

PRESS RELEASE no. 34**Cais affected by defect, Kopecký in the lead after first leg**

The 52nd Barum Czech Rally Zlín has reached the half of its racing programme. Within the first few stages of the first leg, the time differences of the elite drivers kept quite small so the beginning of the rally was an interesting drama. During the first four special stages including the Friday's one in the city centre of Zlín, four different racers jumped to the top overall position. After driving through the SS Slušovice for the second time, Jan Kopecký (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2) became even the fifth one but unlike his opponents he has stayed first for the rest of the day.

The Czech defending champion was the fastest racer of the first-afternoon stage and as Erik Cais (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2) gained a few seconds during his drive, Jan Kopecký moved to the lead.

Alexey Lukyanuk (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2) with Cypriot licence, disappointed about the performance in the morning, was fast as well and finished second with just eight-tenths of a second behind Jan Kopecký. Filip Mareš (Škoda Fabia Rally2 Evo) also improved in comparison with his results in the morning. Norwegian Mads Ostberg z Norska (Citroën C3 Rally 2) contended with technical problems and didn't continue after the fifth stage.

The sixth SS Kateřinice eliminated Erik Cais from battling for total victory at Barum Rally. The second overall driver at that time slipped off the track, got affected by a defect, and lost more than eighty seconds before reaching the finish.

Contrarily, Jan Kopecký followed his own standard, reached the fastest time again, and became the first driver who stayed in the overall lead for more than just one stage. The following five drivers – Filip Mareš, Miklós Csomós from Hungary (Škoda Fabia Rally2 Evo), or Simon Wagner from Austria (Škoda Fabia RS Rally2) among them for example – stayed close and their times were just up to 2.3 seconds slower.

The SS Troják as the last stage of the day didn't change the overall standings at the top positions anymore, so Jan Kopecký is going to start the second leg on Sunday as the leader. It was him along with Erik Cais who won the stage, both in a completely same time. Thanks to his fast drive, Cais at least got closer to the top 10, of which he fell out earlier after the defect.

Adam Březík (Škoda Fabia Rally2 Evo) stays as the Czech second-best and fourth overall, just in front of Hayden Paddon (Hyundai i20 N Rally2) from New Zealand who has already got used to the Moravian tracks and moved to the fifth place during the afternoon. By contrast, Alexey Lukyanuk lost his chance for a top position in the final standings as he lost two and a half minutes due to technical problems at the SS Troják.

Timo Schulz (Opel Corsa Rally4) from Germany leads the juniors after the first leg and at the same time, he is the first among racers in the 2WD and ERC4 categories in front of Jaromír Tarabus (Peugeot 208 Rally4) from the Czech Republic by about 14 seconds.

Igor Widlak from Poland took the lead in the ERC3 category as the current champion Jon Armstrong (both Ford Fiesta Rally3) from Great Britain left from the competition.

Václav Pech (Ford Focus WRC) is the second overall in the Czech national championship with just 4.6 seconds behind Kopecký after the first leg.

Standings after 7th special stage

1. Kopecký, Hloušek (CZE, Škoda Fabia RS Rally2)	1:02:39.1 min
2. Csomós, Bán (HUN, Škoda Fabia Rally2 Evo)	+ 14.9 s
3. Wagner, Winter (AUT, Škoda Fabia RS Rally2)	+ 28.7 s
4. Březík, Krajča (CZE, Škoda Fabia Rally2 Evo)	+ 41.2 s
5. Paddon, Kennard (NZL, Hyundai i20 N Rally2)	+ 42.8 s
6. Mareš, Bucha (CZE, Škoda Fabia Rally2 Evo)	+ 46.9 s
7. Stříteský, Hovorka (CZE, Škoda Fabia R5)	+ 49.4 s
8. Llarena, Fernandez (ESP, Škoda Fabia R5)	+ 59.7 s
9. Franceschi, Malfoy (FRA, Škoda Fabia RS Rally2)	+ 1:05.4 min
10. McErlean, Fulton (IRL, Hyundai i20 N Rally2)	+ 1:20.1 min
18. Schulz, Wenzel (DEU, Opel Corsa Rally4), 1. ERC4, ERC4J, 2WD	+ 5:08.1 min
29. Widlak, Pawlowski (Ford Fiesta Rally3), 1. ERC3	+ 9:17.9 min

Total number of SS victories: 3 – Kopecký, 2 – Cais, 1 – Wagner, Lukyanuk, Csomós
(Kopecký and Cais both won the seventh special stage)

More information available at www.czechrally.com and don't forget to follow the Barum Rally and Star Rally Historic on the official Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts and the other press information.

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