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ROVANPERÄ TÄNAK

A NEW CHAPTER FOR THE WRC:
THE FINN SAYS GOODBYE, THE ESTONIAN STEPS
BACK FROM FULL-TIME RALLYING

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EDITORIAL

The 2025 season marked a turning point in the World Rally Championship: Ott Tänak, the 2019 world champion, opted for a break after a long and demanding career, while Kalle Roivanperä, two-time world champion and a central figure of the new generation, announced his retirement to pursue a different path outside of rallying.

This special edition reviews the sporting careers of both drivers: the early results that propelled them beyond their home countries, their consolidation within factory teams, their adaptation to different generations of cars, and the statistical build-up that took them to the pinnacle of the WRC. It is a tribute. A record designed for those who closely follow the evolution of rallying and recognize that greatness in this sport lies not only in titles or years of competition, but also in the mark a driver leaves when they decide to close a chapter. Every farewell carries its own weight, and the departure of two champions like Tänak and Roivanperä invites us to look beyond the results: to the effort, the risks taken, and the hard-won victories.

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OTT TÄNAK

the champion's first kilometers

Ott Tänak reached the elite of rallying through sheer merit: speed, consistency, and a world title that confirmed everything his career had hinted at from the start. Following in the footsteps of Markko Märtin—a factory driver, five-time WRC winner, and key figure in Estonian motorsport—Tänak grew up in an environment that familiarized him with what it meant to compete at the highest level.

The Estonian's career began on his native island of Saaremaa, where he first got behind the wheel of a Volkswagen Scirocco at the age of 14. He covered his first competitive kilometers on the roads of Saaremaa, driving a two-wheel-drive Volkswagen Golf II in local rallies, where

he began to gain rhythm and confidence.

He started out wearing white, but over time he became famous for his yellow, a color reflected by the legions of fans who followed him around Estonia in matching T-shirts.

Finally, he made the leap to the wheel of a Renault Clio RS Ragnotti. The next step was the Subaru Impreza, with which he truly established himself. At 21, he won the Estonian Rally Championship in 2008, a result that propelled him beyond the local scene. A year later, he made his WRC debut, beginning a career that would make him one of the championship's most prominent names.

After establishing himself in Estonia, Ott Tänak made the international leap that would define his career. His first big opportunity came in 2010 when he was selected for the Pirelli Star Driver Programme, a scheme designed to identify and support the most promising rally talents. There, he competed in the PWRC with a Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X, contesting six events that revealed his true speed.

His class victories in Finland and Wales not only confirmed his progress but also positioned him as one of the system's most promising prospects.

In 2011, he took another step forward, finishing the year with a second-place finish in the SWRC, a performance that led directly to his first outing with a Fiesta RS WRC at the Wales Rally GB.

Finishing sixth in his debut season in the top class was a clear sign that Tänak was ready to compete with the best, and that consistency secured him his first official contract with M-Sport for the 2012 season. However, that campaign was inconsistent. The speed was there, as was his technical development, but adapting to the highest level involved some hard knocks. Even so, he achieved his first stage win in Sweden and his first podium in Sardinia, but a combination of mistakes, pressure, and accidents saw him dropped from the team at the end of the year.

The next two years were a forced return to lower categories, including a season in WRC2, where he had to rebuild his confidence and sporting credibility.

▼ ADAC Rally Deutschland 2010





Philips Rally Argentina 2012
José M. Cabrera



This process led to his return to M-Sport in 2015, a year marked by contrasts: he achieved his second WRC podium in Poland, but also starred in one of the championship's most memorable incidents when, along with his co-driver Raigo Mõlder, he plunged into a lake at the Rally Mexico.

Against all odds, the team managed to recover and repair the car overnight. Tānak returned to the race the following day, a testament to the resilience that would characterize his entire career.

The 2016 season saw him competing for DMACK, where he came within meters of achieving his first victory in Poland. A puncture in the final kilometers handed the win to Sébastien Ogier, a stark reminder of how close he came to success. Even so, he finished the year with another podium in Wales, Great Britain, and established himself as a key player in the driver market. The turning point came in 2017. Tānak strung together three podium finishes in six events, then secured his first victory in Italy – Sardinia and a second in the ADAC Rallye Deutschland. This performance saw him finish third in the championship and play a crucial role in M-Sport's manufacturers' title win. His performance made his move to Toyota Gazoo Racing inevitable in 2018, a period in which his pace reached its peak. He won four rallies, including Finland, Germany, and Turkey consecutively, and battled for the championship until the very end. Only reliability issues—such as a damaged oil pan in Wales—prevented him from clinching the title.



WRC
WORLD RALLY
CHAMPIONSHIP

RFEDA
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de Automovilismo

RallyRACC

55 CATALUNYA-COSTA DAURADA

Rally de España 2019

MICHELIN

SALOU
rally de españa

COSTA DAURADA

CATALUNYA

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In 2019, there was no doubt: Tănak completed a powerful season, with consecutive podium finishes and decisive victories that led him to become world champion and the first Estonian to achieve this feat. The achievement marked a turning point for both his country and his own career. After his crowning victory, he made an unexpected decision by signing with Hyundai for 2020. His debut, however, was eventful: a heavy crash in Monte Carlo and a season marked by the pandemic and technical problems dashed his hopes of defending his title. His victory in Estonia was the only moment of relief in a challenging year. In 2021, the difficulties continued. Although he won the Arctic Rally, suspension failures and retirements kept him out of contention for the championship. In 2022, he regained his form: he won in Sardinia, Finland, and Ypres, even challenging Kalle Rovanperä for the title until the final rounds, ultimately finishing second. Seeking a new impetus, he returned to M-Sport in 2023. An early victory in Sweden seemed to signal a resurgence, but the season was again plagued by mechanical issues, including failures in Mexico, the Acropolis Rally, and Sardinia. A breakdown at his home rally added to his frustration, although he closed the year with a win in Chile. In 2024, Tănak returned to Hyundai determined to reclaim the world title.

The season showed him to be competitive, incisive, and ready to challenge Thierry Neuville in a direct duel that extended to the final round. His pace was undeniable, but an accident on the final stage of the Rally Japan ultimately dashed his championship hopes. Despite the victories he achieved and several stages where he rediscovered his characteristic speed, the balance between performance and results wasn't enough to secure him the top spot at the end of the year.

The 2025 season put him back in the title conversation. He racked up three wins, seven podium finishes, and finished fourth in the Power Stage ten times, securing crucial points for the manufacturers' championship. His consistency was reflected in 17 stage wins, especially on fast surfaces where his aggressive style shone. However, isolated errors—including going off the road in Sweden and retiring due to mechanical failure in Sardinia—took him out of contention for the title.

He finished the season in fourth place in the drivers' championship.

Ahead of the Saudi Arabia Rally, the final round of the season, Tänak decided to take a break from his World Rally Championship career at the end of 2025. It wasn't a definitive retirement, but a reconsidered step after years of extreme demands, team changes, and a constantly evolving sport. For someone who built his career on effort, adversity, and pure speed, this temporary hiatus doesn't imply resignation, but rather a transition. His name remains one of the most influential of his generation, a driver who shaped the hybrid era of the WRC and who leaves the category with statistics to back him up: world champion, multiple winner on different surfaces, and a consistent protagonist in the decisive stages of each season.

Tänak's break doesn't mark an end: ***"This isn't a definitive goodbye to rallying. It's simply a change to reset, recharge, and refocus. I still deeply love this sport and I'm sure I'll remain connected to it in one way or another"***, the Estonian stated.

▼ Rally Arabia Saudita 2025



Honza Froněk



Ladislav Holeček

KALLE.. ROVANPERÄ



Kalle Rovanperä was born on October 1, 2000, in Jyväskylä, Finland, a city internationally renowned for hosting one of the most traditional events in the World Rally Championship: the Rally Finland. Growing up in this region meant being surrounded by motorsport, competition logistics, and the local passion for motorsports from a young age.

His father, Harri Rovanperä, competed officially in the WRC during the 1990s and early 2000s, achieving a notable victory in the 2001 Rally Sweden, which introduced Kalle to the world of competition from an early age.

At the age of eight, a video of him performing precise maneuvers on snow began circulating among fans and specialized media, putting his name on the radar of the motorsport world.

During this initial stage, his activity focused on controlled practice and gradually accumulating driving hours. The early years were not linked to official competitions due to Finnish regulations, which restrict the participation of minors in motorsport. This limitation would later prove decisive, forcing them to explore alternatives outside the country to continue their sporting development.



"When my father put me in a rally car, after teaching me to drive at the age of six, I never wanted to get out."

His name began circulating long before he was of legal age. At just eight years old, he became known through a YouTube video showing a young boy, wedged into a custom-made seat, skillfully maneuvering a rear-wheel-drive Toyota Starlet across a frozen lake. Fans quickly realized that this boy had speed in his blood: he was the son of Harri Rovanperä, a World Rally Championship driver—with Seat, Peugeot, and Mitsubishi—during the era of Carlos Sainz.



Edgars Leonovs

▲ Rally Kurzeme 2015 – Citroën C2 R2 Max

At 14, he was already competing, though not in Finland: he had to cross the border and compete in Latvia, one of the few places where a driver's license isn't required to participate in rally competitions. During the liaison sections, Risto Pietiläinen, a navigator with World Rally Championship experience and a former teammate of his father, was in charge of driving the car from one stage to the next. This accelerated training paid off very quickly. On October 18, 2015, just one day after turning 15, Rovannerä was crowned champion of the Rally of Latvia in the R2 class at the wheel of a Citroën

C2R2 Max, becoming one of the most prominent names in the competition.

In June 2017, the Finnish Transport and Communications Agency (TRAFICOM) granted an exception allowing him to begin the licensing process as soon as he turned 17, a year earlier than permitted by Finnish regulations.

On Monday, October 2, just one day after his birthday, Rovannerä completed the practical exam—having already passed the written test—and officially obtained his driver's license. This document was the final step he needed to formally enter the WRC.

▼ Rally Alūksne 2017 – Škoda Fabia R5



Edgars Leonovs





With his newly granted license, Rovaniemi made his World Rally Championship debut at the wheel of an M-Sport Ford Fiesta R5. His first appearance was at the traditional Wales Rally, where he finished 15th in WRC2 and 35th overall. He adapted quickly: at the next event, in Australia, he secured a victory in his class, signaling from the outset that his progress would not be linear, but rather upward.

"I'm very demanding of myself; I don't understand why I should settle for less. A bad result is never good", he declared at the time.

This mentality caught the attention of Škoda Motorsport, who signed him to their driver program. In 2018, he finished third in WRC2, with victories in Great Britain and Spain. That year also saw him experience one of the most violent accidents of his career, during a stage in Córdoba, when his car rolled several times and landed on top of a private vehicle and a tent. Despite the magnitude of the impact, there were no injuries, and both he and his co-driver escaped unharmed.

In 2019, he was crowned WRC2 Pro champion, securing his move to the top tier: Toyota Gazoo Racing. The Japanese manufacturer signed him for 2020, a year marked by the pandemic and a reduced calendar, where his best result was a third-place finish in Sweden.

In 2021, at just 20 years old, he achieved his first victory in the top category in Estonia. He repeated the feat in Greece and finished the season in fourth place in the championship.







▼ Rally de Suecia 2022



▼ Rally Tet de Letonia 2024



▼ Secto Rally de Finlandia 2025

His development was aided by an ideal technical environment: guidance from Tommi Mäkinen, direction from Jari-Matti Latvala, and the internal mentorship of eight-time world champion Sébastien Ogier.

The 2022 season marked Kalle Rovanperä's definitive consecration at the highest level. He wasn't just champion: he dominated with an authority the WRC hadn't seen for years. He won five of the first seven rallies—including two performances that are now part of his most enduring legacy: the rain-soaked victory in Croatia, where he drove with surgical precision in changing conditions, and the win in the legendary Safari Rally Kenya, one of the most demanding events in world motorsport, where his reading of the terrain and his ability to preserve his car were crucial. His sixth victory, in New Zealand, clinched the championship with two rounds to spare, finishing ahead of 2019 champion Ott Tänak and Thierry Neuville.

He broke the record for youngest world champion: by winning the title at 22 years and one day old, he surpassed the record held by Colin McRae since 1995. The year 2023 presented a different challenge. His teammate Elfyn Evans raised the competitive bar, forcing Rovanperä to maintain a more consistent performance, with no room for error.

After a series of fourth-place finishes in Sweden, Mexico, and Croatia, he regained his form with a resounding victory in Portugal. He triumphed again in Greece, skillfully managing terrain that punished the suspensions of Neuville and Sébastien Ogier. His maturity in analyzing the car's technical aspects and his ability to manage risks were key. Kaj Lindström, from Toyota, described him this way: ***"He's young, but very intelligent. When you listen to his comments, he sounds like someone with many more years in this sport. He handles the mechanics and the pace like a fully-fledged driver."***

His second place in the Central European Rally was enough to secure his second world title. ***"I valued this championship more than the first,"*** he said at the finish line. ***"It was more demanding, and we handled it very well. Jonne is the best co-driver in the world; much of the credit goes to him."***

Rally de Croacia 2022 ►



In 2024, with a part-time program, Rovannerä diversified his career by gaining experience on circuits and in drifting, but still maintained a high level in every WRC appearance. He won in Kenya, Poland, Latvia, and Chile, showing that he could be competitive even with less preparation time than his rivals. His season was also marked by frustration in Finland: while leading with a real chance of winning his home rally for the first time, a touch with a rock on the penultimate stage resulted in a rollover and retirement. That episode capped off a year that was inconsistent in terms of the calendar but solid in terms of results.

For 2025, he returned full-time with Toyota Gazoo Racing, with the clear objective of reclaiming the title that had been won by Thierry Neuville. During this season, he built consistency, stage wins, and speed on various terrains, maintaining an average performance that kept him consistently in contention.

for the championship lead.

The season also found him at a moment of personal reassessment. Between the pressure of the highest level, sporting commitments, and his interest in other disciplines, Rovannerä announced that 2025 would be his last full-time season in the WRC. The decision surprised the racing community, but it was justified by his own assessment: he had already achieved what he set out to do, had a solid track record, and was looking to develop in new areas of motorsport.

Today, with two world championships, multiple victories, and a technical ability that made him a benchmark of the hybrid era, Rovannerä closes his chapter in the WRC with a defined sporting identity: speed, analysis, consistency, and a competitive maturity rarely seen in such young drivers.

His legacy is linked as much to the titles as to the way he won them.

▼ Rally de Europa Central 2023



