

WRC TV EVENT PLANNED

NEXT YEAR'S World Rally Championship could be launched with a stand-alone competition in the grounds of Stormont in Belfast next January. The plan is to run a televised shoot-out event around the superspecial stage used on last year's rally for the manufacturer teams in the world championship. The likely date for the launch would be Saturday January 24, five days before the start of Rally Ireland, round one of WRC 2009. The event is in the early planning stages, with governments from both sides of the border, the FIA and the WRC's commercial boss ISC needing to be in agreement before Rally Ireland can put its plans into action.

Officials from the event declined to discuss the proposed launch, but did enjoy positive discussions with all of the teams.

Subaru's managing director Richard Taylor said he was in favour of the idea. "We would support this idea. It would make a

good spectacle to get the season underway, but from a logistics point of view the Sunday would be easier than the Saturday."



Stormont could host a TV spectacle next year

LANCER ON THE LOOSE

Mitsubishi's run of WRC Group N success continued on the Acropolis, with Andreas Aigner winning the P-WRC round. It was the firm's 24th win since 2002 — one more than Subaru



WILKS LINKED WITH WORKS SUBARU SEAT

BRITAIN'S GUY Wilks has been linked with a drive in the Subaru World Rally Team later this season. Wilks and his management have been in discussions with SWRT for the past 12 months and it's hoped the Darlington driver could step aboard an Impreza WRC2008 in the second half of the year.

Subaru managing director Richard Taylor said: "Guy's people have been in touch and he's a possibility at the moment."

Wilks, who currently competes in the British Rally Championship in a works Mitsubishi, said: "I would welcome an opportunity to drive in that team with open arms."

IRISH ROUTE REVISED FOR '09 WRC OPENER

RALLY IRELAND, the opening round of the 2009 World Rally Championship, is undergoing significant route changes and could include two night-time stages next February.

In addition to the two Friday evening tests, another alteration is the use of a mile-long stage on Saturday lunchtime, which is likely to be shown live on local television. The intention is to run this along a coast road, but the Mullaghmore test — used as the final stage last year — is one of just three options.

Following concerns from the church-goers, the Sunday morning stages from last year

(Marley and Fardross) will move to Friday. And the day-one tests (Geevagh, Arigna and Lough Gil) will run on Sunday morning.

Friday's loop will include one new stage in County Cavan and the Bencroy stage will be lengthened. The second day of the rally remains the same as last season. Drumshanbo is the only stage from 2007 not included in next year's route.

A source within the organising team said: "We're very excited about the route — particularly the night stages. We have also retained the fifty-fifty split north and south of the border."



Ireland has revised its route for the '09 opener

ACROPOLIS TO MOVE FROM ATHENS

AFTER JUST three years in Athens, the Acropolis Rally will move back to Lamia in central Greece for next year.

The stages on last week's seventh round of the World Rally Championship were criticised for being too rough, which is part of the reason for the move. There is also environmental pressure from the World Wildlife Foundation (WWF) for the event to avoid the stages in the Parnitha mountain

region. The organisers had to shelve the first three miles of the Avonlas stage in this area after the WWF discovered endangered species in the region the rally would be running through.

Greek driver Aris Vovos, who has tackled 14 Acropolis Rallies, said: "When this rally moved to Athens, for the last three years, it was not a very successful decision. That's to do with the quality of stages. Around here the

stages are rough, the mountain roads are very rocky and not in good condition. Lamia has better stages and more spectators. The move back to Lamia will be a clever decision."

The organisers of the event also came under fire for the use of a military airbase for the service park. Ford team principal Malcolm Wilson's comments were typical of those across the service park.

"A few years ago this was voted the best event and we were standing in a packed Olympic Stadium watching the superspecial," said Wilson. "How is it that we've ended up here? There are no spectators here and no atmosphere. There's talk of Lamia next year, but we all want to find a solution to stay in Athens."

A decision regarding the rally's future will be made in September.

IN BRIEF



Loeb could probably win the WRC in this C2!

LOEB PLAYS IT SAFE

Four-time world champion Loeb took part in an FIA initiative to raise awareness of Electronic Stability Control (ESC) on roads cars during the Acropolis Rally weekend. Loeb drove a Citroën C2 road car with ESC switched on through a course near the service park at Tatoi, before repeating the exercise with the system switched off. He said: "You never know what can happen on the road. 99 per cent of drivers are not used to the car sliding. ESC works 25 times per second to help avoid this."

SNIJERS: FIVE YPRES WINS?

Former European champion Patrick Snijers has been selected to drive the BFGoodrich-backed Peugeot 207 S2000 on the Ypres Rally, a round of the IRC. Snijers was selected from 55 entrants for the prize drive. The Belgian said: "I want to thank all of those people who voted for me. My aim is to become the first person to win Ypres five times."

FIVE COMMIT TO YPRES

The Ypres Rally will be the first IRC event contested by all five manufacturers — Abarth, Mitsubishi, Peugeot, Honda and Volkswagen — after VW confirmed a brace of Polo Super 2000 cars have been entered for Bernd Casier and Raphael Auquier on the June event.

JUHO'S FALL FROM GRACE

Production Car World Rally Championship driver Juho Hanninen suffered an event worth forgetting on last week's Acropolis. The Finn looked set to collect his second success of the season when he suffered power steering problems in SS11. That was bad enough, but his agony was compiled when the recovery truck taking his Mitsubishi back to service plunged off the road and ended up 30 metres down a bank.

SNEAK PREVIEW IN GERMANY

The organisers of this year's Rallye Deutschland have filmed the entire route of the Trier-based event and will be sending the footage on DVD to all competitors for August's asphalt round of the WRC. The idea is to make the race easier for those drivers who haven't competed in Germany previously — and to offer all the crews the chance to look at the new stages included in this year's itinerary.

WILSON'S RIDE

Matthew Wilson is sure his Land's End to John O'Groats cycle ride in June will help him in the second half of the WRC season. Wilson, who makes the 960-mile ride with co-driver Scott Martin in aid of charity, said: "The psychology of getting up and knowing there's 100 miles to do every day is going to be tough, but I'm sure it will help me when it comes to the WRC."



Wilson will cycle the length of the UK in June