

**PRESS RELEASE no. 29****Flash info after the qualifying stage Maják**

The Friday morning before the official start of the 52nd Barum Czech Rally Zlín traditionally included the free practice runs on the Maják special stage, on which the crews competing in the FIA ERC then qualified for the selection of the starting position for the following day. And its results indicate that this year's Barum rally could really offer very close battles, as the five fastest were within the range of only half a second. During the qualifying, the drivers had to deal with changable weather conditions. In the end, the qualification went best to Filip Mareš, ahead of Erik Cais and Simon Wagner, Dominik Stříteský and Chris Ingram.

**Hayden Paddon (NZL, Hyundai i20 N Rally2, no.1):**

„We took it a bit easy. After the rain overnight it was quite muddy under the trees so it was very tricky. We had a bit of moment in the free practice, it caught me by surprise, but it's good reminder for the rally that we need to be careful. The stages look very challenging, it's gonna be nice challenge here, so I'm looking forward to the rally and hopefully it will be a clean one.“

**Mads Østberg (NOR, Citroën C3 Rally2, no. 2):**

„The stage felt quite good with the conditions we had. The track is drying for every car now, so it's getting faster and faster, but we had quite a decent run. The feeling in the car is good as well, so we're looking forward to the rally start.“

**Efrén Llarena (ESP, Škoda Fabia RS Rally2, no.3):**

„It felt really good, we were quite close to the people that started in front of us. But then the sun came out and it started to dry a lot, so lots of people are improving the times. But it's OK, the conditions here are not so important yet.“

**Alexej Lukjaňuk (CYP, Škoda Fabia RS Rally2, no.5):**

„It's not the best morning for us, because the track is wet and slippery and we chose to go to the rally with harder tyres. So we definitely sacrificed the performance in the qualifying, but I think we need to push somewhere else, so it's all good. I haven't been here for couple of years, but the tracks are still the same, muddy, bumpy, narrow fast and I like it so much, so I'm happy to be back. Unfortunately our car is a bit heavy, so we can't really commit, but it's OK.“

**Martinš Sesks (LVA, Škoda Fabia RS Rally2, no.6):**

„We were one of the first on the road. It was still quite damp in some places, so the cars behind had better conditions but that is rallying. From our side it was good, quite clean, no mistakes.“

**Mathieu Franceschi (FRA, Škoda Fabia RS Rally2, no.7):**

„I am cautious, especially when you discover this style of road, because it's different to what I am familiar with. Really slippery, really narrow, fast. On tarmac I have absolutely no experience. I need to learn, see every stage this weekend to discover this crazy rally.“

**Filip Mareš (CZE, Škoda Fabia Rally2 Evo, no. 9):**

"The track was drying out, so it was tricky for everyone because in the forest at Maják it was wet and also quite dark, so it was hard to judge the grip. The stage overall was nice, of course it's good to be first, but for now it's just a qualification that doesn't really decide anything, because even the starting position for tomorrow is not that essential. So we'll see, but of course it's nice to start the weekend like this."

**Simon Wagner (AUT, Škoda Fabia RS Rally2, no.10):**

"Not too bad. Stage was very tricky also with the weather condition. It's tight in the front, let's see what the rally will be. I'm expecting lot of drivers to be very fast."

**Erik Cais (CZE, Škoda Fabia RS Rally2, no.11):**

"It looks like we'll be at the front, so it looks good. The driving wasn't bad, there are still thousandths that you could improve, but that's how it is and I'm more than satisfied. I think we have a good spot for the selection of starting positions."

**Joshua McErlean (IRL, Hyundai i20 N Rally2, no.12):**

"We can't expect so much, coming here for the first time and not being on tarmac for a very long time. The feeling is okay, roads are tricky, and rally is challenging but the qualifying time wasn't so bad compared to the likes of Hayden who wasn't here before really. We are looking forward to the race and kicking of things tonight."

**Miklós Csomós (HUN, Škoda Fabia Rally2 Evo, no.14):**

"It was a very difficult stage with a lot of mud and cuts. Sometimes it was dry, sometimes wet, so quite tricky to drive. The time is not so good, we made a mistake, which cost us few seconds. But it's OK, the important part starts tonight and then tomorrow in the proper rally."

**Albert von Thurn und Taxis (GER, Škoda Fabia RS Rally2, no.16):**

"I have really good feelings with the new car and I massively look forward to the event. I'm very excited about tonight's special stage in the city centre, I think it's something absolutely unique. In Czech Republic people are so passionate about rally and especially here in Zlín it's always with really good vibes, so I'm looking forward. I'm not such a fan of city stages as they are usually tricky, but let's see, it's gonna be exciting."

**Jan Kopecký (CZE, Škoda Fabia RS Rally2, no.18):**

"It's fine with us. We went on the hardest tyres in the morning, even though it was already completely under water, so they looked at me a little strange at Michelin. But I hope the conditions will be dry and I can continue to use these tyres in the rally."

**Chris Ingram (GBR, Volkswagen Polo Gti R5, no.19):**

"Really good start, we opted to save the hard tyres for the rally, but we were still on the pace, just half a second off the fastest. So perfect start, but the real action starts later and we need to stay focused. I'm so happy to be back, this is one of my favourite rallies, one of best in Europe for me. We're just gonna try to put our best performance ever!"



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**Dominik Stříteský (CZE, Škoda Fabia R5, no.20):**

"Fourth place is definitely a great start for us, it's a good starting position, but the real rally starts tomorrow. It looked like it was going to be nice, but the weather is unpredictable, so I don't think we have anything clear yet."

**Adam Březík (CZE, Škoda Fabia Rally2 Evo, no.21):**

"I hit a lamp, we damaged a new car, so it's not very good. But hopefully it can be fixed by the evening, it's just the door, which is the only thing from the old car that fits onto the new one, so we'll go to the workshop, take the door from the old car and we put them here."

In Zlín 18th of August 2023

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