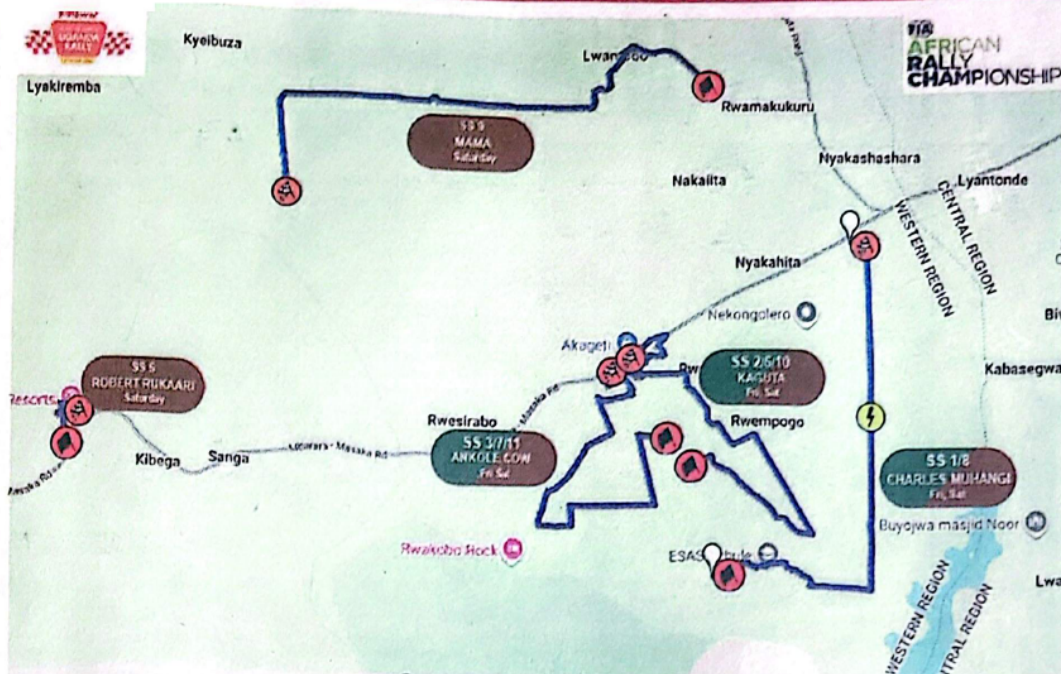




Rally Over View, 7th - 9 th May 2026

SACHANIA READY FOR PEARL TEST

PHOTO BY JOHNNY SSEMPIJJA

By Johnny Ssemplija

After finishing second last year the pearl of Africa rally, Kenyan paraplegic driver Nikhil Sachania is targeting a win in the Pearl of Africa Uganda Rally which gets underway on tomorrow. The former ARC (Africa Rally Champion) 3 winner is among the top contenders for the ARC 1 crown in the three days event. But how does he do it with his specially designed car?

"In terms of manoeuvrability and reaction time, that comes with training and experience," Sachania said, highlighting the discipline behind his craft.

Over the years, Sachania, has grown with his machine. Now driving a modified Ford Fiesta Rally3 fitted entirely with hand controls, he has mastered a unique system that uses rings around the steering wheel for acceleration and braking, complemented by a hand-operated brake and gear lever. It is a setup that demands precision but one he executes with remarkable ease.

So how does he drive without the use of his legs?

In his car, all key controls are transferred from the feet to the hands. Acceleration is managed through a steering-wheel ring or hand lever, while braking is applied using the same system or a separate hand control. Gear changes



Kenyan Nikhil Sachania revs up his Ford Fiesta R5 car in preparation for the Pearl Rally race

are executed via a sequential lever often supported by an automatic clutch. This configuration allows Sachania to steer, accelerate, brake and shift seamlessly.

He pairs alongside him is navigator Deep Patel, whose admiration extends beyond the cockpit.

"Sometimes I just sit and watch how he handles the steering wheel. It's absolutely amazing. He's a great inspiration to me, people can't believe that someone in a wheelchair is racing it's mind-blowing," Patel said.

Their partnership, built over the past three years, has developed into a finely tuned



combination grounded in trust, focus and understanding. Patel notes that once inside the car, everything revolves around Sachania's rhythm and control. "I see how people get inspired, especially when I step out of the car and they realise I'm in a wheelchair," he says with a smile.

"Some ask how I do it and say it's amazing. Others think I'm crazy. But I block out the

negativity and focus on the positive."

Unfortunately, not so much has been attained at his home ground in Kenya because the country has no national rally championship for a couple of years due to governance wrangles and that's why most of his achievements are at the ARC level. His determination has also delivered results;

With those achievements secured, Sachania and Patel are now aiming higher. The team has committed to a full campaign in 2026, started with the WRC Safari Rally now looking forward to the ultimate Pearl of Africa rally as they target the big ARC prize.