

LOIX LANDS IRC GLORY IN BELGIUM

Sixth Geko Ypres victory for popular local hero

Kopecky closes on title lead with Skoda one-two

Local hero Freddy Loix has clinched his sixth Geko Ypres Rally victory to become the fifth different winner of an Intercontinental Rally Challenge round this season. Driving for Skoda Motorsport for the first time, the Belgian was roared all the way through Saturday's 13 sun-coated special stages by tens of thousands of adoring fans, who lined the demanding all-asphalt route.

Co-driven by fellow Belgian Frederic Miclotte, Loix had started day two with a slender 5.8-second lead over Peugeot UK's Kris Meeke, last year's Ypres winner and the defending IRC champion. But what was shaping up to be a repeat of the pair's epic battle in Belgium 12 months previously ended when Meeke suffered a spectacular high-speed roll on Saturday's second stage.

With runaway IRC title leader Juho Hanninen crashing into retirement on Friday evening, Meeke was desperate to make the most of the Finn's early exit by taking his second win of 2010. But it all went awry for the Northern Irishman when he lost control on the exit of a fast right-hander two kilometres into the stage, clipped a bank and rolled. Fortunately both Meeke and co-driver Paul Nagle were uninjured but the crash marked their fourth retirement of the season.

"It was a mistake with the pacenote," said Meeke, who began day two of the rally by claiming his third fastest stage time. "We turned in a little too early and ran out of room on the exit of the corner. When you're pushing like we were that kind of thing can happen."

Although Meeke's crash took the pressure off Loix, the 39-year-old rued his rival's retirement as it meant he had to adopt a less attacking style while also maintaining his concentration by driving at a similar pace for the remainder of the leg, which covered more than 190 competitive kilometres. Apart from a minor brake glitch, little troubled the driver affectionately known as Fast Freddy, whose win was Skoda's fourth in the IRC in 2010 and its first with the facelift Fabia.

Meeke's departure handed second place to Jan Kopecky, who has closed to within three points of Hanninen at the top of the title standings with six rounds remaining. Kopecky got to within 25 seconds of Loix with a succession of fastest stage times on Saturday afternoon but a mistake on stage 15, when he went wide into a field, ended any outside hopes he might have had of snatching an unlikely victory.

The Royal Automobile Club Motor Sports Association Rally of Scotland

***Organised by International Motor Sports Limited
Motor Sports House, Riverside Park, Colnbrook, SL3 0HG, UK
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In fact, Kopecky admitted to a lack of confidence with the handling of his Fabia Super 2000, but was able to dial-out the contributing understeer by making a handful of set-up changes.

Thierry Neuville took a career-best third in his Kronos Racing-run Team Peugeot Belgium-Luxembourg 207. The young Belgian showed a level of maturity that belied his 22 years and rarely made a mistake as he adhered to team orders by reducing his pace to ensure a podium finish. His performance, which elevates him to sixth in the standings, provided some cheer for the Kronos squad, which lost the cars of Meeke and Belgian championship leader Pieter Tsjoen in separate accidents.

Belgian Bernd Casier was a solid fourth overall in his Skoda Fabia with Andreas Mikkelsen fifth in his M-Sport Ford Fiesta S2000. The Norwegian was delayed by a puncture on Friday's second stage but gradually climbed the leaderboard throughout Saturday to bag his first IRC points and finish as the highest-placed Ypres Rally rookie.

Veteran Patrick Snijers was keeping the charging Bruno Magalhaes at bay and seemingly certain of sixth place in his 207 only to retire on the final stage with a technical fault. Magalhaes was pushing hard in his efforts to lessen the impact of a 1m10s time penalty imposed for twice leaving service late due to a gearbox problem and was rewarded with sixth place when Snijers retired.

Poland's Michal Solowow overcame a puncture on the final stage to claim seventh in his M-Sport Ford Fiesta S2000, with Luca Betti eighth and rounding out the point scorers after also falling victim to a deflated tyre on the last run.

Dutch youngster Kevin Abbring won the IRC 2WD Cup in his Clio R3, one place ahead of Corsican Pierre Campana, who now leads the two-wheel drive standings in his similar car, despite a slow puncture on the penultimate stage. Kris Princen had led the class only to drop out of Friday's first leg with alternator failure.

DRIVER QUOTES

Freddy Loix (Belgium), Skoda Fabia S2000, first overall: "I'm very happy, very happy. It was a nice comeback for me to the IRC. I really have to thank my sponsor BFO and Skoda Motorsport who gave me the possibility to prepare myself properly and provided me with a car to win. It was difficult when Kris retired because it was hard to know how much to attack so I am very happy."

Jan Kopecky (Czech Republic), Skoda Fabia S2000, second overall: "We have again a one-two for Skoda and showed what a good car we have. Freddy did a very good job so congratulations to him. The championship is closer now and Azores is coming next where we will do our best."

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Thierry Neuville (Belgium), Peugeot 207 S2000, third overall: "I am so happy, it is incredible. It was a long weekend but this result will really help for the future. I had to listen to my team and drive more slowly today to get to the finish but I was happy to do that."

TOP TEN IRC POSITIONS AFTER LEG TWO

- 1 Freddy Loix/Frederic Miclotte (Skoda Fabia S2000) 2h35m36.9s
- 2 Jan Kopecky/Petr Stary (Skoda Fabia S2000) +22.1s
- 3 Thierry Neuville/Nicolas Klinger (Peugeot 207 S2000) +2m05.5s
- 4 Bernd Casier/Francis Caesemaeker (Skoda Fabia S2000) +4m06.1s
- 5 Andreas Mikkelsen/Ola Floene (M-Sport Ford Fiesta S2000) +5m20.9s
- 6 Bruno Magalhaes/Carlos Magalhaes (Peugeot 207 S2000) +6m06.2s
- 7 Michal Solowow/Maciej Baran (M-Sport Ford Fiesta S2000) +7m24.5s
- 8 Luca Betti/Pierangelo Scalvini (Peugeot 207 S2000) +9m37.6s
- 9 Corrado Fontana/Nicola Arena (Peugeot 207 S2000) +9m53.0s
- 10 Maciej Oleksowicz/Andrzej Obrebowski (M-Sport Ford Fiesta S2000) +10m39.0s

Leading IRC 2WD Cup finishers: Kevin Abbring/Erwin Mombaerts (Clio R3)

IRC STANDINGS

Drivers after round six of 12

- 1 Juho Hanninen (Finland) 42pts
- 2 Jan Kopecky (Czech Republic) 39pts
- 3 Guy Wilks (United Kingdom) 25pts
- 4 Bruno Magalhaes (Portugal) 20pts
- 5 Kris Meeke (United Kingdom) 15pts
- 6 Thierry Neuville (Belgium) 11pts
- 7 Mikko Hirvonen (Finland) 10pts
- = Freddy Loix (Belgium) 10pts
- 9 Paolo Andreucci (Italy) 8pts
- 10 Nicolas Vouilloz (France) 6pts etc

Manufacturers after round six of 12

- 1 Skoda 98pts
- 2 Peugeot 55pts
- 3 M-Sport 21pts
- 4 Subaru 10pts

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5 Ralliart 8pts

IRC 2WD Drivers after round six of 12

- 1 Pierre Campana 16pts
- 2 Kevin Abbring 10pts
- = Harry Hunt 10pts
- = Yeray Lemes 10pts
- = Kris Princen 10pts
- = Marcos Tokarski 10pts
- = Rafael Tulio 10pts
- 8 Enrique Cruz 8pts
- = Luis Gius 8pts
- = Pablo Pelaez 8pts
- = Colin R Smith 8pts
- = Luis Tedesco 8pts etc

IRC 2WD Manufacturers after round six of 12

- 1 M-Sport 68pts
- 2 Peugeot 42pts
- 3 Abarth 19pts
- 4 Honda 16pts
- 5 Skoda 5pts

RALLY LEADERS

Kris Meeke: SS1-2
Freddy Loix: SS3-19

STAGE WINNERS

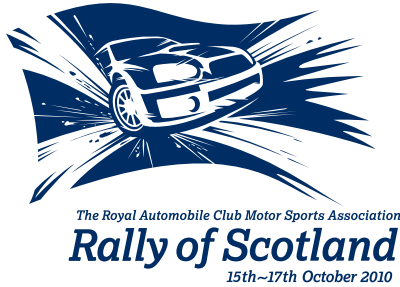
Friday 25 June

- SS1: Hollebeke 1 (28.82kms): Kris Meeke
- SS2: Westouter 1 (6.04kms): Freddy Loix
- SS3: Messen-Sauvegarde 1 (14.80kms): Freddy Loix
- SS4: Hollebeke 2 (28.82kms): Freddy Loix
- SS5: Westouter 2 (6.04kms): Kris Meeke
- SS6: Mesen-Sauvegarde 2 (14.80kms): Freddy Loix

Saturday 26 June

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SS7: Proven-Vieteren 1 (14.80kms): Kris Meeke
SS8: Watou 1 (12.33kms): Freddy Loix
SS9: Kemmelberg 1 (9.06kms): Freddy Loix
SS10: Langemark 1 (18.84kms): Jan Kopecky
SS11: Dikkebus 1 (11.32kms): Jan Kopecky
SS12: Heuvelland 1 (28.80kms): Jan Kopecky
SS13: Lille-Eurometropole (1.66kms): Jan Kopecky
SS14: Proven-Vieteren 2 (14.80kms): Jan Kopecky
SS15: Watou 2 (12.33kms): Freddy Loix
SS16: Kemmelberg 2 (9.06kms): Freddy Loix
SS17: Langemark 2 (18.84kms): Freddy Loix
SS18: Dikkebus 2 (11.32kms): Jan Kopecky
SS19: Heuvelland 2 (28.80kms): Jan Kopecky

KEY STATISTICS

Rally wins in 2010 (drivers)

Hanninen: 2
Hirvonen: 1
Kopecky: 1
Loix: 1
Meeke: 1

Rally wins in 2010 (manufacturers)

Skoda: 4
M-Sport: 1
Peugeot: 1

Stage wins in 2010 (drivers)

Juho Hanninen: 22
Kris Meeke: 21
Jan Kopecky: 16
Freddy Loix: 9
Sebastien Ogier: 7
Paolo Andreucci: 5
Mikko Hirvonen: 3
Stephane Sarrazin: 2
Nicolas Vouilloz: 1
Guy Wilks: 1

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Stage wins in 2010 (manufacturers)

Skoda: 48

Peugeot: 35

M-Sport: 3

TV TIMES

Daily highlights of the Geko Ypres Rally will be available at www.rally-irc.com, while Eurosport, Europe's largest television sports channel, will show coverage on Sunday 27 June as follows:

10:00-10:30: Day two highlights repeated (Eurosport 2)

10:15-10:45: Day two highlights repeated (Eurosport)

23:15-23:45: Magazine programme (Eurosport and Eurosport Asia-Pacific)

MEDIA ENQUIRIES AND INFORMATION

IRC enquiries: Richard Rodgers on media@ircseries.com, +44 7833 470541, or visit www.rally-irc.com for all the latest news, information, live stage times, live rally radio and the free IRC iPhone Application.

Images: Copyright-free, high-resolution photographs are available to download at the end of each leg on the official IRC website. To access them please go to the Partner Login section. The username is IRC. The password is media.

New IRC video download service: The IRC has launched a new online platform to distribute video highlights and news features to dedicated sport and motorsport websites. Provided by Dystrubute.tv, the new application is accessible from the Media section of the IRC website ("Video downloads") and allows authorised website partners to download video content of each IRC round in high resolution. Any website interested in this new service should simply register online.

NEXT ROUND

Sata Rallye Açores, 15-17 July

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