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ŠKODA out to defend APRC title, starting with New Zealand

- › **APRC newcomers Fabian Kreim/Frank Christian and the experienced Gaurav Gill/Glenn MacNeall start for the ŠKODA MRF team**
- › **Season-opener in New Zealand: Rally Whangarei is the first of six races in the FIA Asia-Pacific Rally Championship (APRC)**
- › **Michal Hrabánek: "We are hungry for title number five"**

Mladá Boleslav, 26 April 2016 – The quest for the fifth title in a row in the FIA Asia-Pacific Rally Championship (APRC) begins this weekend for ŠKODA. The German duo of Fabian Kreim/Frank Christian is set to make its debut for the works-assisted ŠKODA MRF team at the Rally Whangarei in New Zealand, which takes place from Friday to Sunday. At the wheel of the second ŠKODA Fabia R5 are the experienced pair of Gaurav Gill/Glenn MacNeall (IND/AUS), who won the title for the Czech car maker in 2013.

"We want to be at our best again in the APRC, and are hungry for title number five," said ŠKODA Motorsport Director Michal Hrabánek. "We have a lot of fans in the densely-populated Asia-Pacific region, which is of great importance to the ŠKODA brand."

The 275 kilometres of special stage that make up the first APRC round is attended by thousands of fans in rally-mad New Zealand and traditionally forms one of the highlights of the season. The rally begins on Friday with two night stages held under floodlights on Pohe Island. ŠKODA youngster Fabian Kreim will make his first appearance at an international gravel rally at the other end of the world. "The start in the APRC is obviously a big step for me, and I am really looking forward to it. The most important thing is initially to get as many kilometres as possible under my belt on what is an unfamiliar surface. I hope to improve consistently over the course of the year, and to challenge for victories," said Kreim.

The 23-year-old has only been competing in rallies since 2013, but has already proven his talent on multiple occasions. He finished runner-up in last year's German Rally Championship (DRM) and has already won one race in the DRM in 2016. The German prepared for the unique challenges of the APRC with a gravel test in Austria. His Indian team-mate Gaurav Gill will be able to offer important tips, but also promises to be one of his biggest rivals in the race for the title. 34-year-old Gill has been a permanent fixture in the ŠKODA MRF team for years, and will be making his ninth consecutive appearance at the Rally Whangarei.

"We want to be in contention in New Zealand, and to continue ŠKODA's winning run in the APRC," said Gill. In 2015, works driver Pontus Tidemand (S) won the Rally China to complete ŠKODA's fourth title treble in a row in the APRC. The Czech automobile



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manufacturer has been the dominant force in the Drivers', Co-Drivers' and Manufacturers' Championships since 2012.

FIA Asia-Pacific Rally Championship (APRC)*

<u>Event</u>	<u>Date</u>
Rally Whangarei – New Zealand	29.04.–01.05.2016
Rally Queensland – Australia	17.06.–19.06.2016
Rally China – China	06.08.–07.08.2016
Rally Hokkaido – Japan	24.09.–25.09.2015
Rally Malaysia – Malaysia	29.10.–30.10.2016
Rally India – India	10.12.–11.12.2016

* Subject to confirmation from the International Automobile Federation FIA.

Did you know ...

... Australian Chris Atkinson started ŠKODA's run of titles in the APRC? He won the title in the prestigious continental championship in 2012. The following year, India's Gaurav Gill was crowned champion driver, while Jan Kopecký (CZ) was unbeatable in 2014. Finally, works driver Pontus Tidemand (S) was triumphant for ŠKODA last year. The Czech car maker has also won the Manufacturers' Championship in the APRC four times in a row.

... ŠKODA has also won the APRC class at the Rally New Zealand for the past four years? In 2012, victory went to eventual champion Chris Atkinson. Esapekka Lappi (FIN) was victorious in 2013. Gaurav Gill won in 2014, before Pontus Tidemand emerged as the victor for ŠKODA twelve months ago.

... the APRC rally in New Zealand has been held in the Whangarei region in the north of the country's North Island since 2007? In the early years, from 1988, the APRC classification also formed part of the world championship round in New Zealand. Between 2000 and 2006 it took place around the geysers in Rotorua.

... ŠKODA traditionally lines up in the APRC with the works-assisted ŠKODA MRF team? MRF is an acronym for "Madras Rubber Factory", the largest Indian tyre manufacturer. Madras Rubber Factory was founded in 1946 by K. M. Mammen Mappillai and originally produced toy balloons. MRF's headquarters are located in Chennai.

... Whangarei is the most northerly city in New Zealand and, with over 50,000 inhabitants, is the capital of the Northland region?



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... the climate in Whangarei is subtropical? In the summer, temperatures can reach over 30 degrees Celsius. Because the region hardly ever suffers any frost, it is known by New Zealanders as "The Winterless North". When the APRC arrives in Whangarei this weekend, it will be autumn in the southern hemisphere. Maximum temperatures of about 20 degrees Celsius are expected.

... an event in the New Zealand Rally Championship is also held on the support programme for the APRC rally? The field is led by WRC driver Hayden Paddon (NZ).

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ŠKODA at the APRC rally in New Zealand

The German Rally Championship (DRM) gave Fabian Kreim and Frank Christian (D/D) a taste of the difficult conditions they will face in the APRC.

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Source: ŠKODA AUTO



ŠKODA at the APRC rally in New Zealand

ŠKODA's appearances in the FIA Asia-Pacific Rally Championship (APRC) – here at the Rally Longyou in China last October – are received enthusiastically by media and fans.

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Source: ŠKODA AUTO





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ŠKODA Motorsport Overview:

ŠKODA has been 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 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.

In 2015, ŠKODA celebrated four victories in the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC 2) with their new ŠKODA Fabia R5 rally car. The high-tech 4x4 was homologated by the International Automobile Federation FIA on 1 April 2015. In the ŠKODA Fabia R5's very first season, factory duo Pontus Tidemand/Emil Axelsson (S/S) secured the fourth APRC title in a row for ŠKODA. In addition, the brand claimed five national titles with their new winning model.

ŠKODA's new Fabia R5 proudly continues the brand's long tradition in motorsport. Its predecessor, the Fabia Super 2000, was the most successful model in ŠKODA's 115-year motorsport history. With the 4x4 from Mladá Boleslav, factory duo Jan Kopecký/Pavel Dresler (CZ/CZ) achieved the historic feat of becoming the first duo in history to win the drivers' title in the ERC and the APRC in consecutive years. Between 2009 and 2014, ŠKODA Fabia Super 2000 drivers won a total of 50 national and international titles around the world.

In 2016, the factory teams Pontus Tidemand/Jonas Andersson (S/S), Jan Kopecký/Pavel Dresler and Esapekka Lappi/Janne Ferm (F/F) are competing with the ŠKODA Fabia R5 in the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC 2).

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 offers the following models in the range: Citigo, Fabia, Rapid, Octavia, Yeti and Superb.
- › delivered more than 1 million vehicles to customers worldwide in 2015.
- › 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 such as engines and gear transmissions.
- › operates at three locations in the Czech Republic. It also produces in China, Russia, Slovakia and India, mainly through Group partnerships, as well as in Ukraine and Kazakhstan through local partners.
- › employs more than 26,600 people globally and is active in more than 100 markets.