



It's all change as new-look Killarney Historic Rally details announced

A new look Killarney Historic Rally was unveiled at the event's launch on Sunday evening.

The Towers Hotel on College Street was officially announced as the event's new title sponsor and headquarters.

The Towers Hotel and Leisure Centre is part of the ODR Collection of high-quality hotels in Killarney and the launch took place in a sister premises, The Killarney Plaza Hotel.

The Plaza, also home to Café du Parc and The Tan Yard Restaurant will be the place to be on Friday, December 1st.

The traditional town centre start ramp, always the first event in the Christmas in Killarney Festival, will be placed directly outside the town centre hotel.

For the first time, the cars will approach the ramp from the opposite side meaning the pre-ramp holding area will extend into Main Street to where the ramp used to be previously located.

These are just one of many changes announced at the launch on Sunday. It was already revealed that the rally will not visit Moll's Gap this year but will feature the return of Caragh Lake for the first time in three years.

A new stage near Killorglin, previously used in the Rally of the Lakes, but never for the Historic Rally has been added to the event schedule.

There will be a sting in the tail too for competitors, as a night stage has been reintroduced for the first time in many years.

Clerk of the course Anthony O'Connor said: "Our plans are at an advanced stage to create a motorsport festival on the streets of Killarney town, the two-day festival event will begin with a ceremonial start in the town centre on Friday at 7 pm on December 1st".

“Saturday morning starts with fast-flowing but technical Dromin followed by sweeping and classic Caragh Lake and the fast-flowing Kilgobnet stage.”

“Then into service at Liebherr Container cranes Killarney. This loop is repeated and into service again, before heading out to take on Rockfield in daylight, service again in Liebherr and out to complete the final stage of Rockfield in darkness.”

“The top three crews from each class will arrive back in Killarney for the finish ramp at 7 pm outside the Killarney Plaza Hotel.”

The event's associate sponsors are media and print partners, The Killarney Advertiser and official vehicle supplier, Reen's of Rathmore, Main Peugeot, Fiat, DS and Jeep dealers for Kerry.

LEADING HISTORIC ENTRIES

Some of the leading entries for the December 2nd rally were also announced at the launch.

They include defending champion Jonathan Greer & Niall Burns in their Ford Sierra Sapphire Cosworth.

The local contingent will be led by Alan Ring of the ODR Collection and his co-driver Adrian Deasy in a Subaru Legacy RS. They have finished on the podium for the last two years and will be aiming to make it to the top step this time around.

The 2023 Irish Historic Rally Champions Duncan Williams and Guy Weaver are on the entry list too in their Ford Escort RS1800.

“Following on from last year's successful event which for the first time ever saw 150 cars starting on stage one, it is hoped that this year's event will be bigger and better. Unfortunately, Molls Gap is out for this year due to roadworks but the choice of spectator-friendly stages and a short road section has once again appealed to competitors from far and near, including the USA, Australia, Belgium, The UK and both Northern and Southern Ireland,” added Mr O'Connor.

INTERNATIONAL ENTRIES

Fan favourite, Belgian Paul Lietaer returns in his Opel Ascona 400.

The London Irish Motor Club is represented by Paul McDevitt, the recently crowned Triton Showers National Historic Champion in his Ford Escort.

Former winner, Welsh man Melvyn Evans and his Cork-based Sean Hayde will compete in a Ford Escort.

The London-based Graham family are best known for competing in FIA European Historic Rally Championship events. Ernie Graham and Anna Graham have entered a Ford Escort RS while Will Graham and Karen Graham will drive a BMW E30 M3.

Former Dakar Rally competitor, Londoner, Harry Hunt, and his Welsh co-driver Steve McPhee return for a second year in another Ford Escort.

England's Les Allfrey has been coming to Killarney since the mid-1980s and he and co-driver Keith Fellowes return in their Austin Mini Cooper S.

Welsh drivers Berian Richards and Tomas Davies are familiar faces too around Killarney and both will drive Ford Escorts.

BMW BRIGADE

Aside from the Graham's example, there are several other BMW M3 E30s on the entry list. Donagh Kelly and Rory Kennedy will drive their Bastos example while local crew Paul Ahern and Kieran Murphy will debut a newly built example.

Michael Cullen and Sean Hasset have competed in European rallies since their last appearance in Killarney and return in their M3.

WORLD CHAMPION

Belfast's Liam Regan guided William Creighton to the Junior World Rally Championship in a Ford Fiesta Rally 3 but he switches to the driver's seat and will campaign a Skoda Estelle 130L in Killarney on the first weekend in December.

Regan's Motorsport Ireland Rally Academy teammates Eamonn Kelly and Conor Mohan have entered a Ford Escort RS1800.

John Meade and Owen Mulcahy will drive a newly restored Peugeot 205 GTi, once campaigned by 1995 World Rally Champion Colin McRae.

Brothers Eoghan and Cian Fogarty will drive their Per Eklund Toyota Corolla Twin Cam.

IRISH TARMAC RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Aside from the aforementioned Duncan Williams several of the ITRC historic rally championship regulars will get their 2024 season underway in Killarney.

They include Alan Watkins / Eoghan McCarthy (Ford Escort RS2000), Craig MacWilliam / Guy MacWilliam (Ford Escort RS1600), Michael McDaid / Declan Casey (Ford Escort RS1800), Peadar Walsh / Grace Walsh (Ford Escort Mk1), Denis Moynihan / Martin O'Brien (Ford Escort), Wayne Evans / John Smithwick (Ford Escort Mk2), Neil Williams / Anthony O'Sullivan (Ford Escort RS1800,) and Tom Clark / Alistair Wyllie (Ford Escort).

LOCAL ENTRIES

Local drivers include former winners Mark Falvey / James O'Brien (Ford Escort RS1600), Brendan Brosnan / Denny Greaney (Ford Escort Mk2), and Robert Falvey / John Doody (Ford Escort RS2000).

Kerry navigators will be represented by Brian Duggan who is on co-driving duty for Allen Treacy in a Ford Escort RS1800 and Tommy Commene who will guide Joe Whyte's Morris Mini Cooper S.

MODIFIED RALLY

Leading locals in the Modified Rally include Robert Duggan / Ger Conway and Conor Murphy / Sean Collins in their Ford Escorts.

There is also a strong visiting contingent in this section of the rally with Gary Kiernan, Kevin Eves and Chris Armstrong all confirmed.

A more detailed Modified and local bulletin will be issued in due course.