

2020 FIA World Rally Championship
Round 4: Rally Estonia

Michelin's tyres shrug off big demands made by Estonia's punishing high-speed stages

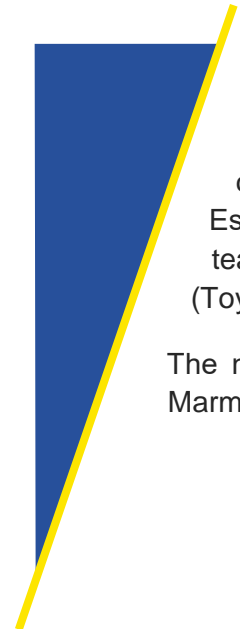
FIA World Rally Championship action resumed this weekend with Rally Estonia, a newcomer to the WRC calendar which featured some extremely fast stages in and around the country's forests and lakes. This cocktail has made it something of a favourite amongst the sport's stars who, in recent years, have used it to prepare for Rally Finland which is just a hop over the Baltic and infamous for its similar roads.

Based in the central city of Tartu, Estonia's second biggest, with a population of 100,000, the rally ran to an unfamiliar compact format for a WRC round in order to comply with the sanitary measures put into place by its organisers and the FIA (Fédération International de l'Automobile). Following Friday evening's opener, 10 of the weekend's 17 tests took place on Saturday and the vast majority of the 232.64 competitive kilometres spanned just two days, making it something of a sprint for the drivers and exceptionally challenging for their cars and tyres.

Competitors reached average speeds of almost 130kph which made Rally Estonia one of the WRC's fastest qualifying rounds of the current era. The enjoyment was heightened by the itinerary's numerous crests and jumps, although the latter put tyres to a particularly punishing test due mainly to the formation of ruts in the landing zones where the cars often hit the ground in an out-of-line posture.

"We had good knowledge of the terrain before coming to Estonia, but not within the framework of a world-class rally," observes **Arnaud Rémy**, the manager of Michelin's rally programmes. "It's fair to say that our tyres had to cope with some extreme situations which can't be put down to either the high-speed nature of the stages or the weather, since the temperature stood at around 20°C for most of the day. It was more the force of the impacts that tyres had to soak up through some of the fastest portions that made this event the sort of challenge we rarely see at WRC level. The speeds reached during the second visit to Saturday's loop were just as high as they were in the morning, but ruts had formed in the meantime, making high-speed impacts inevitable. On top of that, stones exposed on the first pass were an additional hazard, especially when they were situated on the racing line through corners taken at speeds of up to 170kph. That said, all this provided us with an opportunity to showcase the resilience of our tyres which in turn allowed the drivers to push with confidence. For information, they all chose our particularly versatile medium-compound MICHELIN LTX Force M6 and didn't see it necessary to switch to the harder, even more resistant H4 option which would have given less grip in the circumstances. We are delighted to have made a successful return to the championship and to have resumed the rewarding collaboration we had with our partners prior to lockdown."





The first Rally Estonia to count towards the FIA World Rally Championship was the competition's 600th round and was won by Ott Tänak and Martin Järveoja. The Estonian pair was joined on Sunday afternoon's podium by Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC team-mates Craig Breen and Paul Nagle (2nd). Sébastien Ogier and Julien Ingrassia (Toyota Yaris WRC) were third.

The next round of the 2020 FIA World Rally Championship will take teams to Turkey's Marmaris region on September 18-20.

