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News release

Osian leads in Portugal

Welsh rally star Osian Pryce got his Junior World Rally Championship off to the perfect start on the Rally of Portugal this evening – he leads the category overnight.

The 22-year-old completed the opening stage at Lousada faster than any of his rivals in the world championship's feeder formula. He heads the field into tomorrow's first full day of gravel action.

Osian and co-driver Dale Furniss have been counting the minutes until the start of their season-long adventure since arriving in Portugal at the start of the week. And that start couldn't have gone better.

"It's great to get the event started," said Osian. "And, while it's nice to be fastest, the real action starts with the longer stages tomorrow. There were so many people out watching in the stage tonight, it was just amazing – a fantastic atmosphere. So, a great start, but the real business is still to come."

After a stunning WRC 2 debut at Wales Rally GB last year, where Osian was immediately on the pace with the series regulars, the multiple British Rally Championship event winner has been eagerly awaiting his WRC return.

"I've been ready for this moment for a long time now," said Osian. "Now it's just a case of settling everything down and getting on with what will be the longest rally I've ever competed on."

The pair completed their pre-event recce, driving all the stages twice to make the pace notes which Dale will call to Osian in a coded form, allowing them to push the DS 3 to the maximum on the stages this week.

"The recce went really well," said Osian. "It was fantastic to get out there and take a look at some of these iconic stages. The surface of the road was really nice, but quite sandy in places. I think it's probably going to get quite rough for us on the second run.

"There's such a variety of roads on the route; some really quick, fast sections which are nice and wide and then you're braking into some narrow, tight and technical sections where there are rocks at the side of the road just waiting to give you a puncture or rip a wheel off. Absolute concentration is so important on this one."

Osian made one final test of his Autosport Technology-run Citroën at this morning's pre-event shakedown test before heading to Guimarães for the ceremonial start and Lousada for the opening superspecial stage.

"It's great to finally be underway with the event," said Osian, who has been planning his Junior WRC season since setting the WRC 2 field alight with his scorching pace on November's Wales Rally GB.

"I've been competing in the British Rally Championship in recent seasons," he said, "and we've finished second in the BRC twice and won a good few events, so the time had definitely come to make the step up to the Junior World Rally Championship. It's unreal that the moment has arrived and we're competing in round one!"

After tonight's two-mile mixed-surface loosener, the real competition starts tomorrow, when Osian leads the rest of the Junior WRC field from rally headquarters in Matosinhos to drive the northern-most loop of this great and historic event.

Tomorrow in detail

Start: Matosinhos 0800

Three stages run twice

Service: Matosinhos 1255

Parc ferme (end of day): Matosinhos 1800

Longest stage: Ponte de Lima (27.53km/17.10 miles)

Competition day one distance: 128.70km/79.97 miles

Total day one distance: 509.50km/316.60 miles

The opening day takes Osian and Dale as far north up Portugal's Atlantic coast as it's possible to go before crossing the border to Spain. The three stages will all run in the Serra de Arga mountains. Ponte de Lima is one of the most famous stages on this year's itinerary and was included on the 1973 Rally of Portugal route, when this event ran as a round of the inaugural World Rally Championship. Frenchman Jean-Luc Therier was fastest in a Renault-Alpine, 42 years ago.

Twenty years on and a Subaru Legacy RS-driving Colin McRae was fastest down the same stretch of road. Osian might remember that... he was a week old at the time.

The Citroën DS 3 R3-Max Osian's ride this week in detail

Engine: EP6 CDT 1598cc turbo, direct injection developing 234bhp and 430Nm at 3000rpm.

Bodyshell: Reinforced body with welded, multi-point roll cage.

Transmission: Front-wheel drive with six-speed sequential gearbox, activated from steering wheel-mounted paddle. Differential is self-locking ZF.

Suspension: front MacPherson struts with BOS three-way adjustable dampers.

Numbers: Bore and stroke 77 x 85.8mm width 1715mm length 3948mm wheelbase 2465mm fuel tank capacity 67 litres weight

1230kg.Brakes: Alcon forged 4-piston front calipers, 2-piston rears. Vented discs 330 x 34mm (front) 300 x 8mm (rear). Hydraulic handbrake.Wheels: 6 x 15-inch.

About the Junior WRC

Won by such rallying greats as Sebastien Loeb and Sebastien Ogier, the Junior WRC title remains the most sought after drivers' title outside of the World Rally Championship itself.

The series is open to drivers under the age of 28 and is fought out over some of the world's most demanding rallies. The diversity of events Osian will contest this year is incredible: he'll go from flying 50 metres at a time through the forests of Jyvaskyla on what's known as the Finnish Grand Prix (Rally Finland) to the agonisingly slow Rally of 10,000 Corners (Tour de Corse).

Crews score on six of seven rounds of the Junior WRC. Osian and Dale missed the opening round of the season on Monte Carlo and will, therefore count all six from the calendar listed below.

All Junior WRC crews will drive the identical Citroen DS 3 R3-Max, the latest evolution of Citroen Racing's super-successful 1600cc turbocharged, front-wheel drive rally car. And all the crews will run identical Michelin tyres on all six rallies.

Osian and Dale will also compete for the WRC 3 title, which is the FIA's support series for category R3 cars.

Osian's 2015 events

Rally of Portugal (May 21-24)

Moved north from the Algarve to the heartland of Portuguese rallying for this year. The roads around Porto haven't been used as the base for Portugal's round of the FIA World Rally Championship since 2001 – but it's on stages like Fafe that legends and heroes were made in this part of the world.

Rally Poland (July 2-5)

A super-quick gravel round, Poland was one of the most popular rallies of last year. The event will run wholly within Poland this time, after experimenting with a cross-border route in Lithuania last year. Run out of the Polish Lake District town of Mikolajki, the event is always one of the best attended by fans.

Rally Finland (July 30-August 2)

Rallying's Holy Grail. If a driver can't win the championship, a Finland win is the next best thing. Rallying's a way of life in this country, but especially in Jyvaskyla in the last week of July. The stages thread a stunning route between the trees and lakes, while the fans provide an amazing atmosphere on the WRC's fastest weekend of the season.

Tour de Corse (October 1-4)

Back in the championship for the first time since 2008, the French island provides one of the most challenging asphalt routes of the year. The cars will

move between the beautiful towns of Corte, Bastia and Ajaccio as they tackle the toughest and twistiest stages of the year.

Rally of Spain (October 22-25)

The only mixed surface event of Osian's season. This rally starts in the heart of Barcelona, where a hugely popular superspecial stage sets the scene for an intriguing gravel-asphalt event. The service park is based in the seaside town of Salou.

Wales Rally GB (November 12-15)

Based out of Deeside, Osian's home round just keeps on getting better and better. The organisers have further innovations planned for this year, but there's going to be nowhere better for Osian to bring his season-long fight to a close.

About Osian Pryce

Date of birth: 24.02.93

Lives: Machynlleth

Co-driver: Dale Furniss

First rally: Rally Kurzeme (Latvia) August 2009 – 37th overall, eighth 2WD

British Rally Championship event wins: 4

British Rally Championship results: 2nd (2013/14), 3rd (2012)

World Rally Championship starts: 3

World Rally Championship class wins: 1

Website: osianpryce.com

Media contact:

Sandra Evans

+44 7887 693993

sandra@wordspr.com

About Vodafone Rally of Portugal

Date: May 21-24

Base: Matosinhos, Porto

Stages: 16

Competitive distance: 218 miles (352 kilometres)

Total distance: 950 miles (1529 kilometres)

Website: www.rallydeportugal.pt

Media contact:

Miguel Fonseca

+351 21 093 39 17

miguel.fonseca@acp.pt