

PRESS RELEASE no. 23

Will Jan Kopecký break the curse of even years?

Barum Czech Rally Zlín is eagerly anticipating its 46th season and being almost half a century old, it has one traditional element - the Challenge cup for the winner. Every year the best crew of that particular Barum Rally receive the cup from the previous winner and look after till the next Barum Rally. Still, the public can take a look at this cup at Shopping Centre Golden Apple.

But there is a way of keeping such valuable cup at one's possession forever. You need to win Barum Rally three times in a row or five times overall – it sounds so simple yet execution is very difficult, so difficult that nobody succeeded. The Barum Czech Rally Zlín Challenge cup made its way to Zlín for the 45th time, only to be rewarded to another temporary owner after rally. But history remembers many drivers who were so close to having it in their cup cabinet forever.

The first one was Vladimír Hubáček, who won the second and the third Barum Rally, in 1974 a broken gearbox killed his chances. This icon of 70s Czechoslovakian rally sport racing with a blue Renault Alpina managed to win again in 1975, but the needed two other triumphs were too much for him in such difficult rally. His car was often suffering from technical issues and missing parts and the pilot himself was steering to the end of his rally career. At Barum Rally 1976 he made his last appearance in Zlín, unfortunately, he did not finish due to, unsurprisingly, technical problem.

In his footsteps went John Haugland, phenomenal Norwegian starting for Czech manufacturer Škoda. He won with his legendary coupé 130 RS Barum Rally in 1979 and 1980, the next two years he finished second and third and in his final performance in 1983 did not cross the finish line. Therefore, Challenge cup kept travelling and by the end of 80s it was slowly making his home in Austria. Barum Rally's regular driver Franz Wittmann won this tough rally after many years of waiting, in 1988 and 1989. His partner in crime was Lancia Delta HF. Even he was forced to return the cup as in 1990, when he was supposed to fight for its permanent ownership, he did not even arrive to Zlín. Wittmann's last appearance on Barum Rally was in 1992, he was competing with strong car Toyota Celica 4WD, still, he came very close. That year shone German driver Erwin Weber with factory Mitsubishi, who went to win European Championship that year.

Since Haugland, Barum Rally had to wait for another suitor for more than two decades. In mid-90s Italy's Enrico Bertone found his temporary home in the Czech Republic and Barum Rally became his team's domestic competition. His first triumph dates back to 1995, then he won two years later, both victories were achieved behind the wheel of Toyota Celica Turbo 4WD, and the last victory in 1998 with slightly newer Celica GT-Four. Bertone was so close and perhaps he was over motivated. In 1999, which would be his third triumph in a row, he competed with front-wheel drive Renault Meganne Maxi against strong competition composed of four-wheel drive cars. His ambition disappeared almost immediately as he barely finished first stage due to punctured engine cooling system. Bertone raced once again in 2001 with Ford Focus WRC and finished second.

He could not cope only with an up-and-coming star of Czech rally sport named Roman Kresta. Kresta was already an idol and racing for the second year with factory Škoda Octavia WRC. It was Kresta, who was supposed to be another three-time winner of Barum Rally after Bertone's era. He sensationally triumphed in 2000 and the following year and suddenly, Kresta was even closer than

Bertone to the desired cup. But he failed. In 2002, in a fierce fight with Travaglia from Italy he crashed, and had to wait for another victory on local roads until 2006, which he reached for the first time with a production car Mitsubishi. The following years, the start list was full of modern specials S2000, Kresta was still among the favourites yet he did not reach first place. In his last rally in Zlín in 2014 he was in the lead, unfortunately an unlucky technical problem killed his chances of winning.

So now, we have Jan Kopecký, who is in a way an old fella in terms of Barum Czech Rally Zlín. His name first appeared in the gallery of winners in 2009 and since then, the Škoda factory driver and his companion Fabia S2000 and newer Fabia R5 respectively, seized the cup in all odd years. The even years were not in his favour – in 2010 an accident, in 2012 a technical issue, in 2014 only a forerunner with a prototype of R5 car. Will Jan Kopecký break the curse of even years? He has already won Barum Czech Rally Zlín four times, nobody before has done that, which is as such a record. If he adds one more victory, the Barum Czech Rally Zlín Challenge cup will change its owner for good.

But before we witness how this story unravels, the public has the opportunity to see the cup with the names of all of its winners. From Tuesday 23rd August until ceremonial finish the next Sunday, the cup will be shown in jewellery Présence at Shopping Centre Golden Apple.

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