



Ciecierzynski, by winning the Polski Fiat rally, also won the Polish championship

It had to be Polski

Ciecierzynski scores for the factory after the deletion of a controversial stage — Fantastic performance in thick fog from Jerzy Landsberg's Renault 5 — Report: MARTIN HOLMES

After the disappointments of losing the European Rally Championship in Spain two weeks previous, Polski Fiat at least had the consolation of winning their own event, the Warsaw Rally and bring their team driver, Tomasz Ciecierzynski, to win the national Polish championship. It was far from obvious that he would win; for a long while the Austrian driver Wolfgang Sulc was in the lead, but he lost his way on a road section in thick fog whilst incredible times by the Renault 5 driver Jerzy Landsberg — again during the bad fog — put him ahead on special stage points before one particular stage was cancelled subsequently. Team Polski Fiat driver Marian Bien took third place whilst the resident Italian driver (and previous winner) Lollo Lattari came fourth. Positions in the ECR are unaltered by this event, so that Darniche finishes with 380 against 288 for Zanini and 254 for Jaroszewicz who non-started.

ENTRY

Strangely, the Warsaw Rally had one of the best foreign entries in a European championship event all year: some 30 or so crews from outside Poland being entered. Apart from the enjoyable freedom for motorists in that country, together with inexpensive living costs for foreigners, (petrol is the equivalent of only 80 pence per gallon) the English Castrol company had made strong efforts to encourage entries, whilst Champion attended the event to give trade support as well.

The two Polski-Fiat drivers in Cyprus (Michael Koumas and George Kimonides) took part, to learn something new in their rallying careers: neither had used pacenotes before, despite Koumas' incredible performance in finishing third on the 1975 Acropolis. Sulc (the man who had deserved to finish second on the Hungarian Taurus Rally) had entered from Austria with his countryman Vic Dietmayer (Porsche and Golf respectively); Bengt Lundstrom (Celica) and Hans Britth (RS2000 Group 1) came from Sweden; Polski Fiat provided a works 125p for the Finn, Jussi Kynsilehto, and English co-driver Martin Holmes, while also from Finland came Kalle Moller (Simca 1100 Group 2) and Lauzi Koskinen (Fiat X1/9 1300cc).

From West Germany came many foreign entries; Jochen Schweiger had an immaculate Alpine A310, Rolf Petersen a Carrera, Evald Pauli a BMW 2002 Turbo and Holger Bohne was lent a Group 1 Polski Fiat from the factory. Other entries came from Belgium ("Ronny", Carrera) CSSR (Diblik, Skoda) and six from Denmark. But these were mostly private.



The winner....

The team which expected to succeed was of course Polski Fiat themselves. They built four Group 4 cars, fitted with 1600cc engines and Colotti gearboxes, very neatly painted and prepared for Stawowiak, Ciecierzynski, Kynsilehto and Bien, and they entered Andrzej Jaroszewicz with a Lancia Stratos. The usual Fiat 124 Abarth of Stawowiak was being prepared for the Sachsenring Rally in East Germany — a crucial round in the Eastern European ("Friendship and Peace") championship, for which this event did not count. In the event Jaroszewicz did not start: his leg which he had hurt in Spain, was still swollen, there were no championship points usefully to gain and as this is the year of the 25th anniversary of Polski-Fiat, it would be fitting if one of those cars could win.

RALLY

The format of the event was very similar to last year's most of the stages were the same, the event started on Friday lunchtime and finished in early afternoon on the Saturday. There was again a two-hour halt at Breakfast time in Nidzica, which divided the long, foggy night sections from the welcome light of day. The fog is a special characteristic of Poland. It is small wonder that minute cars like Syrena and Trabant have made good overall positions on this event: when visibility is down to zero, the smallest bonnet in front of the driver is a great advantage. So it was that Jerzy Landsberg, a private Polish driver in a Renault 5, sponsored by Marlboro, was able to challenge the bigger cars, cars with twice as much

power. It was almost like reliving the memory of Zasada with the Steyr Puch to hear the stories of astounded drivers who thought they had sensed a little red blur flash past them as they groped through the night.

Sulc started with every intention of winning. From the very first speed test, which preceded the first actual special stage, he was quickest. After three tests he was 39 seconds ahead of Lundstrom and a whole minute ahead of Ciecierzynski. After ten stages he was 77 ahead of the Swedish Celica and 103 of the eventual winner. In his turn, the little Renault was well behind, at that tenth stage mark, Landsberg was over two minutes behind Ciecierzynski, but so far the stages had been clear of bad weather: he was biding his time!

But with other drivers things were not going so well. Kynsilehto reached the first corner of the first speed test and the clutch plate on his Polski broke up. End of rally! At the first special stage Stawowiak was out with electronic ignition trouble; and during the first special stage, the Renault 12 Gordini of Blazej Krupa was beside the road, its driveshaft coupling having broken.

By midnight it seemed that the pattern of the rally was clear; Porsche, Toyota, Polski. But this was not to be. Unexpectedly Lundstrom went off the road into a line of trees which badly damaged his car but fortunately neither he or his co-driver Fergus Sager were hurt. Then after special stage 12, Sulc took a wrong turning on a road section and lost ten minutes. This gave Ciecierzynski the lead which he held through to the 21st stage. All the time, the Polski was five, 10 or 15 seconds ahead of the Renault, until they came to a particularly bad foggy stage. Then the Renault would take chunks of time off the Polski. Forty-one seconds on the 19th, 12 on the 20th, 53 on the 22nd — and an incredible 126 on the 21st! His time was consistent with those when he had tackled that particular stage at other times on the event; Ciecierzynski just could not understand how he could have been that much slower. Perhaps the fog had eased for Landsberg, who tackled the stages some time later. Perhaps, and surely this was correct(?) the watches were wrong. Assuming Landsberg's time was good, the Renault in one leap was 40 seconds ahead at the end of SS21, over 90 at the end of the 22nd stage and 100s ahead when the cars reached Nidzica.

Sulc had a private conference with himself during the halt. He reckoned that his ten minute lapse had lost any chance of a top position, and he decided to abandon there and then. It was a strange decision, for he would certainly have come third or fourth overall at the finish, but for the Austrian this evidently was not enough. It made the work of the leaders more straightforward: they simply had to watch each other's times to see if Ciecierzynski in the clear stages could make up the difference. Except on the final speed test, the Polski was quicker but by not enough margin on them all, so it seemed at the finish that the Renault would win. Only the next day was it discovered that stage 21 had been scrubbed. Why? "A decision of the jury" was the reason!

Early in the rally "Ronny" had retired with a broken gearbox whilst Moller, after a delay with a broken oil pipe, went into a bridge whilst trying to make the following time control without penalty. The Cyprus Polskis were both going strong, learning much, yet inevitably not able to make an impression on the leaders of so specialised an event. Lattari had a mysterious misfire on one long stage with his 2002 Turbo but this probably only cost him third place, whilst the German Alpine stopped on a stage with no petrol.

The rally was quite as much a problem for service crews as the rally drivers themselves — and petrol stations are few and far between in Poland.

Britth was able once again to make the finish, just out of the top ten positions. It was only the next day, whilst the Polski Fiat factory were holding a race just outside Warsaw (to which the leading drivers were all invited to compete) that the results were posted and the final result known. To Polski Fiat it was a great relief. They needed that win. To engineer Lech Walaszek it was a success which restored his sadness after Spain. "Part of my heart went with Tomasz's car", he explained afterwards. Certainly the bespectacled Warsaw baker was a very happy man.

14th Rallye Warsaw of Polski Fiat 5/7 November 1976

(ECR round 35, coefficient 1)

1. T. Ciecierzynski/J. Rozanski (Polski Fiat 125p) 9918.6 points;
2. J. Landsberg/M. Muszynski (Renault 5TS) 9980.4;
3. M. Bien/J. Budynek (Polski Fiat 125p) 10505.0;
4. L. Lattari/J. Borowski (BMW 2002 Turbo) 10545.8;
5. W. Groblewski/J. Czerwonec (Polski Fiat 125p) 10895.2.

(75 starters, 42 finishers)

Notes: first time in the ECR championship — the final round of the '76 season. 30 stages, 28 of which were all tarmac — a total of 314 kms. Also three speed tests. Rally held in region 150 kms north of Warsaw.