

FIA European Rally Championship 2017: Round 8 of 8
Rally Liepāja, 6-8 October

POST-EVENT PRESS CONFERENCE TRANSCRIPT

Present:

Nikolay Gryazin/Yaroslav Fedorov, Sports Racing Technologies, first position
Kalle Rovanperä/Jonne Halttunen, second position
Reinis Nitišs, Neiksans Rally Sport, first position ERC2
Chris Ingram, Opel Rallye Junior Team, first position, ERC3, ERC Junior Under 27
Mārtiņš Sesks, LMT Autosporta Akadēmija, second position, ERC3, ERC Junior Under 27

Q:

Nikolay, double celebration time for you winning ERC Junior U28 and Rally Liepāja overall for your first outright ERC win. How good does that feel?

NG:

I feel very happy. It was a great race. The weather was very difficult because sometimes the forecast says it will be dry, sometimes it will be heavy rain. In real it was little rain then after heavy rain again so it was very difficult to understand what will be in the road and which places will be very slippery, some places will be okay so in some places we cannot push to the limit because we don't know what will be after the crest, some bad, some full grip so it was really difficult.

Q:

You've made plenty of progress in the ERC this year but what was the secret to your success here in Liepāja this weekend?

NG:

I have been starting since 2015 in Latvia so I have a good experience of these roads and I understand how to drive on these roads and I think it's the one thing that's most helpful to me to win this race.

Q:

Turning to your co-driver Yaroslav Fedorov, how far does this go towards making up for some of the disappointments you'd experienced this year?

YF:

The main goal for us in this year was speed, that's why we had so many crashes. But it's one of the parts of this searching for speed. It's very great that the last race in ERC we have seen a duel between these two guys [Gryazin and Rovanperä] and I think everybody likes this. Sitting to the right of Nikolay I like it very much.

Q:

Turning to Kalle, it almost the perfect ERC debut in second place but there was a time this morning when you were closing on Nikolay and maybe could have won. Did anything go wrong?

KR:

For sure it was quite a difficult race because the conditions were like raining or muddy and sometimes good conditions. It's like that sometimes. It was a new car for me and it's not easy to go with the limit with new car. It's easy to go fast with every car but with limit you just need kilometres. We are getting them.

Q:

You've competed against Nikolay several times. How much have you learned from this battle?

KR:

Every battle with Nikolay is always really good because we have been driving in R2 cars also and we are always between a few seconds so it's really nice. We are getting faster all the time and it's a really nice battle all the time.

Q:

And to Jonne, tell us about this performance from Kalle? How good was he? How was it working with your new team?

JH:

We can start with the team, the team worked very well. It was the first time with M-Sport, they did everything good. We did a lot of changes with the car, with the set-up and it was very good. With Kalle he's learning with the new car and improving a lot during the race. Overall it was a super performance. The car is new, okay it's R5 car but it's totally different to the ŠKODA and I think he managed quite well. This was a good test race for Wales GB when we will try to show the speed there.

Q:

ERC Junior Under 27 champion for 2017 and the recipient of 100,000 euros for an R5 drive in the ERC next year. How important is this day for you?

CI:

I can't put it into words to be honest. I work so hard to go rallying, finding sponsors. Luckily Opel gave me an incredible opportunity but to have that prize fund to be able to take the step to R5 and hopefully join these guys is massive. I can't wait. Bring it on.

Q:

It was a four-way battle starting the season finale, what does this say about the strength of the ERC Junior category?

CI:

It's been very competitive at the start to be honest. At Opel we thought we'd just dominate but we've had good competition from the other guys as well. I didn't really know what was going to happen here. Jari [Huttunen] was really strong but then he had some bad luck. But we also had some bad luck earlier in the year so I'm just really happy to take the win finally.

Q:

Only your third ever rally but you're a winner in ERC2. What went through your mind when you realised you were leading your class?

RN:

For sure I didn't expect that when I started the rally but I think I realised it today morning when Jānis [Vorobjovs] crashed. For sure I was not happy because I don't like to win the races like that but anyway we tried to keep a good pace. We did it in the first half of the day but the hardest part for me was starting the last three stages because we decided to go not slowly but safe and then all the small mistakes started. That I didn't like but it's part of the game and if you want to win then you need to think about the result and calm down a bit.

Q:

What plans do you have for more rallies in the future?

RN:

For sure I enjoyed it a lot, it's much more kilometres in rallycross and much longer distance. It was quite a big challenge for me to do 200-plus kilometres but I liked it. For sure rallycross is my main sport and it's where I want to compete and show my pace but really gives me an opportunity to be better there and why not to do more than three.

Q:

Turning to local hero Mārtiņš Sesks. Your car ended up looking a little second-hand at the finish. What happened?

MS:

We started the first day with quite good pace and we were fastest in the first two stages. But then we rolled over. It wasn't a big mistake, it was small, small things that happened and we rolled over. It wasn't game over, we continued and now we are second in ERC Junior U27.

Q:

And what an amazing comeback by you because you were pushing hard on the second day?

MS:

Maybe on the first loop but on the second loop we realised we can't catch Chris [Ingram] so we just made the loop in quite safety mode, not safety but not risky?

Q:

It's been a year of learning for you as part of the ERC Junior Experience. What are the main things you've learned and what would you like to improve in the future?

MS:

I've learned so much media things and thanks for Eurosport for that and also driving physical tests and all that stuff that you need to become a good driver.

ENDS

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