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Press Release

2010 PIRELLI STAR DRIVER WALES RALLY GB REPORT

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The 2010 Pirelli Star Drivers concluded their programme on this week's Wales Rally GB, with all five of them making it to the finish of the Cardiff-based event – and two of them on the FIA Production Car World Rally Championship podium. For the third time this season, Estonia's Ott Tänak piloted the first of the Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution Xs home, taking victory in the FIA Production Car World Rally Championship for the second time this year. Despite the ever-changing conditions on the final round of this year's FIA World Rally Championship all five of the Pirelli Star Drivers set good times on the gravel roads, highlighting the benefit of the FIA's WRC-based young driver scheme.

Pirelli Star Driver report

After two rounds on asphalt, where New Zealander Hayden Paddon had generally been the fastest of the Pirelli Star Drivers, there was great anticipation for the final event of the season, as Paddon and his team-mate and rival Ott Tänak would go head-to-head on the classic gravel of Wales Rally GB.

In the end, the battle didn't live up to expectations, as Paddon hit a rock in Myherin and damaged the left-rear suspension on his Lancer. The Kiwi had been right on the pace in a treacherously slippery Hafren stage, first thing in the morning, taking 12 seconds out of Tänak, but with only remote service available to him mid-way through day one, there was nothing the double New Zealand Rally Champion could do to fix the car except make temporary repairs. Despite the wheel moving about in the wheel arch, Paddon contained the time loss over Friday's repeated three stages to four minutes. For the remaining two days, Paddon posted times at the sharp end of the PWRC competition to climb back to a highly credible third.

With Paddon gone, Tänak was out on his own. He suffered his own problems with a down-on-power engine on the first morning. Advice from the team at the remote service helped him adjust the car to rectify the problem in the afternoon and after that, he was flying towards a repeat of his Rally Finland Production Car win. Tänak did face some tough competition from Patrik Flodin for the PWRC lead on Saturday, but when the Swede smashed a wheel on his car, Tänak was left in the clear and defending his lead from fellow Ralliart Italia runner Armindo Araújo who, despite finishing three minutes in arrears, claimed his second Production Car World Rally Championship title in as many years in Cardiff.

Alex Raschi was the third of the Lancers, the San Marino driver once again collecting PWRC points. Raschi's debut on Wales Rally GB wasn't as straightforward as he would have hoped, however. He smashed the right-front of his Mitsubishi against a rock in Sweet Lamb on Friday, damaging the brake disc beyond repair. With no assistance from the team, there was nothing Raschi could do to solve the problem and he was forced out of Friday afternoon. He returned and set improving times through the weekend, but admitted he found the night stages on Saturday difficult, never having competed in the forest in the dark before.

Nicholai Georgiou and Peter Horsey ended the event on the fringes of the PWRC points after enduring mixed fortunes through the event. Both drivers suffered throttle problems, with Georgiou's car opening the throttle, while his team-mate's Mitsubishi closed it up. Georgiou was forced into day two retirement, but he returned on the final day to enjoy four more stages at the wheel of the Lancer. Horsey's main problem was going off the road in Halfway. He

dropped 15 minutes while spectators rescued the car but then drove to the finish without any further problems.

The drivers

Car 36: Nick Georgiou/Joseph Matar

Nick Georgiou said: "This rally is not really like anything I've done before. The grip is changing all the time, it's hard to know how hard to push from corner to corner, but it's been great to come here and learn the rally. I struggled with the conditions early on, but slowed down a little bit and settled myself down. After that, it was okay. The second day was going well and, again, I was really loving the roads – they were great. Then we had a throttle problem on the car. The throttle was jammed wide open; this happened in Four Ways Crychan the second time. We got through the stage, but decided to retire on the road section afterwards. I could still drive the car, but the pressure the problem was putting on the clutch was a little bit too much and, trying to get the car slowed down when the engine is on full power was not easy. We were worried about running out of brakes, going off the road or causing significant mechanical damage to the car. That was a real shame, we were really enjoying the second day, but the Ralliart Italia team did a good job to get the car fixed and back out for the final day."

Car 37: Peter Horsey/Calvin Cooledge

Peter Horsey said: "The car felt down on power for the first day, we had a problem with the throttle shutting down. On the whole the event has been good. We went off the road on the first run through Halfway, it was driver error. We slid off and the car got beached on a bank, it took us 15 minutes to get enough spectators to help us get the car back on the road. I have enjoyed the event; some of the stages have been fantastic to drive. Driving at night in the forests was a new experience and not the easiest thing; the lights weren't adjusted properly, so we weren't getting the full benefit from them – and it was really tricky when it started raining in the dark on the second run through Halfway. I have learned a lot this year and, apart from the off on SS11, I'm pleased with the way this event has gone for me."

Car 38: Hayden Paddon/John Kennard

Hayden Paddon said: "This turned out to be another frustrating event for us. We had good times in the first morning, but then damaging the suspension on the car pretty much ruled us out after that. The rock was absolutely on the line, there was nothing I could do; I hit it and smashed a rear trailing arm on the suspension. The impact actually ripped the arm off the hub. With only remote service, we could only work on the car with the spare parts we had in the car, which meant we were going to have to drive the afternoon with the car in this state. We thought about retiring and running under SuperRally, but that was going to mean 15 minutes of penalties and I was pretty sure that I could do better than that by driving. We used the two ratchet straps we carry in the car to secure the wheel in place and off we went. We kept stopping after the stages to check the tension of the straps and to re-tighten them. I was pleased that we 'only' dropped four minutes through those stages. Obviously, when we had been right in the fight, the motivation's not quite the same when you come back the next day, but we set some good times and enjoyed the stages. It was a really good experience and some great roads, but this seems to be a bit typical of the way our rallies have gone for the last few events. It was good to get back up to third by the finish on Sunday, but it wasn't exactly the way I'd planned to end my season as a Pirelli Star Driver. Having said that, it's been a great programme and I have learned so much from the whole thing. It's been fantastic, now I've just got to work to make sure I'm back in the World Championship next year."

Car #39 Alex Raschi/Silvio Stefanelli

Alex Raschi said: "This is definitely not like the gravel in Italy! I love the roads, they are so much fun. I feel quite happy with the times I was setting when I knew the road was good; the times have been getting better and better. Our rally was a little bit spoiled on the first day when we crashed into a big rock in the Sweet Lamb stage. I came over a jump and landed a little bit off line; I was too far to the right. I hit a rock, a big, big rock and this damaged the car. At first I drove because I thought it was okay, we got to the end of the stage, but there was damage to the brake disc on the front-right of the car. At remote service, because we could not do anything to the car, we decided it was safer to retire for the rest of the day. It's very disappointing because we were not far from the line at all, and everything had been looking good until then. When we came back on Saturday and Sunday, I liked the roads again and the times were quite good. I didn't like so much to drive in the dark, this was not easy. I never did it before. But this is a good rally, one which I have enjoyed very much. It has been a good way to end the year."

Car 40: Ott Tänak/Kuldar Sikk

Ott Tänak said: "We had a problem with the engine on the first day, it wasn't pulling cleanly. We couldn't get the car to the rev limiter. At service we changed the anti-lag settings, making them more aggressive, and that helped. We had more power in the afternoon, which helped with the driving. We were leading the Production Car WRC into the second day, but [Patrik] Flodin was coming quite quickly. We were pushing hard in those stages, driving as fast as we could without taking any big risks. This was my first time on this rally and it is an event where experience really counts for a lot. Flodin has more experience and he has pace notes for many of the stages. We had one spin in one of the stages and I thought then that we couldn't go any quicker. We were doing everything we could when he had his problem. After that, it was okay, we could drive more sensibly with a two-minute lead for the final day. But still, these roads were not easy: Resolfen is very long and tricky stage, all the time there is something to watch out for."

The other quotes

Phil Short, Pirelli Star Driver Supervisor

Phil Short said: "I've been pleased with the way the final event of the season has gone. Everybody has shown an improvement and that has been reflected in what we saw here today. Ott was very fast when he came to the programme at the start of the year, but what he has shown is his ability to alter his speed. At the beginning of the year he only had one pace and that was pretty much flat-out, but he has matured enormously over the last six rallies and this Production Car win was a demonstration of that ability to modify the pace. He was involved in a big fight for the lead yesterday. He told me he wasn't taking any risks, but then added that he didn't think there was a lot more speed to come from him or the car!

It was a great shame for Hayden, he was running very well in the morning before his suspension problem, but, once again, he has shown very good pace on this rally setting times in the top three of PWRC on days two and three. Similarly, Alex did well to recover from hitting the rock in Sweet Lamb. It was a testament to the strength of the car that there wasn't more damage after such a big impact. The only damage was to the brake disc and the sump guard; the oil cooler and the intercooler all survived. He has been improving again on this event and he drove very well. Peter needed spectators to get him back on the road after he went off in Halfway and Nicholai had his throttle problem. This event was a big challenge with the nature of the stages and the changeable weather and, with that in mind, all of the drivers have done very well.

"It's been a good year for the Pirelli Star Drivers as, once again, we have moved another couple of very talented drivers on in their careers – but all of them have learned a great deal. It was a shame that Martin Semerád retired from second place in the PWRC earlier today. Martin was part of the programme last year and his pace on this rally highlighted the work we had done last season."

Mario Isola, Pirelli Motorsport Manager

Mario Isola said: "It's been another very successful season for the Pirelli Star Drivers and having Ott and Hayden on the podium here is great news and a great endorsement of the programme. This is typically a very tough rally to come and compete on for the first time and none of the drivers had ever seen these stages in competition before. They overcame that lack of knowledge and all drove really well. Ott and Hayden have shown themselves to be the pace-setters, confirming what we saw for the rest of the year, but the other guys have really learned lots on this rally."

The results

17th Ott Tänak (EST)/Kuldar Sikk (EST) 3 hr 38 min 31.0sec (1st in PWRC)

19th Hayden Paddon (NZL)/John Kennard (NZL) 3 hr 42 min 58.9sec (3rd in PWRC)

28th Alex Raschi (RSM)/Silvio Stefanelli (RSM)* 3 hr 55 min 51.4sec (8th in PWRC)

33rd Nick Georgiou (LBN)/Joseph Matar (LBN)* 4 hr 05 min 51.6sec (11th in PWRC)

38th Peter Horsey (KEN)/Calvin Coolidge (GBR) 4 hr 19 min 42.8sec (12th in PWRC)

* continued under SuperRally regulations

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