



First stage win for the MINI ALL4 Racing

- **Al-Rajhi wins stage eight**
- **Five MINI ALL4 Racing hold top-10 positions in the overall rankings**

On the eighth stage, from Bortala to Urumqi, Yazeed Al-Rajhi (KSA) and Timo Gottschalk (GER) were the fastest in the 256.93-kilometres special stage and secured the first stage win for the MINI ALL4 Racing. Russian pairing Vladimir Vasilyev and Konstantin Zhiltsov came fifth, with Harry Hunt (GBR) / Andreas Schulz (GER) and Bauyrzhan Issabayev (KAZ) / Vladimir Demyanenko (RUS) finishing sixth and seventh respectively. The fifth MINI ALL4 Racing pairing, Rakhimbayev (KAZ) / Anton Nikolaev (RUS), completed the great MINI ALL4 Racing result by finishing ninth.

After the rest day on Friday in Almaty, Kazakhstan, that offered the service team the opportunity to prepare the five MINI ALL4 Racing vehicles for the second week of the event, the pairings again had to cope with quite a challenge. Following a short 76-kilometre special stage they crossed the border into China. In addition to the document control at the border, the drivers also were provided with a Chinese driving license. This also applied to all the other members of the rally baggage that crossed the border at the wheel of a vehicle. These licenses are temporary and only may be used in combination of a valid driving license. Furthermore, the service vehicles were equipped with Chinese number plates. Today, the field hit the road to Urumqi. With hindsight one of the most special stages of the rally so far. "The ambient temperatures rose up to 40° C," said Demyanenko. "And in the cockpit it was - or felt at least - even hotter." Furthermore, a part of the route once again took the field through high grass that tended to obstruct the radiators.

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Al-Rajhi had to cope with ups and downs, in the previous two days. Yesterday, in stage seven, he had to stop due to a puncture, thus losing several minutes and at the end of the day he had to settle for finishing eighth. But he refused to let this incident make an impact on his motivation and in today's eight stage he once again really went for it. For a long time he held third position but in the final stages he made it to the lead and crossed the line as stage winner. A result that also helped him to gain several minutes compared to the pairings that hold the positions in front of him in the overall standings. "A truly tough stage," said the Saudi. "An extremely bumpy track but we pushed throughout the special stage. Nearly the entire special stage suited the buggies better but the last kilometres were better for us and allowed us to close in on them and pass them, in the end. "

Meanwhile, Vasilyev and Zhiltsov kept on delivering on a consistent level. Having finished third and fifth in the past two stages, the two VRT pilots currently hold third place in the overall standings. And they delivered so although they were hampered by an overheated engine, today. "Therefore, our air condition unfortunately also didn't work and it was extremely hot in the cockpit," informed co-driver Zhiltsov. "During the final 100 kilometres we backed off to go easy on the engine. But unfortunately we lost five minutes compared to Yazeed."

Hunt and Schulz also keep on working their way up in the overall standings. Yesterday, they made it back into the top 10 by finishing fourth and today the young Briton finished sixth, thus gaining another three places to seventh position overall. "This special stage was more exhausting than the longest special stage prior to the rest day," revealed Hunt. "The track was bumpy throughout the whole special stage and then we hit a stump and Andy had to get out of the car to get us going again. Later, the engine-temperatures rose quite a lot. It's great to currently hold seventh position but we only and fully focus in the coming day, not on the overall standings."

Tomorrow, on the way to Hami, the Silk Way Rally will take the field to desert for the first time, with the stage featuring dunes from the start: In addition, the competitors also will have to cope with on-road and off-road sections.

Results stage 8:

- 1st Y. Al Rajhi (KSA) / T. Gottschalk (GER) MINI ALL4 Racing - 3h 10m 24s**
- 2nd S. Loeb (FRA) / D. Elena (MCO) Peugeot - 3h 10m 55s**
- 3rd S. Peterhansel (FRA) / J.-P. Cottret (FRA) Peugeot - 3h 11m 19s**
- 4th C. Despres (AND) / D. Castera (AND) Peugeot - 3h 14m 43s**
- 5th V. Vasilyev (RUS) / K. Zhiltsov (RUS) MINI ALL4 Racing - 3h 15m 33s**
- 6th H. Hunt (GBR) / A. Schulz (GER) MINI ALL4 Racing - 3h 17m 34s**
- 7th B. Issabayev (KAZ) / V. Demyanenko (RUS) MINI ALL4 Racing - 3h 24m 21s**
- ...**
- 9th A. Rakhimbayev (KAZ) / A. Nikolaev (RUS) MINI ALL4 Racing - 3h 30m 52s**

Overall standings after stage 8:

- 1st C. Despres (AND) / D. Castera (AND) Peugeot - 15h 24m 02s**
- 2nd S. Loeb (FRA) / D. Elena (MCO) Peugeot - 15h 31m 00s**
- 3rd V. Vasilyev (RUS) / K. Zhiltsov (RUS) MINI ALL4 Racing - 15h 38m 52s**
- 4th Y. Al Rajhi (KSA) / T. Gottschalk (GER) MINI ALL4 Racing - 15h 39m 44s**
- 5th A. Rakhimbayev (KAZ) / A. Nikolaev (RUS) MINI ALL4 Racing - 16h 01m 33s**
- ...**
- 7th H. Hunt (GBR) / A. Schulz (GER) MINI ALL4 Racing - 16h 28m 04s**
- 8th B. Issabayev (KAZ) / V. Demyanenko (RUS) MINI ALL4 Racing - 16h 29m 23s**