

The 2026 Shell V-Power Pearl of Africa Uganda Rally is entering “beast mode,” with a record-breaking international field confirmed as the 48-hour countdown to the entry deadline begins, according to organizers.

In a massive show of strength for East African motorsport, the second round of the FIA African Rally Championship (ARC) has already attracted 56 crews. Most notably, the entry list features a staggering 20 ARC-registered drivers, one of the highest turnouts for the continental series in recent years.

When the engines roar to life in Mbarara from May 7-9, the “Milk Capital” of Uganda will play host to a seven-nation showdown featuring top talent from Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ethiopia, India, and the United Kingdom.

Leading the charge is a formidable nine-crew “Kenyan Contingent.” Two-time African champion Karan Patel and his co-driver Tauseef Khan arrive as pre-event favorites in their Skoda Fabia Rally2.

They are joined by the 2024 Kenya champion Samman Vohra, who is fresh from a class podium at the WRC Safari Rally. Adding to the Kenyan heat is the return of Hamza Anwar, the former Junior ARC champion known to his legion of Ugandan fans as “Problem Child,” who will be hunting for an overall podium in his Ford Fiesta Rally2.

The burden of expectation for the host nation rests on the shoulders of defending African champions Yasin Nasser and Ali Katumba.

The Ugandan duo is seeking redemption on home soil after mechanical gremlins hampered their Safari Rally campaign. They lead a five-strong Ugandan ARC contingent that includes Oscar Ntambi, who impressed many with a fifth-place overall finish at the iconic Safari Rally earlier this year.

Rwanda also brings a strong presence to the gravel. The Gakwaya family leads the Rwandan interest, with Eric Gakwaya and Claude Gakwaya both fielding Subaru Impreza STIs. They are joined by Christian Kanagire, all looking to prove that Rwandan pace can upset the established ARC order.

This year’s Pearl of African Rally in Uganda will see a diversity high-profile entries from further afield: Ethiopia’s Stephano Valeriwho made entry brings category-winning form in his Mitsubishi Evo X, bolstered by the local expertise of Ugandan co-

driver Robert Katabalwa.

Veteran Ahmed Huwel provides the grid's only Toyota GR Yaris Rally2, a car that has become a fan favorite for its aggressive pace.

A new rivalry is set to ignite in the ARC3 category as India's Naveen Puligilla debuts against the reigning champion, Kenya's Nikhil Sachania.

The shift to Mbarara offers a different challenge to the rocky terrain of the Safari. Known for its fast, technical gravel stages that weave through rolling hills and cattle farms, the Pearl of Africa Rally requires a delicate balance of raw speed and mechanical sympathy.

With just 48 hours left for late entries to join the fray, the 2026 edition is already being hailed as a landmark moment for the sport in the region. For the 56 crews already on the list, the road to continental glory now runs directly through the heart of Uganda.

This year's ARC calendar includes four events, from Uganda, the crews head to Rwanda for the Mountain Gorilla Rally from 10-12 July before the calendar concludes with in Tanzania with the Mkwawa Rally from 2-4 October, 2026.