

ŠKODA MOTORSPORT PRESS RELEASE

Page 1 of 4



NESTE Rally Finland: Kalle Rovannerä and ŠKODA leading WRC 2, O.C. Veiby fighting for podium

- › After day two of NESTE Rally Finland ŠKODA juniors Kalle Rovannerä/Jonne Halttunen head the WRC 2 category with a score of seven stage wins from ten
- › Despite going off the road, teammates Ole Christian Veiby and co-driver Stig Rune Skjaermoen are currently fourth, still fighting for the podium of the WRC 2 category
- › So far all fastest times in the WRC 2 category have been set by ŠKODA crews

Jyväskylä, 27 July 2018 – The youngest driver entered in the 2018 FIA World Rally Championship's eighth round, the NESTE Rally Finland, controls the WRC 2 category. 17 years old Kalle Rovannerä (FIN) together with co-driver Jonne Halttunen (FIN) powered his ŠKODA FABIA R5 into the category lead after the second stage. With an impressive performance they extended their lead over ŠKODA privateers Eerik Pietarinen/Juhana Raitanen until the finish of the Friday leg to 32 seconds. Rovannerä's ŠKODA teammates Ole Christian Veiby/Stig Rune Skjaermoen (NOR/NOR) went off the road during the sixth special stages while lying second, but managed to continue, albeit with a damaged suspension. Despite a significant time loss, they ended the Friday leg in fourth position and can still fight for a WRC 2 podium position.

The eighth round of the FIA World Rally Championship's WRC 2 category promised to be hot right from the start. Not only, that the temperatures in the Finnish forests climbed above 30 degrees Celsius. The battle for victory promised to be hot as well – even without WRC 2 category leader Pontus Tidemand (93 points from four starts) and runner-up Jan Kopecký (75 points/three starts). Due to the regulations, each driver can only nominate seven out of the 13 rallies counting for the WRC 2 championship. Only the best six results count at the end of the year. As Tidemand and Kopecký did not nominate the Finnish round for their championship campaign, the two experienced ŠKODA factory drivers were absent and the focus was on the ŠKODA junior crews, Ole Christian Veiby/Stig Rune Skjaermoen (NOR/NOR) and Kalle Rovannerä/Jonne Halttunen (FIN/FIN). During Shakedown (the test stage before the rally), Veiby was the quickest ahead of 17 years old Rovannerä, both followed by the rest of the WRC 2 competitors.

On the first special stage "Harju" in the streets of Jyväskylä, O.C. Veiby had to avoid a track barrier which was pushed into the middle of the road by another competitor, but nevertheless scored the second fastest time. Youngster Rovannerä had bad luck – during his run only there was a little bit of rain. "It's a shame, that it was raining. It was very slippery, so I just kept it safe," concluded Rovannerä.

On Friday morning the real action started on the gravel roads in the Finnish forests. On the second special stage, which was running over 20 kilometres, Rovannerä and his ŠKODA FABIA R5 topped the WRC 2 result list with an impressive fastest time, teammate O.C. Veiby being second quickest. Both ŠKODA junior crews started to dominate the WRC 2 category at NESTE Rally Finland. During the remaining three stages, Rovannerä was two more times the fastest driver. On the short stage before the midday service halt, Finnish Championship leader Eerik Pietarinen, driving a privately entered ŠKODA FABIA R5, set the best time and moved into second place of the interim standings, just 1.3 seconds ahead of O.C. Veiby in the second works ŠKODA FABIA R5. "I did a small mistake



ŠKODA MOTORSPORT PRESS RELEASE

Page 2 of 4



on the third stage, which cost me some time. On the fourth, I hit a stone and the car didn't feel so nice to handle afterwards. I am the first WRC 2 car on the road, right after the WRC car. Because of the different width of the track of our ŠKODA FABIA R5 compared to the WRC cars, that meant a little bit of road cleaning for me," summarized O.C. Veiby. Teammate Kalle Rovannerä, leading the category with more than 14 seconds, was happy: "No problems with the car at all, I had a steady drive during the first loop."

After the midday break, O.C. Veiby had a so called big moment on the sixth stage of the rally. "After a fast right hander, I went a little wide and hit a bank," commented Veiby his lucky escape which caused a cracked left rear wheel. Nevertheless, he managed to move into second position in the WRC 2 category. As a consequence of his off road excursion, Veiby broke the left rear brake disc of his ŠKODA FABIA R5 which he had to remove. From then onwards he had to drive with braking power limited to three wheels. He managed to reach the finish of the Friday leg on fourth position and can still fight for a podium position.

Kalle Rovannerä was second quickest in this stage although he had to drive the last kilometres of the stage in the dust of Benito Guerra, which he finally caught at the finish. The 17 years old Finn and co-driver Jonne Halttunen managed to control the lead in the WRC 2 category up to the evening rest halt in Jyväskylä. ŠKODA privateers Eerik Pietarinen/Juhana Raitanen delivered a remarkable performance as well, going into the Saturday leg holding second position.

ŠKODA Motorsport boss Michal Hrabánek was impressed by Rovannerä's performance: "Kalle and Jonne delivered a very fast and faultless performance. O.C. was very lucky to escape from the incident. He proved, that our ŠKODA FABIA R5 is so reliable and strong, that you can even reach the finish with only three brake discs," concluded Hrabánek.

The longest day of the Rally Finland will be the Saturday with eight special stages covering nearly 143 kilometres. Sunday will bring the final decision with four stages, before the winner will reach the podium in Jyväskylä around 16h00 local time.

Standings Rally Finland after Day 2 (WRC 2)

1. Rovannerä/Halttunen (FIN/FIN), ŠKODA FABIA R5, 1:07:47.7 h
2. Pietarinen/Raitanen (FIN/FIN), ŠKODA FABIA R5, +32.0 sec.
3. Huttunen/Linnaketo, (FIN/FIN), Hyundai i20, +57.5 sec.
4. Veiby/Skjaermoen (NOR/NOR), ŠKODA FABIA R5, +1:02.8 min.
5. Greensmith/Parry (GBR/GBR), Ford Fiesta R5, +2:02.6 min.
6. Ciamin/de la Haye (FRA/FRA), Hyundai i20, +3:14.2 min.

Number of the day: 7

Out of the ten stages during the Friday leg of NESTE Rally Finland, Kalle Rovannerä won seven.



ŠKODA MOTORSPORT PRESS RELEASE

Page 3 of 4



The calendar of the 2018 FIA World Rally Championship (WRC 2)

<u>Event</u>	<u>Date</u>
Monte-Carlo	24/01–28/01/2018
Sweden	15/02–18/02/2018
Mexico	08/03–11/03/2018
France	05/04–08/04/2018
Argentina	26/04–29/04/2018
Portugal	17/05–20/05/2018
Italy	07/06–10/06/2018
Finland	26/07–29/07/2018
Germany	16/08–19/08/2018
Turkey	13/09–16/09/2018
Great Britain	04/10–07/10/2018
Spain	25/10–28/10/2018
Australia	15/11–18/11/2018

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ŠKODA MOTORSPORT PRESS RELEASE



Page 4 of 4

Media images:



ŠKODA at NESTE Rally Finland 2018

Finnish ŠKODA juniors Kalle Rovannerä/Jonne Halttunen (ŠKODA FABIA R5) are leading their home round of the WRC 2 championship

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Source: ŠKODA AUTO



ŠKODA at NESTE Rally Finland 2018

Driving a ŠKODA FABIA R5, Norwegian ŠKODA juniors Ole Christian Veiby/Stig Rune Skjaermoen (NOR/NOR) are fourth in WRC 2 category after day two

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Source: ŠKODA AUTO

ŠKODA Motorsport Overview

ŠKODA has been successful on the motorsport scene since 1901. Be it on the circuit or in rallies, ŠKODA has celebrated victories and won titles all around the world. Historical highlights include winning the title in the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC 2) for the first time in 2016, numerous title wins in the FIA European Rally Championship (ERC), the FIA Asia-Pacific Rally Championship (APRC) and the Intercontinental Rally Challenge (IRC), as well as the victory in the European Touring Car Championship in 1981. ŠKODA teams have also triumphed in the world's oldest and most famous rally, taking several class victories in the legendary Monte Carlo, which was first held in 1911.

The ŠKODA FABIA R5, a high-tech 4x4, was homologated by the International Automobile Federation FIA on 1 April 2015. ŠKODA's new FABIA R5 is successfully continuing the long tradition of ŠKODA Motorsport. Its predecessor, the FABIA SUPER 2000, won 50 national and international titles around the world. In the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC 2) 2016, Esapekka Lappi/Janne Ferm (FIN/FIN) won the title for the Czech car maker. In total, ten of the 2016 season's races in the World Rally Championship were won by a ŠKODA FABIA R5. ŠKODA drivers Gustavo Saba (PRY) and Gaurav Gill (IND) also won the continental championships in South America and the Asia-Pacific region at the wheel of the successful ŠKODA FABIA R5. Nasser Al-Attayah (QAT) was unbeatable in the Middle East Rally Championship (MERC), while a further ten national titles also went the way of ŠKODA drivers.

2017 was the most successful year in the history of ŠKODA Motorsport. Works duo Pontus Tidemand/Jonas Andersson (S/S) became WRC 2 Champions, ŠKODA Motorsport won the Team Championship. Jan Kopecký/Pavel Dresler (CZ/CZ) won the Czech Rally Championship (MČR) for the third time in a row and are the spearhead of in total 14 crews winning their country's national titles. Furthermore the FIA Asia-Pacific Rally Championship (APRC), the FIA South American Rally Championship (CODASUR) and the FIA African Rally Championship (ARC) have been won by teams competing in a ŠKODA FABIA R5.

ŠKODA AUTO

- › is one of the longest-established vehicle manufacturers in the world. The company was founded in 1895 – during the pioneering days of the automobile. Today, the company's headquarters remain in Mladá Boleslav.
- › currently offers the following models in the range: CITIGO, FABIA, RAPID, OCTAVIA, KAROQ, KODIAQ and SUPERB.
- › in 2017 delivered more than 1.2 million vehicles to customers worldwide.
- › has belonged to Volkswagen Group since 1991. The Volkswagen Group is one of the most successful vehicle manufacturers 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, produces in China, Russia, Slovakia, Algeria and India mainly through Group partnerships, as well as in Ukraine and Kazakhstan through local partners.
- › employs over 35,000 people globally and is active in more than 100 markets.

