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Perfect start: ŠKODA works driver Lappi with commanding lead at the Rally Australia

- › ŠKODA duo Esapekka Lappi/Janne Ferm dominates the first day at the season finale of the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC 2)
- › More than two minutes' lead over the competition
- › Second place is enough to win the title

Coffs Harbour, 18 November 2016 – In glorious sunshine the ŠKODA works duo Esapekka Lappi/Janne Ferm got off to a perfect start at the 25th Rally Australia. The "Flying Finns" dominated the first day at the grand season finale of the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC 2) and have a commanding lead in the classification, with an advantage of more than two minutes over their rivals. Second place would be enough to see Lappi clinch the historic title win in the WRC 2 drivers' standings.

"I would say that we have everything under control. We aren't taking any major risks and are trying to do exactly what we need to do to win the title. We know that one single mistake could undo all the hard work we have put in to win the title this year," said Lappi. The 25-year-old took the lead on the dusty gravel stages in the forests around the service centre of Coffs Harbour on the very first stage, and had extended it to almost 40 seconds over ŠKODA brad colleague Nicolás Fuchs (PE) by the midday service.

"I needed a bit of time to find the right rhythm. After all, this is the first time that I have contested the WRC 2 in Australia," said Lappi, who won the last three WRC 2 rallies that he contested this year. Then on the afternoon's stages, the Finn extended the lead in his ŠKODA FABIA R5 with additional, outstanding best times. The ŠKODA driver also delighted hundreds of fans at the city stage around the port of Coffs Harbour in the early evening.

After eleven stages covering 90.99 kilometres, everything is going according to plan in terms of the title for Lappi. While his rivals battled with problems on the first day of the Rally Australia, Lappi made it through the day without any problems. However, not even a third of the classified kilometres of the Rally Australia have been mastered. 135.19 kilometres are scheduled for Saturday, including one of the longest special stages of the WRC 2 season. At 50.80 kilometres, "Nambucca" is longer than a marathon and must be completed twice.

Lappi: "Nothing has been won yet. Visibility is difficult due to the clouds of dust, and the grip level on the tracks changes constantly. On one stage we drove into a stick that someone must have thrown onto the racing line. That shows that anything really can happen here. We need to remain fully focussed at all times."



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The ŠKODA brand's victory in the overall standings of the WRC 2 is already certain: Finn Teemu Suninen is currently at the top of the table. He is not competing in Australia.

Interim standings at the Rally Australia (WRC 2):

1. Lappi/Ferm (FIN/FIN)	ŠKODA FABIA R5	1:22:53.7 hrs
2. Fuchs/Mussano (PE/ARG)	ŠKODA FABIA R5	+ 2:12.8 min.
3. Ptaszek/Szczepaniak (PL/PL)	Ford Fiesta R5	+ 2:19.4 min.
4. Al-Suwaidi/Clarke (Q/GB)	ŠKODA FABIA R5	+ 3:02.8 min.

The number of the day: 11

11 special stages were scheduled for the first day of the Rally Australia, making it almost half of the 23 stages in total. Front-runner Esapekka Lappi mastered the 90.99 kilometres at an average speed of 91.6 kilometres per hour. A ŠKODA FABIA R5 was the fastest car on all eleven stages – nine best times went to Lappi, Nicolás Fuchs in a privateer ŠKODA four-wheel drive came out on top once. On the special stage "Utungun II", Lappi and Fuchs shared the best time.

FIA World Rally Championship (WRC 2)

<u>Event</u>	<u>Date</u>
Rally Monte Carlo	21.01.–24.01.2016
Rally Sweden	11.02.–14.02.2016
Rally Mexico	03.03.–06.03.2016
Rally Argentina	21.04.–24.04.2016
Rally Portugal	19.05.–22.05.2016
Rally Italy	09.06.–12.06.2016
Rally Poland	30.06.–03.07.2016
Rally Finland	28.07.–31.07.2016
Rally Germany	18.08.–21.08.2016
Rally China	08.09.–11.09.2016 (cancelled)
Rally France	29.09.–02.10.2016
Rally Spain	13.10.–16.10.2016
Rally Great Britain	27.10.–30.10.2016
Rally Australia	17.11.–20.11.2016



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ŠKODA at the World Championship rally in Australia

It wasn't only at the official start of the season finale of the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC 2) that all eyes were on Esapekka Lappi/Janne Ferm (FIN/FIN).

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Source: ŠKODA AUTO



ŠKODA at the World Championship rally in Australia

ŠKODA works duo Lappi/Ferm dominated the first day with outstanding best times in the FABIA R5.

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ŠKODA Motorsport Overview:

ŠKODA has been on the motorsport scene since 1901. Be it on the circuit or in rallies, ŠKODA has celebrated victories and won titles all around the world. Historical highlights include numerous title wins in the FIA European Rally Championship (ERC), the FIA Asia-Pacific Rally Championship (APRC) and the Intercontinental Rally Challenge (IRC), as well as the victory in the European Touring Car Championship in 1981. ŠKODA teams have also triumphed in the world's oldest and most famous rally, taking several class victories in the legendary Monte Carlo, which was first held in 1911.

In 2015, ŠKODA celebrated four victories in the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC 2) with their new ŠKODA FABIA R5 rally car. The high-tech 4x4 was homologated by the International Automobile Federation FIA on 1 April 2015. In the ŠKODA FABIA R5's very first season, factory duo Pontus Tidemand/Emil Axelsson (S/S) secured the fourth APRC title in a row for ŠKODA. In addition, the brand claimed five national titles with their new winning model.

ŠKODA's new FABIA R5 proudly continues the brand's long tradition in motorsport. Its predecessor, the FABIA Super 2000, was the most successful model in ŠKODA's 115-year motorsport history. With the 4x4 from Mladá Boleslav, factory duo Jan Kopecký/Pavel Dresler (CZ/CZ) achieved the historic feat of becoming the first duo in history to win the drivers' title in the ERC and the APRC in consecutive years. Between 2009 and 2014, ŠKODA FABIA Super 2000 drivers won a total of 50 national and international titles around the world.

In 2016, the factory teams Pontus Tidemand/Jonas Andersson (S/S), Jan Kopecký/Pavel Dresler and Esapekka Lappi/Janne Ferm (F/F) are competing with the ŠKODA FABIA R5 in the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC 2).

ŠKODA AUTO

- > is one of the longest-established vehicle manufacturers in the world. The company was founded in 1895 – during the pioneering days of the automobile. Today, the company's headquarters remain in Mladá Boleslav.
- > currently offers the following models in the range: CITIGO, FABIA, RAPID, OCTAVIA, YETI, KODIAQ and SUPERB.
- > in 2015 delivered more than 1 million vehicles to customers worldwide.
- > has belonged to Volkswagen Group since 1991. The Volkswagen Group is one of the most successful vehicle manufacturers in the world. ŠKODA, in association with the Group, independently manufactures and develops vehicles, as well as components, engines and gear transmissions.
- > operates at three locations in the Czech Republic, produces in China, Russia, Slovakia and India mainly through Group partnerships, as well as in Ukraine and Kazakhstan through local partners.
- > employs over 26,600 people globally and is active in more than 100 markets.