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## FIA ERC JUNIOR UNDER 27 CHAMPIONSHIP PRE-EVENT QUOTES

**Round 1 of 6: Azores Airlines Rallye, 22-24 March**

**PEDRO ANTUNES (PRT)**

**Co-driver:** TBA (PRT) **Team:** TBA **Car:** PEUGEOT 208 R2

“This will be my second time competing on the Azores Rallye, my home round of the ERC. It is for sure one of the most difficult rallies I have ever done but also one of the most beautiful. The stages are very nice but also very tricky. My aim is to fight for the podium and therefore show my sponsors that I can fight for the win in ERC Junior Under 27, one of the most competitive R2 fields in the world.”

**DOMINIK BROŽ (CZE)**

**Co-driver:** Petr Těšínský (CZE) **Team:** ACCR Czech Team **Car:** PEUGEOT 208 R2

“We are very happy to be back in the ERC again in the Junior U27 class, this will be our third year in the series. This year we are hoping to be fast as we have a lot of experience. This year’s calendar is the same as last year apart from Poland which is the only new event, so we hope to push on from last year. In 2017 we suffered a lot of technical problems but I think we are now fully prepared with the car and look forward to the year ahead. It’s hard to say how we will do as there are a lot of new drivers coming into the championship, and we don’t know how competitive they are. The Opel ADAM drivers and Simon Wagner look to be favourites but we will see on the first few stages how we compare.”

**DIOGO GAGO (PRT)**

**Co-driver:** TBA (PRT) **Team:** TBA **Car:** PEUGEOT 208 R2

“I’m not totally confident because it’s the first rally of the season and I haven’t tested yet. I have done the Azores four times in the past, this year will be my fifth attempt, so that should help me because I already know the roads and the true character of the stages. But the other guys coming here for the first time will have done good preparation so it won’t be easy. It’s difficult to know if I’m going to be really fast because I have not driven on gravel in nearly a year and I am not so comfortable in the car, I’m not in the rhythm but hopefully I can find that when we test. At the moment we are only planning to do the Azores but if we win or come second maybe we can go to Canarias but we will have to see because right now I don’t have the budget for more.”

**MIIKA HOKKANEN (FIN)**

**Co-driver:** Jukka Pasenius (FIN) **Team:** Oktan Sport **Car:** PEUGEOT 208 R2

“We did our first test in the car in Croatia, my first time in the PEUGEOT 208 R2. This will be my first visit to the Azores too so a lot of new things. Of course the event will be very tough for us because we haven’t been there so we don’t have any expectations, but we want to finish the event and hopefully get the best result we can. But we don’t know where we will be because it’s the first race of the season. The Opel team drivers will be very fast with the team having won the championship the past few years, and there are a lot of other talented drivers so we expect the competition to be very good.”

**TOM KRISTENSSON (SWE)****Co-driver:** Henrik Appelskog (SWE) **Team:** ADAC Opel Rallye Junior Team **Car:** Opel ADAM R2

"Our preparation for the Azores Rallye has been at full throttle! I still can't believe I'm about to do my dream rally with a dream team. We are really looking forward to this and are confident we are able to deliver a good result. I know that I can be fast on gravel, even in the tricky, narrow stages of the Azores. Both the ADAC Opel Rallye Junior Team and the ADAM R2 have proved their enormous potential on every surface, so I am optimistic we can be competitive against all the highly talented young guns in ERC Junior U27. One thing is for sure: I will smile from start to finish."

**EFRÉN LLARENA (ESP)****Co-driver:** Sara Fernández (ESP) **Team:** Rally Team Spain **Car:** PEUGEOT 208 R2

"I feel very good ahead of the Azores Rallye. We have worked very hard during the winter. To be competing with this team in this car in this championship is a great opportunity for us and we have to take advantage of it. We are going to try and finish the event with lots of important points for the championship. We know it's a very tricky rally but I think we have the right experience to manage it. I think local drivers like [Diogo] Gago and [Pedro] Antunes will be very fast, but of course so will the Opel and Saintéloc drivers. We will see how we compare to them."

**CATIE MUNNINGS (GBR)****Co-driver:** Anne Katharina Stein (DEU) **Team:** Saintéloc Junior Team **Car:** PEUGEOT 208 R2

"I've been working in Sweden on an ice lake for two months as a driving instructor which has been really cool. It also gave me some time on the ice to refine my car control, which I'm hoping will translate into gravel skills for the Azores. I came back from Sweden and went straight to France where I did training days in the workshop and worked on some physical training at the same place as Sébastien Loeb does, which was really eye-opening. I really want to finish the first event of the year, I didn't last year, but I think it's a really tough rally. Last year it was just my second gravel event which was a big ask as the surface is very particular as it's a volcanic rock and isn't smooth like Latvia for example. I haven't been on gravel since then so hopefully I'll readjust in our pre-event test on the island. The Opels will be quick on gravel, but I think Simon Wagner is a bit of an underdog as he's very fast and very clever so he's a really good benchmark for me to compare myself to in my team. The standard from all the drivers in the ERC is so high that you progress so much faster by comparing yourselves to all the others."

**MĀRTIŅŠ SESKS (LVA)****Co-driver:** Renārs Francis (SWE) **Team:** ADAC Opel Rallye Junior Team **Car:** Opel ADAM R2

"I can't wait to tackle these great roads behind the wheel of the Opel ADAM R2. I have to admit I am a little nervous as I haven't completed more than 100 kilometres in the new car so far, but I am confident I will adapt quite quickly. At the moment we are trying to prepare as thoroughly as we can, by analysing stages and receiving recce training. It will be a blast to really start working with the ADAC Opel Rallye Junior Team. The most important thing will be to enjoy and finish rally and come home with some good points in the ERC Junior U27 championship."

**SIMON VALLENTIN (DNK)****Co-driver:** Jeannette Kvick (DNK) **Team:** Renato Pita Motorsport Events **Car:** PEUGEOT 208 R2

"We are preparing as we always do, by looking at plenty of on-board footage from previous years, doing some mental and physical training and also having a small test in our PEUGEOT 208 R2. This is absolutely

crucial ahead of the Azores as I have not done a full gravel rally since 2012. Because of this, it's hard to say where we will end up. I know there are a lot of quick guys in this group, but I always aim for a good result so a top five would be nice. I believe in myself and believe we can fight at the top in every event if we manage to stay out of trouble."

**MATTIA VITA (ITA)**

**Co-driver:** Pietro Ometto (ITA) **Team:** G-Force Marketing Solutions **Car:** PEUGEOT 208 R2

"I am really excited to be heading to the Azores, a rally famous for its stunning landscapes and its tricky weather conditions. It's one of the hardest gravel events in the world and for somebody like me with minimal gravel experience it's very easy to make a mistake so my target is to be very consistent. My background in circuit racing will help me on the Tarmac events but until Rome, I'm just looking to gain as much experience as possible. I am really happy to be part of the ERC. With my partners looking for more media coverage, the series makes sense with its partnership with Eurosport and beautiful yet challenging rallies to compete on."

**SIMON WAGNER (AUT)**

**Co-driver:** Gerald Winter (AUT) **Team:** Saintéloc Junior Team **Car:** PEUGEOT 208 R2

"I am very excited to be honest. The Azores will be with first time with the PEUGEOT 208 R2 on gravel, my first time on gravel with Pirelli tyres and my first event with the Saintéloc team but I believe the team will help me a lot to make the best out of this rally and help me improve step by step. A programme like this is all I have ever wanted and I am unbelievably proud of my family and my sponsors that have all helped me secure this deal, it was so much work! Azores could be a very difficult event for us as I haven't driven that many gravel rallies in my career, but looking at the whole season, I am confident we can fight for the title."

**ENDS**

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