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NESTE Rally Finland: ŠKODA privateer Eerik Pietarinen leads WRC 2 category standings

- › Finnish ŠKODA customer team Eerik Pietarinen/Juhana Raitanen on course to their first victory in a WRC 2 championship event
- › 17 years old Kalle Rovannerä and co-driver Jonne Halttunen down from WRC 2 lead to fourth after a hidden rock broke the suspension of their ŠKODA FABIA R5
- › ŠKODA teammates Ole Christian Veiby/Stig Rune Skjaermoen lost WRC 2 podium position when they went off the road in the same penultimate stage of Saturday's leg

Jyväskylä, 28 July 2018 – ŠKODA's 17 years old Kalle Rovannerä (FIN) together with co-driver Jonne Halttunen (FIN) dominated the WRC 2 category at NESTE Rally Finland for most of two legs. But during Saturday's penultimate stage the left front suspension broke when the car hit a rock under braking. After roadside emergency repairs, the two Finns managed to finish the leg's last stage and returned back to service still in fourth position. In the same 18th stage, ŠKODA teammates Ole Christian Veiby/Stig Rune Skjaermoen (NOR/NOR) went off the road. Unfortunately for them it was game over, just when they had conquered third position. After a dramatic day, with 19 of 23 stages concluded, local ŠKODA privateers Eerik Pietarinen/Juhana Raitanen (FIN/FIN) lead WRC 2 at NESTE Rally Finland – a more than well deserved reward after a fast and faultless performance.

At NESTE Rally Finland, the hot and tense fight in WRC 2 category continued on Saturday, while the temperatures in the Finnish forests climbed again above 30 degrees Celsius. The longest day of the 2018 FIA World Rally Championship's eighth round featured eight special stages covering nearly 143 kilometres. ŠKODA youngsters Kalle Rovannerä/Jonne Halttunen continued the rally in the way they had finished it on Friday evening: The leaders of the WRC 2 category won the first stage of the day.

ŠKODA privateers Eerik Pietarinen/Juhana Raitanen also continued their brilliant performance setting the next fastest time, before the 17 years old Rovannerä fought back in front of ten thousand enthusiastic fans on the famous Kakaristo stage. "The first stage in the morning was quite okay. In the second one I was probably too cautious. Afterwards, I tried to drive like normal," confessed Kalle Rovannerä. "Normal" meant: He was 7.3 seconds quicker than everybody else in the WRC 2 category. After another fastest time, he brought his ŠKODA FABIA R5 back to the midday service in Jyväskylä with a solid 49.4 seconds lead.

Teammates Ole Christian Veiby/Stig Rune Skjaermoen began the Saturday morning with a clear mission, after the damages on their ŠKODA FABIA R5 due to the off road excursion on Friday (which had thrown them back to fourth position) had been repaired by the ŠKODA mechanics. They reduced the gap to third place down to 1.6 seconds already during the first stage of the morning loop. But Hyundai driver Jari Huttunen fought back on the next stage, enlarging the gap again to 3.8 seconds. On the next one Veiby was 2.2 seconds quicker, now only 1.6 seconds separated both WRC 2 drivers.





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During the afternoon leg, four stages were waiting for the crews, totalling another 71 kilometres under the unusual hot Finnish sun. O.C. Veiby moved up to the third place in the WRC 2 category, before disaster happened on the 18th stage. He went off the road into retirement.

Meanwhile Rovannerä took two spare wheels in his ŠKODA FABIA R5 to be on the safe side. But on the same 18th stage, under braking he hit a rock hidden in the deep ruts on the racing line. As a consequence the front left suspension of his car collapsed. But Kalle Rovannerä and co-driver Jonne Halttunen did not give up. They successfully performed an emergency repair at the roadside, cautiously drove the leg's last stage and managed to bring the car back to service – still holding fourth position in WRC 2 at the end of the Saturday leg!

ŠKODA Motorsport boss Michal Hrabánek commented: "That's rallying. Kalle and Jonne delivered so far a faultless drive and they really would have deserved to win their home event! O.C. and Stig Rune had bad luck as well going off the road in the same stage. Now we keep our fingers crossed for our local ŠKODA customer team Eerik Pietarinen/Juhana Raitanen for the victory."

Sunday will bring the final decision at NESTE Rally Finland with four stages, before the winner will reach the podium in Jyväskylä at around 16h00 local time.

Standings NESTE Rally Finland after Day 3 (WRC 2)

1. Pietarinen/Raitanen (FIN/FIN), ŠKODA FABIA R5, 2:21:57.0 h
2. Huttunen/Linnaketo, (FIN/FIN), Hyundai i20, +53.0 sec.
3. Greensmith/Parry (GBR/GBR), Ford Fiesta R5, +2:25.5 min.
4. Rovannerä/Halttunen (FIN/FIN), ŠKODA FABIA R5, +3:11.5 min.
5. Loubet/Landais (FRA/FRA), Hyundai i20, +3:43.3 min.

Number of the day: 18

Disaster hit both ŠKODA junior crews in stage number 18 of NESTE Rally Finland: Kalle Rovannerä broke the suspension, teammate O.C. Veiby went off the road.

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 at NESTE Rally Finland 2018

Finnish ŠKODA juniors Kalle Rovannerä/Jonne Halttunen (ŠKODA FABIA R5) dropped to fourth place of the WRC 2 category at NESTE Rally Finland after they broke the suspension of their ŠKODA FABIA R5

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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) went off the road and had to retire at NESTE Rally Finland

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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-Attiyah (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.

