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After SS4: Defending champion withdraws, close battle for top spots

The **54th BARUM CZECH RALLY ZLÍN 2025** has completed first special stages. After Friday's city super special stage, the competition continued on Saturday morning with three special stages in Březová, Halenkovice, and Bunč.

The first section caused problems and cleared the starting field of European leaders. Miklo Csomos from Hungary crashed on the Březová special stage and Simone Tempestini from Romania withdrew due to damaged suspension. Christopher Ingram from Great Britain also had problems, suffering a puncture and changing his front left wheel. All three are from the MRF Tyres team, for which the Březová special stage proved fatal. On the other hand, Czech drivers Jan Kopecký and Erik Cais had a great performance in the special stage, finishing with the same time to the second. Jan Kopecký moved into the lead ahead of young Italian Andrea Mabellini, both in Škoda Fabia RS Rally2 cars.

The second stage of the morning section in Halenkovice also caused problems for the drivers. Czech defending champion Dominik Střiteský suffered a triple puncture and had to quit the competition despite being only 8 seconds behind the fastest driver, Jan Kopecký. Young Swede Mille Johansson also had problems, missing a turn, as did Jakub Matulka from Poland, who spun out. Local hero Adam Březík had problems with his handbrake and lost 10.6 seconds to the leader Jan Kopecký, who maintained a 5-second lead over second place, which was taken by Simon Wagner from Austria.

The third special stage was the 18-kilometer Bunč, which once again shook up the rankings, with the top five competitors being within 4.4 seconds overall. The drivers faced gravel sections, but with no issues. However, last year's ERC3 champion, Czech driver Filip Kohn, had an accident. Jon Armstrong from Ireland showed his speed here, beating his closest rival by 4 seconds.

Eleven-time Barum Czech Rally Zlín winner Jan Kopecký took the lead after the first section, avoiding problems on the treacherous gravel sections, and will fend off attacks from his rivals in the second section. Especially the young Italian Mabellini, who, according to his rivals, has proven his speed and who shares the second place with Simon Wagner.

Several crews encountered complications during the first section on Saturday, which knocked them out of the fight for the top positions. The aforementioned Ingram had technical problems at Halenkovice after a puncture at Březová and also received a time penalty for arriving late at the time control. Despite his fast times, local driver Erik Cais said in interviews that he was at his limit and had a minor crisis at Bunč.

In the ERC3 category, Hubert Kowalczyk leads after the first section of Saturday's leg, just like last year, with his Renault Clio Rally3 ahead of his Polish compatriot Adrian Rzeźnik, who is 3.2 seconds behind. Third place is held by local driver Daniel Polášek with Zdeněk Omelka. The best driver in the ERC4 category is European championship leader Calle Carlberg of Sweden, who has a 33-second lead over second-placed Leevi Lassila of Finland.

Standings after the 4th special stage:

1. J. Kopecký, J. Hovorka (CZE, Škoda Fabia RS Rally2) 36:15,9 min
2. A. Mabellini, V. Lenz (ITA, Škoda Fabia RS Rally2) + 1,2 s
3. S. Wagner, H. Ostlender (AUT/GER, Hyundai i20 N Rally2) + 1,2 s
4. J. Armstrong, S. Byrne (IRL, Ford Fiesta MkII Rally2) + 3,1 s
5. E. Cais, D. Trunkát (CZE, Hyundai i20 N Rally2) + 4,4 s
6. F. Mareš, R. Bucha (CZE, Toyota GR Yaris Rally2) + 10,1 s
7. M. Marczyk, S. Gospodarczyk (POL, Škoda Fabia RS Rally2) + 18,2 s
8. A. Březík, O. Krajča (CZE, Škoda Fabia RS Rally2) + 23,6 s
9. J. Kundlák P. Baran (CZE/SVK, Škoda Fabia RS Rally2) + 41,5 s
10. J. Matulka, D. Syty (POL, Škoda Fabia RS Rally2) + 48 s
21. H. Kowalczyk, J. Hryniuk (POL, Renault Clio Rally3), 1. place ERC3 + 2:55,0 min
23. C. Carlberg, T. Carlberg (SWE, Opel Corsa Rally4), 1. place ERC4 and 2WD + 3:01,0 min

Won SS:

2 – Kopecký, 1 – Mabellini, Armstrong

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