



Silk Way Rally: Four MINI ALL4 Racing pairings secure top-five positions!

- **Al-Rajhi/Gottschalk the fastest MINI ALL4 Racing crew**
- **All five MINI ALL4 Racing vehicles make it to the top 10**

Today, the 2016 Silk Way Rally ended with the second stage win for Yazeed Al-Rajhi (KSA) and his German navigator Timo Gottschalk. Tomorrow, the competitors will drive in a convoy to the winners' podium in Beijing. At the end of the 14-stage marathon with a total distance of more than 10,000 kilometres, Al-Rajhi finished second behind Peugeot's Cyril Despres. Right behind the Saudi, three other MINI ALL4 Racing pairings also secured top-five positions: third place was clinched by the Russians Vladimir Vasilyev and Konstantin Zhiltsov who raced for Team VRT and were followed by Harry Hunt (GBR) / Andreas Schulz (GER) and Aidyn Rakhimbayev (KAZ) /Anton Nikolayev (RUS) in fourth and fifth positions respectively. And Bauyrzhan Issabayev (KAZ) and Vladimir Demanyenko (RUS) took their MINI ALL4 Racing to 10th place.

As the Dakar, the Silk Way Rally is one of the longest events on the calendar. Altogether, the schedule featured 14 more or less gruelling stages but two of them had to be cancelled due to adverse weather conditions: the second from Kazan to Ufa because of torrential rain and the 11th, from Dunhuang to Jiayuguan, due to a sandstorm.

One of the factors making the days in Russia and Kazakhstan so gruelling were the long ride times. Not only the competitors but also the service teams had to complete long on-road liaison stages. In China, the teams still had to cope with long special stages but the overall ride times were shorter. In the three countries, the competitors had to cope with the most different track and weather conditions. From normal, hard

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track surfaces to dunes and sand and from rain to sunshine with temperatures of more than 40° C.

Al-Rajhi is happy about having finished runner-up. “We learned a lot and gathered a lot of experience. The MINI was very good and our performance, too,” said the Saudi who succeeded in winning two stages. “It was a tough rally and driving from Moscow to Beijing was a true adventure.”

Meanwhile, the Russians Vasilyev and Zhiltsov impressed with extreme consistency. On every single day of the event they made it to the top six. “It was a good rally and a good fight,” said Vasilyev. “Unfortunately, the first special stage had to be cancelled. I think it would have suited our MINI well. In China, however, the buggies had an advantage.”

At the same time, Hunt who lost a lot of time in the opening stages of the rally when he got stuck in a mud hole for more than 30 minutes impressed by working his way back up with great fighting spirit. “I’m really delighted,” beamed the young Briton. “I never would have expected that we could be able to finish fourth, after this incident. The Silk Way was a really tough rally and as I see it, it’s even more demanding than the Dakar. Both the special stages and the liaison sections were longer and more often than not the going got really tough. In China, the rally made another step up, the temperatures rose and the landscape was more beautiful.”

Despite a break of more than a year, Rakhimbayev also delivered in fine style. “I’m happy and pleased with my achievements,” the Kazakh said in Hohhot. “I enjoyed contesting the Silk Way Rally, it was an interesting challenge. Ride times of less than two or three hours just aren’t my scene.” For his co-driver, Nikolaev, this year’s edition already was the fourth Silk Way Rally. “But it was my first time to have made it to the finish,” the Russian beamed.

Unfortunately, Issabayev had to cope with a major dose of bad luck, on the final day: due to a technical problem he lost a lot of time and dropped back from seventh to tenth position in the overall ranking. “A top-10 position is okay but nonetheless, it is a pity that we didn’t secure a better result,” said the Kazakh. “It was a tough rally for me. You really could say that it was tougher than this year’s Dakar.”

Today, the cars have to be taken to the Parc Fermé following a 90-minute service. Tomorrow, the Silk Way Rally will end with the ride to Beijing. It will be a pure liaison stage for the racing cars that will take them to Beijing’s famous Olympic Stadium – the Bird’s Nest. To make sure that the entire rally baggage – racing car as well as

service cars and trucks – make it to Beijing in time, they all will cover the distance to Beijing in a convoy. And in the following weeks, X-raid team members will drive all the vehicles back to Trebur. This long haul also will be completed in a convoy, together with other European competitors. Until the three service trucks, three support cars and four MINI ALL four Racing vehicles will be back at home at X-raid some 21 days later.

Result stage 14:

1st Y. Al Rajhi (KSA) / T. Gottschalk (GER) MINI ALL4 Racing - 3h 44m 01s

2nd S. Loeb (FRA) / D. Elena (MCO) Peugeot - 3h 46m 43s

3rd H. Hunt (GBR) / A. Schulz (GER) MINI ALL4 Racing - 3h 47m 22s

4th V. Vasilyev (RUS) / K. Zhiltsov (RUS) MINI ALL4 Racing - 3h 47m 32s

5th C. Koolen (NED) / P. Larroque (FRA) Optimus - 3h 48m 16s

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7th A. Rakhimbayev (KAZ) / A. Nikolaev (RUS) MINI ALL4 Racing - 3h 52m 15s

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26th B. Issabayev (KAZ) / V. Demyanenko (RUS) MINI ALL4 Racing - 4h 59m 23s

Overall standings after stage 14:

1st C. Despres (AND) / D. Castera (AND) Peugeot - 36h 15m 18s

2nd Y. Al Rajhi (KSA) / T. Gottschalk (GER) MINI ALL4 Racing - 36h 41m 09s

3rd V. Vasilyev (RUS) / K. Zhiltsov (RUS) MINI ALL4 Racing - 37h 05m 04s

4th H. Hunt (GBR) / A. Schulz (GER) MINI ALL4 Racing - 38h 10m 05s

5th A. Rakhimbayev (KAZ) / A. Nikolaev (RUS) MINI ALL4 Racing - 38h 28m 03s

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10th B. Issabayev (KAZ) / V. Demyanenko (RUS) MINI ALL4 Racing - 41h 23m 27s