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Audi in the 2017 FIA World Rallycross Championship

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Audi in the FIA World Rallycross Championship

EKS and Audi: Joining forces in World RX

Starting in the 2017 season, AUDI AG provides factory support to Mattias Ekström's rallycross project, EKS. Consequently, Audi Sport, in addition to its commitments in Formula E and the DTM, will be competing in the FIA World Rallycross Championship as well.

Longstanding Audi factory driver Mattias Ekström founded EKS in early 2014, subsequently leading the squad to the top of the world's standings with great personal commitment within the space of only three years. In the 2016 season, Ekström and EKS in the all-wheel-drive Audi S1 EKS RX quattro won both the drivers' and the teams' world championships against strong competitors from Ford, Peugeot, Volkswagen and numerous privateer teams. "We realized that it was becoming increasingly difficult for EKS to stand its ground against the factory teams, so we decided to intensify our commitment in the World RX," says Head of Audi Motorsport Dieter Gass.

Thanks to factory help from AUDI AG, the EKS project can continue. For Mattias Ekström, this means that his commitment has paid off: "We laid a lot of groundwork as a team in the first three years, gathered important experiences and set new standards with EKS. At the same time, it was clear to us that we'd need support for the future in order to be able to continue on this level. That Audi is now providing factory support to EKS makes me very happy. I'm convinced that rallycross has a great future, also with respect to potential electrification."

For Audi, entering the World RX with a factory commitment means breaking new ground. Although EKS was able to draw on support from Audi Sport's suppliers and partners in the past three years, the further technical development of the 560-HP Audi S1 EKS RX quattro will now take place in collaboration with Audi's motorsport department. Audi employees will be at the race tracks at all twelve World RX rounds to support the work of EKS, while the team will continue to independently run its racing commitments.

Winning the two world championship titles last year was very special for Audi Sport as well because besides Formula 1, the World Rally Championship (WRC), the World Endurance Championship (WEC) and the World Touring Car Championship (WTCC)



the World Rallycross Championship (World RX) is only one of five FIA world championships. Most recently, in 2012 and 2013, the Audi driver teams in the WEC were able to celebrate victories in the drivers' championship. The last title won by an individual Audi campaigner dates back more than 30 years. In 1984, Ekström's compatriot Stig Blomqvist won the World Rally Championship. "Stig clinched the title with quattro drive, in the WEC the Audi R18 e-tron quattro was successful and last year I was able to contribute a chapter to this tremendous success story in my Audi S1 EKS RX quattro," says Ekström. As the reigning rallycross world champions in the drivers' and teams' classifications, EKS has the clear aim this year: winning the title again together with Audi.

In parallel to the factory commitment in the FIA World Rallycross Championship, Ekström remains with Audi as a DTM driver. The Swede has extended his driver contract and is tackling his 17th DTM season in 2017. "I have good prospects in the DTM and would like to become champion for the third time," says the 2004 and 2007 DTM Champion.



Interview

Dieter Gass: “Rallycross delivers a spectacle”

The new Head of Audi Motorsport Dieter Gass about the brand’s entry in the World Rallycross Championship, Audi’s focus in the commitment and what the DTM and other series can learn from rallycross.

In 2017, Audi Sport is active in DTM, Formula E and World RX. How would you rate the significance of the rallycross program at Audi?

Rallycross with a factory-supported involvement is a completely new project for us. Even though it’s an FIA world championship it’s our smallest program. Even so, it is a very important one.

Why did Audi choose to provide factory support to EKS?

We’ve been watching the EKS project with interest from the very beginning. After three years, it was time for us to decide whether or not to provide technical support to Mattias Ekström against increasingly strong competition. The drivers’ and teams’ world championship wins gave us additional motivation to get involved. Another important factor for us is that the fielding of electric vehicles might be possible from a mid-term perspective in rallycross. Electrification is a focus topic for us.

Audi has always consistently used motorsport to test and further develop new technologies for subsequent use in production vehicles. Is this the case in rallycross as well?

This may be the case when electrification is introduced in rallycross. Whether that’s actually going to happen, and when, is not clear at the moment. I don’t think that it will become reality before 2019. But if it happens in a format that’s attractive for Audi, we’re going to look into it.

How do you assess the development of rallycross in general?

The popularity of rallycross has incredibly increased in recent years. You can also tell that this is the case by the fact that we’re not the only manufacturer with a factory-backed involvement. The events are spectacular, spectator-friendly and put the crowd in close touch with motorsport.



What can the DTM and other series learn from rallycross?

The things I particularly like about rallycross is its openness and atmosphere. It's a format that packs the whole weekend with action. This is what we're currently working on in the DTM and we're heading in the right direction.

With quattro permanent all-wheel drive Audi set a milestone in automotive history in 1980. Since then, more than eight million cars with quattro drive have rolled off the assembly line. How can this success story, also through the rallycross commitment, continue to be written?

With quattro in rallycross we're continuing the original idea of all-wheel-drive. Without all-wheel drive there's no point in competing in rallycross, so quattro is optimal. In terms of format, a rallycross event is a lot more interesting to the visitors than a rally where you can watch a car drive past a particular place on the route only once. Rallycross delivers a much greater spectacle. The races are short and dynamic and the spectators see immediately who won.

What role does Audi Sport play in the further development of the Rallycross-S1?

We're handling the development work especially in the concept stage. In the tests and races, EKS receives support from us as well, but the team will continue to independently run its racing commitments.

In addition to Audi, other manufacturers such as Ford, Peugeot and Volkswagen have factory commitments in the World RX. In the light of this, are you expecting costs to successively increase in the way this can be observed in other series?

This is a critical issue that needs to be closely watched. At the moment, the World RX, compared with other series, is still very cost-efficient. However, if this should change, then the World RX will not exist for a long time in the current form. Initially, a certain cost increase is inevitable because professionalism is enhanced as a result of manufacturers entering the series. But later it'll be important to keep costs under control.

quattro technology

The success story

With permanent quattro all-wheel drive Audi set a milestone in automotive history – no other manufacturer had a fast-running, lightweight all-wheel drive for large-scale production in its lineup in 1980. By the same token, Audi has always consistently used motorsport to test and further develop new technologies for use in production vehicles.

By the beginning of 2017, more than eight million cars with quattro drive have rolled off the assembly lines around the globe, and the writing of this success story is intended to go on, not least due to the brand's factory involvement with EKS. The fielding of quattro drive in rallycross marks the logical continuation of the original use of quattro all-wheel drive. Although all cars in the Supercar class have four-wheel drive, quattro technology proved unbeatable in 2016, resulting in the two world championship titles won by Mattias Ekström and EKS.

quattro technology debuted at the Geneva Motor Show in 1980 in the so-called Ur-quattro (original quattro). In 1986, Audi replaced the first-generation manual center differential lock by a Torsen differential that was able to variably distribute torque, followed in 2005 by a planetary gear with asymmetrically dynamic torque distribution. Audi has continually been pursuing the further development of the self-locking center differentials. They are regarded as the benchmark in terms of traction and driving dynamics, combined with very low weight, ever since.

Currently, quattro technology is available in more than 100 Audi model variants. On the Audi Q7, the Audi A4 allroad quattro*, the Audi A6 allroad quattro*, the Audi A8, the Audi R8 and on all S and RS models, the all-wheel drive system is. In 2016, 44 percent of all Audi customers around the globe opted for a quattro model.

Tailored to each model, Audi offers all-wheel drive in various versions. The compact model ranges with transverse engines use a hydraulically operated and electronically controlled multi-plate clutch installed on the rear axle. In the mid-engine R8 sports car, the multi-plate clutch sits on the front axle. These active systems variably

* Please refer to the list at the end of this basic info for a summary of the fuel consumption of all the models named in the text and available on the German market.



distribute torque to both axles, depending on the driving situation.

With quattro technology Audi celebrated numerous triumphs in motorsport as well. Not counting the era before the Second World War including the legendary Auto Union Grand Prix race cars in 1930s, the motorsport history of AUDI AG began with the Audi quattro. The dominant victories and two manufacturers' and two drivers' titles achieved with the "Ur-quattro" in the World Rally Championship between 1982 and 1984 were an important factor in the market success of quattro drive.

After Audi had turned rally racing upside down and stormed up Pikes Peak (USA) in record time on three consecutive occasions with the Sport quattro, the brand from Ingolstadt made quattro drive presentable in circuit racing as well. To demonstrate its capabilities and to strengthen its market position in the United States at the same time, the Audi 200 quattro was put on the grid of the TransAm series in which it celebrated the title win in 1988. Seven races in total were won by the car's successor, the Audi 90 quattro IMSA-GTO, as well. With the Audi V8 quattro two titles in the German Touring Car Championship (DTM) followed in 1990 and 1991, plus eleven national titles with the A4 in production-based supertouring car racing – with seven of them clinched in 1996 alone. They were followed 20 years later by the two titles for Ekström and EKS in the World RX.

Audi S1 EKS RX quattro

The world championship winning car

The Audi S1 name brings back memories to many rally fans. The racing version of the fabulous road-going quattro became a legend due to its Group B races and victories in the World Rally Championship as well as Walter Röhrl's triumph in the 1987 Pikes Peak International Hill Climb. This tradition now continues with the Audi S1 EKS RX quattro.

In the planning stage of the rallycross project, the S1 became the car of choice relatively soon. According to team boss Ekström, the subcompact car with its short wheelbase is perfectly suited for the sometimes very narrow rallycross circuits and, thanks to its very good traction and sophisticated suspension, is in contention for victory on fast tracks as well. Aside from these factors, the start is particularly crucial in rallycross, with as many as six cars battling each other in the races. The narrow circuits frequently offer only limited overtaking opportunities following the start.

Under the hood, a two-liter turbo engine provides the required power. The transverse inline-four unit delivers 560 HP and develops approximately 750 Nm of torque which, in spite of its 45-mm air restrictor, makes this engine a similar brute as the one used in the old Group B monster, although the vehicle's weight is only 1.3 metric tons – including the driver.

Gears are manually shifted using a sequential six-speed transmission. Thanks to the unit's short gear ratio combined with its extreme ability to transmit power to the wheels and systematic lightweight design the all-wheel-drive rocket catapults the driver from 0 to 100 km/h in 2.5 seconds. Not even Formula 1 cars accomplish this in less time. Top speed is 210 km/h, which is enough on the short straights in rallycross racing.

Obviously, as far as its exterior is concerned, the car features aerodynamic modifications. Large wheel arch cutouts and flared fenders, a roll cage, louvers and a massive rear double wing transform the fast city car into a rallycross monster bursting with vigor. The large air scoops in front of the rear wheels supplying the radiator installed at the rear end with fresh air are a special characteristic. There is a good reason for this unusual arrangement. If the radiator sat at the front, gravel and mud would obstruct air supply and cause the engine to overheat.



For the car's exterior design, Ekström and his team deliberately attempted to take cues from the legendary Audi S1 quattro from the 1980s. As a result, the fenders of the Audi S1 EKS RX quattro are "slightly sharper and more angular than those of the other rallycross cars," according to Ekström. However, the regulations are very strict in this respect. The width of the racing version may differ from the road-going car by a maximum of seven centimeters. In terms of length, they even have to be identical.

Another specialty in rallycross are the specification tires supplied by the U.S. manufacturer Cooper. "We have a cut slick that's very soft. In other series, you'd call it a qualifier," says Ekström. Due to the soft compound and the hand-cut tread, it is possible to drive on gravel rallycross tracks nearly as fast as on tarmac. In order to lose as little time as possible even while cornering the Audi S1 EKS RX quattro cockpit includes a special eye-catcher: an oversized handbrake projecting upward at a steep angle and directly installed next to the gear knob. When used, the handbrake decouples the rear wheels from the drivetrain, causing them to break traction and slide out. This makes it possible to drift through the tightest turns.

Technical data

Audi S1 EKS RX quattro (2017)

As of: March 2017

| Model | Audi S1 EKS RX quattro (2017) |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Vehicle | |
| Vehicle type | World RX Supercar |
| Chassis | Reinforced Audi S1 body with weld-in safety cell according to FIA standard |
| Engine | |
| Engine | Gasoline R4 turbo engine, 4 valves per cylinder, 45-mm diameter air restrictor acc. to regulations |
| Engine management | Bosch MS 5.0 |
| Engine lubrication | Wet sump |
| Cubic capacity | 2,000 cc |
| Power output | 560 HP |
| Torque | More than 700 Nm |
| Drivetrain/transmission | |
| Type of drive | Permanent quattro four-wheel drive, drive of rear axle can be decoupled by operating the handbrake |
| Clutch | 3-plate CFRP clutch |
| Transmission | Mechanical sequential 6-speed transmission |
| Differential | Adjustable multi-disc differential locks on front and rear axle |
| Suspension/steering/brakes | |
| Steering | Servo-assisted rack-and-pinion steering |
| Suspension | MacPherson struts, front and rear, adjustable gas pressure dampers |
| Brakes | Hydraulic dual-circuit braking system, monoblock light alloy brake calipers, ventilated brake discs front and rear with Pagid RS brake linings, brake force distribution between front and rear infinitely adjustable by the driver |
| Wheels | Cast magnesium wheels from OZ Racing, front and rear: 8" x 17" |
| Tires | Cooper Tires 225 / 640 - 17 |
| Weight/dimensions | |
| Length | 3,975 mm |
| Width | 1,840 mm |
| Height | 1,417 mm |
| Minimum weight | 1,300 kg |
| Fuel cell capacity | 20 l |

Driver lineup

Two turned into three

In the 2017 season, Mattias Ekström and his team, EKS, will be competing with three Audi S1 EKS RX quattro cars for the first time. Together with the Finn Toomas “Topi” Heikkinen driver world champion Ekström won the teams’ title last year. New signing Reinis Nitišs from Latvia is another strong campaigner, complementing the team this season.

In addition to the drivers’ title, Ekström and Heikkinen are again jointly battling for the teams’ title this year, for which two driver entries have been made. Last year, the Swedish-Finnish duo was heading the overall standings from the season opener in Portugal to the finale in Argentina for a straight 225 days. Together, Ekström and Heikkinen have won 44 of their total of 131 races. Four times Ekström mounted the top step of the podium during the season, more often than any other campaigner in the 2016 World RX. In the 12 rounds in Europe, Canada and Argentina, EKS celebrated five more podium places – culminating in the one-two result in the round held as part of the DTM at Hockenheim.

“Never change a winning team,” says Ekström. “I’m excited about tackling the title defense project with Topi. He’s a young but very experienced race driver who perfectly fits our team.” Heikkinen was 2014 rallycross vice champion and finished on podium three times last season. In the drivers’ championship he finished seventh in 2016. “That Mattias Ekström is placing his trust in me again this year is fantastic. I’m very proud to continue being part of this great team,” says Heikkinen.

This year, EKS is competing with three Audi S1 EKS RX quattro cars for the first time and in Reinis Nitišs from Latvia has signed a promising talent that has attracted attention on several occasions. “Together with Audi Sport we worked hard to field three cars and I’m very happy that we made this happen,” says Ekström whose team will receive factory support from AUDI AG starting in the 2017 season. “In Reinis we have another strong driver. Although he’s only 21 years old he already has a lot of experience in rallycross under his belt.”

In 2013, Nitišs became European champion in the Super1600 class. A year later, at the age of 18 and 181 days, he was the youngest driver to date to have won a world championship round in the Supercar class and finished the world championship in



third place. “Joining a world championship winning team is the dream of any race driver,” says Nitišs. “That’s a unique opportunity and I’m exceptionally happy that Audi and EKS have expressed their trust in me.” In the 560-HP Audi S1 EKS RX quattro, Nitišs will be contesting all twelve World RX rounds and battling for points in the drivers’ classification this year.

The driver lineup of EKS and Audi in the 2017 World RX

Mattias Ekström (S), Audi S1 EKS RX quattro #1, Drivers’ & Teams’ championship

Topi Heikkinen (FIN), Audi S1 EKS RX quattro #57, Drivers’ & Teams’ championship

Reinis Nitišs (LV), Audi S1 EKS RX quattro #15, Drivers’ championship



EKS driver statistics*

#1 Mattias Ekström (S)

Events: 38

Event wins: 10

Podium places: 17

Qualifying heat wins: 20

Participations in finals: 28

Total number of races (qualifyings, semi-finals, final): 210

Total points in drivers' championship: 783

#15 Reinis Nitišs (LV)

Events: 48

Event wins: 1

Podium places: 7

Qualifying heat wins: 5

Participations in finals: 13

Total number of races (qualifyings, semi-finals, final): 239

Total points in drivers' championship: 477

#57 Toomas Heikkinen (FIN)

Events: 49

Event wins: 2

Podium places: 8

Qualifying heat wins: 7

Participations in finals: 18

Total number of races (qualifyings, semi-finals, final): 255

Total points in drivers' championship: 633

* As of: November 12, 2017



Mattias Ekström (Audi S1 EKS RX quattro #1)

The world champion continues to be hungry

In 2017, Mattias Ekström will again be competing in a dual role. In the DTM, the Swede is aiming to secure his third title in the new Audi RS 5 DTM. And as the reigning rallycross world champion he has a single goal this year: to crown himself again in the World RX.

On achieving success in the World Rallycross Championship last year, Ekström once again proved that he is one of the most universal race drivers. To date, he has contested 177 DTM races for Audi Sport Team Abt Sportsline, having celebrated 22 victories and two titles (2004, 2007) in the process. With that, Ekström is the most successful Audi DTM campaigner in history. In addition, his career has seen him triumph four times in the Race of Champions, racing in the World Rally Championship, NASCAR and other series, and celebrating overall victory in 2011 in the world's most prestigious GT3 endurance race: the 24 Hours of Spa.

In rallycross, Ekström is more than just a race driver – since 2014, he has been a team boss as well, a dual role he was not able to imagine for a long time. When he was a young boy his father was racing in rallycross, but this sport was always too dirty for him. His opinion changed when he ran as a guest entrant in the 2013 European Rallycross Championship. On the way home, he decided to come back and win. With friends, partners and longstanding companions he began to put his plan into action – and went on to crown this effort with the world championship title. Much of what he has learned at Audi Sport and ABT is now reflected in his own rallycross team, EKS.

In spite of his numerous triumphs Ekström continues to be hungry for success. The dual burden of DTM and World RX demands iron discipline of the Swede, a perfectly structured calendar and a family that shares the 38-year-old's passion and accepts that the red-blooded racer is on the road many years of the week. Ekström lives in Austria near the German border with his partner, Heidi, and their two children, Hanna and Mats. For his numerous trips to the airport in Munich, to the team in Kempten or to Audi in Neuburg/Donau the multi-talent loves using his Audi Q7. "This year, I ordered an SQ 7 – the Q7 is simply the best family car for me."

Profile

Mattias Ekström (S)

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Date of birth | July 14, 1978 |
| Place of birth | Falun (S) |
| Residence | Ellmau (A) |
| Marital status | single (partner Heidi), one son (Mats), one daughter (Hanna) |
| Height/weight | 1.83 m/79 kg |
| Motorsport since | 1993 (Audi driver since 1999) |
| Hobbies | cross-country skiing, jogging, tennis, skiing |

Major successes

| | |
|-------------|--|
| 1996 | 1st Swedish Renault 5 Cup, "Young Driver of the Year" |
| 1999 | 1st Swedish Touring Car Championship (Audi A4 quattro) |
| 2004 | 1st DTM (Audi A4 DTM), 4 victories, 1st Gr. N Rally Sweden and Rally Catalunya |
| 2005 | 2nd DTM (Audi A4 DTM), 3 victories 1st Nations Cup Race of Champions |
| 2006 | 1st Race of Champions |
| 2007 | 1st DTM (Audi A4 DTM), 1 victory 1st Race of Champions |
| 2011 | 1st 24 Hours of Spa (Audi R8 LMS) |
| 2014 | 2nd DTM (Audi RS 5 DTM), 2 victories |
| 2016 | 1st World RX (Audi S1 EKS RX quattro), 4 victories |
| 2017 | 2nd DTM (Audi RS 5 DTM), 1 victory 2nd World RX (Audi S1 EKS RX quattro), 4 victories |

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|------------------|---|
| Homepage | www.mattiasekstrom.com |
| Facebook | facebook.com/mattiasekstrom.racing |
| Twitter | @mattiasekstroem |
| Instagram | mattiasekstromracing |



Reinis Nitišs (Audi S1 EKS RX quattro #15)

The record holder

Reinis Nitišs is the new signing at EKS. Although just 21 years old, he brings plenty of experience to the team and in the FIA World Rallycross Championship is holding a record no-one is going to take away from him soon.

Nitišs started his motorsport career in karting at the age of six and celebrated his first title when he was 13. At that time, it was too early to tell that Reinis would be following in the footsteps of his father, Aigars, who in 2005 became the Latvian champion in autotrek, a type of speedway racing with cars instead of motorcycles. Following a brief foray into motocross, Reinis Nitišs in 2011 switched to rallycross where the avid cross-country skier and endurance athlete continued his success story. In 2013, he became European champion in the Super1600 class. A year later, at the age of 18 years and 181 days, he was the youngest driver to date to win a World RX round in the Supercar class and finished the World Championship in third place. Consequently, Nitišs, in 2014, was voted Latvia's Sportsman of the Year.

The youngster regards switching to the World RX winning team, EKS, as a unique opportunity, intending to repay the trust placed in him by scoring top results in the 560-HP Audi S1 EKS RX quattro. But even off the race tracks, Nitišs, who is a celebrated star in Latvia, regularly makes his mark – for instance with his intensive involvement in the development and implementation of the rallycross track in the Bīķernieki Sports Complex in Riga. In addition, he pitted himself against the players of FC Arsenal in a goal wall shooting event last season and drove a speed boat.

Since last year, Nitišs has also been ambassador of the Road Traffic Safety Directorate campaign that aims to help sensitize aggressive drivers to conscious behavior in road traffic. In other respects, the Latvian, who is not just recognized by motorsport fans, is a sought-after star at home as well. For instance, he regularly appears in country-wide sports television shows and recently was a guest on the major prime-time evening show *Es mīlu tevi, Latvija!* as well.

Like his two EKS teammates, Nitišs privately uses an Audi. Preferring cars that are fast and comfortable, he has found the Audi A5 to be the perfect solution for him.

Profile

Reinis Nitišs (LV)

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Date of birth | December 16, 1995 |
| Place of birth | Jēkabpils (Latvia) |
| Residence | Jēkabpils/Rīga (Lettland) |
| Marital status | single |
| Height/weight | 1.74 m/69 kg |
| Motorsport since | 2001 |
| Hobbies | cross-country skiing, endurance sports |

Major successes

| | |
|-------------|--|
| 2009 | 1st Latvian and Baltic Kart Championship |
| 2011 | 1st Estonian and Baltic Rallycross Championship 2nd Latvian Autocross Championship |
| 2012 | 1st FIA North European Zone Rallycross Championship (Super1600) |
| 2013 | 1st FIA European Rallycross Championship (Super1600) |
| 2014 | 3rd FIA World Rallycross Championship (Supercar), 1 victory 1st Sportsman of the Year in Latvia |

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|------------------|---|
| Homepage | www.reinisnitiss.com |
| Facebook | facebook.com/ReinisNitissOfficial |
| Twitter | @ReinisNitissRX |
| Instagram | reinisnitiss |

Toomas “Topi” Heikkinen (Audi S1 EKS RX quattro #57)

The flying Finn

Toomas “Topi” Heikkinen is not just a fast and successful race driver but also at the front of the field of upbeat personalities. There was one occasion, though, that put a damper on his spirits: a serious accident in 2012.

Heikkinen is a perfect match for EKS. He has a zest for life, is open – and definitely not as reserved as some Finns. Perhaps that’s because he has two sisters and a brother or that, in spite of being only 26, he has seen a lot of the world. In 2012, during one of his many stops in the United States, he had a serious accident while practicing for the X Games in Los Angeles. Following a jump, the front of his car gets caught on the edge of the landing ramp and lands on the roof. Heikkinen is diagnosed with a comminuted fracture of his left ankle, plus numerous internal injuries.

Today, Heikkinen says that this accident may have been the most important experience in his career. A year later, he takes the X Games by storm. Two gold medals are the reward for hard work, including the victory in Munich achieved against Mattias Ekström, among others. The same year sees Heikkinen crowning himself champion in the young Global Rallycross Championship, which at that time is still part of the X Games. But Heikkinen is hungry for more and in 2014 switches to the newly formed FIA World Rallycross Championship in which he immediately finishes as the runner-up. In 2016, the pinnacle of his career to date follows: the teams’ world championship win with Mattias Ekström and EKS. His race engineer since 2014, Aleksi Koskinen, has a major part in this success. He is like a big brother for Heikkinen – someone who knows exactly what makes the race driver tick and can immediately tell when his fellow countryman has made a slip either on or off track.

Deeply rooted in his native soil, Heikkinen still lives in Joensuu in eastern Finland, where he was born and where he enjoys his dogs, unless there’s a Formula 1 race on TV. As a personal car, he drives an Audi A3, the perfect everyday car for him. “It has everything I need, comfort and enough room for my luggage,” says Heikkinen, adding with a smile, “But some day I wouldn’t mind an Audi RS 7 either.”

Profile

Toomas “Topi” Heikkinen (FIN)

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Date of birth | March 27, 1991 |
| Place of birth | Joensuu (Finland) |
| Residence | Joensuu (Finland) |
| Marital status | single (partner Elisa) |
| Height/weight | 1.70m/67 kg |
| Motorsport since | 1999 |
| Hobbies | Sports (active and passive) |

Major successes

| | |
|-------------|---|
| 2010 | 1st Finnish Rallycross-Championship |
| 2013 | 1st X Games Los Angeles 1st X Games Munich 1st Global Rallycross Championship |
| 2014 | 2nd FIA World Rallycross Championship (driver) |
| 2016 | 1st FIA World Rallycross Championship (team) |
| 2017 | 3rd FIA World Rallycross Championship (team) |

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|------------------|---|
| Homepage | www.heikkinen.fi/toomas |
| Facebook | facebook.com/toomastopiheikkinen |
| Twitter | @Heikkinen57 |
| Instagram | Toomasheikkinen |



Team EKS

A tight-nit outfit

For three years Team EKS has been successfully battling for victories and titles in the World Rallycross Championship. Mattias Ekström built his victorious squad from scratch. How an idea was transformed into a winning team.

For a long time rallycross was “too dirty” for Mattias Ekström. His opinion changed while he was running as a guest entrant in the 2013 European Rallycross Championship. The Swede whose father, Bengt, was on the European Rallycross Championship grid in the 1980s and 1990s, finished runner-up in his home round at Höljes and was enthralled by the unique atmosphere in the Swedish woods. As soon as he was on his way home he made initial phone calls and forged out plans for putting his idea into action with friends and partners. Janne Ljungberg, now Technical Director at EKS, tipped the scales. “If Janne hadn’t said that we’d be making this project reality EKS would never have come into existence,” says Ekström who knows Ljungberg from their joint days in the DTM.

After less than a year of preparation, Ekström contests his first World RX round in the Audi S1 EKS RX quattro on June 14, 2014. Just three weeks later, in his home round at Höljes, he actually stands on the top step of the winners’ rostrum. 857 days following his debut, he crowns himself world champion early and only 38 days later, EKS becomes teams’ world champion as well. The squad has since grown to 25 members – including the three drivers, Ekström, Toomas Heikkinen and new signing Reinis Nitišs, plus mechanics, race engineers, a small media team and chef Jonas Landmark, who has even cooked for the Swedish King before. “I personally selected all the team members,” says team boss Ekström. “That’s very important to me. All of them are experts in their field as well as friends of mine. They think the way I do and know how to jointly achieve success: with passion, commitment and in a really good mood.”

Thanks to factory backing from AUDI AG in the 2017 season, EKS is now supported by employees of the Audi motorsport department as well. One of them is Andreas Roos. Previously, the Project Leader Rallycross at Audi Motorsport was Technical Director LMP Racing Commitments, among other things and, in addition to plenty of experience, brings a lot of personal passion to the project.



The history of rallycross

From a stopgap to a resounding success

Rallycross was formed in the 1960s when British television was looking for a weather-independent motorsport to fill gaps in the program when, for example, a horse race would fall victim to the rain.

The approach used was simple, yet revolutionary. On tarmac-gravel tracks, about a kilometer in length, six drivers would compete with each other in four qualifying rounds, two semi-finals and a final. Wheel-to-wheel duels from circuit racing would be paired with spectacular drifts from rally racing. Daredevil maneuvers and car contact are not uncommon in these tightly scheduled races, each lasting about three minutes. Plus, the series features brute cars with up to 600 HP and acceleration from 0 to 100 km/h in 2.5 seconds – faster than the race cars in Formula 1.

February 4, 1967 is deemed to have marked the birth of rallycross. The first official competition was held at the Lydden Hill Race Circuit in Kent. The winner of this acclaimed premiere was future Formula 1 driver and Rally Monte Carlo winner Vic Elford who had borrowed a bright red Porsche 911 from the British importer AFN. In spite, or rather because, of the numerous collisions in the races and nearly all cars having only scrap value in the end, the crowd and the TV audiences were thrilled. But that was just the beginning, as by the end of the 1960s, up to ten million Britons would follow the races on television.

So it was only a matter of time for rallycross to successfully spread to the continent. The motorsport-mad Dutch were the first to pick up on it. At the same time, the sport saw rapid growth in interest particularly in Scandinavia. Even today, Sweden, Norway and Finland continue to be absolute rallycross hot spots. "Rallycross is an orgy," wrote the Austrian Herbert Völker in "Autorevue" as far back as in 1971. The first Europe-wide series was launched in 1973 in the form of the European Rallycross Championship. The grid would at times feature outlandish cars such as souped-up VW Beetles with 300-HP Porsche Carrera engines or Ford Escorts powered by BMW units from Formula 2. The cars in today's World Rallycross Championship have about twice as much horsepower. "The cars are overpowered," admits Ekström who has about 560 horsepower under the hood of his Audi S1 EKS RX quattro.



As interest kept growing, the FIA appeared on the scene in 1976, inviting entries by rallycross drivers for the FIA European Cup and tightening the regulations. This did not put a damper on enthusiasm for the series, though. Quite the opposite was true. The late 1980s and early 1990s are still regarded as the heyday of rallycross. Division 1 featuring two-wheel drive Group A cars was dominated by 14-time European champion Kenneth Hansen who, in his Ford Sierra RS 500 Cosworth, would occasionally be fighting a gripping duel with Mattias Ekström's father, Bengt.

The actual "top tier," though, was an even greater crowd-puller. Competing in Division 2 were extremely modified four-wheel drive race cars originally homologated for Groups A or B and powered by engines delivering up to 750 HP. One of the dominant competitors was "Mr. Rallycross," Martin Schanche. The six-time European champion is regarded as Norway's Michael Schumacher and for years was one of the celebrated superstars in rallycross. In 1987, the Group B monsters banned from the World Rally Championship began to experience their renaissance in Division 2. Behemoths such as the Peugeot 205 T16 E2, the Ford RS200 E2 or the Audi Sport quattro S1 found a new home in the European Rallycross Championship and went on to define its image in the subsequent years.

Following the turbo race cars' swan song and a few modifications of the regulations in the mid-1990s, rallycross racing became a clearly less prominent topic in the media. Cost savings and a lack of professionalism in marketing caused the series to fall into a deep slumber. Only as a result of IMG, the world's largest sports marketing agency with more than a billion U.S. dollars in sales, coming in to promote the series, plus its upgrading from a European to a World Championship in 2014, has rallycross been experiencing its second spring.



The 2017 FIA World Rallycross Championship

12 events on three continents

The fourth season of the FIA World Rallycross Championship promises suspense galore. 18 permanent entrants and a large number of guests compete for podium positions in the twelve events on three continents. One of the highlights will be the season finale in South Africa, the first ever World RX round to be held on the African continent.

Mattias Ekström and his team, EKS, have to tackle fierce competition again in the FIA World Rallycross Championship. A total of 18 permanent entrants will be racing for the World RX crown this season. "The Peugeot and Ford factory teams have no doubt done their homework and the newly formed Volkswagen team with Petter Solberg and Johan Kristoffersson is going to try to make life difficult for us as well," says double world champion Ekström. "But we're well prepared and are going to give our all to again win both World RX titles."

A total of twelve rounds are on this year's calendar including two in Germany, at the Hockenheimring and at the Estering. With rounds at Trois-Rivières (Canada) and Cape Town (South Africa) the World RX will also visit venues outside of Europe twice. Particularly the premiere at the Cape of Good Hope is being awaited with eager anticipation. The race at the Killarney International Raceway on the outskirts of Cape Town has taken Argentina's place as the venue for the season finale and boasts an impressive view of Table Mountain. In 165 countries around the world, the races will be broadcast live.

The regulations have not changed compared to last year. In 2017, the drivers are going to determine a winner in four qualifying heats, plus two semi-finals and a final at all events. Lots are drawn on the Friday of the race weekend to determine the pairings for the heats. Each session consists of several heats with up to five cars racing four laps respectively. Rather than the positions achieved, it is the times clocked that matter in these sessions. After all the qualifying heats have been completed, all drivers are listed in an overall table, receiving points in descending order for the intermediate classification. The winner of a heat receives 50 points. These results produce the pairings for the next session – starting with the five slowest up to the great showdown with the fastest drivers in a direct comparison. Following the four qualifying heats, the results are added up. The twelve drivers with the highest



point score move into the semi-final sessions where the name of the game is six drivers and six laps. Now the campaigners no longer start directly side by side as in the qualifying heats, but from an offset grid. The top three finishers in the two semi-finals progress to the final which follows the same format as the semi-finals. The driver who crosses the finish line in first place is the winner of the race weekend.

Now the time has come to do the math. The final winner is not necessarily the driver who has scored the most points because the campaigners have three opportunities to score. The top 16 from the intermediate classification following the qualifying heats receive points: position one earns 16 followed by the subsequent positions down to 16, for which one point is awarded. All semi-finalists add points to their tallies as well (6-5-4-3-2-1 each). In the final, the winner receives eight points, while the driver finishing in sixth place gets one (8-5-4-3-2-1). Consequently, a driver can score a maximum of 30 points (16+6+8) for the drivers' classification on a race weekend.

New this year is the introduction of a video monitoring system on all circuits. As car contacts with opponents are "part of the program" in rallycross, but do not always conform to the regulations, the multi-camera system is intended to assist the race director and stewards of the meeting in the case of controversial decisions. The system provides them with live footage of the entire track which they will re-evaluate in case of doubt. The list of penalties provides for a driver who has been found guilty of three infractions within one season to be stripped of five championship points, ten for six and 15 for eight breaches, and exclusion from the championship in the case of ten infractions.



World Rallycross Championship statistics*

All driver world champions

- 2014** Petter Solberg (N)
- 2015** Petter Solberg (N)
- 2016** Mattias Ekström (S)
- 2017** Johan Kristoffersson (S)

All team world champions

- 2014** Olsbergs MSE
- 2015** Team Peugeot Hansen
- 2016** EKS
- 2017** PSRX Volkswagen Sweden

Largest number of World RX rounds (49 to date)

- 49** Andreas Bakkerud (N), Timmy Hansen (S), Topi Heikkinen (FIN),
Petter Solberg (N), Timur Timerzyanov (RUS)

Largest number of final participations

- 38** Petter Solberg (N)
- 34** Andreas Bakkerud (N), Timmy Hansen (S)

Largest number of event wins

- 10** Mattias Ekström (S), Petter Solberg (N)
- 9** Johan Kristoffersson (S)

Largest number of podium places

- 24** Petter Solberg (N)
- 22** Timmy Hansen (S)
- 18** Andreas Bakkerud (N), Mattias Ekström (S)

Largest number of qualifying overall victories (195 to date)

- 56** Petter Solberg (N)
- 35** Johan Kristoffersson (S)
- 31** Timmy Hansen (S)

* As of: November 12, 2017



Events

2017 World RX Calendar

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1) Apr 01–02 | World RX of Barcelona (E) |
| 2) Apr 22–23 | World RX of Portugal, Montalegre (P) |
| 3) May 05–07 | World RX of Hockenheim (D) |
| 4) May 13–14 | World RX of Belgium, Mettet (B) |
| 5) May 27–28 | World RX of Great Britain, Lydden Hill (GB) |
| 6) Jun 10–11 | World RX of Norway, Hell (N) |
| 7) Jul 01–02 | World RX of Sweden, Höljes (S) |
| 8) Aug 05–06 | World RX of Canada, Trois-Rivières (CDN) |
| 9) Sep 02–03 | World RX of France, Lohéac (F) |
| 10) Sep 16–17 | World RX of Latvia, Riga (LV) |
| 11) Sep 30–Oct 01 | World RX of Germany, Estering (D) |
| 12) Nov 11–12 | World RX of South Africa, Cape Town (ZA) |

Track description

1) World RX of Barcelona (E)

Date: April 01–02

Track: Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya, 25 km north of Barcelona

Track length: 1.135 km (Joker lap: 1.235 km)

Surface: 60% tarmac, 40% gravel

Turns: 7 left, 4 right

Top speed: approx. 171 km/h

Lap record: Mattias Ekström (S), 42.826s (2017)

Average speed: approx. 95.41 km/h

Winner 2017: Mattias Ekström (S), 4m 32.260s

The review

The 2017 FIA World Rallycross Championship could not have been off to a better start from Audi and EKS's point of view. The season opener at the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya saw Mattias Ekström triumph. The start to the season's first race weekend had ups and downs in store for Ekström and his teammates, Toomas Heikkinen (FIN) and Reinis Nitišs (LV). "Saturday was incredibly difficult," says Ekström. "The weather situation kept changing – sun, rain, sun, rain ... In rallycross with its many single races, that's extremely complicated – at one time you have an advantage and others a disadvantage." Ekström caught a rain shower in his second race and at the end of day one was only in position eleven of the overall classification. Heikkinen had better luck. The Finn did the best job of coping with the changeable conditions and was leading after day one.

On Sunday, the prerequisites changed. In bright sunshine and on a dry track, Ekström was able to fully use the strengths of his 560-HP Audi S1 EKS RX quattro and at the end of the four qualifying sessions was trailing Timo Scheider in second place. For the semi-finals of the twelve best drivers, Heikkinen (P7) and Nitišs (P10) qualified as well. However, both EKS campaigners were eliminated in the penultimate session. Ekström on the other hand dominated the action, took the top spot after having started from pole position and in the final prevailed with a lights-to-flag victory as well. "All in all, it was a terrific weekend," says Ekström. "I won at Barcelona in 2016, and now I did it again. My whole team did a fantastic job and we scored important points for both classifications."

Track description

2) World RX of Portugal, Montalegre (P)

Date: April 22–23

Track: Circuito Internacional de Montalegre, 150 km northeast of Porto

Track length: 1.010 km (Joker lap: 1.130 km)

Surface: 60% tarmac, 40% gravel

Turns: 5 left, 7 right

Top speed: approx. 169 km/h

Lap record: Johan Kristoffersson (S), 37.802s (2017)

Average speed: approx. 96.19 km/h

Winner 2017: Mattias Ekström (S), 3m 59.345s

The review

Everything continues to run according to plan for Mattias Ekström and his EKS team in the FIA World Rallycross Championship 2017. At the second round in Montalegre, the defending World Champion beat nine-time Rally World Champion Sébastien Loeb in a thrilling finale. With his second victory this season, the Swede extended his lead in the drivers' classification. In the team classification, World Champion EKS sits in second place behind the PSRX Volkswagen Sweden squad.

Ekström and his team-mates Toomas Heikkinen (FIN) and Reinis Nitišs (LV) initially had to contend with some problems on the technically very demanding track close to the Spanish border. "We were not the quickest for a long time here this weekend," admitted the overjoyed Ekström after the finale. "But we never give up. In the end it was one of the most hard fought wins in my rallycross career." In the final, the 38-year-old took the lead after making a perfect start. However, after making a mistake on the last lap a tough battle erupted with Sébastien Loeb, which the Swede ultimately won.

On only his second competitive start in the Audi S1 EKS RX quattro, the 21-year old Nitišs also made the final for the best six drivers. The Latvian, the youngest ever race winner in World Rallycross Championship history, was fifth after a courageous race. "A big compliment to Reinis," said Ekström. "He did a great job again, but also Topi proved again what he and his car are capable of." The 26-year-old Heikkinen's hopes of another podium finish came to a premature end after finishing fifth in his semi-final – last year the Finn finished third in Portugal on his first start for EKS.

Track description

3) World RX of Hockenheim (D)

Date: May 05–07

Track: Hockenheimring, 20 km south of Mannheim

Track length: 1.280 km

Surface: 60% tarmac, 40% gravel

Turns: 8 left, 4 right

Top speed: approx. 179 km/h

Lap record: Petter Solberg (N), 53.780s (2017)

Average speed: approx. 85.68 km/h

Winner 2017: Mattias Ekström (S), 6m 04.066s

The review

Mattias Ekström and his Team EKS remain the measure of all things in the 2017 FIA World Rallycross Championship. In round three of the season at the Hockenheimring, the reigning world champion was again not to be beaten. In difficult weather conditions, the Swede, shortly before the DTM qualifying session for race two, prevailed against his compatriots Johan Kristoffersson and Timmy Hansen in a gripping final. In the drivers' classification, Ekström has extended his lead. In the teams' classification, world champions EKS continue to trail Team PSRX Volkswagen Sweden in second place.

At the Hockenheimring, Ekström continued last year's success with a forceful drive. "Winning here at Hockenheim, in front of the many DTM and rallycross fans, is an incredible feeling," said Ekström with a big grin on his face. For a long time it did not seem like the Swede would be able to celebrate another success. Although Ekström and his teammates, Reinis Nitišs and Toomas Heikkinen, had again qualified for the semi-final of the twelve best drivers, positions four, eleven and twelve were not a good starting base.

"On Friday and Saturday, we had a few problems keeping pace with the competition," said Ekström. "Unfortunately, due to my double commitment in the World RX and the DTM, I wasn't able to spend a lot of time with the team and to help getting a handle on these issues. But the guys burned the midnight oil from Thursday on and did another fantastic job." In drizzling rain on an extremely slippery track, Heikkinen completed the good team result clinched by EKS.

Track description

4) World RX of Belgium, Mettet (B)

Date: May 13–14

Track: Circuit Jules Tacheny, 80 km southeast of Brussels in Wallonia

Track length: 1.031 km (Joker lap: 1.102 km)

Surface: 61% tarmac, 39% gravel

Turns: 6 left, 6 right

Top speed: approx. 171 km/h

Lap record: Johan Kristoffersson (S), 38.074s (2017)

Average speed: approx. 97,48 km/h

Winner 2017: Johan Kristoffersson (S), 4m 02.316s

The review

Mattias Ekström suffered a minor setback in round four of 2017 World RX. At Mettet in an all-Scandinavian final, the reigning world champion finished in position four but, for the first time this season, had to yield to the competition on podium.

Initially, events at the Circuit Jules Tacheny seemed to be a repetition of the most recent rounds. Ekström and his teammates, Toomas Heikkinen and Reinis Nitišs, were struggling to keep pace with the front runners in the first sessions. “Saturday was rough,” says Ekström, who after two of four qualifying rounds was only ranked in position seven. “Q3 and Q4 were highs and lows then – a really good result and a really bad one after we suffered suspension damage in Q4. That cost us a better grid position in the semi-final.” There, Ekström took position three and, as a result, qualified for the final of the top six drivers. “From the third row, I tried everything, but overtaking here is near-impossible. Fourth place was the best I could do.”

His teammate Heikkinen for the fourth time this season qualified for the semi-final where he fought a number of fierce position battles and was ultimately eliminated in sixth place. “This is not the result I was hoping for. I’ve won twice before in Belgium, but this weekend I was lacking that little bit of fortune you need in rallycross.” Nitišs was in a similar situation. In the third Audi S1 EKS RX quattro, he won two of his four qualifying rounds, but in position 13 barely missed the opportunity to compete in the semi-final. “Absolutely disappointing.”

Track description

5) World RX of Great Britain, Lydden Hill (GB)

Date: May 27–28

Track: Lydden Hill Race Circuit, about 5 kilometers from Dover

Track length: 1.335 km (Joker lap: 1.420 km)

Surface: 60% tarmac, 40% gravel

Turns: 3 left, 4 right

Top speed: approx. 173 km/h

Lap record: Petter Solberg (N), 39.728s (2017)

Average speed: approx. 120.97 km/h

Winner 2017: Petter Solberg (N), 4m 09.602s

The review

To mark the 50th anniversary of rallycross at the Lydden Hill Race Circuit, Mattias Ekström and his team mates Toomas Heikkinen und Reinis Nitišs experienced a weekend with several obstacles. “I started well and held third place consistently in the qualifying sessions behind the strong Polos,” said Ekström. “In the semi-final, things weren’t quite right, which is why I had to start the finale from the third row.” After making a good start and a thrilling battle with Sébastien Loeb, a tire failure dropped the Swede down the order. At the end, he finished fifth. “We have to be honest. Winning here was never on the cards, but a podium finish was. But to achieve this, everything would have had to run perfectly.”

Toomas Heikkinen qualified for the semi-final for the fifth time this season, but missed the final after finishing sixth. “The semi-final is always the minimum goal. It’s disappointing that it wasn’t quite enough again this time, but the engine failure on Saturday had me playing catchup immediately,” explained the Finn. Nitišs fared much worse and as 16th overall was demoted to spectating after qualifying. “I’ll have to forget this weekend quickly and look forward.”

Track description

6) World RX of Norway, Hell (N)

Date: June 10–11

Track: Lånkebanen Hell, 30 km northeast of Trondheim

Track length: 1.019 km (Joker lap: 1.110 km)

Surface: 63% tarmac, 37% gravel

Turns: 3 left, 6 right

Top speed: approx. 156 km/h

Lap record: Timur Timerzyanov (RUS), 37.731s (2016)

Average speed: approx. 97.22 km/h

Winner 2017: Johan Kristoffersson (S), 3m 57.461s

The review

Mattias Ekström took fourth place at the sixth round of the FIA World Rallycross Championship 2017 in Hell. In his tenth World Championship finale in a row, the defending rallycross World Champion missed yet another podium finish by 0.4 seconds. Ekström made a flying start around the rollercoaster track in Norway. Despite torrential rain, the Swede coped the best with the slippery track at the wheel of his Audi S1 EKS RX quattro, and led the overall classification after the first day. “I was a little surprised that we were so fast in the wet, but that was quattro weather,” joked Ekström after the final. “In the dry conditions on Sunday, we struggled again to match the pace of the competition. In the final we lost crucial ground right at the start. This was our own mistake and this ultimately cost us the podium finish.” Although Ekström leaves Norway without a trophy, he still scored 23 important points for the overall standings. After six of twelve rounds, the World Champion is eight points behind the leading VW driver Johan Kristoffersson.

Ekström’s team mates Toomas Heikkinen (FIN) und Reinis Nitišs (LV) also made the semi-final runoffs for the twelve best drivers. However, with fifth and sixth places the two EKS drivers had to bury any hopes of making the final. For the first time all three Audi S1 EKS RX quattro competed together in the same semi-final. “I have reached the semi-final in all six rounds this season, but only once the finale,” says Heikkinen deflated. “This is not my goal.” Nitišs summarizes similarly: “I had a weekend with several setbacks – a puncture in qualifying 2, Ken Block made a hard move on me in the semi-final and then it’s simply not enough,” analyzed the disappointed Latvian.

Track description

7) World RX of Sweden, Höljes (S)

Date: July 01–02

Track: Höljes Motorstadion, 200 km north of Karlstad (S)

Track length: 1.210 km (Joker lap: 1.250 km)

Surface: 60% tarmac, 40% gravel

Turns: 6 left, 5 right

Top speed: approx. 147 km/h

Lap record: Johan Kristoffersson (S), 41.278s (2017)

Average speed: approx. 105.53 km/h

Winner 2017: Johan Kristoffersson (S), 4m 14.579s

The review

Round seven of the 2017 FIA World Rallycross Championship in Höljes was a weekend to forget for Audi and EKS. At EKS' home round in Sweden of all events, all three drivers missed the semi-finals. The team had started the "magic weekend" with great ambitions. Even without Ekström, who was racing in the DTM at the Norisring this weekend, the squad was intent on continuing the 2014 and 2015 successes when the local hero went home as the winner on both occasions.

This year, however, even the qualifying sessions revealed that the necessary pace was lacking. On Saturday, Reinis Nitišs as the best EKS campaigner was ranked only in position twelve and, as a result, would have just barely qualified for the semi-finals of the twelve fastest drivers on Sunday. Plus, on Sunday, there were some technical issues. In the final qualifying session, the suspension of the Latvian's car broke, dashing all hopes of making it into the semi-finals.

Consequently, it was up to Toomas Heikkinen to finish the weekend that left something to be desired as the best-placed EKS driver. However, position 14 was anything but a perfect result. For Heikkinen, a victory in the third qualifying was followed by a setback in the last race when the Finn, after a collision with Timo Scheider and a subsequent spin, was only able to drag his damaged Audi S1 EKS RX quattro to the finish line. Ekström's stand-in P-G Andersson in 17th overall complemented the worst result achieved by EKS since May 2015. The last time the entire squad had missed the semi-final rounds was at the Hockenheimring exactly 792 days ago.

Track description

8) World RX of Canada, Trois-Rivières (CDN)

Date: August 05–06

Track: Circuit Trois-Rivières, 125 km northeast of Montreal

Track length: 1.370 km (Joker lap: 1.455 km)

Surface: 59% tarmac, 41% gravel

Turns: 4 left, 7 right

Top speed: approx. 200 km/h

Lap record: Timur Timerzyanov (RUS), 47.141s (2016)

Average speed: approx. 104.62 km/h

Winner 2017: Johan Kristoffersson (S), 5m 02.704s

The review

Toomas Heikkinen continued his streak in the eighth round of FIA World Rallycross Championship in Trois-Rivières by reaching the final in Canada for the fourth time in succession – a record. Any hopes of a podium finish were however destroyed by a slow puncture. The Finn was fifth in the end.

Mattias Ekström was forced to retire in the semi-final with clutch problems. “Saturday was a good start, even if we didn’t have the paces of the two Polos of Johan Kristoffersson and Petter Solberg,” said Ekström. “Things also started very well on Sunday in the dry.” The Swede had qualified third for the final races for the best twelve drivers, and started from the front row. A problem with the clutch initially dropped him back, before he had to park his Audi S1 EKS RX quattro on the penultimate lap without drive. “A good weekend until the semi,” summarized Ekström.

For the third EKS driver Reinis Nitišs the weekend was already over after qualifying. Due to a problem with the propshaft, the Latvian finished day one in only 19th place. His race to catch up was rewarded with only 16th place. “A big thank you to my mechanics, who did a fantastic job on Saturday so that I could actually line up on the start. Unfortunately I didn’t have luck on my side. I have to push Canada to the back of my mind quickly and look forwards. In France everything starts from zero again and I’ll prove that I can be better.”

Track description

9) World RX of France, Lohéac (F)

Date: September 02–03

Track: Circuit de Lohéac, 30 km south of Rennes in Brittany

Track length: 1.070 km (Joker lap: 1.090 km)

Surface: 33% tarmac, 67% gravel

Turns: 2 left, 5 right

Top speed: approx. 163 km/h

Lap record: Sébastien Loeb (F), 36.095s (2017)

Average speed: approx. 106,72 km/h

Winner 2017: Johan Kristoffersson (S), 4m 08.408s

The review

Mattias Ekström is back on the road to success in the FIA World Rallycross Championship. At the ninth round in Lohéac, the reigning World Champion finished third – the first podium result since his victory in Hockenheim last May. In front of 75,000 spectators, the Swede was only beaten in the final by his countryman Johan Kristoffersson and local matador Sébastien Loeb.

Following heavy rain, the final race in Brittany became a mud festival featuring many overtaking moves. “Saturday sun and Sunday rather more swimming and sliding, a varied weekend,” confirmed Ekström. “I’m actually quite satisfied with my third place, but I’m a little annoyed because we weren’t so far from the front. In the dry and in the rain we were just missing a tiny bit, but we can certainly build on the performance.”

In Lohéac, Ekström’s team mates Reinis Nitišs and Toomas Heikkinen once again made the semi-final races for the twelve fastest drivers, but drew the short straw at this stage. “After contact with Andreas Bakkerud my wipers stopped working, from there on I was running blind,” summarized Nitišs and added: “I’m disappointed with the result because it doesn’t show our real performance.” Heikkinen missed the final after a collision with Ken Block. “I initially had problems with the pace, but at least made the semi-final, but after skating through the gravel bed that was it.”

Track description

10) World RX of Latvia, Riga (LV)

Date: September 16–17

Track: Biķernieki Sports Complex, 10 km east of Riga

Track length: 1.295 km (Joker lap: 1.355 km)

Surface: 60% tarmac, 40% gravel

Turns: 8 left, 4 right

Top speed: approx. 161 km/h

Lap record: Johan Kristoffersson (S), 48.894s (2017)

Average speed: approx. 95,35 km/h

Winner 2017: Johan Kristoffersson (S), 5m 06.673s

The review

Mattias Ekström has won the next trophy in the FIA World Rallycross Championship. At the tenth round of the season in Riga, the Swede finished second and was only beaten by his compatriot Johan Kristoffersson. The Volkswagen driver was crowned 2017 FIA World Rallycross Champion in Latvia with two rounds to spare and therefore succeeds Ekström. Kristofferson's PSRX Volkswagen Sweden squad also secured the teams' championship two races before the end of the season.

On the challenging track in the Latvian capital, the drivers had to deal with constantly changing conditions yet again. After sunshine on Saturday morning the heavens opened. On Sunday the track dried out very slowly before it started to rain lightly again just before the final. "Despite the changing weather conditions, it was a really good weekend for us," said Ekström. "For the first time we had four cars in the semi-final and my second place. I'm especially pleased for Nico who made the final in only his second event."

Audi DTM driver Müller beamed with joy after the final: "I'm mega happy," summarized the Swiss. "It was fantastic to start in the final with Mattias. A big thank you to the entire team for the support." Local matador Reinis Nitišs missed making the final in front of his home crowd. Nevertheless the Latvian drew a positive upshot: "On the whole it was a good weekend. Unfortunately, I lost a little ground after the start in the semi-final, but it is always a special feeling to race in front of your own fans." Toomas Heikkinen's weekend did not end as planned. After the first day, the Finn held the lead in the classification. In the semi-final a driveshaft broke.

Track description

11) World RX of Germany, Estering (D)

Date: September 30–October 01

Track: Estering in Buxtehude, 35 km southwest of Hamburg

Track length: 0.952 km (Joker lap: 0.890 km)

Surface: 60% tarmac, 40% gravel

Turns: 3 left, 6 right

Top speed: approx. 176 km/h

Lap record: Johan Kristoffersson (S), 35.227s (2017)

Average speed: approx. 97,29 km/h

Winner 2016: Mattias Ekström (S), 3m 41.663s

The review

Mattias Ekström claimed his fourth victory of the season in the FIA World Rallycross Championship. The Swede won at the Estering from countryman Timmy Hansen and EKS team mate Toomas Heikkinen. The journey to Estering paid off once again for Ekström. After the Swede wrapped up the World Championship title early in 2016 at the track in Buxtehude near Hamburg, he celebrated his tenth victory in the World Rallycross Championship this year and, in doing so, closed up on record winner Petter Solberg. “That was a fantastic weekend for us,” said Ekström. “After we won the title last year we celebrated by having a really big party, but we also have every reason to be satisfied this time. I’m especially happy for Topi, who has had so much bad luck this season, and was finally rewarded with third place.”

Toomas ‘Topi’ Heikkinen was finally able to hoist a trophy skywards 309 days after his last podium finish in Argentina. “That was a heck of a long time, but thank God it happened here at the Estering,” said the Finn relieved. “A big thank you to the team. I just have the best guys around me and am delighted that after all the bad luck over the last few months I was finally able to give them something back.” Reinis Nitišs in the third Audi S1 EKS RX quattro also qualified for the semi-final for the twelve best drivers. However, after contact in the notorious first corner at the Estering the Latvian spun and crossed the finish line in sixth place. “Disappointing, simply disappointing,” summarized Nitišs. “It’s clear after looking at the lap times that the final was possible, but it wasn’t to be once again. Now I still have the season finale in South Africa where I’ll be at maximum attack.”

Track description

12) World RX of South Africa, Cape Town (ZA)

Date: November 11–12

Track: Killarney International Raceway

Track length: 1.060 km

Surface: 60% tarmac, 40% gravel

Turns: 3 left, 5 right

Lap record: Timmy Hansen (S), 39.805s (2017)

Average speed: approx. 95,87 km/h

Winner 2017: Johan Kristoffersson (S), 4m 23.751s

The review

Mattias Ekström has clinched the FIA World Rallycross Championship runner-up slot. At the season finale in Cape Town, the Swede took third place and in doing so snatched second place in the overall standings from Petter Solberg, even though Ekström contested one race less than the Norwegian due to a clash of dates with the DTM. The previously crowned World Champion Johan Kristoffersson won the race in South Africa. EKS is third in the teams' classification.

The World Rallycross Championship premiere in South Africa World greatly impressed. Packed grandstands and exciting races to the end – the last event of the season was the best advertisement for rallycross. "That was a tremendous weekend," said Ekström with a smile. "Obviously we always want to win, but unfortunately we weren't fast enough in the final. Second place in the overall standings is good, but at the end of the day also only the first loser. Even so I'll celebrate this success with the team and look forward to the winter break after the long season."

A successful 2017 season concluded in South Africa for Audi and EKS. Mattias Ekström won four of the twelve races and finished third again to finish the year. In addition, Toomas Heikkinen took another podium position after finishing third at the Estering. On eleven of the twelve race weekends at least one driver in an Audi S1 EKS RX quattro made the final for the fastest six drivers. World Championship runner-up Ekström won 23 of his 75 races. With ten race wins to his name, the Swede, along with Petter Solberg, is the most successful driver in rallycross history.



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*** Fuel consumption and emissions of the models named above:**

Audi Q5 2.0 TFSI quattro S tronic (185 kW):

Combined fuel consumption in l/100 km: 7,1–6,8 **

Combined CO₂ emissions in g/km: 162–154 **

Audi A4 allroad quattro:

Combined fuel consumption in l/100 km: 6.7–4.9 **

Combined CO₂ emissions in g/km: 154–127 **

Audi A6 allroad quattro:

Combined fuel consumption in l/100 km: 6.5–5.6 **

Combined CO₂ emissions g/km: 172–149 **

**Depending on the tire/wheel set used.