

Aalto2

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Rally Finland – 75 Years of Gravel, Heroes and a Travelling Circus

When it began in 1951, the Rally of the Thousand Lakes was a modest event – defined above all by its famously long route. Over the decades, “Jyskälä” (the event’s Finnish nickname) has grown into a World Rally Championship highlight: an international carnival of speed and Finland’s largest sporting event by audience numbers. Opening at Aalto2 Museum Centre in June, this exhibition dives deep into the world of rallying – into the history, background and culture of the Jyväskylä rally event. It explores rallying both as a sport and as a Central Finnish phenomenon that, over the decades, has shaped Jyväskylä, the Central Finland region, and people’s relationship with the event.

Memories, atmosphere and shared traditions

This exhibition takes museum visitors out to the gravel roads, pine forests, and makeshift field parking that define rallying in Central Finland. It also brings to life the camaraderie of the volunteers who make the event possible, and explores how the rally has evolved – sparking excitement, debate, and passion in the hundreds of thousands who experience it each year. Visitors can get up close to legendary rally cars, immerse themselves in the most iconic moments of Rally Finland, and glimpse how Jyväskylä and the Central Finland region have transformed alongside the sport through the decades.

At the museum, rallying can be viewed differently than in the midst of competition itself. While experiencing rallying on site is immediate, immersive and lived in the moment, the exhibition brings together a 75-year story through photographs, videos and objects. At the same time, rallying is moved from its familiar setting into the museum space, where it can be seen from new perspectives and as part of a broader cultural and local story.

On display is a wide-ranging collection of objects and archival materials that illuminate the history, atmosphere and changing culture of rallying. The heaviest exhibits are genuine historic rally cars from the 1950s to the 1970s. Alongside them are old admission tickets, rally passes, race publications, timing equipment, drivers’ gear, helmets, racing suits and volunteers’ handwritten notes. The exhibition also invites visitors to try and experience rallying for themselves – including sitting behind the wheel of a rally car and playing the classic Sega Rally game.

At its core, the exhibition looks at rallying as a complete event and experience. Beyond motorsport, it is also something of a Central Finnish summer celebration – bringing people together to follow the competition, spend time with friends and family, enjoy an international atmosphere in streets and cafés, and savour both the thrill of rallying and picnic provisions in the outdoors.

“Here, rallying is above all an event. For many, it matters because of motorsport, but just as much it is a great summer celebration where people come to spend time together. In a way, it is a vast, decentralised forest festival,” says exhibition scriptwriter Mikko Lundell.

For many, rallying is also about memories, traditions and nostalgia. It carries familiar feelings from childhood – preparations, packed food, checking weather forecasts, planning routes – even a distinctive sense of celebration. “I hope the exhibition becomes the starting point for people to reflect on their own rally memories. Rallying is such a broad phenomenon that it can never be presented exhaustively, but the exhibition becomes richer when visitors place their own memories within it,” Lundell says.



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Rallying as a Central Finnish phenomenon

The exhibition looks at the Jyväskylä rally above all as a phenomenon that has been exceptionally visible in Central Finland for decades. The event has left its mark on the cityscape, on event culture, and on how the region has wished to present itself to the world.

At different times, rallying has embedded itself into Jyväskylä in familiar landscapes, around recognisable landmarks, and in new venues as the city has grown. On display are photographs in which the Jyväskylä of past decades meets rally cars in ways that make visible both the city's transformation and the continuity of the event. Through the rally, Jyväskylä has been presented to domestic and international audiences alike, and the places chosen as stages for the event over the decades also tell a story about the city itself. Rallying has been part of Jyväskylä's identity as an event city, and has played its part in shaping the kinds of places and settings in which events have been built.

"Through rallying, there has always been a desire to showcase Jyväskylä. It is no coincidence that prizes have been awarded in front of City Hall or at the foot of the Harju steps – in those images, the city is visible too. In a way, the power of images was understood here long before social media," Lundell emphasises.

The exhibition also highlights that rallying has always involved strong emotions and differing viewpoints. For some, it is not simply a celebration, and at different times the event has also drawn criticism. The exhibition does not seek to create opposition, but rather to deepen understanding of what rallying means to different people.

"The idea is to present the many sides of rallying and increase understanding in both directions. It has been here for so long that it is important to pause and look at what this phenomenon really is as a whole – why some love it, while others approach it with reservation," Lundell reflects.

In Central Finland, rallying is an exceptional combination of locality, nature, tourism and internationality. During rally week, the city takes on an atmosphere that many would otherwise travel abroad to experience. At the same time, the event spreads into forests, roadside gathering places and village communities, where for decades it has held both practical and communal significance. In the exhibition built in the Museum of Central Finland's Art Hall, rallying emerges as part of Central Finnish everyday life, event tradition and regional identity.

A New Perspective on Rallying

From a historical perspective, Rally Finland – 75 Years of Gravel, Heroes and a Travelling Circus also reminds visitors of how different the status of the car was when the Rally of the Thousand Lakes began in the 1950s. At that time, the car represented a new era and the future in a very different way than it does today. Over the decades, the meanings associated with rallying have also changed along with society.

The exhibition does not aim to offer a single fixed interpretation of rallying. Instead, it creates space to reflect on what the event means today – and what it has meant to different generations.

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In collaboration

The exhibition is produced by the Museum of Central Finland, in collaboration with the Mobilia Automobile and Road Museum and AKK Sports Oy, organiser of today's WRC event, Secto Rally Finland. The exhibition also draws on the expertise of rally communities and hobbyists from all over Finland.

Rally Finland – 75 Years of Gravel, Heroes, and a Travelling Circus
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The Aalto2 Museum Centre is a meeting place for architecture, design and cultural heritage in Jyväskylä, Finland.

[PRESS IMAGES](#)

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