

Rally Italia Sardegna: Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 crew Andreas Mikkelsen/Torstein Eriksen wins WRC2

- › In a last minute decision, former WRC2 Champion Andreas Mikkelsen and co-driver Torstein Eriksen (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2) from Norway score their first category victory of the season
- › Polish crew Kajetan Kajetanowicz/Maciej Szczepaniak wins WRC Challenger classification with ORLEN Rally Team's Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 ahead of two more Škoda crews
- › First WRC Masters Cup victory for Austrians Johannes Keferböck/Ilka Minor sharing a Škoda Fabia Rally2 evo of Team Baumschlagler Rallye&Racing

Olbia (ITA), 4 June 2023 – Andreas Mikkelsen and co-driver Torstein Eriksen scored their first WRC2 victory of the season at Rally Italia Sardegna, sixth round of the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC). The two Norwegians sharing a Toksport WRT run Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 took over the category lead only during the very last stage of the gravel event on the Mediterranean island. Despite not scoring championship points, Mikkelsen's team mate Oliver Solberg (SWE) still holds second place overall in WRC2.

It's not over until it's over! This old wisdom proved true again at Rally Italia Sardegna, sixth round of the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC). Andreas Mikkelsen/Torstein Eriksen (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2) started the rally ending Powerstage trailing Adrien Fourmaux/Alexandre Coria by 31 seconds. With less than eight kilometres of stage left, nobody would have bet against the French crew to win WRC2 – until they slid off the road with the finish line more or less in sight. Initially not believing the live TV pictures, Mikkelsen and Eriksen celebrated their first 2023 WRC2 victory at their second start of the season.

An unusually wet Rally Italia Sardegna presented a completely different challenge to the competitors. Normally being one of the hottest and most dusty events of the FIA World Rally Championship, the event this time confronted the crews also with muddy stages and deep water crossings. The ever changing road conditions resulted in different tire strategies from the WRC2 front-runners, who had to choose between a restricted number of soft and hard compound Pirelli rubber.

"A very difficult rally," Andreas Mikkelsen described. The Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 driver from Norway was slowed by a puncture on Friday, reaching the day's finish fourth in WRC2. "Focus of the day was to stay out of trouble and keep within striking distance to the lead," the 2021 WRC2 Champion said. After the second leg Andreas Mikkelsen and co-driver Torstein Eriksen had climbed to second position and were chasing WRC2 leaders Adrien Fourmaux/Alexandre Coria. But to no avail. On Saturday evening, 25.7 seconds separated the Frenchmen and the Norwegians. "That's too much to gain during the short Sunday leg," Mikkelsen had no illusions.

With WRC2 third overalls already more than two minutes up, both crews played it safe on the first three stages of the final leg. At the start of the Powerstage, the gap had increased to 31.0 seconds. That's it, everybody thought. And then Fourmaux' off with only a few hundred metres to go turned the tables in favour of Mikkelsen. "Not a nice end for Adrien. He has done a fantastic weekend," Mikkelsen showed true sportsmanship. "But it's a win for us, and of course we are very happy."

Key stage of the first leg was "Monte Lerno-Sa Conchedda", with nearly 50 kms the longest test of the season so far. And it was in this stage, where Oliver Solberg hit trouble. The 21-year-old son of

former FIA World Rally Champion Petter Solberg at the wheel of a Toksport WRT run Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 came to Sardinia placed second in the WRC2 overall standings. But after the first run through "Monte Lerno-Sa Conchedda", Solberg and co-driver Elliott Edmondson were down in 32nd position. The Swedish-British crew had reached the stage finish with nearly 27 minutes delay – and with a broken suspension. With some ingenious road side repairs, Solberg/Edmondson made it back to service and at least stayed in competition. After some more issues including a puncture, they eventually reached the finish in 26th position in WRC2. Even with no points from Rally Italia Sardegna, Solberg still holds second overall in the WRC2 Drivers' standings.

While Solberg ran into trouble, Toksport WRT team mate Sami Pajari shone. The 21-year-old Finn and co-driver Enni Mälkönen lead WRC2 after the first leg. "It's a nice feeling to lead, but the rally is long ways from over," Pajari said on Friday evening. Unfortunately, he was right. After stage 11, it was „game over“ for the young Finns. „We went a bit too wide in a short left corner,“ Pajari explained significant rear suspension damage to his Škoda Fabia RS Rally2.

The sub-category WRC2 Challenger was dominated by Škoda crews. After the first leg, Toksport WRT's Sami Pajari/Enni Mälkönen lead the sub-category, where only drivers are eligible for points, who have not yet won a WRC2 or WRC3 title as well as not previously been nominated to score manufacturer points. After the Finns troubles, Kajetan Kajetanowicz/Maciej Szczepaniak of ORLEN Rally Team took over. They eventually won WRC2 Challenger from another Polish crew, Mikołaj Marczyk/Szymon Gospodarczyk, and Eric Cais/Petr Těšínský of team Orsák Rally Sport.

Škoda crews also ruled WRC Masters Cup, the sub-category reserved for drivers over the age of 50. When early leaders Armin Kremer/Timo Gottschalk of team Baumschlager Rallye&Racing retired due to tire and suspension problems, Dream One Racing's Mauro Miele/Luca Beltrame took the top position. But at the end of the second leg, another Baumschlager Rallye&Racing crew was leading: Austrians Johannes Keferböck/Ilka Minor. They kept this position until the finish, promoting Keferböck into the WRC2 Masters Cup overall lead.

Defending WRC2 Champion Emil Lindholm from Finland and Briton Gus Greensmith, twice WRC2 winner already this season, competed Rally Italia Sardegna without nominating the event for their respective points scoring selection. In a way, it was the right decision: Both drivers of a Toksport WRT run Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 didn't reach the finish. Greensmith and Swedish co-driver Jonas Andersson crashed out of the rally. Lindholm and co-driver Reeta Hämäläinen had to retire with suspension issues.

Next on the calendar is one of the FIA World Rally Championship's most iconic events: the gruelling Safari Rally Kenya (22-25 June).

Rally Italia Sardegna, 1-4 June 2023, Result WRC2

- 1 Andreas Mikkelsen/Torstein Eriksen (NOR/NOR), Škoda Fabia RS Rally2, 3:49.34.7 hours**
- 2 Teemu Suninen/Mikko Markkula (FIN/FIN), Hyundai i20 N Rally2, +2:15.6 minutes**
- 3 Kajetan Kajetanowicz/Maciej Szczepaniak (POL/POL), Škoda Fabia RS Rally2, +3:12.8 minutes**
- 4 Yohan Rossel/Arnaud Dunand (FRA/FRA), Citroën C3 Rally2, +3:20.2 minutes**
- 5 Mikołaj Marczyk/Szymon Gospodarczyk (POL/POL), Škoda Fabia RS Rally2, +6:00.5 minutes**
- 6 Erik Cais/Petr Těšínský (CZE/CZE), Škoda Fabia RS Rally2, +7:16.1 minutes**

Number of the rally: 0.4

Only 0.4 seconds separated Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 crews Oliver Solberg/Elliott Edmondson and Sami Pajari/Enni Mälkönen after the 50 kilometres monster stage “Monte Lerno-Sa Conchedda”. After a driving time of more than 33 minutes, the two Toksport WRT crews were 17 seconds faster than anybody else.

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Škoda Motorsport at Rally Italia Sardegna

Former WRC2 Champion Andreas Mikkelsen and co-driver Torstein Eriksen (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 of team Toksport WRT) won WRC2 at the FIA World Rally Championship's sixth round.

Source: Škoda Auto



Škoda Motorsport at Rally Italia Sardegna

Polish crew Kajetan Kajetanowicz/Maciej Szczepaniak (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 of ORLEN Rally Team) won the WRC2 Challenger classification, at the same time finishing third in WRC2 overall.

Source: Škoda Auto



Škoda Motorsport at Rally Italia Sardegna
Mikołaj Marczyk/Szymon Gospodarczyk from Poland (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 of ORLEN Rally Team) jumped to fifth position in WRC2.

Source: Škoda Auto



Škoda Motorsport at Rally Italia Sardegna
Czech Orsák Rally Team crew Erik Cais/Petr Těšínský (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2) finished a fine sixth in WRC2.

Source: Škoda Auto



Škoda Motorsport at Rally Italia Sardegna
21-year-old Oliver Solberg from Sweden and British co-driver Elliott Edmondson (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 of team Toksport WRT) posted fastest WRC2 times on five stages.

Source: Škoda Auto



Škoda Motorsport at Rally Italia Sardegna
Baumschlager Rallye&Racing's Johannes Keferböck/Ilka Minor from Austria (Škoda Fabia Rally2 evo) won the WRC Masters Cup classification.

Source: Škoda Auto



Škoda Motorsport at Rally Italia Sardegna
Reigning WRC2 Champions Emil Lindholm/Reeta Hämäläinen (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 of team Toksport WRT) taking a mud bath during an unusually wet Rally Italia Sardegna.

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.