

Rally Japan: Former WRC2 Champion Emil Lindholm returns to scene of his biggest success with Škoda

- › Four years ago at the Japanese round of the FIA World Rally Championship, Emil Lindholm secured the WRC2 title at the wheel of a Škoda Fabia.
- › This time around, the experienced driver from Finland shares a Toksport WRT-run Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 with Brazilian navigator Gabriel Morales.
- › On the tarmac stages in the Aichi and Gifu prefectures, local Škoda crew Osamu Fukunaga/Misako Saida goes head-to-head with international competitors.

Mladá Boleslav (CZE), 27 May 2026 – Tarmac once more: Rally Japan (28–31 May 2026) will be the final tarmac event of the 2026 FIA World Rally Championship. The only Asian fixture in the series has been brought forward in the calendar, changing from November to May as the new seventh round of the season. Among the favourites for WRC2 victory are the Finnish-Brazilian Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 crew of Emil Lindholm/Gabriel Morales.

Emil Lindholm is one of the most successful rally drivers at the wheel of a Škoda Fabia. One of the career highlights for the 29-year-old from Finland: celebrating the WRC2 title on the podium of Rally Japan, after finishing the finale of the 2022 season third in the category at the wheel of a Škoda Fabia Rally2 evo.

Following a difficult start to his 2026 campaign, Emil Lindholm returns to Rally Japan with high hopes. “I love the small and winding tarmac roads, the setup of my Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 fits this kind of stages very well. I am very optimistic that I can deliver a good result,” he says. Emil Lindholm is competing again for Toksport WRT, with Brazilian co-driver Gabriel Morales providing the pace notes.

None of the top drivers of the WRC2 overall classification have chosen Rally Japan as one of their points-scoring events. But local Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 driver Osamu Fukunaga and navigator Misako Saida won't miss the opportunity, to take on the international competitors during their home event. Their main focus, however, is the WRC Masters Cup classification, which is reserved for competitors aged 50 and over. The Japanese duo came third in this category two years ago.

Since returning to the FIA World Rally Championship in 2022, Rally Japan has reaffirmed its reputation as a unique and challenging event. Based in the Aichi and Gifu prefectures, its narrow, twisty stages are often lined by barriers, drop-offs or dense trees. These roads demand an extremely precise driving style, even though the usual wet leaves shouldn't be a problem at the event's new date.

The field of WRC2 competitors will face 20 special stages, covering a total distance of 302.82 kilometres. The service park is based in the stadium of the city of Toyota. The ceremonial start kicks off the event on Thursday evening (28 May). On Friday, six stages over 108.54 kilometres are scheduled. Saturday is the longest day of the rally with eight stages covering 120.22 kilometres. The Sunday finale (31 May) offers six more stages, totalling 74.06 kilometres. The winners will be celebrated on the podium around 3:45 pm local time (8:45 am CEST).

Did you know, that...

...the current format of Rally Japan was established in 2022, with the service park located in Toyota City, Aichi Prefecture — a 300-kilometre road trip west of Tokyo.

...the rally is not being held in late autumn for the first time, but has moved to the end of May, which is the start of summer in Japan.

...Rally Japan was part of the FIA World Rally Championship from 2004 to 2010, albeit held on gravel stages in the north of the country.

...the fans in Japan are especially enthusiastic, with tens of thousands of spectators lining the road sections between the stages.

Standings WRC2/Drivers (after 6 of 14 events)

- 1 Yohan Rossel (FRA), Lancia, 52 points
- 2 Roope Korhonen (FIN), Toyota, 52 points
- 3 Léo Rossel (FRA), Citroën, 52 points
- 4 Teemu Suninen (FIN), Toyota, 42 points
- 5 Roberto Daprà (ITA), Škoda, 37 points**

Standings WRC2/Teams (after 6 of 14 events)

- 1 Lancia Corse HF, Lancia, 163 points
- 2 Toksport WRT, Škoda, 126 points**
- 3 M-Sport Ford World Rally Team, Ford, 45 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 – Rally of Spain	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 Rally Japan

Emil Lindholm from Finland and Brazilian co-driver Gabriel Morales (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 of team Toksport WRT) are among the favourites to win the WRC2 category.

Source: Škoda Auto



Škoda crews at Rally Japan

Emil Lindholm from Finland has fond memories of Rally Japan. In 2022, driving a Škoda Fabia Rally2 evo for team Toksport WRT, he reached the finish as WRC2 Champion.

Source: Škoda Auto



Škoda crews at Rally Japan

Japanese crew Osamu Fukunaga/Misako Saida are regulars at their home event. In the past, they competed with a Škoda Fabia Rally2 evo from team Three Five Motorsport.

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 Slovakia, Kazakhstan 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.