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PRESS RELEASE 4

59th Rallye International du Valais The fight is on

The 59th edition of the Rallye International du Valais keeps its promises. Under the sun and with temperatures unusually high for the season, the competitors set off from Sion this morning for a loop of four special stages repeated in the afternoon, interspersed with the famous stretch of Casernes.

Among the candidates for victory, Olivier Burri, 8-time winner of the event, was the fastest in action and rose in the lead at the wheel of his Škoda Fabia R5. On the heels of the driver from Belprahon, several of the stars had no intention to surrender without a fight. Giandomenico Basso (Škoda Fabia R5), was split between his aim to ensure the title in the Tour European Rally and his desire to win the Rallye International du Valais for the second consecutive time. He finished the first day in second place overall, just 3.1s behind the leader. Dutch Kevin Abbring (Ford Fiesta R5) has also the victory in sight. Conceding 18s during these first nine timed sections, he lies in third and always has a say. If Michael Burri (Škoda Fabia R5) has lost some ground in the afternoon after having matched the best drivers' times in the morning, he remains in ambush, 34s3 off the lead.

In the Swiss Rally Championship, Ivan Ballinari (Škoda Fabia R5) follows the road map that he has set. He controls the situation and is seventh, just in front of his rival Cédric Althaus (Ford Fiesta R5) who is 12s3 adrift. On the other hand, the day of the third driver in contention for the national title, Steeves Schneeberger (Ford Fiesta R5), was fairly complicated by lack of confidence resulting from the accident he suffered during the Rally Ticino.

The winner of the 2018 FIA GT World Cup, Frenchman Raphaël Astier, is at the top of the category and lies in 11th with his Abarth 124 Spider Rally. At the 18th place overall, Jonathan Michellod (Peugeot 208 R2) is comfortably in control of the Swiss Junior Rally Championship. He is ahead of Thomas Schmid, second in the class, by thirty seconds or so, while Sacha Althaus is third.

Meanwhile, the 2018 Swiss Rally Cup winner, Julien Schopfer (Peugeot 106 S16) is 47th overall. In the Clio R3T Alps Trophy, Ishmael Vuistiner leads the way with a beautiful 13th place overall, far ahead of Olivier Courtois, the leader of the trophy.

The roads of Valais were not favourable for the cars entered in the Rallye Historique du Valais. Six crews have overcome the difficulties of the course. The Renault 5 Turbo Gratien Lovey is first overall, ahead of the BMW M3s of Eddy Bérard and Julien Camandona.

DRIVERS QUOTES

Olivier BURRI

Fast! Good feeling with the car. Everything works fine. We are in our position and the rally is still long. Despite the good road conditions, the tarmac does not change and there is still very little grip, it slides a lot... We attacked in the second part we lost six seconds, and then a second in Les Casernes but we made the mistake to go with soft tyres... With a few adjustments we improve the behavior of the car at high speed and we only had a big scare today. Tomorrow we'll have attack very, very hard to leave our mark. I appreciate a lot the tomorrow's special stages except perhaps Chamoson, where we cross a village very quickly, but the rally will not be played here!

Giandomenico BASSO

We have an eye on the Championship and another on the race. It is not so easy to match Burri's times because he's very fast and we must take risks to try to catch him. We are not in the same psychological condition to win here. The roads here are really beautiful, a little slippery but we knew that before. Burri's good times don't surprise me as he was already fast last year. In the second loop our feeling was better, the pace is faster because we were able to make some changes. The Pirelli tyres work well. Tomorrow it will be a hard day. We focus on the Championship and therefore not on the race. Tomorrow Burri will be very strong because he knows better and because it has an advantage. It's new for us, so we need to focus.



Kevin ABBRING

For the first special stages, I had a very good feeling and although we lacked a bit of performance compared to others, we had a good pace. In the afternoon we have lost 17 or 18 seconds, which proves that we could stay in the game. We have done what we can. It's great to be able to attack and feeling confident. Tomorrow, there are some gravel sections. This could be a good opportunity for us to catch up a bit. The roads here are really great and made for rallying. I attacked very hard but in some places, the trace is not favourable to our car. In this case, if I try to do more, I must take more risks.

Michael BURRI

The results are satisfactory because we are 4th and 2nd Swiss. We were in the groove in the first because we were attacking hard despite two scares. Tomorrow it's going to be very selective. It is quite stressful to fight against your father and he is stronger than us, so we would like to match his times. We are only 30 seconds off the lead, with the same car but different settings, including a gearbox with shorter gear ratio for him.

Ivan BALLINARI

This first day, we were quite careful because we are playing the Championship, then we increased the pace. We must stay focused until the finish line even if we are satisfied. It's very slippery but fortunately Pirelli gave us good tires. Tomorrow, after some rest, there are nice special stages with a lot of rhythm, but he must stay focused to reach the finish line.

Joachim WAGEMANS

I didn't have any problem, we are here to test the car, the speed is there, I'm happy with the car. The roads are beautiful even if it was really slippery today so we did not take chances to continue like that.

Raphaël ASTIER

For the first loop, it went well overall. A nice first special stage with little grip. We did not expect the road to be so slippery even though the weather is very nice and particularly dry. We are still drifting with these low grip roads. There's rhythm, it is nice even if we have to stay vigilant especially in a few turns and at some braking points. Until here everything is fine, we're 11th, I'm glad the car works well enough. It is rolling, it's rhythm, so have rear wheel-drive, with a lot of power, it's good, even if I'd like to have 50 more bhp... There are dirty places so it will be worse for us. We must have a softer setup to get better traction. For the second loop, we have improved the times without taking big risks. We had a good pace with good settings. Tomorrow we want to have a good pace. I can't wait to see how we do on gravel.

Steeves SCHNEEBERGER

Very difficult! No good times. I have trouble concentrating. I am disappointed, I thought that it would be easier. I didn't feel very well, so I'll try to forget about everything to relieve pressure. I thought that this would never happen. I need to stop thinking! I'm going to open up a bit, I'll try... This afternoon, my wife was a little tense and I was not too keen either, and after compression, we had no power steering. We stopped to check. Then we carried on, but we wondered whether it was wise to continue... Tomorrow we need to get confidence back.

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Media contact: media@riv.ch