

2015 FIA World Rally Championship
RallyRACC-Rally de España

Michelin monopolises WRC and WRC2 podiums after dramatic 2015 RallyRACC-Rally de España

- **A Volkswagen/Michelin one-two and a podium finish for Hyundai/Michelin in WRC**
- **A Skoda/Michelin one-two-three and the 2015 title for Al Attiyah/Baumel in WRC2**

In addition to the event's extremely challenging and varied cocktail of gravel and asphalt stages, the last day of the 2015 RallyRACC-Rally de España provided a dramatic conclusion to the week's competitive action in Catalonia.

Spain's round of this year's World Rally Championship started with Thursday evening's 3.2km super-special – with the cars in gravel trim, equipped with gravel tyres – through the streets of Barcelona. The 2015 world champions Sébastien Ogier and Julien Ingrassia bounced back from their disappointing run in Corsica to flex their muscles and put the N°1 Volkswagen Polo R WRC straight to the top of the leaderboard.

After a service halt at the rally's base at the PortAventura fun park later that evening, competitive action resumed on Friday to the west of Salou. The day's programme took the form of four gravel stages to be tackled twice each for a total against-the-clock distance of 129km.

Running first on the road and faced with road-sweeping duty, Sébastien Ogier lost first place during the morning before recovering a comfortable lead at the very end of the leg thanks to an assertive run on SS9 (Terra Alta 2, 35.7km) which included a lengthy portion of the asphalt in the middle.

With the gravel competition over, Ogier/Ingrassia topped the provisional order, ahead of Latvala/Anttila (VW Polo R WRC) and Tanak/Molder (Ford Fiesta WRC), winners of SS4, SS6 and SS8.

Friday evening's service halt was one of the features of the week since the teams had just 75 minutes to convert their respective cars to asphalt trim ahead of Saturday and Sunday's sealed-surface tests. Part of this job involved swapping their 15-inch MICHELIN LTX Force gravel tyres for 18-inch MICHELIN Pilot Sports.

With the cars now prepared for asphalt, the crews headed out for Leg 2 which featured a number of changes compared with the 2014 event.

"Many of the insides of the corners on Saturday's stages were very delicate," says **Jacques Morelli**, manager of Michelin's FIA WRC programme. "Big steps to either side of the asphalt resulted in several broken rims but the MICHELIN Pilot Sport shrugged off many of these impacts to allow the crews to reach the finish line, despite having no air pressure inside their tyres on occasions."

Saturday saw Ogier consolidate his lead, but Latvala lost ground after damaging a rim while cutting a corner. The Finn was then compelled to push hard to defend second place from Andreas Mikkelsen (VW Polo WRC) and local hero Dani Sordo (Hyundai i20 WRC), a known asphalt specialist. By Saturday evening, Latvala was back into second spot, albeit only 2.5s clear of his Norwegian team-mate, and just 4.5s ahead of the Spaniard.

With first place apparently safe in the hands of Ogier/Ingrassia, the attention on Sunday (76.4km of stages) focused on the battle for podium honours between these three drivers.

Driven by the desire to take the week's silver medal, Mikkelsen/Floene kicked off the final day by



claiming the first two tests, as well as the fourth, plus second place on the third. Despite a spin on the fifth (SS22, Prati 2), the Norwegians started the Power Stage (SS23, Duesaignes 2) with a cushion of 1.4s over Latvala/Anttila, while Sordo/Marti were more than 12 seconds back prior to the last test.

They couldn't have guessed that the result of this stage would hand them their first world class victory...

With the start orders reversed, Sordo/Marti were the first of the top four crews to tackle the stage and their time of 8m0.9s for the 12.1km gave them little hope of gaining any positions.

Latvala/Anttila then posted a 7m53.6s which put them in a strong position to claw back second place, but Mikkelsen/Floene clocked a time of 7m51.9s to stay ahead of their VW team-mates.

Even then the drama wasn't over, however, since Sébastien Ogier's bid to win the Power Stage saw him go wide at one point and clout a metal guardrail, significantly damaging his car and abruptly stemming a decade-long domination of French Sébastiens (Loeb, then Ogier) in Catalonia.

The incident allowed Andrea Mikkelsen and Ola Floene to celebrate their maiden WRC win, while Latvala/Anttila ended up second overall and Sordo/Marti had the joy of finishing on their home event's podium!

A Skoda/Michelin one-two-three and the title for Nasser Al Attiyah in WRC2

The Spanish round also saw Michelin runners monopolise the top-three positions in the WRC2 class, a category marked by close competition between tyre manufacturers.

The victory went to Swedes Tidemand/Axelsson (Skoda Fabia R5), ahead of team-mates Kopecky/Dresler. In their similar Fabia R5, Al Attiyah/Baumel finished third to clinch the WRC2 crown for the second year running.

"I would like to congratulate Nasser Al Attiyah and Mathieu Baumel on their WRC title," said Jacques Morelli. "This year, they have contested nine rounds of the championship, and eight of those were on Michelin tyres. Our association with Nasser extends to the Middle-East Rally Championship, the Cross-Country World Cup and the Dakar, so we have had plenty of victories to celebrate with them this season!"

The last round of the 2015 FIA World Rally Championship will take teams to Wales on November 12-15. The chief tyre choice for the British round will be the soft-compound MICHELIN LTX Force S4.