

2018 FIA World Rally Championship (WRC)
Round 2: Rally Sweden

The MICHELIN X-Ice North delivers faultless display in wintry Scandinavia

Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Gilsoul produced a surefooted display in snowy Sweden and Norway to claim Hyundai's first victory of the 2018 FIA World Rally Championship. The Belgian pair shrugged off pressure from Craig Breen and Scott Martin (Citroën C3 WRC) who were also on form on the icy stages on their way to second spot. The Korean carmaker provided further evidence of its speed in the cold by claiming the week's bronze medal with Andreas Mikkelsen and Anders Jaeger.

In recent years, Rally Sweden has tended to take place on a mixture of melting snow, ice and dirt, a cocktail that can be particularly punishing for the MICHELIN X-Ice Norths' studs which protrude 6.5mm from the tread blocks. This year's event was held in pristine wintry conditions, however, so the drivers were able to draw maximum benefit from the ability of the 384 metal tips inserted into each one of their tyres to bite firmly into the icy ground.

"The FIA World Championship regulations state that only one type of tyre can be used for Rally Sweden. They also specify a maximum overall stud length of 20mm," says **Jacques Morelli**, the manager of Michelin's FIA WRC programme. "Two months ahead of the event, each tyre manufacturer has to decide by how much the studs will protrude from its tyres' tread blocks. We opted for 6.5mm which has been a particularly efficient choice over the years, giving a great deal of versatility when the conditions have been 'warmer'."

The studs' resistance to repeated impacts and the tread pattern's ability to clear snow were the two areas on which Michelin Motorsport's engineers focused during the design of the MICHELIN X-Ice North and, in winter, the same qualities are a priority for Scandinavian motorists who obviously have to cope with a mixed bag of ice, snow and occasionally clearer roads at this time of the year.

"Driving on snow and ice is always a huge challenge," explains the 2018 Rally Sweden winner **Thierry Neuville**. "Good front-end stability allows you to control the rear as you slide. You also need to think ahead as you turn into corners to be sure all four of your wheels are straight when you re-accelerate again. The grip and control delivered by the MICHELIN X-Ice North proved to be key factors over the past three days, especially as nobody had any plans to ease off in the slightest. We were kept under pressure all the way to the finish!"

The next round of the 2018 FIA World Rally Championship will take teams across the Atlantic Ocean for Rally Mexico (March 8-11), the first in a sequence nine gravel rounds which all feature very different types of ground.



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