and inserting the studs. The 384 steel and tungsten tips fitted to each tyre are 20 millimetres in length but only 6.5 millimetres protrude from the tread, and it takes around 45 minutes to complete each tyre. Michelin’s WRC partners had a total allocation of 28 tyres for this year’s Rally Sweden. The same figure for the brand’s WRC2 and WRC3 runners was 26, plus four additional tyres for shakedown in both cases.

The MICHELIN X-Ice North NA01 for WRC2/WRC3

WRC2 and WRC3 crews will fit the MICHELIN X-Ice North NA01 which made its debut appearance on last season’s Rally Sweden.

This new tyre was developed over a period of several months to meet the specific characteristics of the cars that feature in these two classes and provide Michelin’s partners with superior performance on ice and snow. Compared with the WRC tyre, the MICHELIN X-Ice North NA01 features a different construction and a bespoke studding pattern, although the number of studs per cover is still 384.

The 2020 Rally Sweden, was won by Elfyn Evans/Scott Martin (Toyota Yaris WRC), ahead of Ott Tänak/Martin Järveoja (Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC) and Kalle Rovanperä/Jonne Halttunen (Toyota Yaris WRC) who made it an all-Michelin podium.

Winner of the WRC2/WRC3 battle were Huttunen/Lukka (Hyundai i20 R5), chased by fellow Finns Lindholm/Korhonen (Skoda Fabia R5 Evo), while third-placed Norwegians Østberg/Eriksen (Citroën C3 R5, 1st WRC2) secured an all-Michelin top-three in the feeder class, too.

The next round of the 2020 FIA World Rally Championship will take teams to Leon, Mexico, on March 12-15.

