

FIA European Rally Championship 2018: Round 4 of 8
Cyprus Rally: Leg two report, 17 June

0.6 SECONDS! CYPRUS ACE GALATARIOTIS SEALS HOME ERC WIN IN DRAMATIC FINISH

- *Local star beats Magalhães in third closest finish in recent European championship history
- *Lead changes hands three times during dramatic final day on Larnaca-based event
- *Cypriot success in ERC2 as Panteli claims production division laurels
- *PEUGEOT-powered Pellier dominates ERC3 with impressive drive

Home hero Simos Galatariotis became the first Cypriot winner of his country's FIA European Rally Championship counter for a decade with a dramatic last-gasp victory over Bruno Magalhães by 0.6s.

In what was the third-closest finish in recent ERC history, Galatariotis and co-driver Antonis Ioannou triumphed despite carrying a front-right puncture to the end of the closing ENEOS Golden Stage. Although victory eluded SEAJETS-backed Magalhães and namesake co-driver Hugo by the smallest of margins, the Portuguese move to the top of the ERC standings at the halfway point of the season.

Nasser Al-Attiyah had stormed into first place on the penultimate stage, taking 20.6s out of Galatariotis to gain a 2.3s lead with one stage remaining. However, Al-Attiyah was forced to stop and change a puncture close to the finish of the Cyprus Rally's final test, his attempts to continue with a deflating tyre for several kilometres ultimately in vain.

ARC Sport's Magalhães overtook Al-Attiyah in-stage moments before the finish line to snatch second and the ERC points lead. The Portuguese driver's approach of being sensible and avoiding rocks at all costs paid dividends, ensuring another top result after his win on the EKO Acropolis Rally two weeks ago.

Four-time Hungarian champion Norbert Herczig was promoted to a surprise second consecutive podium finish by Al-Attiyah's delay, finishing 1m21.4s behind Galatariotis aboard his MOL Racing Team ŠKODA Fabia R5. Al-Attiyah settled for fourth place for Autotek Motorsport after his late tyre change, while fifth went to Toksport WRT's Orhan Avcioğlu, his first ERC top five finish.

ACCR Czech Team-entered Vojtěch Štajf beat Dávid Botka to sixth by 13.4s, while Albert von Thurn und Taxis scored his first ERC points finish of 2018 in eighth. Petros Panteli sealed ninth overall and the ERC2 win for the Q8 Oils Rally Team, ahead of a rapidly recovering Alexandros Tsouloftas in P10. It was an astounding day's work from Tsouloftas, going fastest on leg two to score seven bonus points and also win the Golden Stage cash prize. Laurent Pellier dominated ERC3 in a Saintéloc Junior Team PEUGEOT 208 R2, while Emma Falcón beat Catie Munnings to ERC Ladies' Trophy honours.

How leg two unfolded: ERC lead battle goes down to the wire in Cyprus

Wevers Sport-run Juuso Nordgren, the ŠKODA Motorsport-backed youngster from Finland, had gone into Leg Two with a 4.6s lead over Galatariotis, and despite a pledge to keep his driving clean and sensible, managed to extend his lead to 7.3 seconds after two stages.

From there Cyprus lost its second major victory contender after Alexey Lukyanuk's retirement on Saturday afternoon. Nordgren rolled his ŠKODA Fabia R5 only one corner into the Lageia stage, losing a minute and dropping out of the podium places.

Nordgren's mistake following a fine run gave Galatariotis his first taste of first place, but pressure was strong from behind. Bruno Magalhães was only 3.3s adrift, while Nasser Al-Attiyah was recovering rapidly from a double puncture late on Saturday.

Though Galatariotis had increased his margin over a cautious Magalhães to 12.7s by midday service, Al-Attiyah closed in further, 18.3s in arrears. By now Nordgren had fallen out of contention altogether, retiring from a separate incident to his roll one stage later.

The lead battle quickly became a two-horse race, Magalhães backing off to secure ERC championship points and allowing his two rivals to take control out front. Al-Attiyah turned in a storming drive through PSALTIS AUTOPARTS Golden Stage 1, 17.0s quicker than Magalhães and 20.6s ahead of Galatariotis to vault both and steal first place away with one stage remaining.

Magalhães' safety-first approach would be vindicated however, as one of the most exciting finishes in ERC history played out amongst those in full attack mode. As onlookers awaited Al-Attiyah's arrival at the finish of the ENEOS Golden Stage 2, it was Magalhães who arrived first after he overtook the stricken Al-Attiyah late on in the final stage. The Qatari's hopes of a record-extending sixth win were over.

This would surely hand victory to Galatariotis, yet the Cyprus Rally was not finished creating more drama. A front-right puncture meant Galatariotis was half a minute off the pace, though he clung on to a first ERC victory by the smallest of margins. An 11.4s advantage had been slashed to 0.6s as Galatariotis crossed the final flying finish.

Al-Attiyah dropped to fourth place after trying his best to press ahead with a slow puncture to his front right tyre. Despite his best efforts, it risked causing extensive damage to his Ford Fiesta R5, so a spell on the side of the road to change it for a spare was required.

Behind Galatariotis and Magalhães was MOL Racing Team's Nobert Herczig, picking up his second consecutive ERC podium finish. After SS2 on Saturday he had been down in ninth overall, but methodically climbed his way up the order. He lost only 10.2s to eventual winner Galatariotis across Sunday's six stages, showing how quickly he had improved on his first ever Cyprus Rally appearance.

Behind Al-Attiyah, a large midfield scrap carried over from Saturday and continued well into Sunday, eventually headed by Orhan Avcioglu. It was the Toksport WRT driver's best ERC result to date, executing a measured drive on Sunday after a fence-demolishing trip through a field the day before.

Vojtěch Štajf turned the tables on his old ERC2 rival Dávid Botka in their battle over what would become sixth position. Štajf started with a 14.5s deficit to Botka, whom he had been defeated by for the ERC2 title in 2015, but turned this into a 13.4s advantage by rally end.

A pivotal moment in their battle came away from the special stages in a road section leading up to SS8. Botka missed a turning and arrived two minutes late, incurring a 20-second penalty to hand Štajf a position he would not relinquish.

Behind Botka in seventh was Albert von Thurn und Taxis, who was elated to have survived Cyprus' treacherous stages and record his first ERC points finish of 2018 with eighth place. Despite starting first

on the road and road-sweeping for all those behind him, he kept a steady pace all day, starting 4.6s behind Štajf and finishing 4.7s behind Botka.

Petros Panteli not only scored his first ERC2 category win, but dovetailed his production success with ninth overall in the full ERC classification. Though his heavier Q8 Oils Rally Team Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X could not keep pace with the more-nimble R5 machines of his rivals, he held off his fellow compatriot Alexandros Tsouloftas by only 5.6s.

Tsouloftas had executed a stunning comeback drive on Sunday, going fastest across Sunday's five stages to win Leg Two and take a maximum seven bonus points. He had retired late on Saturday from a potential podium position with a broken wishbone, but bounced back emphatically come Sunday. Tsouloftas topped up his P10 finish and day victory with a double win in the Cyprus Rally's Golden Stage, taking home a cash prize as both the quickest overall driver and also the fastest Cypriot.

Michalis Posedias brought his production-spec Lancer to the finish P11, while ERC3 category winner Laurent Pellier completed the Cyprus Rally P12, a fantastic result given he was piloting a less powerful front-wheel-drive R2-specification PEUGEOT 208.

ERC2: Panteli takes maiden category win on home event

Cypriot Petros Panteli scored a dream maiden FIA European Rally Championship ERC2 category win on the Cyprus Rally, cruising home safely after issues struck nearest challenger Panikos Polykarpou. There had been a lead change overnight in the production-spec category, as Polykarpou was handed down a 20-second penalty for checking out late from Saturday evening's service in Larnaca. This gave Panteli a 0.2s advantage as Sunday's five stages began, albeit with Polykarpou expected to mount a strong comeback after winning four stages to Panteli's two on Saturday. Polykarpou's hopes were dashed almost instantly, as a right-rear puncture on SS7 forced him to pull over mid-stage and change a wheel, dropping five minutes and handing Panteli a lead he would hold until the very end. Michalis Posedias ensured a Cypriot 1-2 in ERC2, losing 18.5s to Panteli in SS7 before gaining that time back – and a little more – across Sunday afternoon's two stage loop to finish 33.8s adrift of Panteli. Argentina's Juan Carlos Alonso scored a welcomed third place after two consecutive retirements on Rally Islas Canarias and EKO Acropolis Rally. Starting first on the road had compromised his speed on Saturday, so was happy to keep his driving neat and tidy and ensure a solid haul of points to go with his podium trophy. Much like Alonso, Zelindo Melegari was pleased to bring his Movisport Lancer back safe and sound for good points in fourth place, after a pair of challenging events to begin his season on Airlines Azores Rallye and Rally Islas Canarias. He did enough to fend off the recovering Polyparkou in fifth place, finishing 25.1s ahead.

ERC3: Unstoppable ERC3 winner Pellier sweeps up in Cyprus dust

FIA European Rally Championship Junior Under 28 regular Laurent Pellier scored a near-perfect victory in the ERC3 support category on the Cyprus Rally, winning by more than 13 minutes. Pellier, who usually drives for the PEUGEOT Rally Academy in an R5-specification 208 T16, dropped down to a 208 R2 for the Cyprus Rally with the same Saintéloc Junior Team which runs his ERC Junior U28 programme. He had won every stage on Saturday and came close to making it a perfect 11 from 11, stopped only by Emma Falcón who was victorious in SS8 on Sunday. Pellier's only drama on the closing day was a front-left puncture on the first stage, but was otherwise untroubled, even matching the pace of more powerful four-wheel-drive production class ERC2 cars on occasion. Artur Muradian had been Pellier's closest challenger, though he fell by the wayside at midday service. He had suffered a broken wishbone on SS9, and though cancellation of SS10 allowed him to return directly to service without penalty, his Renault Clio could not be fixed for the afternoon loop. Constantinos Televantos ensured every Cyprus Rally class would have a local driver on the podium, safely passing through Sunday's stages to secure second place aboard

his Q8 Oils Rally Team Ford Fiesta R2. He was joined on the rostrum by ERC newcomer Norbert Berezcki, finishing third despite driving a lone R1 specification car less powerful than those of his R3 and R2-equipped rivals. Falcón added a fourth place finish to her earlier stage win, overcoming similar mechanical gremlins to those which had affected her pace at EKO Rally Acropolis. This also won her the ERC Ladies' Trophy battle, finishing ahead of Pellier's Saintéloc Junior team-mate Catie Munnings in fifth place. Munnings had originally been in a podium position fight with Televantos, at one point even over 40 seconds ahead, but a 15-minute penalty due to a start line mix-up on Saturday's third stage. Christos Mannouris completed the ERC3 top six, driving a similar Citroën DS3 R3T to Falcón.

LEG ONE REPORT: Click [here](#) for leg one report

PROVISIONAL TOP 10 POSITIONS (after 13 stages, 205.41 kilometres)

- 1 Simos Galatariotis (CYP)/Antonios Ioannou (CYP) ŠKODA Fabia R5 +1h55m40.2s
- 2 Bruno Magalhães (PRT)/Hugo Magalhães (PRT) ŠKODA Fabia R5 +0.6s
- 3 Norbert Herczig (HUN)/Ramón Ferencz (HUN) ŠKODA Fabia R5 +1m21.4s
- 4 Nasser Al-Attiyah (QAT)/Matthieu Baumel (FRA) Ford Fiesta R5 +2m27.0s
- 5 Orhan Avcioglu (TUR)/Burçin Korkmaz (TUR) ŠKODA Fabia R5 +3m05.7s
- 6 Vojtěch Štajf (CZE)/Marcela Ehlová (CZE) ŠKODA Fabia R5 +3m25.1s
- 7 Dávid Botka (HUN)/Márk Mesterházi (HUN) ŠKODA Fabia R5 +3m38.5s
- 8 Albert von Thurn und Taxis (DEU)/Bjorn Degandt (BEL) ŠKODA Fabia R5 +3m43.2s
- 9 Petros Panteli (CYP)/Kyprias Christodoulou (CYP) Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X +6m44.6s
- 10 Alexandros Tsouloftas (CYP)/Antonios Chrysostomou (CYP) Citroën DS3 R5 +6m50.2s

FIA ERC2: Petros Panteli (CYP)/Kyprias Christodoulou (CYP) Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X

FIA ERC3: Laurent Pellier (FRA)/Geoffrey Combe (FRA) PEUGEOT 208 R2

ERC Ladies' Trophy: Emma Falcón (ESP) Citroën DS3 R3T

Click [here](#) for full results, stage classifications, retirements and other data.

RALLY LEADERS

SS1-SS3: Lukyanuk/Arnautov

SS4-SS5: Al-Attiyah/Baumel

SS6-SS8: Nordgren/Suominen

SS9-SS11: Galatariotis/Ioannou

SS12: Al-Attiyah/Baumel

SS13: Galatariotis/Ioannou

STAGE WINNERS

Leg one (Saturday 16 June, 91.12 kilometres):

SS1: Kellia 1 (19.87kms):

ERC1	ERC2	ERC3	ERC Ladies
Lukyanuk	Polykarpou	Pellier	Munnings

SS2: Analiontas 1 (14.41kms):

Al-Attiyah	Polykarpou	Pellier	Munnings
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SS3: Cyta Stavrovouni 1 (11.28kms):

Al-Attiyah	Polykarpou	Pellier	Munnings
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SS4: Kellia 2 (19.87kms):

Al-Attiyah	Panteli	Pellier	Munnings
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SS5: George Kyprianou Analiontas 2 (14.41kms):

Nordgren	Polykarpou	Pellier	Munnings
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SS6: Cyta Stavrovouni 2 (11.28kms):

Nordgren	Panteli	Pellier	Munnings
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Leg two (Sunday 17 June, 114.29 kilometres):

SS7: Cyta Yeri 1 (24.50kms):

Al-Attiyah	Panteli	Pellier	Munnings
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SS8: Nicosia SSS (2.67kms):

Botka	Panteli	Pellier	Falcón
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SS9: Lageia 1 (11.49kms):

Al-Attiyah	Posedias	Pellier	Munnings
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SS10: Lefkara 1 (19.82kms):

Al-Attiyah	Stage cancelled	Stage cancelled	Stage cancelled
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SS11: Cyta Yeri 2 (24.50kms):

Stage cancelled			
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SS12: PSALTIS AUTOPARTS Golden Stage 1 (11.49kms):

Al-Attiyah	Panteli	Pellier	Munnings
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SS13: ENEOS Golden Stage 2 (19.82kms):

Tsouloftas	Polykarpou	Pellier	Falcón
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KEY STATISTICS

ERC rally wins in 2018: Lukyanuk 2, Galatariotis and Magalhães 1

ERC stage wins in 2018: Lukyanuk 22; Al-Attiyah and Magalhães 7; Nordgren 3; Botka, Gryazin and Herczig 2; Åhlin, Avcioğlu, Brynildsen, Kreim, Moura, Pellier, Ptaszek and Tsouloftas 1

CHAMPIONSHIP POSITIONS Click [here](#) the provisional positions after 4/8.

LEG TWO HIGHLIGHTS ON EUROSPORT, EUROSPORT PLAYER. CHECK LOCAL LISTINGS.

WHAT'S NEXT? Rally di Roma Capitale, Italy, 20-22 July: The progression of this exciting asphalt event, organised and promoted by Motorsport Italia, has been remarkable. Having run for the first time in 2013, Rally di Roma Capitale made its ERC debut in 2017 as Italy returned to the European championship for the first time since 2013 when Rallye Sanremo was on the calendar. It proved a big hit with a driving parade through the centre of Rome, a spectacular spectator stage around the Palazzio della Civiltà del Lavoro in the EUR district, followed by two days of action-packed rallying on stages to the east and south-east of the capital. **Media contact:** Stefano Cossetti, stefanocossetti@hotmail.it, +39 3483810685

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