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ASCENZI WINS IN A THRILLER AT LE TOUQUET



Valentin Ascenzi and Marine Lacruz were locked in a thrilling battle for victory on the Rallye Le Touquet - Pas-de-Calais and won the season-opener after their rivals Patrick Magnou and Arthur Pelamourgues crashed out on the final two stages. The French driver also led the way in the Junior category and scored maximum points in the Jean Ragnotti Power Stage to claim the lead in the Clio Trophy France Asphalté.

Thirty-eight crews entered the season's first round on the roads of Pas-de-Calais. Before the rally began, Jordan d'Agostino and Christophe Gouville each won two tyres in a draw organised by Ceerta, the official Michelin Motorsport distributor for the French Rally Championship. This prize was in addition to the two-tyre starting bonus for all competitors in the Clio Trophy France Asphalté.

On Friday morning, Patrick Magnou jumped into the lead in an extremely compact field. Second at three tenths on SSI, Arthur Pelamourgues struck back in the next timed sector to open up a 6.2s lead before Tom Pellerey became the third stage winner in as many stages to immediately reduce the gap. Although the opening loop ended with a reply from Patrick Magnou, Arthur Pelamourgues returned to the service park with an 8.2s margin over Tom Pellerey, who led a six-crew chase group covered by ten seconds.

Patrick Magnou kept the momentum going in the afternoon with three consecutive best times, each time ahead of Valentin Ascenzi and Arthur Pelamourgues. Valentin Ascenzi, however, ended his rival's run in the darkness of the last



test of the day, but it was still Arthur Pelamourgues in the lead with an advantage of 2.7s over Patrick Magnou and 4.1s over Valentin Ascenzi. Benjamin Stirling was fourth at 31.9s, ahead of Yoan Corberand and Julien Deslauriers, following the retirement of Tom Pellerey on Camiers - Longvilliers.

Having gained confidence on the slick tarmac on Friday thanks to the new S10, M20 and H30 tyres from the Michelin Pilot Sport Pro Rally range, the competitors switched to rain tyres on Saturday to challenge the roads soaked by heavy showers. In these conditions, Patrick Magnou resumed his march forward on La Calotterie to come back to within 1.6s of Arthur Pelamourgues, but the latter replied, as did Valentin Ascenzi, who got back in contention for the win after claiming the maximum ten bonus points at stake on the Jean Ragnotti Power Stage.

The three frontrunners began the decisive loop covered by less than 12 seconds. Following the cancellation of the second run of La Calotterie, Arthur Pelamourgues tamed the aquaplaning and the mud to consolidate his lead on the penultimate stage, whereas Patrick Magnou retired and Valentin Ascenzi went straight ahead. With an advantage of 35.6s, Arthur Pelamourgues thought he had done enough, but he was caught by a slippery section in the final kilometres. Forced to retire, the long-time leader let the victory slip away to Valentin Ascenzi, who doubled up with the Junior category win.

Long engaged in a duel with Julien Deslauriers, Yoan Corberand finished second while his rival lost a lot of time in the last stage. Benjamin Stirling completed the podium, but a happy event in the coming days will deliver his most cherished trophy. Tom Vauclore was a model of consistency in his debut, finishing one second ahead of Nicolas Hebrard for fourth place. Corsica's Jean-Claude Pietri also made a strong impression, finishing sixth in his first appearance, ahead of Romain Fostier and another newcomer, Tobias Laurence. Benjamin Barnouin and Julien Deslauriers rounded out the top ten while Mike Souvigné won the Gentlemen category ahead of Franck Giraud and Pascal Donnadiou after taking the lead on SS4.

Valentin Ascenzi ran the table to take the lead of the general classification ahead of Yoan Corberand and Benjamin Stirling, two drivers whose performances put Sébastien Loeb Racing atop of the team classification. Meanwhile, Groupe Bertrand is the first leader of the Renault Network Challenge this season.

Title holder Thomas Chauffray excelled behind the wheel of a Rally2 to claim his first podium in the French Rally Championship. Last year's Junior category winner, Tom Pieri launched his official programme with Clio Rally4. Slowed down by a time-consuming puncture on Friday morning, the young driver demonstrated his potential with six stage wins under his belt. Styve Juif, also competing with a Clio Rally4, won the Michelin Amateur Trophy and finished second in his category with two best times to his credit.

Round two will take the Clio Trophy France Asphalte crews to the Rallye Antibes Côte d'Azur (May 18-20). Before that, the Clio Trophy France Terre will have its first two events, starting with the Rallye Terre des Causses (30 March-2 April).

Valentin Ascenzi: "This first victory is a huge relief, especially as it comes in a round that is not necessarily the easiest for me. Everything clicked from the start with the team, whose work I am super pleased with, and Marine, who knows how to steer me. That is what I was missing last year. I think Arthur was faster than us, but we drove a smart rally. That's where I think I have made the most progress. The tricky roads made Sunday morning a bit difficult. We lost a bit of time, but I wanted to do well in the Power Stage to get points, and I closed the gap without taking too many risks. After seeing that Arthur's car had gone off the road, it was hard to finish the stage with the euphoria in the car! It's a shame for Patrick and him as they both put up a superb fight. But I'm delighted to have won. The target in Antibes, my home round, will be to do it again, and I have every reason to believe that it is possible with our performance in Le Touquet!"



Clio Trophy France Asphalte - Rallye Le Touquet Pas-de-Calais

1. Valentin Ascenzi – Marine Lacruz (J) 1h46:07.7s
2. Yoan Corberand – Amélie Pierron +22.3s
3. Benjamin Stirling – Thibault Raincourt (J) +50.5s
4. Tom Vauclare – Frédéric Vauclare (J) +1:22.6s
5. Nicolas Hebrard – Bastien Dumas +1:23.6s
6. Jean-Claude Pietri – Kylian-Alexis Sarmezan (J) +1:36.9s
7. Romain Fostier – Ophélie Abchiche +1:46.4s
8. Tobias Laurence – Florian Duthu (J) +2:28.9s
9. Benjamin Barnouin – Enzo Mahinc (J) +2:38.0s
10. Julien Deslauriers – Amandine Brunel +3:10.3s
11. Enzo Beschet – Camille Clément (J) +3:48.3s
12. Martin Massé – Melvine Pitois (J) +4:06.0s
13. Arthur Roché – Quentin Proust (J) +4:20.2s
14. Romain Perrin – Albin Goutry-André (J) +6:32.8s
15. Louis Myr – Camille Flajolet (J) +7:58.9s
16. Jérôme Janny – Clément Gutierrez +8:41.1s
17. Mike Souvigné – Yoan De Mol (G) +10:43.3s
18. Maxime Krasnobaev – François Gilbert (J) +11:48.9s
19. Christophe Gouville – François Heer +11:54.0s
20. Franck Giraud – Sylvain Guillaume (G) +13:25.8s
21. Sylvain Janny – Mireille Guy +14:05.5s
22. Théo Apchie – Aurélie Vedrine (J) +14:41.3s
23. Pascal Donnadieu – Laurent Delmas (G) +16:07.6s
24. Willy Mathey – Mathieu Favreau (G) +16:31.7s
25. José Da Cunha – Magalie Da Cunha (G) +18:52.7s
26. Quentin Roger – Alysée Poillon (J) +20:37.7s
27. Jordan D'Agostino – Benoît Manzo (J) +32:40.8s
28. Ugo Girardeau – Julien Bichon +56:31.6s
29. Calvin Lucas – Amandine Houry (J) +1h13:59.3s
- DNF. Arthur Pelamourgues – Alizée Pottier (J)
- DNF. Tom Pellerey – Hervé Faucher (J)
- DNF. Carla Gaffayoli – Marc Bernardi (J, F)
- DNF. Patrick Magnou – Anthony Vilanova
- DNF. Yannick Francisci – François-Marie Ghelardini (J)
- DNF. Dylan Gagnière – Maryne Bonne (J)
- DNF. Manon Massarotto – Jean-François de Montredon (J, F)
- DNF. Jean-Pierre Lejeune – Geneviève Arnavielhe (G)
- DNF. Mattéo Chatillon – Brice Ricou (J)

ABOUT THE CLIO TROPHY FRANCE ASPHALTE AND TERRE

After a successful launch, Clio Rally5 is now taking on all surfaces with the Clio Trophy France Asphalte and the Clio Trophy France Terre. With two calendars intentionally independent and complementary to maximise the opportunities for all, each trophy consists of five rounds of the FFSA French Tarmac or Gravel Rally Championship. Junior, Gentlemen, Female and Teams categories allow all the contenders to be valorised while enjoying unrivalled



technical support and a unique level of equity at this level of the pyramid. A real springboard for the most promising hopefuls, the best Juniors on each surface at the end of the year will be offered an official programme.

ABOUT RENAULT

Renault, a historic mobility brand and pioneer of electric vehicles in Europe, has always developed innovative vehicles. With the 'Renaulution' strategic plan, Renault has embarked on an ambitious, value-generating transformation moving towards a more competitive, balanced and electrified range. Its ambition is to embody modernity and innovation in technology, energy and mobility services in the automotive industry and beyond.