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1. EVENT SUMMARY

Burkart scores debut J-WRC win in Ireland

German driver **Aaron Burkart** and co-driver Michael Kölbach scored the debut J-WRC win of their career in their Suzuki Swift S1600, on Rally Ireland, the opening round of the 2009 FIA Junior World Rally Championship. **Martin Prokop** (CZ) brought his Citroën C2 home in second and Italian **Simone Bertolotti** (Suzuki) scored the best result of his career for third.

As runner-up in last year's J-WRC, Burkart is clearly out to make amends this season, and he kicked off the year in style setting the pace amongst his rivals. Atrociously wet conditions made progress tricky and Burkart was one of the first to be caught out as his new-for-2009 Suzuki aquaplaned just after the start of SS3, losing 30 seconds after sliding off the road and relying on spectators to help him rejoin. But damage-free, he managed to hold onto his slim lead.

Dutch KNAF Talent First team driver **Hans Weijs Jr.**, who has upgraded last year's C2-R2 for the more powerful S1600 version for 2009, was arguably the main surprise of the rally. In a car recently bought from Burkart, driving it for the first time and with a new co-driver, he moved into second on SS3 and by SS6 he had taken the lead, despite brake problems through the last stage of the day.

Not content with second, Burkart stepped up his pace to reclaim the lead by SS10 but had some fierce competition from Weijs' team-mate **Kevin Abbring** (NL) whose Renault Clio R3 suited the wet conditions perfectly and started to claim stage wins. Through day two, however, it was Weijs who was knocking on the door of the lead all day, reducing his deficit to Burkart to just 1.5 seconds by SS12 after claiming his first J-WRC stage win. Sadly he was caught out by the conditions on the last stage of the day, when he hit a tree which caused irreparable damage.

Prokop, who made a steady start to the rally hoping to avoid the bad luck he incurred at the start of last year's J-WRC, lay in third place by SS6, despite electrical problems on SS3 caused by the sheer volume of water on the stages, and hitting a tree on SS11. Weijs' demise on SS14, however, saw the Czech driver move into second but with almost one and a half minute's gap to Burkart, he focused on finishing rather than challenging for the win to avoid making a mistake. His second place finish also scores him maximum points for the Czech National Team in the ASN classification.

Bertolotti drove a steady rally from the start and didn't let the conditions affect him much, despite not enjoying them. Like others, he suffered on SS3 with water affecting the electrics and broken power steering, but by day two he had settled into fourth, despite finishing SS11 with two punctures. With Weijs out, he defended his adopted third position through the final day to clock his best J-WRC result to date.

Yoann Bonato (F, Suzuki) made a great start in second, lying just 6.6 seconds off Burkart's lead by SS5. He dropped a few seconds on SS3 as he slowed to overtake another competitor, but so conscious was he to avoid the water in the apex of the corners that he went too wide on SS6, sliding off the road. With no spectators to help him rejoin, he was unable to complete the stage. With such a large gap to close, his aim from day two was simply to reach the finish to gain experience and take as many points as possible to kick start the Championship. He eventually finished fourth.

Bad luck struck Abbring early on as electrical woes after SS2 saw him stop for the day. His car was affected by the large

amount of water in the stages and his engine wouldn't restart after arriving at the start of SS3, while lying in fourth place. Eager to prove his new found pace however, the J-WRC's youngest competitor flew through the rest of the event's stages, winning no less than nine in total; a small consolation for his troubles, before finishing in fifth. His finish also scores eight points for second in the ASN classification and he wins the sprinter standings for the event.

Luca Griotti (I, Renault) made a steady start to a very tricky rally but was happy with his Clio R3 in the wet to begin with. Like others, however, the electrics on his car were affected by the water and as a result he arrived at the time control after SS6 on day one later than the permitted amount of time lateness, incurring huge penalties. He restarted for day two and was happy to reach the finish to score three points for sixth.

Entered into the event by the organisers, Galway-based driver **Ross Forde** (IRL, Suzuki) had a difficult event. The 25-year-old was awarded the drive after winning the 2008 Billy Coleman Award and being named the Young Rally Driver of the Year and was co-driven by his younger brother for the first round of the J-WRC. Like his rivals, he found the opening group of stages really tricky. He managed to stay out of trouble for most of the event but disaster struck on SS17 when a damaged gearbox and broken differential forced his retirement.

2. DRIVER QUOTES

1st – Aaron Burkart, Suzuki Swift S1600:

"It's an amazing result! We have a new car, a new team and a new rally and we won it! I don't know what to say – it's been the toughest rally I've ever done as it was so easy to make a mistake. But I'm really happy!"

2nd – Martin Prokop, Citroën C2 S1600:

"I think we can be happy with second as it's a good start to the season for us after last year when nothing went our way. Now we can try and push to win some races this year and eight points is a good way to start."

3rd – Simone Bertolotti, Suzuki Swift S1600:

"This is my first time on the podium so I'm very, very happy. Unfortunately we're not so close to first but this is fantastic for me and Suzuki. It's starting the season in a good way and it's the just the beginning of the Championship as we have lots of work to do with Suzuki."

3. RESULTS (EVENT) *subject to scrutineering and routine fuel analysis

POS	CAR#	DRIVER	CO-DRIVER	CAR	TIME	POINTS
1	31	Aaron Burkart (D)	Michael Kölbach (D)	Suzuki Swift S1600	3:16:41.5	10
2	38	Martin Prokop (CZ)	Jan Tománek (CZ)	Citroën C2 S1600	+47.3	8
3	33	Simone Bertolotti (I)	Luca Celestini (I)	Suzuki Swift S1600	+9:00.1	6
4	35	Yoann Bonato (F)	Benjamin Boulloud (F)	Suzuki Swift S1600	+13:06.2	5
5	37	Kevin Abbring (NL)	Erwin Mombaerts (B)	Renault Clio R3	+17:38.0	4
6	34	Luca Griotti (I)	Corrado Bonato (I)	Renault Clio R3	+27:08.4	3

4. RETIREMENTS (EVENT)

CAR#	DRIVER	CO-DRIVER	CAR	STAGE	REASON
36	Hans Weijs Jr (NL) ®	Bjorn Degandt (B)	Citroën C2	SS14	Accident
60	Ross Forde (IRL)	Aaron Forde (IRL)	Suzuki Swift Sport	SS17	Differential

5. LEADERS (EVENT)

CAR#	DRIVER	CAR	STAGE
31	Aaron Burkart	Suzuki Swift S1600	SS1-5, SS10-19
36	Hans Weijs Jr	Citroën C2 S1600	SS6-9

10. DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP STANDINGS

2009 FIA JUNIOR WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP (FOR DRIVERS)

* subject to the official publication of the results by the FIA ® = denotes eligibility for Rookie Award

POS	#	DRIVER	CAR	IRL	CY	P	RA	I	POL	FIN	E	PNTS
1	31	Aaron Burkart (D)	Suzuki Swift S1600	10								10
2	38	Martin Prokop (CZ)	Citroën C2 S1600	8								8
3	33	Simone Bertolotti (I)	Suzuki Swift S1600	6								6
4	35	Yoann Bonato (F)	Suzuki Swift S1600	5								5
5	37	Kevin Abbring (NL)	Renault Clio R3	4								4
6	34	Luca Griotti (I)	Renault Clio R3	3								3
7	36	Hans Weijs Jr (NL)	Citroën C2 S1600	R								0
8	G	Ross Forde (IRL)	Suzuki Swift Sport	R								0

11. CO-DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP STANDINGS

2009 FIA JUNIOR WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP (FOR DRIVERS)

* subject to the official publication of the results by the FIA ® = denotes eligibility for Rookie Award

POS	#	DRIVER	IRL	CY	P	RA	I	POL	FIN	E	PNTS
1	31	Michael Kolbach (D)	10								10
2	38	Jan Tománek (CZ)	8								8
3	33	Luca Celestini (I)	6								6
4	35	Benjamin Boulloud (F)	5								5
5	37	Erwin Mombaerts (B)	4								4
6	34	Corrado Bonato (I)	3								3
7	36	Bjorn Degandt (B)	R								0

12. ROOKIE STANDINGS

2009 FIA J-WRC ROOKIE CLASSIFICATION

#	DRIVER	CAR	IRL	CY	P	RA	I	POL	FIN	E	TOT
	Not applicable										

13. NATIONAL SPORTING ASSOCIATIONS (ASN) STANDINGS

2009 FIA J-WRC ASN CLASSIFICATION

#	DRIVER	IRL	CY	P	RA	I	POL	FIN	E	TOT
1	38 Czech National Team	10								10
2	36/37 KNAF Talent First 1 & 2	8								8

14. WHAT IS THE FIA JUNIOR WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP?

The FIA Junior World Rally Championship (For Drivers) is a support championship to the FIA World Rally Championship for upcoming young drivers aspiring to reach the highest level of the championship, with 2009 seeing nine drivers representing at least six countries. The cars they compete in are B-segment cars or the 'hot hatchbacks', are front-wheel drive and have a total length of 3.6m and 4.15m. In the first seven years of the J-WRC we have seen many manufacturers produce cars eligible for the category including Citroën, Fiat, Ford, Honda, Peugeot, Renault and Suzuki. Eligible cars must be homologated in one of four technical classes: Super 1600 (<1600cc), Group N cars (<2000cc), Group R cars and selected Group A cars (<1600cc).

NEXT ROUND –

CYPRUS RALLY www.cyprusrally.com.cy

FIA JUNIOR WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP (FOR DRIVERS)

13 – 15 MARCH 2009

ROUND 2 OF 8

For more information visit: www.wrc.com

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