



Rallye du Maroc: Difficult final test

- Three MINI ALL4 Racing in the top five
- A lot of bad luck in the final stage

This year's Rallye OLibya du Maroc was one of the most difficult ones ever and took both drivers and navigators to their very limits. After six exhausting days across Morocco, three MINI ALL4 Racing pairings secured top-five positions. The Russians Vladimir Vasilyev and Konstantin Zhilstsov came third in the desert rally, followed by Orlando Terranova (ARG) / Paulo Fiúza (POR) and Kuba Przygonski (POL) / Tom Coulsoul (BELG). Boris Garafulic (CHI) and Filipe Palmeiro (POR) finished seventh. Meanwhile, the two MINI ALL4 Racing pairings Yazeed Al-Rajhi (KSA) / Timo Gottschalk (GER) and Mikko Hirvonen (FIN) / Michel Périn (FRA) as well as Mohamed Abu Issa (QAT) and Philipp Beier (GER) in the buggy were forced into retirement in the final stage.

Vasilyev delivered in consistent style and made it to the top 10 in every single stage. While his rivals made several mistakes, the Russian contested the rally without encountering any major problems to finish third, in the end. "We are happy, the MINI ran very well," Vasilyev said afterwards. "We had no problems whatsoever. Neither technical nor when it came to driving and navigating. For us, it was about testing our car and the suspension in particular." Right behind Vasilyev, Terranova and Przygonski finished fourth and fifth respectively. Both also impressed with their consistent performances and made it to the top 10 in every stage while benefiting from the problems of the other competitors at the same time. "Last year, my experiences with the car in the dunes were limited. Now, the fifth place reflects the progress I made," the Pole said with delight. "The cooperation with Tom is great. We speak the same language. The fifth place is a really fine result and I hope that we also will be fast in the Dakar." Garafulic also made it to the top 10, in the Moroccan event.

The other X-raid pairings, however, had to cope with a lot of bad luck, in the final stage. Following a difficult start, Saudi Al-Rajhi could work his way back up to the top

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three as early as in special stage two but in the fourth stage, he was stopped by the nature. Al-Rajhi's and Gottschalk's MIN ALL4 Racing got stuck on a huge camel-grass hill and needed several minutes to get going again. And on the final day, they were forced into retirement by a turbocharger damage. "The rally was very demanding but the road book wasn't optimal. Altogether, the navigation was really challenging. Unfortunately, yesterday's mound and today's damage prevented us from securing a good result."

Hirvonen held a top-three position in the early stages but a puncture and navigation problems made him drop back to fifth. On the following day he pushed again but from stage four, the Finn had to cope with a massive dose of bad luck. On the penultimate day he went off the track in the dust of a car driving in front of him, thus damaging the suspension. In addition, he fell ill and consequently couldn't complete the final stage. "Unfortunately we couldn't make it to the finish," said Hirvonen. "Nonetheless, there are some positive things on our balance sheet: "We displayed a good pace in several special stages and I kept on learning a lot in the dunes. It was a tough rally, the toughest I contested so far. Today I felt really sick and I also had fever. In the special stage I felt my body overheating and that's why I stopped."

Abu Issa who contested his first rally in the buggy was able to make for several highlights. But he also had to cope with bad luck, in the final stage and was stopped by a broken drive shaft. But we all know that a bad final test is followed by a successful competition.

Results stage 5:

1. C. Depres (FRA) / D. Castera (FRA) Peugeot – 2h 21m 50s
2. C. Sainz (ESP) / L. Cruz (ESP) Peugeot – 2h 21m 56s
3. **V. Vasilyev (RUS) / K. Zhiltsov (RUS) MINI ALL4 Racing – 2h 24m 13s**
4. **O. Terranova (ARG) P. Fiuza (POR) MINI ALL4 Racing – 2h 25m 24s**
5. N. Al-Attiyah (QAT) / M. Baumel (FRA) Toyota – 2h 26m 32s
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7. **J. Przygonski (POL) / T. Colsoul (BEL) MINI ALL4 Racing – 2h 33m 51s**
8. **B. Garafulic (CHI) / F. Palmeiro (POR) MINI ALL4 Racing – 2h 37m 09s**

Overall standings after stage 5:

1. N. Al-Attiyah (QAT) / M. Baumel (FRA) Toyota – 12h 28m 28s
2. C. Sainz (ESP) / L. Cruz (ESP) Peugeot – 12h 40m 36s
3. **V. Vasilyev (RUS) / K. Zhiltsov (RUS) MINI ALL4 Racing – 13h 04m 37s**
4. **O. Terranova (ARG) P. Fiuza (POR) MINI ALL4 Racing – 13h 12m 21s**
5. **J. Przygonski (POL) / T. Colsoul (BEL) MINI ALL4 Racing – 13h 38m 03s**
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9. **B. Garafulic (CHI) / F. Palmeiro (POR) MINI ALL4 Racing – 14h 39m 23s**