

Rally Japan: Double Škoda triumph as Mikkelsen tops WRC2 and Kajetanowicz wins WRC2 Challenger title

- › In extreme weather conditions, WRC2 champions Andreas Mikkelsen and co-driver Torstein Eriksen¹ (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2) celebrate fourth category victory of the season.
- › Finishing third in WRC2 on the tarmac stages in the Nagoya area, Kajetan Kajetanowicz (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2) becomes inaugural champion of the WRC2 Challenger classification¹.
- › Škoda crews take top five WRC2 positions at the FIA World Rally Championship's final round.

Nagoya (JPN), 19 November – Already crowned WRC2 champions Andreas Mikkelsen/Torstein Eriksen¹ (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2) finish off the season by winning the category at Rally Japan. Second position in WRC2 Challenger classification is enough for Kajetan Kajetanowicz (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2) to win this title. Also driving a Škoda, former F1 racer Heikki Kovalainen again made a guest appearance in WRC2.

Torrential rain, some sunshine and even a little snow – Rally Japan had it all. The 13th and final round of the 2023 FIA World Rally Championship (WRC) threw the most adverse weather conditions at the competitors. In the WRC2 field, Andreas Mikkelsen and co-driver Torstein Eriksen mastered the challenges best. The Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 crew won WRC2 with a margin of more than one minute, on the way posting fastest WRC2 time on 14 of the 21 stages actually run. After the wet first leg, the Norwegians driving for team Toksport WRT for some stages even ranked as high as fourth overall. "It's been a really challenging weekend. I think our experience was key," said Andreas Mikkelsen. He and Eriksen had sealed the WRC2 Drivers' and WRC2 Co-Drivers' titles already three weeks ago at the Central European Rally.

With Mikkelsen/Eriksen seemingly easy in control in WRC2, the focus turned on the duel for the WRC2 Challenger title. Kajetan Kajetanowicz and Nikolay Gryazin both had the chance to overtake interim leader Sami Pajari. The Finn had already scored points in seven past events – the maximum allowed by the regulations – and didn't travel to Japan.

Gryazin and co-driver Konstantin Aleksandrov, who shared a Toksport run Škoda Fabia RS Rally2, eventually were fastest of the sub-category finishing second in WRC2. But third place was enough for Kajetan Kajetanowicz, as usual navigated by Maciej Szczepaniak aboard ORLEN Rally Team's Škoda Fabia RS Rally2, to become the inaugural WRC2 Challenger champion. The support series was introduced at the beginning of 2023 for WRC2-registered drivers who have not previously won a title with Rally2 machinery at WRC level. "We can say, we are champions – it's an amazing feeling," commented Kajetanowicz, a three times FIA European Rally Champion and four times title winner in Poland.

With their Rally Japan results, Gryazin and Kajetanowicz climbed to fourth and fifth position respectively in the final WRC2 Drivers' standings. Škoda drivers took four of the top 5 overall positions in the world championship's main feeder category. The WRC Masters Cup went to Alexander Villanueva (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2) from Spain, while Škoda Motorsport customer Toksport WRT 3 became the 2023 WRC2 Teams' champion¹.

¹ subject to confirmation of results by the FIA

Finishing fourth and fifth respectively in WRC2 at Rally Japan, locals Osamu Fukunaga/Misako Saida (Three Five Motorsport) and Daniel Chwist/Kamil Heller from Poland (Eurosol Racing Team Hungary) made sure, that Škoda crews took the top 5 positions of the category at the season finale.

Like last year, former Formula One racer Heikki Kovalainen again made a guest appearance in WRC2. The Finn and local co-driver Sae Kitagawa recently won their second Japanese Rally Championship for Škoda Motorsport customer team Aicello. Until their retirement during the second leg of Rally Japan, they ran as high as third in WRC2.

The WRC2 teams now head into a short winter break. The 2024 season of the FIA World Rally Championship starts on 25 January with Rallye Monte-Carlo.

Number of the rally: 22.8

In the 22.9 kilometres long stage 18 "Ena City", Andreas Mikkelsen/Torstein (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2) beat the closest WRC2 competitor by 22.8 seconds. In other words: The Norwegians were nearly exactly one second per kilometre faster than everybody else.

Rally Japan, 16-19 November 2023, Result WRC2

- 1 Andreas Mikkelsen/Torstein Eriksen (NOR/NOR), Škoda Fabia RS Rally2, 3:39:42.5 hours**
- 2 Nikolay Gryazin/Konstantin Aleksandrov (ANA/ANA), Škoda Fabia RS Rally2, +1:15.9 minutes**
- 3 Kajetan Kajetanowicz/Maciej Szczepaniak (POL/POL), Škoda Fabia RS Rally2, +11:52.2 minutes**
- 4 Osamu Fukunaga/Misako Saida (JPN/JPN), Škoda Fabia Rally2 evo, +17:05.3 minutes**
- 5 Daniel Chwist/Kamil Heller (POL/POL), Škoda Fabia Rally2 evo, +20:19.3 minutes**

Final Standings WRC2/Drivers²

- 1 Andreas Mikkelsen (NOR), Škoda, 134 points**
- 2 Gus Greensmith (GBR), Škoda, 111 points**
- 3 Yohan Rossel (FRA), Citroën, 104 points**
- 4 Nikolay Gryazin (ANA), Škoda, 96 points**
- 5 Kajetan Kajetanowicz (POL), 95 points**

Final Standings WRC2 Challenger²

- 1 Kajetan Kajetanowicz (POL), Škoda, 126 points**
- 2 Nikolay Gryazin (ANA), Škoda, 121 points**
- 3 Sami Pajari (FIN), Škoda, 118 points**

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² subject to confirmation of the results by the FIA

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Škoda Motorsport at Rally Japan

WRC2 champions Andreas Mikkelsen/Torstein Eriksen (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 of team Toksport WRT) won the category for the fourth time during the 2023 season.

Source: Škoda Auto



Škoda Motorsport at Rally Japan

Three Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 crews on the WRC2 podium of Rally Japan (from left): Konstantin Aleksandrov and Nikolay Gryazin, Torstein Eriksen and Andreas Mikkelsen, Maciej Szczepaniak and Kajetan Kajetanowicz.

Source: Škoda Auto



Škoda Motorsport at Rally Japan

Kajetan Kajetanowicz and co-driver Maciej Szczepaniak (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 of ORLEN Rally Team) finished third in WRC2 and second in the WRC2 Challenger classification.

Source: Škoda Auto



Škoda Motorsport at Rally Japan

Kajetan Kajetanowicz, a 44-year-old Škoda driver from Poland and former FIA European Rally Champion, became the inaugural WRC2 Challenger title winner.

Source: Škoda Auto



Škoda Motorsport at Rally Japan

Škoda crew Osamu Fukunaga/Misako Saida finished fourth and best-placed local team in WRC2.

Source: Škoda Auto



Škoda Motorsport at Rally Japan

For some stages former F1 racer Heikki Kovalainen and co-driver Sae Kitagawa of Škoda customer team Aicello ranked as high as third in WRC2. But the reigning Japanese Rally Champions eventually had to retire.

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 eleven passenger-car series: the Fabia, Scala, Octavia and Superb as well as the Kamiq, Karoq, Kodiaq, Enyaq, Enyaq Coupé, 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 MEB battery systems, engines and transmissions in association with the Group.
- › operates at three sites in the Czech Republic; has additional production capacity in China, Slovakia and India primarily through Group partnerships, as well as in Ukraine with a local partner.
- › employs over 40,000 people globally and is active in over 100 markets.