

# Rallying around the World

A look at the WRC and more...

As we waited for the start of the 2005 World Rally Championships in Monte Carlo, some of us took our entertainment in the form of Dakar 2005; a little bit of guilty pleasure to whet our appetite before the WRC. The Car category was topped by the duo of Stéphane Peterhansel and Jean-Paul Cottret. Sure there were also motorcycles and trucks, but really, don't we love to see those cars going all out across the desert?



Stéphane Peterhansel and Jean-Paul Cottret, Luc Alphand and Gilles Picard on Stage 16 of the 2005 DAKAR rally.

Pondering the upcoming WRC season has been good armchair sport. As usual, drivers shuffling from one team to another, cars being prepared for the next season, and courses 'tweaked'. In the 'guys we can't help cheering for' department, Richard Burns reports on his website that he is "getting physically and mentally much stronger" in his recovery from a brain tumor.

There were driver changes on every team this year, but Ford seems to have taken a big leap. After losing Markko Märtin to Peugeot and Francois Duval to Citroën, Ford puts some faith in two 'less proven' drivers: Toni Gardemeister, and Roman Krešta. Both show great promise, but the WRC circuit is no picnic, so only time will tell. Ford's loss of Duval is Citroën's gain. Duval ran 53 points last year, which put him in 6th place. Along with top driver Sébastien Loeb, Citroën has some impressive talent. Unfortunately that this will be the last year for Citroën and Peugeot, as they have announced



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in third. This year the Monte Carlo was made tighter by setting up the service park in town, harbour-side. Most of the stages were predominantly tarmac, with sporadic patches of snow and ice. Choosing to run racing slicks was really the only option, a situation best described by Petter Solberg as "bloody difficult." Added to this was the challenge created by some spectators throwing snow on the stage, catching both Solberg and Marcus Grönholm by



that they will be pulling out end of year. Citroën had planned on bringing out the new C4 during 2005, but those plans have been scrapped. "For sure, using the Xsara is going to be a handicap," said Citroën Boss Guy Freguelin, in a quote from Autosport. Wasn't that car involved in winning both the Manufacturer's and Driver's titles last year?

January 21-23rd saw the hosting of the opening rally of the WRC season in Monte Carlo. As many expected, Sébastien Loeb made it a hat trick by winning his third Monte Carlo three years running. Ford's new blood Toni Gardemeister impressed many by taking second place, and Gilles Panizzi bringing Mitsubishi to the podium

surprise, and although they both admitted that they should have known better, they were frustrated that they had crashed. Both drivers lost a wheel on the same corner. Peugeot was able to get Grönholm back in it, but the Subaru car was too badly damaged, bringing them no points for this rally.

Next stop: the Uddeholm Swedish Rally, the only 100% snow event on the circuit.

by Ken Jeffery  
photos from Motorsport.com