

FIA World Rally Championship debut for Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 at Rallye Monte-Carlo

- › Seven of the all-new Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 entered into the first round of 2023
- › Škoda once again the strongest brand in the fiercely contested WRC2 category
- › In cooperation with Škoda Motorsport Toksport WRT defends WRC2 Team's title
- › Reigning WRC2 Drivers' Champion Emil Lindholm (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2) skips Rallye Monte-Carlo and starts his seven-rounds program with Rally Sweden in February

Mladá Boleslav, 18 January 2023 – 75 entries are accepted for Rallye Monte-Carlo (19-22 January), opening round of the 2023 FIA World Rally Championship (WRC). No less than 22 of them are Škoda Fabia in different specifications, including seven examples of the all-new Škoda Fabia RS Rally2. The latest version of the most successful car of the category makes it's world championship debut during the most famous rally on the WRC calendar.

Following a tradition going back to the series inaugural season in 1973, Rallye Monte-Carlo again kicks off the FIA World Rally Championship. The 2023 edition also sees the world championship debut of the Škoda Fabia RS Rally2. The all-new car from the Czech brand follows in the footsteps of the Škoda Fabia Rally2 evo, which won the WRC2 category at last year's 'Monte' and also carried Emil Lindholm to the 2022 titles of WRC2 Drivers' Champion and WRC2 Junior Champion.

The Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 is the first Fabia competition variant, which shows the legendary letters RS in its name. Johannes Neft, Škoda Auto Board Member for Technical Development, says: "RS – at Škoda, these two letters symbolise decades of motorsport tradition and countless victories on the international race tracks and rally circuits. As a new member of the RS family, the Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 has all the credentials to continue this success story."

WRC2 title holder Emil Lindholm is not among the field of 41 Rally2 competitors entered into the season-opener. The Finn and co-driver Reeta Hämäläinen have voluntarily waived Rallye Monte-Carlo and start their title defence at the next WRC round in Sweden (9-12 February). "In WRC2, we are only allowed to score points from seven of the 13 WRC rounds. We prefer to kick off our season on the full-snow stages of Sweden," Lindholm explains.

Still, with a total of 22 crews relying on the Škoda Fabia during Rallye Monte-Carlo, a handful of them are among the favourites for WRC2 victory. Two young drivers stand out in particular, both competing with the latest version Škoda Fabia RS Rally2: 22-year-old Marco Bulacia from Bolivia and Czech Eric Cais, who is only one year older.

Cais and co-driver Petr Těšínský finished the Rallye Monte-Carlo 2022 second in WRC2. With last year's winners Andreas Mikkelsen/Torstein Eriksen (Škoda Fabia Rally2 evo) absent, the Czech crew of team Orsák Rally Sport carries the burden of being favourites. On the other hand, Bulacia delivered his WRC2 debut with the Rallye Monte-Carlo in 2021 at the wheel of a Toksport WRT run Škoda. Now, he is back for the reigning WRC2 Teams' Champion, together with new co-driver Axel Coronado from Spain. "In 2021, I finished the Rallye Monte-Carlo fourth in WRC2. Of course I want to build on this result. The new Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 will certainly help me to do that. Still, I have a lot of respect for the legendary 'Monte' stages", Bulacia emphasizes.

Two candidates for victory in the WRC Masters Cup, which is reserved for drivers over 50 years of age, also drive Škoda Fabia RS Rally2. Reigning WRC2 Masters Champion Mauro Miele (Dream One Racing) from Italy faces opposition from local hero François Delecour (Toksport WRT). The Frenchman is no newcomer to the podium of Rallye Monte-Carlo – he won the event overall back in 1994.

Although regulations allow drivers competing for WRC2 titles to score points in seven events only, nothing prevents them from entering additional rallies outside the championship classification. One of them is Swedish-Norwegian youngster Oliver Solberg. During Rallye Monte-Carlo, the 21 years old son of former world champion Petter Solberg shares a Toksport WRT run Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 with British co-driver Elliott Edmondson. Also driving for the Germany-based team is the Sami Pajari/Enni Mälkönen crew from Finland. Also 21 years of age, Pajari won the FIA Junior World rally Championship in 2021 and now steps up to a full WRC2 season. Both Pajari and Solberg use Rallye Monte-Carlo as a warm-up for their respective WRC2 championship campaigns to start at Rally Sweden.

The fight for the WRC2 title is set to enter full swing not before Rally Mexico (16-19 March), the third round of the 2023 season. Among the Škoda drivers expected to join at that point are last year's WRC2 third overall Kajetan Kajetanowicz from Poland and Gus Greensmith from the United Kingdom, who after some years in Rally1 machinery steps back to a Rally2 car from Mladá Boleslav.

To sum it up, Rallye Monte-Carlo is about to start the probably most exciting WRC2 year ever. The season consists of 13 rounds. After a pandemic-enforced break, the gravel rallies in Mexico and Chile are back in the calendar. Completely new is the Central Europe Rally. The all-tarmac event starts in Prague, the capitol of the Czech Republic, runs stages in Austria as well and reaches the finish in Passau, a historic city in the very south of Germany.

Rallye Monte-Carlo kicks off on Thursday (19 January) at 6:30 p.m. in front of the Casino. Two special stages in the dark follow including the run-up to the legendary Col de Turini, this year finishing on top of the pass. Twelve stages make up Friday and Saturday, both legs without midday service. Sunday (22 January) will see a further four special stages. In total, the teams have to complete a competitive distance of around 325 kilometres.

Three questions to Michal Hrabánek, Head of Škoda Motorsport

Mr. Hrabánek, in 2022 the top three overall finishers of the WRC2 category as well as the WRC2 Junior and WRC2 Masters Champion drove a Škoda. Škoda Motorsport supported team Toksport WRT won the WRC2 Teams' title. Can your customers repeat this success in 2023?

MH: First of all, it is not only this result that makes us incredibly proud. Also for some time, even in purely numerical terms, the Škoda Fabia has been by far the most popular rally car in its category. Until today, the Škoda Fabia Rally2 and Škoda Fabia Rally2 evo have won nearly 2,000 rallies worldwide. Obviously, we want to continue this success story in 2023.

During Rallye Monte-Carlo, the Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 is about to make its debut in the FIA World Rally Championship. Can the new car repeat the success of the Škoda Fabia Rally2 evo?

MH: We have tested the new Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 extensively. It is a completely new vehicle, that takes another step forward in all respects. However, the basic philosophy has not changed compared to its predecessor. Our aim was to once again design an absolutely reliable car, that also takes running costs into account. We have developed the Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 especially with the needs of private teams in mind.

The demand for the Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 is very high. Not all WRC2 teams could yet exchange their trusted Škoda Fabia Rally2 evo for the new car . . .

MH: We are working full-throttle to answer all orders as quickly as possible. We need to be also able to deliver all Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 together with a sufficient spare parts package.

Did you know, that...

...the "Monte" was first held in 1911, making it the oldest event on the current WRC calendar?

...the rally was originally invented to boost tourism in Monaco even in the less attractive winter months? Up to 1998, the competitors (although in that year the works teams were excluded) drove from starting points all over Europe and even North Africa to a common assembly point in the south of France before the actual rally started.

...the right choice of tyres is extremely difficult and at the same time decisive? Only four types are available: slicks in two different compounds plus snow tyres with and without studs. The crews have to complete up to four special stages without service. During this time they have to rely on the four tyres fitted to the car plus a maximum of two spare wheels. While one special stage may be covered in deep snow, the next may be icy, wet or even dry. As a result, the tyre choice is almost always a compromise.

2023 FIA World Rally Championship

Rallye Monte-Carlo	19-22 January
Rally Sweden	9-12 February
Guanajuato Rally México	16-19 March
Croatia Rally	20-23 April
Rally de Portugal	11-14 May
Rally Italia Sardinia	1-4 June
Safari Rally Kenya	22-25 June
Rally Estonia	20-23 July
Rally Finland	3-6 August
Acropolis Rally Greece	7-10 September
Rally Chile	28 September-1 October
Central Europe Rally (CZE/AUT/DEU)	26-29 October
Rally Japan	16-19 November

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Video: Škoda Motorsport at Rallye Monte-Carlo

Sami Pajari enters his first full WRC2 season at the wheel of a Škoda Fabia RS Rally2. This video follows the 21 years old Finn during the Rallye Monte-Carlo pre-event test.

Source: Škoda Auto



Škoda Motorsport at Rallye Monte-Carlo
Building on the title of 2021 FIA Junior World Rally Champion, Sami Pajari and co-driver Enni Mälkönen compete with a Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 run by team Toksport WRT.

Source: Škoda Auto



Škoda Motorsport at Rallye Monte-Carlo
Rallye Monte-Carlo will be the first WRC event at the wheel of a Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 for Czech youngster Eric Cais of team Orsák Rally Sport.

Source: Škoda Auto



Škoda Motorsport at Rallye Monte-Carlo
Oliver Solberg from Sweden, 21 years old son of former FIA World Rally Champion Petter Solberg, switches to a Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 for the 2023 WRC2 season.

Source: Škoda Auto



Škoda Motorsport at Rallye Monte-Carlo
Italian Mauro Miele, defending WRC2 Masters Champion, picked up his Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 at Škoda Motorsport in Mladá Boleslav.

Source: Škoda Auto

Škoda Motorsport

- › Škoda has been active in motorsport since 1901, garnering success in rallies as well as in circuit racing.
- › Highlights include winning the 1981 European Touring Car Championship (ETCC) with the Škoda 130 RS.
- › Since 2009, the Škoda Fabia celebrated numerous successes for the Czech manufacturer on rally stages worldwide.
- › Until 2014, the Škoda Fabia S2000 (2.0 naturally aspirated engine, four-wheel drive) secured 50 international titles and national rally championships. The Škoda Fabia S2000 also helped to win the FIA European Rally Championship (ERC) and the Intercontinental Rally Challenge (IRC) three times each.
- › The successor model Škoda Fabia R5 (1.6 turbo engine, four-wheel drive) entered the scene in 2015. Later renamed to Škoda Fabia Rally2 and followed by the further developed Škoda Fabia Rally2 evo, the model collected nearly 2,000 victories in 68 countries until the end of the 2022 season.
- › During this period, Škoda Motorsport factory drivers Jan Kopecký (CZE), Esapekka Lappi (FIN), Pontus Tidemand (SWE) and Kalle Rovanperä (FIN) won the FIA World Rally Championship's support category WRC2/WRC2 Pro. Škoda Motorsport also took the WRC2/WRC2 Pro Manufacturers' title five times in a row from 2015 to 2019.
- › Beginning with the 2020 season, Škoda Motorsport changed its strategy to supporting private teams. The success story continued: Driving a Škoda Fabia Rally2 evo run by Toksport WRT, Andreas Mikkelsen (NOR) und Emil Lindholm (FIN) became WRC2 Champions in 2021 and 2022. The Škoda Motorsport supported team Toksport WRT also won the WRC2 Teams' title three times in a row from 2020 to 2022.
- › Škoda Motorsport customer teams have also won titles in the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC), FIA European Rally Championship (ERC), the FIA African Rally Championship (ARC), the FIA North American and Central American Rally Championship (NACAM), the FIA South American Rally Championship (CODASUR) and the FIA Asia-Pacific Rally Championship (APRC).

Škoda Auto

- › is successfully steering through the new decade with the Next Level – Škoda Strategy 2030.
- › aims to be one of the five best-selling brands in Europe by 2030 with an attractive line-up in the entry-level segments and additional e-models.
- › is emerging as the leading European brand in important growth markets such as India or North Africa.
- › currently offers its customers twelve passenger-car series: the Fabia, Rapid, Scala, Octavia and Superb as well as the Kamiq, Karoq, Kodiaq, Enyaq iV, Enyaq Coupé iV, Slavia and Kushaq.
- › delivered over 731,000 vehicles to customers around the world in 2022.
- › has been a member of the Volkswagen Group for 30 years. The Volkswagen Group is one of the most successful vehicle manufacturers in the world.
- › independently manufactures and develops not only vehicles but also components such as engines and transmissions in association with the Group.
- › operates at three sites in the Czech Republic; has additional production capacity in China, Russia, Slovakia and India primarily through Group partnerships, as well as in Ukraine with a local partner.
- › employs 45,000 people globally and is active in over 100 markets.