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Rally Portugal: New ŠKODA Fabia R5 set for its FIA WRC debut

- › ŠKODA returns to the FIA World Rally Championship at the Rally Portugal
- › Two Fabia R5s to line up – at the wheel: European Champion Esapekka Lappi and ŠKODA newcomer Pontus Tidemand
- › Hrabánek: “World Rally Championship is a special challenge”

Mladá Boleslav, 18 May 2015 – The new ŠKODA Fabia R5 enters the international rally stage. Two Fabia R5s will make their debut in the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC 2) at the Rally Portugal (21th to 24th May). This marks ŠKODA’s return to the FIA World Rally Championship after a two-year absence. Over the course of the season, the Czech manufacturer will line up at selected WRC 2 races with the Fabia R5.

The two ŠKODA racing cars will be driven in Portugal by European Rally Champion Esapekka Lappi (FIN) and ŠKODA newcomer Pontus Tidemand (S). ŠKODA’s comeback in the pinnacle of rallying will be a tough test for man and machine: 16 special stages must be negotiated, with a total 352.09 kilometres against the clock. Furthermore, the ŠKODA teams will face stiff opposition at the fifth round of the WRC.

“The debut in the FIA World Rally Championship is the next highlight for the new Fabia R5. The entire team is really looking forward to the first outing in WRC 2. The World Championship will be a special challenge for us. Our priority in Portugal is to test the Fabia R5 under the demanding WRC conditions. The rally will really put the car and the team through their paces,” said ŠKODA Motorsport Director Michal Hrabánek.

The new ŠKODA Fabia R5 completed its first official race in April with flying colours. Jan Kopecký (CZ) and Pavel Dresler (CZ) won the opening round of the Czech Rally Championship (MČR) – the Rally Šumava Klatovy – on the last weekend in April. However, the car only had to survive half as many kilometres of special stage in the Czech Republic as it now faces in Portugal.

For European Rally Champion Esapekka Lappi (FIN), adrenalin levels are rising every day: “After months of preparation the waiting is finally over. We are hungry for our first race with the Fabia R5. For that to come in the World Championship is fantastic. The start will be a particularly emotional moment for all involved.”

The appearance in WRC 2 sees the works driver, who is set to represent ŠKODA as their regular driver at all the WRC races in Europe, come full circle. Lappi was also involved the last time ŠKODA raced in the FIA World Rally Championship – and in Portugal too. In April 2013, the Finn and his co-driver Janne Ferm (FIN) claimed a superb victory in the WRC 2 category in a Fabia Super 2000. “It would obviously be great if we could



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immediately follow on where we left off. However, we must first test the new car at the limit. Furthermore, the route is completely new," said Lappi.

The second Fabia R5 will be driven in Portugal by the FIA Junior World Rally Champion, Pontus Tidemand (S), assisted by co-driver Emil Axelsson (S). "It is fantastic to be able to take the next big step in my career with such a successful manufacturer as ŠKODA. To be able to race in the FIA World Rally Championship with the new Fabia R5 is obviously the icing on the cake," said Tidemand. Tidemann/Axelsson made their ŠKODA debut in this year's Asia-Pacific Rally Championship (APRC), winning the Rally New Zealand in the Fabia Super 2000. Last weekend the duo reached a second place at the Rally of New Caledonia and defended their lead in the overall ranking of the APRC. Over the course of the season, the new ŠKODA Fabia R5 will also be used in the APRC.

The Fabia R5 will also line up at its next home race this weekend: reigning Asia-Pacific champion Jan Kopecký (CZ) and his co-driver Pavel Dresler (CZ) will take their place in the cockpit of the new racing car at the second round of this year's Czech Rally Championship – the Rally Český Krumlov.

FIA World Rally Championship 2 (WRC 2)

<u>Event</u>	<u>Date</u>
Rally Monte Carlo	22.01.-25.01.2015
Rally Sweden	12.02.-15.02.2015
Rally Mexico	05.03.-08.03.2015
Rally Argentina	23.04.-26.04.2015
Rally Portugal	21.05.-24.05.2015
Rally Italy	11.06.-14.06.2015
Rally Poland	02.07.-05.07.2015
Rally Finland	30.07.-02.08.2015
Rally Germany	20.08.-23.08.2015
Rally Australia	10.09.-13.09.2015
Rally France	01.10.-04.10.2015
Rally Spain	22.10.-25.10.2015
Rally Great Britain	12.11.-15.11.2015

Did you know ...

... ŠKODA Motorsport won with a comfortable lead on its last outing in the WRC 2 category of the FIA World Rally Championship? Esapekka Lappi won the class at the Rally Portugal from 12th to 14th April 2013, finishing a commanding 11:36.5 minutes clear of Ireland's Robert Barrable. Third place went to Sepp Wiegand (D) of the ŠKODA AUTO Deutschland team.



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... the 2013 WRC 2 season produced a spectacular win for ŠKODA? Sepp Wiegand/Frank Christian won the opening round at the iconic Rally Monte Carlo.

... the Rally Portugal was held for the first time in 1967? It also formed part of the FIA World Rally Championship in the series' first season in 1973.

... the Rally Portugal has been voted the "best rally in the world" on five occasions? The most successful driver is Finland's Markku Alén, who triumphed five times between 1975 and 1987.

... this year's rally returns to the north of Portugal for the first time since 2001? The rally centre is located in the Exponor exhibition centre in Matosinhos, to the north of Porto.

... the Recce will be particularly important this time? All the crews must prepare new pace notes, as they have no experience with the completely new special stages. As such, Esapekka Lappi is unable to benefit from his victory in 2013, when the rally was staged in the Algarve.

... the cars must cover a total distance of 1529.43 kilometres, including the liaison stages? The 16 special stages feature "just" 352.09 kilometres against the clock.

... Sébastien Ogier (F) has won the WRC category in Portugal for Volkswagen Motorsport for the last two seasons? In 2012, the parent company prepared its drivers for the pinnacle of the World Rally Championship with a year in the ŠKODA Fabia Super 2000. And with great success: Volkswagen Motorsport has since won the World Championship titles in the Driver, Co-Driver and Manufacturer competitions in 2013 and 2014.

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Media images:



WRC debut for the new Fabia R5

European Champions Esapekka Lappi (FIN) and Janne Ferm (FIN) lead the ŠKODA Motorsport team at the new Fabia R5's debut in the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC).

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Source: ŠKODA AUTO



Reinforcement for ŠKODA Motorsport

New works driver Pontus Tidemand (S) and his co-driver Emil Axelsson (S) also line up in the new ŠKODA Fabia R5 in Portugal.

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Source: ŠKODA AUTO

ŠKODA Motorsport Overview

ŠKODA has been involved in the world of motorsport since 1901. The brand has taken home many trophies from the Intercontinental Rally Challenge (IRC), FIA European Rally Championship (ERC), FIA Asia-Pacific Rally Championship (APRC) and several famous races, such as the oldest rally in the world – the Monte Carlo, which has taken place annually since 1911.

The Fabia Super 2000 rally car is the most successful model in ŠKODA's 114-year history in motorsport. In 2014, ŠKODA won a hat-trick of titles in the Manufacturers' and Drivers' competitions in the APRC. The new reigning champions Jan Kopecký/Pavel Dresler (CZ/CZ) achieved the momentous feat of becoming the first duo in history to win the Drivers' title in the ERC and then the APRC in consecutive years.

In the ERC, ŠKODA Motorsport took the title for the third time in a row in 2014, thanks to Esapekka Lappi/Janne Ferm (FIN/FIN) with the ŠKODA Fabia Super 2000. Before Lappi, the Finn Juho Hänninen (2012) and Jan Kopecký (2013) had won the European title with the ŠKODA Fabia Super 2000.

Between 2009 and 2014, ŠKODA Fabia Super 2000 drivers won a total of 50 national and international titles.



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The International Automobile Federation FIA approved ŠKODA's new rally car - the Fabia R5 on 1 April, 2015. The new rally car was presented to the International Press in the Czech Republic on 15 April. The ŠKODA Fabia R5 celebrated its competitive début at the Šumava Rally, Czech Republic in 2015.

ŠKODA AUTO

- > is one of the longest-established vehicle production companies in the world. In 1895, the Czech headquarters in Mladá Boleslav began producing bicycles, followed by the production of motorbikes and cars.
- > currently has seven passenger car models: Citigo, Fabia, Roomster/Praktik, Rapid, Octavia, Yeti and Superb.
- > in 2014 delivered more than one million vehicles to customers around the world for the first time in a single year.
- > has belonged to Volkswagen since 1991. The Volkswagen Group is one of the most successful automotive groups in the world. ŠKODA, in association with the Group, independently manufactures and develops vehicles, as well as components, engines and gear transmissions.
- > operates at three locations in the Czech Republic. It also manufactures in China, Russia, Slovakia and India, mainly through Group partnerships, as well as in Ukraine and Kazakhstan through local partners.
- > employs over 25,900 people globally and is active in more than 100 markets.