

Solberg scores stunning debut Polo GTI R5 victory in Latvia

- Oliver scores his first ever outright rally victory
- Wins five from 10 Rally Alūksne stages
- 17-year-old thrilled with Volkswagen's new rally car
- Second after two Friday night stages, Oliver was a winner by Saturday afternoon

Oliver Solberg has delivered a dream drive in Latvia, winning Rally Alūksne on his debut in a Volkswagen Polo GTI R5. The event finished in Alūksne on Saturday evening.

The 17-year-old, co-driven by Aaron Johnston, won half of the stages, all 10 of which were run in perfect Latvian winter conditions.

Rally Alūksne represented Oliver's step up from junior rallying to the big time. And he delivered in the most emphatic fashion.

"I'm so, so happy," said Oliver. "I had a really good feeling with the car from the pre-event test and I took a lot of confidence to the first stage. But still, I didn't know what to expect – there's a lot of really good drivers in a lot of really good cars here."

Oliver's first ever competitive experience of four-wheel drive rallying came in the dark on a pair of Friday night stages. He was immediately on the pace, posting second fastest time on each.

"Aaron and I had a plan on Friday night," said Oliver, "we wanted to take a little bit of time and just get into the event. I love to drive in the dark, with the lights and the snow, it's so cool – but it's also a little bit different. It's dark! If you stall or if something out of the ordinary happens then you can't always see straight away where everything is, especially when you're still a little bit in a new car."

Daylight brought another step in pace. And the lead.

"I was enjoying the car so much, the speed just seemed to be coming better all the time. We had one small visit to a snowbank [in SS4] and then I stalled going off the line on the penultimate stage (SS9). I was trying to limit the wheelspin by launching in second gear, but I didn't give it enough revs and we stalled.

"I went back into first gear for the launch on the final stage and gave it lots of revs!

"Honestly, this has been a fantastic day, so much fun driving the car in really nice winter conditions with good snow and a solid ice base.

"When we took the lead on stage six, Aaron and I again took some time and talked things through. I think we both got quite excited about the position, but we knew we had to stay calm and finish the job. That's what we did.

"I want to say a very big thank you to my co-driver Aaron for a great job, my parents and the PSRX team for all the work they put in to make this happen. I also want to thank Volkswagen for the brilliant car they made and Circle K and all my partners who made this result possible. I'm so glad to be able to bring this result to them."

Predictably and understandably Oliver's parents Petter and Pernilla are both delighted with the result.

PSRX team principal Pernilla said: "Oliver and Aaron did a very, very good job today. Petter and I are so proud. We've watched Oliver growing up and we've known for a while that this moment was coming, but to be here watching our boy stand on top of the podium and celebrate his first win is something very special. As parents, we're super-proud and a little bit blown away by what he's done. It's fantastic!

"I told him before he went to the podium, he's only allowed to spray the champagne – he's not old enough to drink it!"

Triple FIA World Champion Petter added: "Pernilla and me went to watch in the stages and everything looked very good. The car was stable and really fast. And what was very impressive

was how calm Oliver was through the whole day, he kept everything really cool – even when he was in a big fight. Him and Aaron have learned a lot today and that experience is what we came here for.”

Just before we sign off, we'd like to mention the Bilsport Awards (January 26). Oliver has been nominated in the Junior category and, if you think he's worthy of a vote, you could do that right here... <http://www.bilsport.se/award2018.php/>

Contact:

Sandra Evans PR manager

sandra@pettersolberg.no

+44 7887 693993

+46 76 110 7 110

Johan Kraft-Johanssen

Senior Marketing Manager

jokraf@circlekeurope.com

+47 950 63740

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