



STAR DRIVER

Name: Jarkko Nikara
Date of birth: 28.04.1986
Nationality: Finnish
Started rallying: 2004
Co-driver: Jarkko Kalliolepo

Another country boy from Finland

With echoes of four-time World Champion Tommi Mäkinen's early career, Jarkko Nikara works in the forests during the week and then spends the weekends racing along the tracks and lanes through those same woodlands. His first event was the OK Auto Rally – a traditional shakedown event for his nation's World Rally Championship qualifier Neste Oil Rally Finland. Aged 18, Jarkko's first event left a big impression on him – determined to make it to the Finnish Championship the following season, he did just that and collected sixth position, driving an Opel Astra, in the Junior category of his domestic series. Along the way, he won the prestigious A-Juniors in the F-Cup class.

Turning Japanese to make a big impression

Having mastered front-wheel-drive in his first season-long campaign, Jarkko chased more power for his second year – and found it in the shape of a Group N Honda Civic Type R. He used this car to great effect throughout 2006, but never more so on the Pirelli Rally of Tampere, when he won his class and collected an impressive top-10 finish overall. Following further performances in the same vein, the then 19-year-old from Koskenylä ended the year as Finnish Junior Rally Champion.

The fastest Fiesta in Finland

For the next season (2007), Jarkko retained the same Honda, a car he would use to make his World Rally Championship debut. He entered and finished that year's Neste Oil Rally Finland, impressing with his stage times, but relying on SupeRally to get to the end of the event. After toying with a Group N Mitsubishi Lancer programme, Jarkko elected to buy and run a Ford

Fiesta ST on selected events. One of those rallies would be his home WRC round, which also qualified for Ford's WRC-based one-make series, the Fiesta Sporting Trophy International. After suffering a gearbox problem on the opening day, Jarkko scorched back through the forests around Jyväskylä, taking minute after minute off his nearest Fiesta rival, impressing Ford Team Principal Malcolm Wilson enormously in the process. Few would forget that Rally Finland effort from the spectacular Fiesta.

A great way to end 2008

Later last year, Jarkko entered one of the most memorable rallies in the world of rallying: the Colin McRae Forest Stages, an event run in the memory of the 1995 World Rally Champion, with four former champions heading-up an all-star cast. Despite facing fierce competition from all-wheel-drive cars, Jarkko collected a top-10 finish on the event that bore the name of one of his childhood heroes. And, just when he thought his season couldn't get any better, he won one of two WRC drives through the FIA European Rally Championship Pirelli Star Driver Shoot-out competition.

Typically, for a Finn, motor sport – and rallying in particular – is not Jarkko's only passion; he's also a big fan of ice hockey. And when he's not busy with both of those pursuits, or at work on his forest machine, you'll find him in the gym.

Career highlights

2008 won one of two FIA European Rally Championship Pirelli Star Driver places

2007 second in Group N Finnish Rally Championship

2006 Finnish Junior Rally Champion