



2018 Dakar: Przygonski finishes fifth in his MINI John Cooper Works Rally

- Good debut of the MINI John Cooper Works Buggy
- Tough Dakar – strong team

It was not a Dakar like any other: the 40th edition of the prestigious event was one of the most difficult ones in the recent past. And it also proved to be a tough rally for the X-raid Team, with the seven MINI pairings representing the team's colours keeping the squad on its toes. After 14 stages and more than 7,000 kilometres across South America, Jakub 'Kuba' Przygonski (POL) and Tom Colsoul (BEL) in a MINI John Cooper Works Rally secured an excellent fifth place in the overall standings. Boris Garafulic (CHI) and Filipe Palmeiro (POR) took their MINI JCW Rally to 13th place in the 2018 Dakar. Meanwhile, Mikko Hirvonen (FIN) and Andreas Schulz (GER) secured 19th place in the debut Dakar of the MINI John Cooper Works Buggy, with Orlando 'Orly' Terranova / Bernardo 'Ronnie' Graue (both ARG) in another MINI JCW Rally following right behind their team-mates and finished 20th.

Przygonski and Colsoul succeeded in avoiding any problems throughout the Dakar. Due to this strategy they benefitted from the mistakes made by their rivals and worked their way up in the overall standings step by step. "We are very happy to be here in Cordoba", says Przygonski. "It was a tough Dakar. The pilots in front of us have all won here before or stood on the podium. I'm also the youngest in the Top 5, so all I need is a little experience and then we will be among the frontrunner."

"Kuba delivered in fantastic style," said a happy Team Manager Sven Quandt. "He raced very consistently right from the start. Nobody really kept an eye on him and all of a sudden he held a top five position. That is exactly the approach it takes to succeed in the Dakar."

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Hirvonen and Schulz were the only pairing that succeeded in taking its John Cooper Works Buggy to the finish line in Cordoba. “It was just great. Unfortunately, you always have the best stories to tell when things are not running too well,” the Finn said smiling. “But although we failed to secure a good result: that’s exactly how I imagined the Dakar to be. I am really sorry for the mechanics who worked so hard on the buggy before Christmas. But they all can be proud of having built such a great vehicle.”

The Dakar also proved to be difficult for Terranova and Graue. They rolled over on day four – an incident that cost them a lot of time although they could continue, at the end of the day. Furthermore, Terranova suffered massively from altitude sickness and consequently had to abandon the sixth special. “We encountered minor problems in nearly every stage,” said the Argentinean driver, “Sometimes driving problems and sometimes navigation difficulties. But we made it to the finish. Driving the MINI John Cooper Works Rally feels great and it is really quick.”

The MINI JCW Buggy was the first in-house designed and built buggy the Trebur based team entered in the Dakar. The tests with the new ‘family member’ went really well and the entire team was curious to find out how the buggy would fare in the Dakar. After two weeks and several nightshifts the conclusion has to be positive. The MINI John Cooper Works Buggy coped with sand, dunes, mud and the tight WRC-like sections without encountering any major problems. “We are really amazed by how the MINI John Cooper Works Buggy acquitted itself,” added Sven Quandt. “Apart from a sensor problem it did not encounter any difficulties. The JCW Buggy and the JCW Rally both showed that they are very reliable vehicles. The future will show which route the buggy can take advantage of. We are looking forward to the next races.”

Meanwhile, the MINI John Cooper Works Rally pairings also had fun driving their vehicles. Its reduced weight and increased wheel travel improved its competitiveness and it was better to drive on bumpy terrain. “The MINI is fantastic,” added Terranova. “The responsiveness of the engine is outstanding and the new tyre-suspension package also is amazing.”

Unfortunately, the car’s competitiveness was not reflected by the result as bad luck was X-raid Team’s ‘faithful’ companion right from the start. For Bryce Menzies and Pete Mortensen (both USA), the Dakar ended as early as on day two after a bad rollover. The ankle fracture of Mortensen has been operated, in the meantime. On the following day, another rollover forced Nani Roma and Alex Haro (both ESP) into

retirement. Roma spent two days in a hospital in Lima to then fly home. There he was subjected to several checkups but no serious injuries could be detected. Thanks to the rugged roll-cage everybody X-raid opted for when designing the cars, everybody involved survived the incidents without bad injuries. “We do not make compromises when it comes to the safety, even if this means that the car will be 20kg heavier,” revealed Sven Quandt. “The two accidents demonstrated what the cars can cope with. And the accident of Mikko on stage 11 when car and drivers were exposed to 8G also proved that our MINI vehicles are extremely safe.”

At the same time, the X-raid pairings also made for weird moments. Al-Rajhi / Gottschalk and Garafulic / Palmeiro, for instance, collided on the peak of a dune. Due to the momentum, Al-Rajhi afterwards was standing on Garafulic’s bonnet. Both pairings lost a lot of time but could continue, in the end. While they waited for the race trucks with spare parts they helped rivals that had two bad incidents nearby. A few days later, Al-Rajhi and Gottschalk even upped the ante: they followed a track on the Pacific shore when they suddenly were drawn into the sea by a big wave. With the towrope they could keep the MINI in the vicinity of the beach until Garafulic came to rescue them. The buggy made it to the bivouac under its own steam where the X-raid service crew prepared it for the coming challenges on dry terrain. Unfortunately, Al-Rajhi and Gottschalk were disqualified by the race control after stage nine for having missed too many waypoints in the seventh special stage.

Despite all these difficulties the X-raid team members never lost their motivation and all the pairings could go to sleep in the knowledge that their vehicles would be well prepared on the next morning. The internal WhatsApp group also demonstrated the great team spirit. The retired pairings proved to be thrilled by the race action and tried to support their still active team-mates with funny and motivating messages.

Result Dakar 2018

1. C. Sainz (ESP) / L. Cruz (ESP) Peugeot – 49h 16m 18s
2. N. Al-Attiyah (QAT) / M. Baumel (FRA) Toyota – 49h 59m 58s
3. G. de Villiers (RSA) / D. von Zitzewitz (GER) Toyota – 50h 32m 59s
4. S. Peterhansel (FRA) / J.-P. Cottret (FRA) Peugeot – 50h 41m 47s
5. **J. Przygonski (POL) / T. Colsoul (BEL) MINI JCW Rally – 52h 01m 42s**
- ...
13. **B. Garafulic (CHI) / F. Palmeiro (POR) MINI JCW Rally – 62h 06m 00s**
- ...
19. **M. Hirvonen (FIN) / A. Schulz (GER) MINI JCW Buggy – 65h 36m 46s**

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20. O. Terranova (ARG) / R. Graue (ARG) MINI JCW Rally – 68h 10m 19s