

*2017 FIA World Rally Championship (WRC)  
Round 3: Rally Guanajuato Mexico*

*The new MICHELIN LTX Force S5 acclaimed in Mexico as  
Michelin's gravel tyre strategy for 2017 reaps its first benefits*

Although gravel events account for the majority of the 2017 FIA World Rally Championship's 13-round calendar, the regulations permit just one type of tyre (available in a choice of two compounds: 'SOFT' and 'HARD') – for the nine loose-surface fixtures, despite the broad spectrum of conditions crews face on them.

The first gravel rally of 2017 was this weekend's Rally Mexico where, prior to last year, the most frequently used tyre tended to be the HARD version of the MICHELIN LTX Force, with the SOFT alternative available in the case of wet weather. This time round, Michelin decided to rationalise its approach and Michelin Motorsport's engineers have spent the past months optimising the firm's LTX Force range by making the most of the opportunities permitted by the regulations. Its plan for 2017 is founded on three phases and will unfold as a function of the results observed during the season.

**Phase 1 (Rally Mexico): the introduction of a more versatile SOFT-compound tyre**

The new soft-compound MICHELIN LTX Force S5 made its debut in Mexico. Michelin's partners got a foretaste of its potential during testing and the North American fixture gave them a chance to evaluate it at last in a competitive context.

**Jacques Morelli**, manager of Michelin's FIA WRC programme, explained the thinking behind the MICHELIN LTX Force S5's development: "If you look at the season's nine gravel rallies, the hard-compound tyre is only the nominated choice in Italy, Spain and Australia where it is widely used when the conditions are dry. We therefore decided to focus on broadening the window of the soft version of the MICHELIN LTX Force. Our engineers paid particularly close attention to its longevity and resistance to damage. In keeping with the MICHELIN Total Performance philosophy, they succeeded in achieving these qualities with no detriment to stage times."

In Mexico, the crews took advantage of these improvements to optimise their respective tyre strategies. "It's a shame that we only had three SOFTs with us this afternoon," remarked **Sébastien Ogier's** co-driver **Julien Ingrassia** (M-Sport) as the French pair checked into Friday evening's service halt. Like the French pair, the other crews soon realised that the key to success in Mexico was going to be making the most of the new MICHELIN LTX Force S5 as a function of the conditions.

Despite the negative impact of the high altitudes visited by the rally on the cars' performance, along with the event's notoriously twisty mountain roads, the crews were able to count on their Michelin tyres to put on a spectacular show for the big crowds who turned out to line the stages.



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After a fiercely-fought opening leg, the outcome was all but settled on Saturday when three crews succeeded in pulling clear from the rest of the field, namely Kris Meeke/Paul Nagle (Citroën C3 WRC), Sébastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia (Ford Fiesta RS WRC) and Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul (Hyundai i20 WRC). These crews went on to finish in the same order, while Kris Meeke and Paul Nagle provided Citroën with its first success of 2017.

“Congratulations to Kris Meeke and Paul Nagle and to everyone at Citroën Racing! This is a demanding rally which is tough on both the crews and their cars, but they enjoyed a very reliable run,” said Michelin Motorsport Director **Pascal Couasnon**. “Since the start of 2017, we have had three different winners in three different cars, in conditions ranging from snow and -15° C in Sweden, to 25°C on gravel here in Mexico, and temperatures around freezing point on the Rallye Monte-Carlo. Each time, our partners were able to take advantage of the safety, performance and durability of our tyres.”

### Phase 2 (Rally Italia Sardegna): signing off our HARD-compound tyres on aggressive stages

The next step of Michelin’s 2017 ‘gravel tyre’ plan will be to verify the performance of the hard-compound MICHELIN LTX Force H5 on what is one of the toughest dirt events of the season, namely Rally Italia Sardegna. This phase is especially important as the 2017 cars are more powerful and generate more downforce than their predecessors.

“From what we have seen in testing with our partners, we believe that our current hard-compound gravel tyres are perfectly suited to the new cars and should be able to cope with Rally Italia without any problems,” observes **Jacques Morelli**. “If our calculations are correct, after Sardinia we should find ourselves with a sound range and a clearer picture as we turn our attention to the second half of the season.”

In the opposite case, the French firm will be called upon to rapidly develop the sixth evolution of its MICHELIN LTX Force gravel tyre (S6 and H6 versions) with new compounds.

### Phase 3 (Wales Rally GB): a super-soft ‘joker’ tyre

If Rally Italia Sardegna confirms the pertinence of Michelin’s choices, the French company will not have to play the only ‘joker’ authorised in the course of the year to introduce evolutions to its range of gravel tyres, with the authorisation of the FIA.

If that is the case, Michelin Motorsport will use its ‘joker’ to conceive a super-soft tyre particularly suited the traditional wet, muddy conditions encountered on Wales Rally GB towards the end of the season. “The third part of our plan will enable us to put pressure on our competitors by providing our partners with tyres that are even more competitive. Not all M-Sport’s Ford Fiesta RS WRCs run on our tyres, so it is important for us to take advantage of this competitive context to further enhance the performance of our tyres.”

By revealing its plan in Mexico, Michelin Motorsport seeks to work with the different key phases of the season in mind to ensure the satisfaction of its partners. The next round of the 2017 FIA World Rally Championship will take teams to Corsica for Rallye de France-Tour de Corse on April 6-9.



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