



Silk Way Rally - SS5: MINI ALL4 Racing battle their way through the longest stage

- Three MINI ALL4 Racing vehicles in the top five
- Al-Rajhi / Gottschalk the quickest MINI ALL4 Racing pairing

Today, on the way from Astana to Balkhash, the teams contesting the Silk Way Rally had to cope with the longest special stage. The MINI ALL4 Racing pairings weren't ready to get scared by the massive 568.24-kilometre distance and secured the positions two to four, six and 13! The fastest MINI ALL4 Racing pairing in today's special stage was Yazeed Al-Rajhi (KSA) / Timo Gottschalk (GER) who suffered three tyre damages and came second, nevertheless. Third position was clinched by Kazakh Aidyn Rakhimbayev and his Russian navigator Anton Nikolaev, followed by young Briton Harry Hunt and Andreas Schulz (GER). The Russian pairing Vladimir Vasilyev /Konstantin Zhiltsov finished sixth, with Bauyrzhan Issabayev (KAZ) / Vladimir Demyanenko (RUS) crossing the finish line in 13th position.

Today's special stage was not only the longest on the 2016 Silk Way Rally schedule but also represented a particular technical challenge – for both the drivers and the co-drivers. "Navigating was anything but easy," revealed Andreas Schulz, "And so we lost our way for a short time twice. But it also was a beautiful stage: fast, plane sections and in the closing stages, we had to slightly drive up into the mountains." However, the track featured mud holes throughout the special stages that took the windscreen wipers to their very limits. So, many pairings had to get out of their cars and clean the windows manually.

Following their problems in yesterday's special stage when they lost time due to an overheated engine, Al-Rajhi / Gottschalk really went for it, today. "This was the longest special stage I contested to date," said the Saudi. "And it was not only long but also very technical. You had no time for a breather. It was our goal to make it to

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the top three.” However, the pairing was forced to stop four times: three times due to damaged tyres and once to remove the mud from the windscreen. “The windscreen wipers just weren’t able to cope with the mud and the vision was zero,” added Al-Rajhi.

Rakhimbayev was virtually over the moon after having arrived in the bivouac in Balkhash. “Third place is fantastic,” he beamed. “We had no problems whatsoever and got through very well. In the closing stages we got stuck in the dust of two of our competitors but that was no big deal. Only in China, in the dunes, the rally really will begin.” Hunt also was happy with his result although his day wasn’t trouble-free. “This was the longest special stage in my career so far,” said the Briton. “We had to get out of the car for cleaning the windscreen twice as we had run out of our windscreen cleaning fluid. And in addition, we temporarily had to back off as we had problems with our central differential.”

Vasilyev, however, encountered a day to forget. Thanks to a tyre puncture in the early stages, the competition could close in on him. “We had to stop three times as we got the Sentinel signal to let somebody pass. Furthermore, Peterhansel had an accident and we stopped for a short time but fortunately they both were unharmed,” reported co-driver Zhiltsov. “All this cost us a lot of time. But the rally is far from being over. As I see it, the Chinese special stages will determine the Silk Way Rally.”

Tomorrow, the rally will take the pairings to Almaty, the venue of the rest day on the day after tomorrow. A day of rest the entire rally baggage really needs. Long stages for competitors and service crews in combination with short nights have been a really hard and exhausting experience for all those involved. In Almaty, they all will use the time for a breather before getting back into the cockpits on the way to China.

Result stage 5:

1st C. Despres (FRA) / Castera (GRA) – Peugeot - 5h 37m 52s

2nd **Y- Al-Rajhi (KSA) / T. Gottschalk (GER) - MINI ALL4 Racing – 5h 49m 08s**

3rd **A. Rakhimbayev (KAZ) / A. Nikolaev (RUS) - MINI ALL4 Racing – 5h 51m 03s**

4th **H. Hunt (GBR) / A. Schulz (GER) - MINI ALL4 Racing - 5h 51min 23s**

5th S. Loeb (FRA) / D. Elena (MCO) – Peugeot – 5h 53m 22s

6th **V. Vasilyev (RUS) / K. Zhiltsov (RUS) - MINI ALL4 Racing – 5h 54m 26s**

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13th **B. Issabayev (KAZ) / V. Demyanenko - MINI ALL4 Racing – 6h 15min 49s**

Overall standings after stage 5:

1st C. Despres (FRA) / Castera (GRA) – Peugeot - 9h 47m 05s

2nd S. Loeb (FRA) / D. Elena (MCO) – Peugeot – 10h 01m 27s

3rd Y- Al-Rajhi (KSA) / T. Gottschalk (GER) - MINI ALL4 Racing – 10h 01m 43s

4th V. Vasilyev (RUS) / K. Zhiltsov (RUS) - MINI ALL4 Racing – 10h 02m 21s

5th A. Rakhimbayev (KAZ) / A. Nikolaev (RUS) - MINI ALL4 Racing – 10h 03m 09s

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10th B. Issabayev (KAZ) / V. Demyanenko - MINI ALL4 Racing – 10h 38min 45s

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12th H. Hunt (GBR) / A. Schulz (GER) - MINI ALL4 Racing - 10h 46m 05s

For videos from the Silk Way Rally 2016 please click [here](#)