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kept Hänninen at the top of the standings, albeit by just three points from Kopecký.

All three of those established Skoda stars would have had their feathers distinctly ruffled had the Skoda UK entry of Andreas Mikkelsen enjoyed a free run. While his pace on gravel has already been proven, the young Norwegian had yet to come to the fore on sealed surfaces, but Zlin marked a major breakthrough for the prospective Volkswagen prodigy. Mikkelsen ran a close second to Kopecký through most of Saturday, until a rear puncture on SS8 and a spin on SS9, Saturday's finale, wrecked his chances, but he was happy with his surge in Tarmac performance.

"This is Jan's home rally. He knows the roads very well and he's definitely not slow here, so to be able to battle with him is very pleasing," said Mikkelsen. Four stage wins out of six on Sunday proved his opening-day form was no fluke, and he came up just six seconds short of reclaiming fourth from Thierry Neuville.

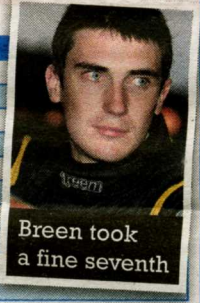
Indeed, Neuville's fourth - taken despite clouting some small trees on Saturday after a frightening sixth-gear off - was as good as it got for Peugeot, after a disastrous rally

RESULTS

Intercontinental Rally Challenge, round 7/11, Barum Rally Zlin, August 26-28

POS	DRIVER / CO-DRIVER	CAR	TIME
1	Jan Kopecký (CZE)/Petr Starý (CZE)	Skoda Fabia S2000	2h 15m 51.7s
2	Freddy Loix (BEL)/Frédéric Miclotte (BEL)	Skoda Fabia S2000	+1.2s
3	Juho Hänninen (FIN)/Mikko Markkula (FIN)	Skoda Fabia S2000	+37.4s
4	Thierry Neuville (BEL)/Nicolas Gilsoul (BEL)	Peugeot 207 S2000	+1m 59.6s
5	Andreas Mikkelsen (NOR)/Ola Fløene (NOR)	Skoda Fabia S2000	+2m 05.7s
6	Toni Gardemeister (FIN)/Tapio Suominen (FIN)	Skoda Fabia S2000	+3m 43.2s
7	Craig Breen (IRL)/Gareth Roberts (GBR)	Ford Fiesta S2000	+3m 47.4s
8	Roman Krešta (CZE)/Petr Gross (CZE)	Skoda Fabia S2000	+4m 21.5s
9	PG Andersson (SWE)/Emil Axelsson (SWE)	Proton Satria Neo S2000	+4m 41.1s
10	Karl Kruuda (EST)/Martin Järveoja (EST)	Skoda Fabia S2000	+4m 54.4s

Other notable finishers: 12 Patrik Sandell (SWE)/Staffan Parmander (SWE), Skoda Fabia S2000, +5m 29.1s; 13 Giandomenico Basso (ITA)/Mitia Dotta (ITA), Proton Satria Neo S2000, +5m 52.8s.
Leading retirements: Guy Wilks (GBR)/Phil Pugh (GBR), Peugeot 207 S2000, SS13/alternator belt; Bryan Bouffier (FRA)/Xavier Panseri (FRA), Peugeot 207 S2000, SS10/accident; Robert Barrable (IRL)/Damien Connolly (IRL), Skoda Fabia S2000, timecard error.
Stage wins: Loix 5, Mikkelsen 4, Kopecký 2, Hänninen 2, Bouffier 1, Wilks 1. **Drivers standings after 7/11 rounds:** 1 Hänninen 98pts, 2 Kopecký 95, 3 Loix 88, 4 Bouffier 61, 5 Neuville 60, 6 Mikkelsen 56, etc. **Manufacturers standings:** 1 Skoda 275pts, 2 Peugeot 181, etc. **Next round:** Mecsek Rally (Hungary), September 9-11.



Breen took a fine seventh

that severely dented its drivers' and manufacturers' title hopes. Frenchman Bryan Bouffier did his best to hang on to the Skodas' coattails and held fourth overnight, only to crash out on Sunday's opening stage, SS10: "I was trying, doing my best when I went off, hit a boulder and broke off two wheels," said the Peugeot France-backed ace, who is now 37 points behind Hänninen. "For sure we needed good points and the result this weekend is very bad."

As for Guy Wilks, things were looking up for the Englishman

when he won the first full stage, SS2, on Saturday. He kept himself in the fight for at least a podium until SS8, when he went wide on a right-hander, ran through some bushes and punctured a tyre on his Peugeot 207 S2000.

"We took hard tyres for the afternoon but with cuts at the rear as we heard it was going to rain," said Wilks, who fell back to 12th as a result. "The car was moving around too much and I was pushing too much to make up for the lost time, slid wide and hit some bushes. We had to drive

for three kilometres before we could change the tyre."

Wilks fought gamely on Sunday morning to get himself back into the points, and got as far as eighth until a snapped alternator belt put him out on SS13.

Of the rest, Craig Breen was the stand-out star: The Irishman put in a faultless run to finish seventh overall in his Ford Fiesta S2000, just behind Toni Gardemeister, who was hampered by a brace of clutch failures. Robert Barrable finished 13th, but was later excluded for a timecard error. ■