



FIA ERC: RALLYE DU VALAIS (NOVEMBER 9, 2013)

SPIRITED FIGHT-BACKS FROM BREEN AND ANCIAN

Between them, Peugeot 207 S2000 drivers Craig Breen and Jérémie Ancian notched up more stage victories than all their rivals on the 2013 Rallye International du Valais, with 12 wins and seven one-two finishes to their name after the weekend's 18 tests. After leading early on, however, they were handed big time penalties for early arrival at the start of SS3, which relegated them to 16th and 28th positions overall respectively. Overcoming the disappointment, the two Peugeot Rally Academy drivers bounced back thanks to thrilling fight-backs to claim third and fourth spots at the finish. Meanwhile, Stéphane Lefebvre was on top in his class before dropping a minute-and-a-half on SS14 and ultimately retiring on the following test.

Penalties for the early pace-setters

In spite of the relatively mild weather for the time of year encountered during Switzerland's Rallye du Valais, the final round of the 2013 FIA European Rally Championship proved extremely complex for the drivers because of the mountain stages' repeated changes of grip, not to mention the long portions of dirt.

The objective of Craig Breen and Jérémie Ancian before the start was to round off their year on a high note, and the Peugeot Rally Academy's two 207 S2000 drivers were effectively running 1st and 2nd after SS2, split by just two-tenths of a second.

Their bids for victory took a blow on Thursday evening, however. *"We were delayed by road works on the road section between SS1 and SS2,"* reported Breen's co-driver Lara Vanneste and her counterpart alongside Ancian, Olivier Vitrani. *"As a consequence, we didn't start SS2 at our ideal time and our actual start time wasn't clearly indicated on our timecards, so we checked in early at the start of SS3."* The N°1 and N°5 Peugeots were penalised two and three minutes respectively, but neither driver threw in the towel...





Incredible fight-backs

Although delayed further still by a puncture on SS14, Jérémi Ancian managed to fight his way back to fourth overall at the flag thanks to a score of seven fastest times.

Meanwhile, despite completing Friday morning's three tests without power steering, Craig Breen's comeback was rewarded with a podium finish after claiming five of the weekend's 18 stages.

Craig Breen: "Our top-three finish is payback for the effort we put in on Friday and Saturday to fight our way back up the order, but it wasn't really the result we came here for. My mind was absolutely set on winning this weekend. This rally epitomises our 2013 season which has been one of ups and downs, with some strong results and lots of ill luck. But I am sure the experience will help us in the future."

Jérémi Ancian: "If you deduct the time penalty we took, we would have been leading when we picked up our puncture on SS14. The positive is that we won more stages than anybody else, despite the fact that this event was new to me. We had previously retired on three of our asphalt events this year, so I hadn't even completed the equivalent of a complete sealed-surface rally in the Peugeot 207 S2000 before coming to Switzerland. It was therefore quite an encouraging result."

Jérémi Ancian has been awarded the Colin McRae ERC Flat Out Trophy for his competitiveness.

Stéphane Lefebvre: Over the top!

Like his fellow Peugeot Rally Academy runners, Stéphane Lefebvre appeared at the top of his class in his Peugeot 208 R2 before eventually dropping more than a minute on SS14. He was then side-lined for good on the following test. "It's a big shame to end our 2013 programme in this way. We had a brake problem on the long stage but I managed to stay on the road. Then the engine broke on SS15..."

The Swiss Peugeot 207 S2000 drivers met with mixed fortunes on their home event. The country's 2013 rally champion Grégoire Hotz was halted by an oil pipe problem on Friday's leg, while Sébastien Carron also failed to finish Day 2 when he crashed out. The 2012 Swiss champ Nicolas Althaus (6th) and Pascal Perroud (8th) both completed the rally inside the top 10.

For further information, standings and statistics: www.fiaerc.com