

ITALIAN BAJA PROMISES MORE INTENSE BATTLES

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The Italian Baja (21-23 June) provides yet another different challenge for the contenders in the third of eight rounds of the FIA World Cup for Cross Country Bajas. After the snow and ice of Russia and the desert and dunes of Dubai, the crews now face rocky riverbeds around the host city of Pordenone, in the northeast of Italy.

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Recent heavy rainfall and flooding has now given way to warm and dry weather and the scene is set for another classic Italian Baja for the 40 crews on the provisional entry list. Vladimir Vasilyev and Konstantin Zhiltsov currently top the FIA World Cup for Cross Country Bajas standings by just three points after two rounds. Toyota Hilux driver Vasilyev, who won the event in 2012, is chasing his first victory of the season after finishing second and fourth on the opening two events. Jakub Przygonski is another driver who knows how to master the Italian tracks, the Pole having won the last two editions. The MINI John Cooper Works Rally driver will be looking to claim the hat-trick this weekend, and a second Baja win of the season with co-driver Timo Gottschalk.

Benediktas Vanagas is just four points adrift of Przygonski in the overall standings courtesy of two top five placings this season. The Lithuanian is partnered by Poland's Sebastian Rozwadowski in Italy in another Toyota Hilux. The Czech crew of Martin Prokop and Jan Tománek swap the Fiesta World Rally Car they powered to 15th on last weekend's Rally Italia Sardegna for their trusty Raptor RS Cross Country, the car that took them to third on the last event in Dubai. They are just two points adrift of Andrey N. in the championship, the Russian just off the podium on his home round in February. Overdrive Racing has entered a Hilux for another Russian crew, Viktor Khoroshavtsev and Anton Nikolaev, and the X-Raid MINI JCW Team will be represented by Argentina's Orlando Terranova and Ronni Graue. Lorenzo Codecà, co-driven by Mauro Toffoli, will be fielding a Suzuki Grand Vitara, the multiple Italian Cross Country Champion hoping to uphold honours for his country.

Fourteen crews will be fighting for victory in the highly competitive T3 category, which is currently being led by Italy's Michele Cinotto. With a number of crews at the top of the leaderboard entered for the Italian Baja, competition is sure to be fierce. Aldis Vilcans is the sole entrant in T2 and the Latvian is leading the Trophy standings going into the third round.

PROVISIONAL RALLY DATA

Total distance	827.10 km
Selective section distance:	430.64 km
Number of selective sections:	6

ITALIAN BAJA – TIMETABLE & MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES

Thursday 20 June

Scrutineering	From 17:30 hrs
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Friday 21 June

Scrutineering	From 08:30 hrs
Shakedown, San Martino al Tagliamento	10:00-13:00 hrs
Pre-event Press Conference, Media Centre	14:30 hrs
Ceremonial Start, HQ, Parterre	17:45 hrs
SSS1 Murlis (12.50 kilometres)	18:30 hrs
Start position ceremony for Leg 2, Lignano Pineta	21:45 hrs

Saturday 22 June

SS2 Barbeano 1 (95.18 kilometres)	08:00 hrs
SS3 Barbeano 2 (95.18 kilometres)	12:00 hrs
SS4 Barbeano 3 (95.18 kilometres)	16:00 hrs
First car arrives Parc Fermè	21:00 hrs

Sunday 23 June

SS5 Gradisca 1 (66.30 kilometres)	09:00 hrs
SS6 Gradisca 2 (66.30 kilometres)	11:00 hrs
First car arrives at the finish	14:00 hrs
Podium ceremony	14:30 hrs
Post event press conference, Media Centre	15:30 hrs

Photo: MCH