

## Russian Performance Motorsport: first points in FIA ERC

The first racing day of the Azores Airlines Rallye ended on the Portuguese island of Sao Miguel. Half of the race distance is behind and the first day winners get bonus points by the rules. The Russians added scores to their collection both in the overall standings and in the ERC2 standings – the Russian Performance Motorsport team crews received seven bonus points.

Alexey Lukyanuk and Alexey Arnautov performing in the Ford Fiesta R5 finished the day in the first position overall, leaving their closest pursuer behind for 22 seconds. However they did not try to push hard, their tactic was to get to the finish carefully, but at the leading position.

**Alexey Lukyanuk, driver, Ford Fiesta R5,** *“To be honest, I’m very tired of driving today. It’s a bit difficult because there is no good contact with the car, we did not find some necessary settings. During the tests everything was just super-super, and now the feeling is... There is something to work on and we are doing it, but today it was not easy. I have to do my best to make these times. At the same time, I try not to risk and restrain myself so as not to make mistakes. We also have some problems with the car – the turbine pressure valve is triggered, it opens when not needed. Cows went out to the road, we lost a few seconds. So we are alert and alive. There is also not very pleasant situation with the tyre wear: for example, at the last section we went more slowly than our contenders, but the tyres got worn out more. I understand that I drive aggressively, but I do not slip too much, I try to take into account the consumption of tyres. Anyway, we have some cushion of time, so it's not bad”.*

Friday results were determined by the final special stage of the day – that very unique Sete Cidades on the slopes of the same volcano, the visiting card of the Portuguese race, the longest special stage in the whole race. It is that stage, where the Portuguese crews try to make up for earlier lost time at the short special stages and exhaust most of the newcomers in the fight on a difficult, not very familiar track... There was no doubt that many crews will dramatically improve their times at Sete Cidades – Norwegian Frank Tore Larsen, who started the second, was able to surpass the victorious result of Lukyanuk during the first pass of the track (17.03,8 against 17.06,6). And then Bruno Magalhaes raised the bar almost for half a minute and made 16.35,8!

As for the production standings, the situation is less dramatic here because there are not 35 cars, as in ERC1, but only six

Yesterday Tibor Erdi retired at the first special stage of the day because of troubles with the front suspension. Three special stages of Thursday and six of Friday are considered as one racing day, so Erdi was forced to receive penalization for all nine missed stages. He will start on Saturday, but in the last position without any chance for the podium. At the third special stage of the day Argentinian pilot Juan Carlos Alonso faced the problem of fuel pump. The rest of the field simply drove at their own pace, not reaching the leaders of their class. Sergei Remennik was able to get a time buffer, but cut it, punctured the tyre at the fifth special stage.

**Sergei Remennik, driver, Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution,** *“We tried to accelerate slightly. The gap that we had after the first day allowed us to keep the first position in the standings, to drive with a comfortable pace for us, just defending ourselves. But the flat tyre at the fifth stage of the rally greatly reduced that gap between us. We did not stop to replace it, Mark (co-driver) said that the finish was already close, and the stage was short. We lost 50 seconds there. In any case, we would have spent more time to replace the tyre – our best result is one and a half minutes, and this is in service, not on the road. That is, the decision not to stop was correct. Well, by the end of this day there are 60 seconds between us and Alonso. Considering that tomorrow there are about 110 competitive kilometers, if we move at the same pace, it will not be enough to keep the position. Alonso can win back a little less than a second from one kilometer. We’ll see tomorrow, if I feel confident, we will try to defend ourselves. If I don’t, we will go with our own pace and surprise no one. The most important is we shouldn’t get upset because of this flat tyre, because we won the lead and get extra points for it. In the fog it was very complicated now, we even slipped past the road a couple of times, knocked out the tail lamp, got a hard fall somewhere right on the trajectory, so that the steering wheel moved to the right slightly, but in general, everything was good, the day turned out nice (laughing)”.*

Tomorrow is the final racing day and the final 110 kilometers of the stunningly beautiful tracks of one of the best races in the FIA European Rally Championship.

Top-10 after SS-9:

1. Lukyanuk/Arnautov (RUS, Ford Fiesta R5) 1:11.33,4
2. Moura/Costa (P, Skoda Fabia R5) +21,8
3. Magalhaes B./Magalhaes H. (P, Skoda Fabia R5) +32,4
4. Ingram/Whittosk (GB, Skoda Fabia R5) +44,1
5. Koci/Schovanek (SK/CZ, Skoda Fabia R5) +56,0
6. Ahlin/Sjoberg (S, Skoda Fabia R5) +1.37,9
7. Sousa/Kardoso (P, Citroen DS3 R5) +1.54,9
8. Yates/Edmondson (GB, Skoda Fabia R5) +2.23,1
9. Larsen/Eriksen (N, Ford Fiesta R5) +2.26,3
10. Vieira/Carvalho (P, Hyundai i20 R5) +2.45,8