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For immediate release: 12th May 2017

## **M-SPORT SET SAIL FOR PORTUGAL** IN HOPE OF ANOTHER STRONG PERFORMANCE

M-Sport will be hoping to continue their strong performance next week when the FIA World Rally Championship returns to Europe for the popular Vodafone Rally de Portugal.

With Sébastien Ogier, Ott Tänak and Elfyn Evans all behind the wheel of the Ecoboost-powered Ford Fiesta WRC, the team have a strong chance of maintaining their immaculate run of podium finishes and the team are highly motivated to achieve that goal.

Having contested a five-day test in the north of Portugal, the team worked on perfecting set-up configurations as well as confirming a number of findings from last month's extensive research and development test so as to be best placed for the challenges ahead.

Next week's event also marks another landmark in the team's customer programme with the international debut of the Ford Fiesta R5 Evo2. The latest evolution of M-Sport's most-successful global rally car includes an engine upgrade with redesigns to the cylinder head and exhaust manifold.

Producing additional horsepower, the Fiesta R5 Evo2 will be entrusted to Éric Camilli, Teemu Suninen, Pierre-Louis Loubet, Gus Greensmith and Pedro Heller as they do battle in the highly-competitive WRC 2 category.

## **RALLY DE PORTUGAL** POPULARITY AND PASSION

Popularity and passion are two words that best describe the Vodafone Rally de Portugal. As the first gravel event on European soil, the Portuguese fixture has become a firm favourite amongst competitors and fans alike – the huge number of spectators mirrored in the impressive entry which the rally receives year after year.

Based in the coastal town of Porto, the crews will tackle 349.17 competitive kilometres across nineteen special stages. The sandy, clay-based terrain means that grip will be at a premium for the early runners. But the soft nature of the roads can also see the stages become more abrasive and hazardous over the second pass.

With deep ruts and the threat of rocks being dragged onto the racing line, survival is a key concern and the team must prepare for the rough conditions.

Tyre selection could also prove pivotal and the crews will need to find the right balance between their soft and hard compounds – the first offering more grip through the soft gravel and the latter proving more durable for the longer loop of stages.



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If that weren't enough, the Portuguese weather can also be somewhat unpredictable. The event has been subject to both glorious sunshine and torrential rain in previous years and the team must be prepared for all conditions.

Whatever the outcome, Rally de Portugal never fails to impress and the closing run through the legendary Fafe stage is a sight to behold with thousands of rally fans lining the hillside.

## **MALCOLM WILSON**

### THE TEAM PRINCIPAL

With M-Sport leading both the drivers' and manufacturers' championship standings, Team Principal Malcolm Wilson is keen to see the team continue their strong performance. Rally de Portugal also sees the international launch of the Ford Fiesta R5 Evo2 – and Wilson is equally as eager to see how the latest evolution performs.

#### **Team Principal, Malcolm Wilson OBE, said:**

*“Rally de Portugal is an event that everyone looks forward to. There is a truly unique atmosphere there and the Portuguese rally fans are some of the most passionate and knowledgeable in the world – with a real enthusiasm for their motorsport.”*

*“It will be a special event for us as we launch the new Ford Fiesta R5 Evo2. The team has been working extremely hard to extract even more from a car that was already very successful and I'm looking forward to seeing what our WRC 2 contenders can do against what will undoubtedly be some of the strongest competition of the year.”*

*“In the top flight, our goal always has to be the podium. With Sébastien, Ott and Elfyn we have a good chance of maintaining our impressive run and the whole team will be working towards that end.”*

*“Sébastien has a fantastic track record at this event, and Ott and Elfyn will be full of confidence following an impressive display in Argentina. The stage is set for a great event and, although the win is anyone's for the taking, that's where our eyes will be firmly fixed.”*

## **OGIER AND INGRASSIA**

### THE CHAMPIONSHIP LEADERS

Rally de Portugal is arguably the spiritual home for Sébastien Ogier and Julien Ingrassia. The four-time World Champions secured their first victory at the event in 2010 and have since enjoyed much success on the Portuguese roads.

With four victories to their name, they are just one win away from matching the great Markku Alén who won the event a record five times. As such, the French pairing will be hoping to be in with a chance of challenging for the top-step of the podium next week.

They may find themselves at a disadvantage opening the road through the first day of competition, but the duo can never be discounted and another successful development test in the lead-up to the event sees their confidence back to full force.

**Previous starts:** 8

**Best result:** 1st (2010, 2011, 2013 and 2014)

#### **Sébastien Ogier said:**

*“Rally de Portugal is an event that I look forward to every year. Julien and I have had a lot of success there and it was where we took our first victory so it holds a lot of special memories.”*

*“It's a country with a real passion and enthusiasm for motorsport, and the atmosphere that the*





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*fans generate is something quite unique. As a driver, you always want to do well in those conditions, and we will push the limits to challenge for the win.*

*"The competition is even closer this year and every team has a chance of victory. Opening the road on the first day will probably make it harder for us, but we come to Portugal with high objectives and a focus on increasing our championship lead once again.*

*"We've done a lot of testing in Portugal over the past couple of months and done some further development work on the car – that's definitely a confidence booster ahead of this rally."*

## **TÄNAK AND JÄRVEOJA** FOURTH IN THE CHAMPIONSHIP

Having secured three podiums so far this year, Ott Tänak and Martin Järveoja are enjoying their best ever start to an FIA World Rally Championship.

In what is arguably a break-through year for the Estonians, they now have the ability to challenge for the top results at all loose-surface events to come.

Having made his world-stage debut at Rally de Portugal in 2009, Tänak has contested the event on six previous occasions and always shown good speed at what is traditionally the first European gravel event of the season.

Having further developed their new partnership, Tänak and Järveoja will be hoping to challenge for a top result next week – and will be keen to add another podium to their ever-growing repertoire.

**Previous starts:** 6

**Best result:** 5th (2015)

**Ott Tänak said:**

*"Rally de Portugal starts a series of gravel events that I'm really looking forward to. I've always enjoyed the Portuguese roads and we've shown good speed there in the past.*

*"I feel as though we've developed a lot recently and should be looking towards the podium at every gravel event to come. That has to be our goal in Portugal and I'm looking forward to seeing what we can do.*

*"The stages are generally quite technical and twisty with a lot of blind corners and crests, but then there are stages like Fafe – a really enjoyable and fast stage where you can really feel the passion of the fans.*

*"With the competition so close at the moment, we'll need to be fully focused and at the top of our game if we want to deliver another strong result. That's certainly our aim and we'll be giving it our all as always."*

## **EVANS AND BARRITT** SIXTH IN THE CHAMPIONSHIP

After coming so close to a maiden FIA World Rally Championship victory at last month's Rally Argentina, Elfyn Evans and Daniel Barritt will be aiming for a similarly strong showing at next week's Rally de Portugal.

The pairing missed out on victory by the cruellest of margins – just 0.7 seconds – but came away with renewed confidence which should hold them in good stead next week.

Having contested the Portuguese event on five previous occasions, Evans has good knowledge of

the rally but it remains the chink in his armour having never secured a points-scoring finish.

This year the Welshman will be keen to put that right and, if his impressive performance in Argentina is anything to go by, another strong result could well be on the cards.

**Previous starts:** 5

**Best result:** 22nd (2014)

**Elfyn Evans said:**

*"We've always had pretty good pace in Portugal, but for various reasons we've not been able to translate that into a strong result. After coming so close to victory in Argentina, our confidence is high and I think we're in a good position to deliver a strong result next week."*

*"The whole package worked really well in Argentina and the hope will be to continue that in Portugal. A lot will depend on the weather, but the surface isn't too dissimilar and the soft roads have the potential to become quite rough and rutted over the second pass."*

*"If we're to challenge for another strong result we're going to have to be at the top of our game. We'll need to get into a good rhythm early on and find our confidence through the stages. If we can do that, anything is possible."*

## MEET THE TEAM

RICHARD MILLENER

M-Sport Client Liaison Manager, Richard Millener, is one of the most valued members of the team. It's his job to ensure that all of our customers are satisfied and well looked-after both on and off events.

At popular events such as Rally de Portugal, Richard works around the clock but took time out of his busy schedule to answer some of our questions.

### How long have you worked with M-Sport and how did you first become interested in rallying?

I've been at M-Sport for exactly 10 years and one month now and I've always been an avid fan. My dad was interested in cars, and in rallying in particular. I can remember as a child watching the rallying on TV with him and he took me to Wales Rally GB – the year Tommi [Makinen] won after Colin's [McRae] huge crash. From that moment on, I was hooked.

At university, I wrote my dissertation on rallying – heart rate profiles of rally drivers to be exact – and did quite a lot of competing at club level. After completing my degree, I had no idea what I wanted to do. At the same time, there was a job advertised at M-Sport and I thought why not. I applied, and started picking and packing parts for Ford Fiesta STs.

### What does your role as M-Sport's Client Liaison Manager involve?

My role as Client Liaison Manager generally falls under two categories – looking after those who buy their own cars to do their own events, and those who choose to rally with us in the FIA World Rally Championship. Whichever category you consider, the main aspect is customer care.

I have a small team of really good people working with me, and we look after each and every customer from the moment they contact us. From the private perspective, they're assisted from the moment they buy the car. We help them out with any issues they might be experiencing, provide engineers when requested and have a full team working to ensure they receive the best after care we can possibly give.

On the WRC side of things, we organise their tests, their liveries, make sure that everything is in the right place at the right time, and that their specific programmes are exactly as they want them to be.



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As you can imagine, it's a fairly big job. With the R5s alone we have more than 200 customers and we make it a priority to ensure each one is looked after individually. So far this year, our customers have secured 65 wins across 22 different national championships – and it's statistics like that which give us the most satisfaction.

### **What makes Rally de Portugal such a popular event for competitors?**

It's the first European gravel rally of the year. With Monte and Sweden being quite specialist, it's where most people choose to start their seasons and this year it's also the first of three mandatory rounds of the WRC 2 category.

It's also just a really nice event. The weather is nice, the country is nice, the people are nice, and the stages and organisation is some of the best that we see throughout the year.

### **How is your time spent on events like Rally de Portugal?**

This year I'll head out on Sunday and attend our P2 test on Monday to ensure that all of our customers are happy ahead of the rally. I'll then go out on the recce to keep an eye on things there and ensure that everything is running smoothly and that everyone has everything they need.

Once the rally gets underway, it's up to the drivers and I'll just keep an eye on how they're all getting on. I try to keep an eye on everyone – those in our service area and those running as privateers.

I'll also make sure that I head over to the in-control at least once or twice to spend a couple of hours catching up with everyone. It's important to see how they're getting on and if there is anything we can help with.

It's also a great opportunity to meet with prospective new customers and it's not uncommon for us to sell cars on the events themselves. Last year when Elfyn was running in the WRC 2 category at the Tour de Corse, I had a customer ask if he could buy a car like Elfyn's. I told him he could have that very car and we did the deal there and then – with him taking the car away straight after the rally.

### **What are your hopes ahead of this year's Rally de Portugal?**

For the main team, I hope that we can challenge for the win. We've had a great start to the season and all three of our crews are driving really well at the moment – all of them have a fighting chance of victory.

We're also leading both championships at the moment which is something that I've never experienced before. Hopefully we can strengthen that with a strong result to give us a bigger cushion at the head of the standings.

It would be nice to see a strong result in the WRC 2 category too. There are some really strong competitors out there but we have a good number of cars and a lot of young drivers coming through the ranks. It'll be interesting to see how they get on.

More than anything though, I just hope that all of our customers enjoy their Rally de Portugal and have fun doing it – that's what it's all about.

## **MEET THE PARTNER**

### **PULSAR**

Pulsar is an international watch brand with a strong reputation and wide retail distribution. Since 2009, they have also been M-Sport's official timing partner and have continuously kept the team on schedule in the time-pressurised environment of the FIA World Rally Championship.



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Whatever the conditions, and whatever the challenge, precision performance is what the team demands and that is what Pulsar delivers rally after rally.

Over the past eight years, M-Sport personnel have worn Pulsar's stylish time pieces to keep the operation running like clockwork and a number of our drivers – both past and present – have become strong supporters of the Pulsar brand.

#### **A moment to remember from Pulsar's Susan Boobyer**

*"For us, the best memories are of the rallies to which we have invited our retail partners. When we see their amazement and excitement at the speed and precision of the M-Sport cars, we know that we are giving them an experience that they will never forget. Thanks to the team's hospitality, every group we have taken to a rally has had a great time and we look forward to more such events this year.*

*"The M-Sport team has always been a great partner for us. As our relationship has deepened over the years, the team has been unfailingly supportive whenever we have needed their help. We wish Malcolm and everyone at M-Sport the very best in 2017 and thank them for their hard work on our behalf."*

- ENDS -

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