



Ford extends World Rally Championship participation with new two-year agreement with M-Sport

- Ford of Europe continues its World Rally Championship programme for 2012 and 2013
- Company signs new two-year agreement with British-based M-Sport, Ford's long-term rally partner
- Jari-Matti Latvala confirmed as lead driver in Fiesta RS World Rally Car
- Former world champion Petter Solberg joins the team as second driver.

COLOGNE, Dec. 15, 2011 – Ford of Europe announced today it is extending its participation in the FIA World Rally Championship into 2012 and 2013.

Long-term partner M-Sport, the British-based preparation company, which has successfully operated Ford's WRC activities since 1997, will continue to operate the programme from its state-of-the-art facilities at Dovenby Hall in north-west England.

The Fiesta RS World Rally Car will continue as Ford's WRC flagship in 2012 and 2013. The car, based on the successful Fiesta road car, claimed a clean sweep of the podium in both the first and final rounds of its debut season this year.

Finland's Jari-Matti Latvala and co-driver Miikka Anttila, who topped the world rankings for special stage victories in 2011 and won the final round of the championship in Britain last month, are confirmed as team leaders for 2012.

They will be partnered by former world champion Petter Solberg and Chris Patterson, who have signed a one-year agreement to drive the team's second Fiesta RS WRC in all 13 rounds. The experienced Solberg won the world title in 2003 and the 37-year-old Norwegian has 13 world rally wins to his name. It will be his second stint with Ford, having launched his world rally career with the team in 1999.

The squad will be named Ford World Rally Team and will retain support from long-term partner Castrol for both 2012 and 2013.

Ford has a long and successful heritage in rallying. It is second in the all-time wins list with 79 world rally victories and its run of 145 consecutive points finishes, dating back to the opening round of the 2002 championship, is the longest in the sport's history.

Ford of Europe chairman and CEO Stephen Odell highlighted the strong will of all parties to continue in the WRC.

“Ford has a rich history in world rallying and we’re excited to continue fighting for titles on the world stage with our great partners at M-Sport,” said Odell. “WRC is a great fit with the Ford brand DNA of precise handling, fun-to-drive cars with leading technology and we’ll continue to leverage rallying to inspire innovation in future vehicles and reach new audiences.”

Gerard Quinn, Ford of Europe’s senior manager for motorsport, emphasised what WRC competition means to Ford.

“The WRC is motorsport’s toughest competition for production-based cars,” he said. Through WRC, we can convey the attributes of our road vehicles and send a clear message to our customers and fans about Ford’s passion and expertise.

“We feel that the timing for our announcement is right. We had to be confident about the stability of the championship and to ensure it continues to provide great value and increased exposure globally. We discussed it with our stakeholders and after receiving such assurances we look forward to focusing on competition once again,” said Quinn.

“We have a great team with M-Sport and its leader, Malcolm Wilson, and in Jari-Matti Latvala we have one of motorsport’s rising stars. Already regarded by many as the fastest driver in WRC, this year he showed consistency and expertise on all surfaces. We believe he will flourish in his new role as Ford’s team leader, and look forward to seeing his pace light up the special stages around the world.

“The addition of Petter Solberg to the team brings one of the sport’s most experienced and flamboyant drivers back to the team where he started his top-level career. A drivers’ world title and 13 world rally victories are testament to his abilities and his vast experience will be a great asset to our line-up,” added Quinn.

Wilson, M-Sport managing director and team director, said the new deal was a vote of confidence in his company.

“The performance of the Fiesta RS WRC in 2011 was strong on all surfaces and I’m genuinely excited about what we can achieve in the future,” he said. “We want to challenge for world titles and I have no doubts that our car and driver combination, allied to the infrastructure and expertise of our staff at Dovenby Hall, will allow us to do that.”

M-Sport recently completed its ladder of opportunity, adding a first rung to complete a structured path to take young and talented rally drivers from the grass-roots to the top level in Ford Fiestas. From the entry-level MS1 car, drivers can progress via the increasingly more powerful R2, S2000 and Regional Rally Car models to the top-billing World Rally Car.

“Ford has five different Fiesta models in which drivers with potential can graduate from entry level to the WRC. This ladder is the breeding ground of Ford’s future stars, and in the next seasons we will see drivers with ability climb it and begin to emerge at the top,” he added.

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About Ford Motor Company

Ford Motor Company, a global automotive industry leader based in Dearborn, Mich., manufactures or distributes automobiles across six continents. With about 166,000 employees and about 70 plants worldwide, the company's automotive brands include Ford and Lincoln. The company provides financial services through Ford Motor Credit Company. For more information regarding Ford's products, please visit www.fordmotorcompany.com.

***Ford of Europe** is responsible for producing, selling and servicing Ford brand vehicles in 51 individual markets and employs approximately 66,000 employees. In addition to Ford Motor Credit Company, Ford of Europe operations include Ford Customer Service Division and 22 manufacturing facilities, including joint ventures. The first Ford cars were shipped to Europe in 1903 – the same year Ford Motor Company was founded. European production started in 1911.*

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