

2017 FIA WTCC AFRIQUIA RACE OF MOROCCO 7-9 APRIL



The eagerly-awaited 2017 FIA World Touring Car Championship gets underway on the streets of Marrakech from 7-9 April when the North African city hosts WTCC AFRIQUIA Race of Morocco for the eighth time as one of the most open WTCC seasons for nearly a decade begins. With two WTCC dominators of recent times, José María López and Yvan Muller, taking on new challenges and the pacesetter factory Citroën squad having completed its planned three-year WTCC stint, picking their successors will be a very close call as several potential title winners prepare for on-track battle. They include: **Mehdi Bennani:** *WTCC Trophy champion tipped for big things by Sébastien Loeb* **Theo Björk:** *Swift Swede has race-winning pedigree with Volvo's factory team* **Nicky Catsburg:** *Endurance racer proved he can be a slick sprinter too* **Tom Chilton:** *Chil will aim to thrill during second season with Sébastien Loeb Racing* **Néstor Girolami:** *López's former nemesis is a double Argentine touring car champ* **Rob Huff:** *Briton gets a Citroën in his pursuit of second world crown* **Norbert Michelisz:** *Can the gamer turned racer be Hungary's first world champion?* **Tiago Monteiro:** *He raced in F1 and wants to be world No. 1 in touring cars.* As well as the wide-open nature of the championship fight, an emerging pack of rookie racers, including Yvan Muller's nephew Yann Ehrlacher, will bring added intrigue, while there are new formats and venues, upgraded cars and rule tweaks to further spice up the action. The championship's global tour features 10 stops in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and South America from April to December and the season opener in Morocco will take on added significance as it's the home event for Sébastien Loeb Racing's Mehdi Bennani. "It's one of the biggest events in Morocco and everyone is waiting to see if I can do a great result and fight for the win," he said. "Because people are expecting me to do well there is pressure but it's a positive one. I prefer to have this kind of pressure than having no pressure at all." Like Bennani, Honda factory race Tiago Monteiro is among the title favourites in 2017 after finishing third in the standings last season. But the ex-Formula One racer is braced for a big battle for glory: "The championship is going to be so wide open with so many possible winners and that makes it definitely more exciting for everybody."

WEEKEND HIGHLIGHTS

*Opening weekend of 10-event 2017 season featuring eight potential world champions *One of the most open seasons for nearly a decade excites star names *Semi-permanent track in Marrakech provides close racing and allows no margin for error *Huge crowds to cheer on home hero Mehdi Bennani *Rookie drivers out to make their mark in highly-competitive field *Ambient temperatures to hover around 32 degrees centigrade and test drivers and their cars *Extensive live TV coverage in North Africa and Middle East (MENA) and around the world

RACE DATA

Name: Circuit Moulay El Hassan
Rounds: 1 and 2 of 20
Circuit lap length: 2.971km
Lap record (qualifying): José María López (Citroën C-Elysée); 1m22.024s (130.3kph), 07/05/16
Lap record (race): Hugo Valente (LADA Vesta) 1m23.087s (128.7kph), 08/05/16
Opening Race laps: 18
Main Race laps: 21
WTCC appearances: Seven
Time zone: GMT +1 hour
Sunrise/sunset: 07h11/19h57 (9 April)
Average temperature: 13°C-27°C (April)

2016 RESULTS

Opening Race: 1, Tom Coronel (Chevrolet Cruze) 2, José María López (Citroën C-Elysée) 3, Yvan Muller (Citroën C-Elysée). Main Race: 1, José María López (Citroën C-Elysée) 2, Yvan Muller (Citroën C-Elysée) 3, Gabriele Tarquini (LADA Vesta)

PREVIOUS WINNERS

2015: Race 1: José María López (Citroën C-Elysée); Race 2: Yvan Muller (Citroën C-Elysée)
2014: R1: José María López (Citroën C-Elysée); R2: Sébastien Loeb (C-Elysée)
2013: R1: Michel Nykjær (Cruze); R2: Pepe Oriola (SEAT León)
2012: R1: Alain Menu (Cruze); R2: Yvan Muller (Cruze)
2010: R1: Gabriele Tarquini (SEAT León); R2: Andy Priaulx (BMW 320)
2009: R1: Rob Huff (Chevrolet); R2: Nicola Larini (Chevrolet)

WHAT'S NEW FOR 2017 *Factory teams from Honda and Volvo Polestar go up against leading privateer entrants *Revamped calendar features return to iconic venues Monza and Macau, a new track for WTCC Race of China, plus a mid-July date for WTCC Race of Argentina *Shortened schedule means every result counts *Main Race longer than before with more points on offer to the top 10 (new scale: 1=30 points; 2=23; 3=19; 4=16; 5=13; 6=10; 7=7; 8=4; 9=2; 10=1) *WTCC MAC3, the Tour de France-inspired time trial, continues with two more points for winning *FIA World Rallycross-style 'joker' lap planned for WTCC Race of Portugal in Vila Real *New two-day format to reduce costs for teams (Free Practice 1 and 2 now last 45 minutes each, no Friday Testing) *Renewed social media push with several innovations coming during the season *Use of 360-degree camera to give viewer the impression they are in-car with the driver

LATEST DRIVER NEWS *Factory teams Honda and Volvo Polestar both feature tweaked driver line-ups for 2017. Japanese racer Ryo Michigami replaces Rob Huff at Honda where he will partner Norbert Michelisz and Tiago Monteiro. Thed Björk gets two new team-mates: Nicky Catsburg and Néstor Girolami, while Yvan Muller has signed as a development driver for partner team Cyan Racing *Huff has returned to ALL.INKL.COM Münnich Motorsport after three years away to drive the German team's newly acquired Citroën C-Elysée WTCC. Mehdi Bennani and Tom Chilton continue to drive Sébastien Loeb Racing-run Citroëns and welcome new team-mate John Filippi, who has renewed support from OSCARO *There will be family pride at stake for rookie racers Yann Ehrlacher and Aurélien Panis. Ehrlacher is the nephew of four-time world champion Yvan Muller, while Panis's father Olivier won the 1996 Monaco Grand Prix and commentates on Eurosport France's WTCC coverage *Panis will partner Dániel Nagy at Zengő Motorsport, while Ehrlacher joins new team RC Motorsport *Esteban Guerrieri has secured a partial programme with Campos Racing with work underway to make it a full-season deal *Like Guerrieri, Tom Coronel will be Chevrolet Cruze mounted in 2017 after he extended his long-term agreement with Roberto Ravaglia's ROAL Motorsport backed by DHL

THEY SAID WHAT?

Norbert Michelisz (Castrol Honda World Touring Car Team): "My target is simple: to become world champion this year, and that has to start with a good points score in Morocco, especially while the Civic isn't carrying any compensation weight. Last year we were very fast at the revamped Marrakech circuit, which features a lot of low-speed corners and rewards a car that is well-balanced under braking and has good traction. Several upgrades to the car were made at our final pre-season test at the Hungaroring and I think we've taken a significant step forwards compared to where we were even a few weeks ago, so everyone in the team can feel confident of a strong performance."

Néstor Girolami (Polestar Cyan Racing): "I raced on a lot of street circuits in Argentina and I enjoy them a lot. From looking at pictures and videos, it's a very difficult track but you have to go to the limit – although a little bit less to avoid stupid mistakes in Free Practice – so you can push very hard in qualifying because being fastest in qualifying is 90 per cent of the weekend."

Mehdi Bennani (Sébastien Loeb Racing): "We know that it's a big challenge to do a race in this level so every time we need to renew the car, try another set-up. There will be a moment when we are struggling but this is the level of the WTCC. Marrakech is a nice track with lots of fighting and everybody is on the same level. You need to do everything on the limit but you can't touch the wall so it's a mix between. Sometimes you need to go on the limit, sometimes you need to flirt a bit with the wall. My preparations have been a mix between training and promotional work. I have a good programme of training with a new coach for this year and we try to be stronger in the physical way. But there are lots of events with partners and it's important to be present."

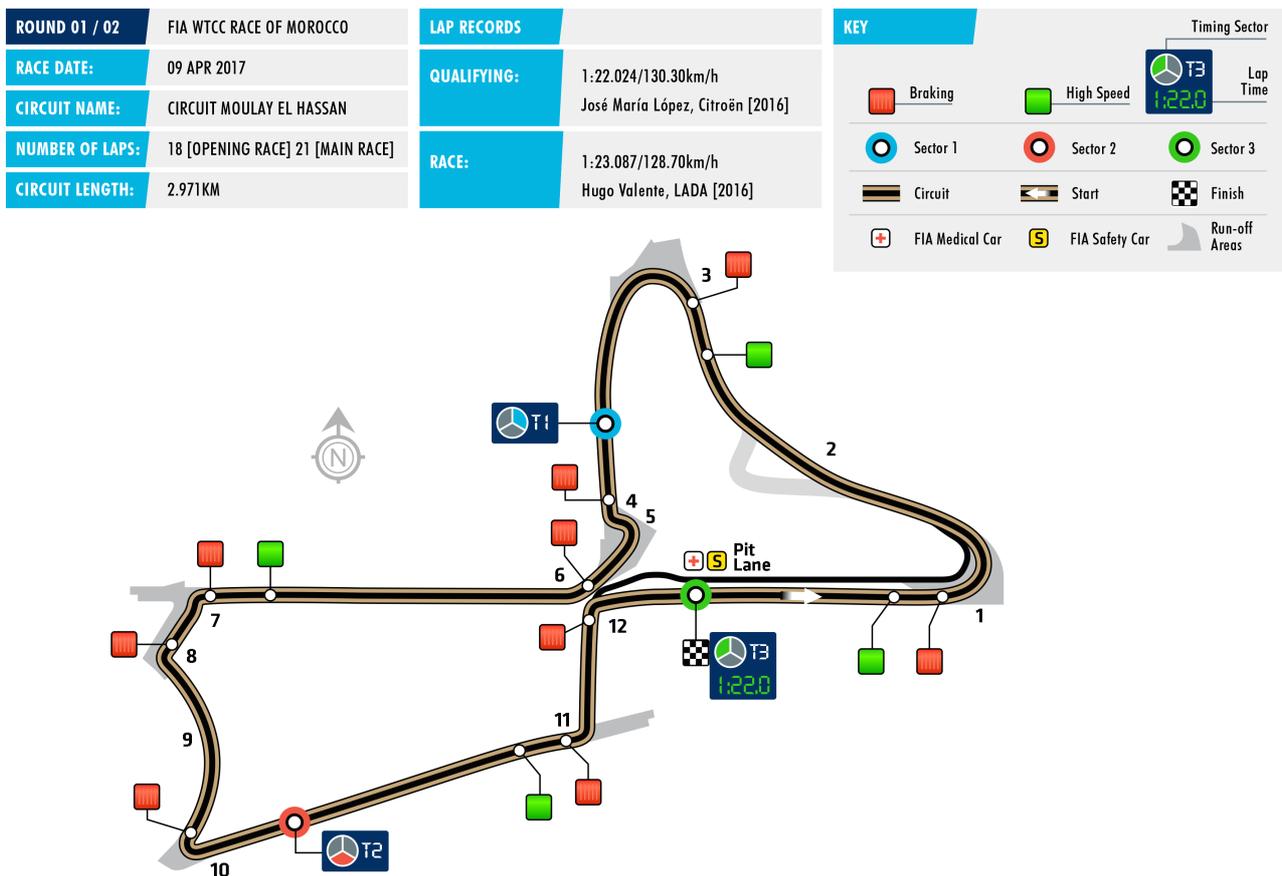
Tom Coronel (ROAL Motorsport): "It's a very difficult place. I've had some really bad memories there after two big crashes two years ago and three years ago. Last year we won so it's a big up and a big down. I feel confident on street tracks but we should be clever because it's the first race of the season and we have a good package. I am confident I can be on the podium."

WHAT HAPPENED IN 2016? Independent driver Tom Coronel ripped up the formbook by winning the Opening Race of FIA WTCC AFRIQUIA Race of Morocco after withstanding intense pressure from world champion and factory Citroën driver José María López for his first victory since 2013. With former WTCC title winner turned team boss Roberto Ravaglia watching from the pits, Coronel didn't crack after inheriting top spot from Hugo Valente when the LADA driver was ordered to serve a drive-through penalty following contact with DHL pole-sitter James Thompson. The Marrakech event then took a dramatic twist, with rain before the start of the Main

Race making for a slippery new-look Circuit Moulay El Hassan. But Rob Huff took the difficult conditions in his stride to lead home a Honda 1-2-3 with Norbert Michelisz second and Tiago Monteiro third. However, all Hondas were subsequently excluded for failing post-race technical checks, which handed victory to López, second to his Citroën team-mate Yvan Muller and third to LADA's Gabriele Tarquini. Local hero Mehdi Bennani made up for his frustrating qualifying to take the WTCC Trophy honours in the Main Race and maintain his title advantage.

TRACK GUIDE IN 100 WORDS Transformed from street circuit to semi-permanent race track for 2016, Circuit Moulay El Hassan is located in the heart of Marrakech's bustling hotel district. Built to FIA Grade II standards, the layout is the work of Hermann Tilke's renowned architecture agency and offers impressive views of the Atlas Mountains and Marrakech city wall. But with a compact lap of 2.971 kilometres (down from 4.545km) and a sprinkling of tight, wall-lined turns, there's no time for WTCC drivers to take in the scenery. Home hero Mehdi Bennani attracts a fervent following at this race, restored to season-opening status after two years.

TRACK MAP



MEDIA INFORMATION National Press Officer: Sanaa Smyej, s.smyej@publikart.ma, +212 661323331
Media Accreditation Centre location: Ryad Mogador Kasbah & Spa Hotel, Marrakech **Opening times:** From 08h00-18h00 on Friday 7 and Saturday 8 April and from 08h00-12h00 on Sunday 9 April **Media Centre location:** Inside T1 close to the main paddock area **Media Centre opening times:** From 08h00-20h00 on Friday 7 and Saturday 8 April and from 08h00 until the last journalist leaves on Sunday 9 April

MEDIA DIARY Friday 7 April: 08h00-18h00: Media Accreditation Centre open; 08h00-20h00: Media Centre open; 11h30-12h00: Pre-event press conference, Media Centre. In attendance: Mehdi Bennani, Thed Björk, Yann Ehrlacher, Tiago Monteiro **Saturday 8 April:** 08h00-18h00: Media Accreditation Centre open; 08h00-20h00: Media Centre open; 09h00-09h45: Free Practice 1 (extended by 15 minutes for 2017); 11h45-12h30: Free Practice 2 (extended by 15 minutes for 2017); 14h00-14h20: Autograph session (WTCC VIP Club); 15h15-15h45: Qualifying Q1; 15h50-16h05: Qualifying Q2; 16h10 (pit lane opens): Qualifying Q3; 16h30-16h45: WTCC MAC3; 16h50 (approx.): Post-Qualifying press conference **Sunday 9 April:** 08h00-12h00: Media Accreditation open; 08h00-until last journalist leaves: Media Centre open; 11h00-11h30: Autograph session (WTCC VIP Club); 14h30-15h00: Official WTCC driver family photo (starting grid); 16h35: Opening Race (18 laps); 17h05 (approx.): Opening Race podium; 17h45: Main Race (21 laps); 18h20 (approx.): Main Race podium; 18h40 (approx.): Post-Race press conference *Timings provisional and subject to change.*

ENTRY LIST (T = Indicates WTCC Trophy contender)

#	Team	Driver (Nationality)	Car
3	Sébastien Loeb Racing	Tom Chilton (GBR) T	Citroën C-Elysée WTCC
5	Castrol Honda World Touring Car Team	Norbert Michelisz (HUN)	Honda Civic WTCC
8	Zengő Motorsport	Aurélien Panis (FRA) T	Honda Civic WTCC
9	ROAL Motorsport	Tom Coronel (NLD) T	Chevrolet RML Cruze TC1
12	ALL-INKL.COM Münnich Motorsport	Rob Huff (GBR) T	Citroën C-Elysée WTCC
18	Castrol Honda World Touring Car Team	Tiago Monteiro (PRT)	Honda Civic WTCC
25	Sébastien Loeb Racing	Mehdi Bennani (MAR) T	Citroën C-Elysée WTCC
27	Sébastien Loeb Racing	John Filippi (FRA) T	Citroën C-Elysée WTCC
34	Castrol Honda World Touring Car Team	Ryo Michigami (JPN)	Honda Civic WTCC
61	Polestar Cyan Racing	Néstor Girolami (ARG)	Volvo S60 Polestar TC1
62	Polestar Cyan Racing	Thed Björk (SWE)	Volvo S60 Polestar TC1
63	Polestar Cyan Racing	Nicky Catsburg (NLD)	Volvo S60 Polestar TC1
68	RC Motorsport	Yann Ehrlacher (FRA) T	LADA Vesta
86	Campos Racing	Esteban Guerrieri (ARG) T	Chevrolet RML Cruze TC1
99	Zengő Motorsport	Dániel Nagy (HUN)	Honda Civic WTCC

ONLINE MEDIA CENTRE The new online Media Centre is a one-stop-shop for media professionals covering the WTCC. The site contains a press release archive, downloadable press kit, event guides, Q&As, high-resolution rights-free images, driver profiles, statistics, results, track maps, logos, accreditation details and much more. Visit <http://media.fiawtcc.com> for details.

WTCC STATISTICS:

All-time race wins (top 5): Y Muller 48; López 29; Huff 28; Menu 23; Tarquini 22

All-time pole positions (top 5): Y Muller 29; López 21; Tarquini 17; Menu 15; Farfus and Huff 11

All-time fastest laps (top 5): Y Muller 38; López 29; Huff 27; Tarquini 24; Menu 20

All-time laps led (top 5): Y Muller 571; Huff 344; López 301; Menu 297; Tarquini 295

FIA OFFICIALS

Chairman of the stewards	Paolo Longoni (ITA)	Technical Observer	Manuel Leal (ESP)
2nd international steward	Rob Jones (GBR)	Driving Advisor	Marc Duez (BEL)
Race Director	Miroslav Bartos (CZE)	Media Delegate	Richard Rodgers (GBR)
Assistant Race Director	Rui Marques (PRT)	Time keeper	Sébastien Mascret (FRA)
Medical Delegate	Jacques Tropenat (FRA)	Safety Car driver	Bruno Correia (PRT)
Technical Delegate	Carlos Barros (PRT)	FIA Coordinator	Olivier Steveny (BEL)

MORE INFORMATION: Richard Rodgers, media@fiawtcc.com, +44 7833470541 **Follow the WTCC on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram**

NEXT EVENT: FIA WTCC OSCARO Race of Italy, Monza, 28-30 April