



MINI ALL4 Racing secures podium in the World Cup kick-off

- Vladimir Vasilyev finishes second in Russia
- Erik van Loon comes fifth

Just a month after the Dakar, the cross-country rally calendar featured the next event: the Northern Forest – Baja Russia, round one of the 2015 FIA Cross Country Rally World Cup, held from 20th to 22nd February. At the end of three days and with 326 kilometres contested, the Russian pairing Vladimir Vasilyev / Konstantin Zhiltsov took their MINI ALL4 Racing to second position, with the Dutchmen Erik van Loon and Wouter Rosegaar coming fifth.

Following the prologue, Vasilyev was the second to start into the second special stage and held a position among the front-runners right from the start. But with 100 kilometres contested, the Russian hit a rock with a front wheel. Due to having to change the wheel he lost several minutes and finished fifth on Saturday. In the third and final special stage on Sunday, Vasilyev once again really went for it and clinched second place, thus working his way up in the overall rankings to finish second.

For Van Loon it was the first event on ice and snow. Therefore, he needed some time for familiarising himself with the conditions and finished seventh, on Saturday. On Sunday, however, the Dutchman made good use of the experiences gathered on the previous day and took his MINI ALL4 Racing to fourth place. In the end, he made it to fifth position in the Northern Forest – Baja Russia.

The organisers of the Northern Forest – Baja Russia had moved the event further to the north to make for lower temperatures but just as in 2014, the rally took place at temperatures above 0° C and so, the snow was extremely wet and slippery. An

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anything but easy task for the competitors as even spikes didn't provide the grip and traction they needed.

"The Sunday went really well for the MINI ALL4 Racing crews," said X-raid GmbH CEO Sven Quandt. "It's a pity that Vladimir hit the rock on Saturday, as this incident probably cost him the win. Meanwhile, Erik contested his first event on ice and snow and delivered in really fine style. You really could see the massive step forward he made from Saturday to Sunday."

Baja Russia Overall rankings with all the three stages contested:

1st SUOMINEN / NASMAN – Toyota – 3h 37m 10s

2nd VASILYEV / ZHILTSOV – MINI ALL4 Racing – 3h 38m 17s

3rd VARELA / GUGELMIN – Toyota – 3h 44m 27s

4th ZAPLETAL / MARTON – H3 – 3h 49m 11s

5th VAN LOON / ROSEGAAR – MINI ALL4 Racing – 3h 50m 38s