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Rally fireworks to kick off Central European Rally

- Sébastien Ogier leads after the opening day of the Central European Rally
- Czech president Petr Pavel gave the signal for the start of the WRC rally
- Rally action in Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic – tickets available on site

Munich. The 2024 Central European Rally is up and running. President Petr Pavel attended the start in the Czech capital Prague on Thursday afternoon, where he sent the stars of the WRC on their high-speed journey, which will see them cover more than 302 kilometres at full throttle over the course of the 18 stages by the time they reach the finish on Sunday. The itinerary again features routes in Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic. And, as they did last year, the selective asphalt stages in the heart of Europe will be instrumental in deciding who is to be crowned world champion. The opening two stages on Thursday's short prologue leg produced the first thrilling and extremely close showdown between the WRC stars, with Toyota's top man Sébastien Ogier coming out on top. The Frenchman, currently third in the WRC table, holds a slender lead of 0.9 seconds going into the second leg on Friday. The very latest information on the event, news and quotes can be found on the official homepage at centraleuropeanrally.eu.

Large numbers of fans from all over the world flocked to Prague's Presidential Palace on Thursday, in front of which the start ramp for the twelfth of this season's 13 WRC rallies had been erected. They were treated to an atmospheric start, with a packed programme including autograph sessions and interviews. The Belgian fans were particularly euphoric: championship leader Thierry Neuville (Hyundai, 207 points) has the opportunity at the Central European Rally to become the first driver to bring the WRC title back to Belgium. He currently holds a comfortable lead over his team-mate Ott Tänak (EST, 178) in second place and Toyota ace Sébastien Ogier (166). With a maximum 30 points up for grabs this weekend, the Belgian will be crowned champion if he scores at least two points more than Tänak and concedes no more than ten points to Ogier. "Our plan is to tackle the rally with a good rhythm, to find our line, and to enjoy it," said a relaxed Neuville on day one. "We are all hoping that we can wrap up the title this weekend, but we will have to wait and see. If we feel good and everything goes well, why not? On the other hands, there are still two months until the end of the season, and we must continue with our rhythm and our strategy."

Ogier and Neville battle scrapping for fractions of a second

Neuville left nobody in any doubt as to his ambitions as early as the showdown, setting the fastest time on the 2.1-kilometre test circuit. However, it was Toyota driver Ogier who then had his nose in front on the first showdown after the spectacular start at Hradčany Square in Prague: in front of big crowds at the Velká Cuchle racecourse, the eight-time WRC champion got off to a flying start and clocked the fastest time on the Super Special Stage, 0.6 seconds ahead of fellow Toyota man Takamoto Katsuta. In contrast, Neuville had a wake-up call when he touched a straw bale and damaged his fender. However, the Belgian hit back on the evening stage in Klatovy, setting the fastest time in front of team-mate Tänak and Ogier. However, it is Ogier at the top of the standings after day one, as he leads Neuville by 0.9 seconds after the opening two stages. As such, the stage is set for a thrilling second day. "Thierry has a pretty comfortable lead in the WRC, which reminds me of the first season I won the



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championship,” said rally lead Ogier, who is definitely up for the fight: “However, he still has to get the job done. It is never over until it’s over.” With that in mind, he is looking forward to day two after the short opening leg: “It is often like that on the Thursday – there will be more action tomorrow.”

Demanding routes on Friday

Ogier starts as the overall leader on day two of the rally – a day that features six special stages in the Czech Republic, with a good 111 kilometres against the clock. After the short prologue, the extremely demanding routes will reveal the first real balance of power. Once again, the Klatovy stage promises to be one of the big crowd-pullers, as the crews return to the scene of Thursday evening’s stage for a second and third crack at the 11.8-kilometre route. At 27 kilometres, Strasin is the longest special stage on the rally and is also tackled twice. Like the other Czech stages, it leads through narrow, often wooded sections, on which even the slightest mistake can be extremely costly. “The Central European Rally is challenging,” says Thierry Neuville. “The Czech stages on Friday are particularly demanding. It is not going to be easy. We have some great stages ahead of us on Saturday and Sunday, on which we will definitely have a lot of fun. The organisers have done a good job and positioned a lot of anti-cuts. That should help keep the roads relatively clean and make it a fair competition.”

Tickets on site, easy access to all information

Anyone wishing to watch the Central European Rally on site has over 40 spectator points to choose from. They are signposted around the region and are easy to find: access routes are signposted from the key main roads around the stages. Each fan zone is identified with a unique fan zone number, whereby the fan zone is labelled with a letter indicating the special stage and a consecutive number. Tickets (stage passes) for the respective special stages are available directly at the entrances. Day passes for all the special stages on each of the individual event days and for the entire weekend are available exclusively from the two central sales points in Bad Griesbach (Welcome Center) and Klatovy (Ticket Service). All you need to know about the Central European Rally, including news and quotes from all the special stages, can be found online at centraleuropeanrally.eu. For those wanting to follow the rally on their smartphone, the TW Sportsoft app is the perfect companion – all the important information is summarised in compact form here, which makes it particularly useful for visitors at the rally. The organisers are also calling on fans to share lifts to the rally. The award-winning ADAC Pendlernetz app is the ideal tool for this. Not only does it make it easy to find and share lifts, but anyone using the app for their journey to the rally is also entered into a draw to win attractive prizes.

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