



SQUARE LEFT

OPINION

Did Ingram put in the performance of the rally?



Nobody was more impressed than me when [Chris Ingram's](#) name lit up the timesheets on the opening round of the European Rally Championship.

The Junior U27 Champion has finally moved up to four-wheel-drive machinery after several years driving an R2 car, and it really didn't take him long to adapt at all.

Driving a Skoda Fabia R5 for Toksport WRT, Ingram was on the pace right from the word go, enjoying a titanic scrap for honours with fellow Skoda man Martin Koci. A puncture set him back, but Koci buckled under the pressure, quite literally, ripping a wheel off in the final stage, making Ingram's path to victory that little bit easier.

In the end his winning margin was over a minute from a name familiar to UK rally fans thanks to his BRC exploits: Fredrik Ahlin.

And that gap is precisely what makes Ingram's performance mind-blowing.

Ahlin was the undisputed fastest man on gravel in the British Championship last year, winning both the Border Counties and the Pirelli International and only losing out on the Scottish Rally win through a holed radiator in the final stage.

For Ingram to wipe the floor with him on his first ever outing in a four-wheel-drive yet alone the Fabia R5 is hugely impressive. Ahlin has been out competing in the Swedish Championship too, with this being Ingram's first rally of the year.

Of course, the Azores is a very specialised rally with incredibly narrow roads and a very unique surface with the event running over volcanic rock. Previous class-winning experience helped the Manchester driver, but it doesn't equate for all of his speed and skill to win the Junior U28 series on his way to fourth overall.

It's important we don't get ahead of ourselves however. The Azores is one of Ingram's self-proclaimed favourite rallies in the world, and the winning margin is a tad flattering

after Koci's exit. The real test comes next month on Rallye Islas Canarias, where he will learn the R5 on tarmac for the first time in competition.

Perform well there, and he is a definite championship contender. He has spent a lot of years in the ERC in an R2, but that could serve very well in helping him progress up from the ERC.

Surely then his drive on the Azores was the performance of the rally?



Well, not so fast on that one. Because there was another British driver who made a brilliant account of himself on the Portuguese island.

Rhys Yates had very different objectives to Chris Ingram heading to the Azores.

Planning a full BRC campaign as well as a couple of sporadic ERC outings, Yates was out to measure himself against a fiercely competitive R5 field, working with a co-driver that was new to him on a rally that was new to him in a car that was also new to him in competition.

Did that hold him back? Did it heck? The Chesterfield's times were both impressive and sensible in an appropriate measure as he guided his Skoda round to third in Junior U28 and eighth overall.

He would have liked to have been closer to the ultimate pace, but given the level of competition he was up against, a podium is a huge result.

I spoke to him before the rally and he said if he did well he may consider doing more ERC rounds. I would say this qualify as doing well...

Was his performance more impressive than Ingram's? I don't know, because on paper Ingram was far superior, but if you analyse their factors Yates' podium was perhaps more surprising than Ingram being in contention was.

What do you think? Head to our [poll](#) to have your say.