

Safari Rally Kenya: Škoda comeback for double WRC2 champion Andreas Mikkelsen

- › With the third round of the FIA World Rally Championship, former WRC2 title winner **Andreas Mikkelsen** from Norway returns to customer team Toksport WRT
- › Taking the wheel of another Škoda Fabia RS Rally2, Estonian Robert Virves will be teaming up with **Andreas Mikkelsen** for the first time
- › Škoda drivers **Fabrizio Zaldivar** from Paraguay and **Daniel Chwist** from Poland are among the competitors starting at Rally Kenya

Mladá Boleslav, 11 March 2026 – One of the most successful Škoda drivers returns to competition, when the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC) hits the plains of East Africa. Safari Rally Kenya (12-15 March) will mark the comeback of two-time WRC2 champion **Andreas Mikkelsen**, who has been away from the series for over a year. The Norwegian will once again take the wheel of a Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 run by Toksport WRT.

The third round of the 2026 FIA World Rally Championship, Safari Rally Kenya, drops its traditional Nairobi start and will instead focus entirely on the plains of the Great Rift Valley in the Lake Naivasha area. Varying from extremely soft “fesh-fesh” sand, typical of the Safari Rally Kenya, to high-speed passages and rocky sections, the stages are arguably some of the roughest of the series. Also, the March date makes the weather unpredictable. At this time of the year, heavy rains easily can turn the stages into a mud bath. To handle water crossings, muddy sections and soft sand, the rally cars can be fitted with so-called ‘snorkels’. These unique devices draw – relatively – clean air from the roof to the engine.

It’s in this setting that **Andreas Mikkelsen** is returning to the championship after the 2024 Rally Japan. The 36-year-old Norwegian won the WRC2 title in 2021 and again in 2023, both times at the wheel of a Škoda run by team Toksport WRT. While he can boast nearly two decades of experience in the world series, he literally is entering new territory, not least because he has a new co-driver, **Jørn Listerud**. “Although I can call myself very experienced, I am a rookie at the Safari Rally Kenya,” says **Andreas Mikkelsen**. “But I’m confident about my debut. Škoda rally cars have proven to be the right choice for the tough African stages in the past.” Indeed, since 2022, all the winners of the WRC2 category have competed with a Škoda Fabia.

Like **Andreas Mikkelsen**, **Robert Virves** is new to Safari Rally Kenya. The 25-year-old Estonian also kicks off his 2026 campaign in East Africa, again with a Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 of team Toksport WRT and co-driver **Jakko Viilo**. “The key is to find the right speed while avoiding punctures and other issues,” says **Robert Virves** ahead of his debut.

Andreas Mikkelsen and Robert Virves are not the only competitors in the WRC2 category relying on a Škoda Fabia RS Rally2. Fabrizio Zaldivar from Paraguay and Italian co-driver Marcelo Der Ohannesian return after having finished third in the category last year. The Polish duo of Daniel Chwist and Kamil Heller are getting ready for their fourth participation. The Škoda Fabia is also very popular with local teams: Seven drivers from Kenya alone will be taking the wheel of the Rally2 car from Mladá Boleslav. In total, ten Škoda crews are entered into WRC2. Missing on the entry list are the top six of the current WRC2 overall classification: Safari Rally Kenya is not part of their individual programs.

The 2026 Safari Rally Kenya comprises 20 all-gravel stages. Between the start on Thursday (12 March) and the finish on Sunday (15 March), competitors will be driving 350 kilometres against the stopwatch. The podium ceremony will take place right after the finish of the iconic “Hell’s Gate” power stage around 2h15 pm local time.

Did you know, that...

...the event was first held in 1953 under the name “East African Coronation Rally” to celebrate the enthronement of Queen Elizabeth II?

...the event was also part of the inaugural season of the FIA World Rally Championship in 1973, running through Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda under the name East African Safari Rally?

...until 1995, there were no special stages on closed roads like there are today? Instead, the entire rally took place on open roads between numerous time controls. Lateness at these checkpoints resulted in penalties, which in turn made up the classification.

...the Safari Rally Kenya was not part of the championship from 2003 to 2020?

...German pairing of Armin Schwarz and co-driver Manfred Hiemer finished third overall in 2001 with a factory-run Škoda Octavia WRC Evo2, marking the best result for the Czech brand at this iconic rally?

Standings WRC2/Drivers (after 2 of 14 events)

- 1 Roope Korhonen (FIN), Toyota, 25 points
- 2 Léo Rossel (FRA), Citroën, 25 points
- 3 Roberto Daprà (ITA), Škoda, 17 points**
- 4 Teemu Suninen (FIN), Toyota, 17 points
- 5 Lauri Joona (FIN), Škoda, 15 points**
- 6 Arthur Pelamourgues (FRA), Hyundai, 15 points

2026 FIA World Rally Championship

Rallye Monte-Carlo	22-25 January
Rally Sweden	12-15 February
Safari Rally Kenya	12-15 March
Croatia Rally	9-12 April
Rally Islas Canarias (ESP)	23-26 April
Rally de Portugal	7-10 May
Rally Japan	28-31 May
Acropolis Rally Greece	25-28 June
Rally Estonia	16-19 July
Rally Finland	30 July-2 August
Rally del Paraguay	27-30 August
Rally Chile Bio Bío	10-13 September
Rally Italia Sardegna	1-4 October
Rally Saudi Arabia	11-14 November

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Škoda crews at Safari Rally Kenya

Safari Rally Kenya runs through most spectacular scenery. Pictured: Fabrizio Zaldivar/Marcelo Der Ohannesian (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2).

Source: Škoda Auto



Škoda crews at Safari Rally Kenya

Driving a Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 of team Toksport WRT, Andreas Mikkelsen won the WRC2 title in 2021 and 2023. Nevertheless, the Norwegian faces his debut at the Safari Rally Kenya.

Source: Škoda Auto



Škoda crews at Safari Rally Kenya

To deal with soft “fesh-fesh” sand and water crossings, so-called “snorkels” are allowed. Pictured: Daniel Chwist/Kamil Heller (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2).

Source: Škoda Auto

Škoda Motorsport

- › Škoda celebrates 125 years of Motorsport since the first efforts in 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. Mikkelsen became WRC2 Champion again in 2023 with team Toksport WRT, when the all-new Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 entered the scene. The Škoda Motorsport supported team Toksport WRT also won the WRC2 Teams' title three times in 2020, 2022 and 2023. In 2025 Toksport WRT took another WRC2 Teams' title and Nikolay Gryazin/Konstantin Aleksandrov of Toksport WRT become WRC2 Challenger drivers' and co-drivers' champions respectively.
- › 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;
- > aims to become one of the top three best-selling brands in Europe by the end of the decade by offering its customers the best of both worlds through a range of attractive BEV, hybrid & ICE products;
- > effectively exploits the potential in important growth markets such as India, Vietnam and the ASEAN region;
- > currently offers customers 12 passenger car model ranges: Fabia, Scala, Octavia, Superb, Kamiq, Karoq, Kodiaq, Elroq, Enyaq, Slavia, Kylaq and Kushaq;
- > delivered more than 1,040,000 vehicles to customers worldwide in 2025;
- > has been part of the Volkswagen Group, one of the world's most successful car manufacturers, for more than 30 years;
- > is part of Brand Group CORE, an organisational merger of the Volkswagen Group's volume brands, with the aim of achieving joint growth and significantly increasing the overall efficiency of all five volume brands;
- > independently develops and produces components such as MEB battery systems, engines and transmissions for other Volkswagen Group brands;
- > operates three production plants in the Czech Republic; has production capacities in China, Slovakia and India, mostly through group partnerships, as well as in Vietnam and Ukraine in cooperation with a local partner;
- > employs around 40,000 people worldwide and is active in almost 100 markets.