

Oscar Polli – World Cross Country Rally champion 2008

The title for the open class Cross Country Rally championship is back in Italy, thanks to Oscar Polli. After years of finishing in the top ten, he finally has his gold medal.

It is a long and difficult season, extending over four continents. Those knobbly tyres have cut their way through Sardinian quarries, left their tracks in the Brazilian interior, wound past the Egyptian pyramids, and dug their way through those huge and unending dunes in Dubai.

The beginning of the championship was disappointing. The results obtained in Sardinia were below expectations particularly in view of the good results achieved in Tunisia. This last rally was not part of the championship calendar, but is a splendid event, much appreciated by all. Sadly, it was just a week before the event in Sardinia, and riders who did both were still recovering from their African epic. There is a plus.

Hard work at the beginning of the season prepared the riders for the trials to come, which were equally demanding. The Brazilian was extremely long and very demanding, featuring really fast and risky special sections which included crossing rivers on rough-hewn planks with no side protection, across every kind of mud and sand.



Oscar had a very bad fall on one of these high-speed special sections, and it was only thanks to his high degree of physical preparation that he was able to remount the bike and complete the event, picking up more precious points which contributed to his championship aims.



Back on African soil, the International Pharaoh's Rally in Egypt played to Oscar's strength. With many years experience, the ability to maintain a high average speed, and his navigation skills he picked up a fifths position in a general classification but second in his class, which made the "roaring Milanese" the series leader, putting him four points ahead of his strongest rival, the Polish rider Jakub Przygonki.

Ten days later, it was time for the last and decisive event of the championship, the magical UAE Desert Challenge in Dubai. A lot of last minute planning and preparation, and it was time for the off! Fabio Zanone who is the head mechanic of the Free Racing Team is a fast worker, yet methodical and with great attention to detail. His task was to make Oscar's

KTM 690 rally replica faster and yet more reliable than ever before. Every component had to be checked, including such special items as the slipper clutch supplied by the Italian Surfex company. There were a few hours to go, and then it is the moment of truth.

48° in the daytime, 35° at night, and 350 km a day of high speed cross country racing make this a truly exhausting event. In spite of this, the team's well-tried strategy remained unchanged: set off like a bat out of hell, get to the front, and then keep the pressure on the other leading riders while retaining the early advantage.

As planned, Oscar took an early class lead, showing all the qualities that make him a winner. Then, like the old fox he is, he allowed his main rival to move into the lead, taking the pressure off himself and his KTM. At the finish, Oscar arrived a very close second, but the lead he had picked up in the earlier races left him firmly in first place, and World Champion. All his dreams were fulfilled – champion at last!

"I am overjoyed, and I am still struggling to believe that we have achieved our aim and brought this title back to Italy after eight years of trying! I must thank Carla my wife, my mechanic, KTM, all my sponsors and technical partners, my friends and fellow students who have all supported me in this unforgettable adventure" These were his first words, interrupted by kisses, congratulations, back-slapping, and even the occasional well-earned glass of champagne, washed down with tears of joy.

From our point of view Oscar old friend, we send you all our thanks. Thanks for putting Italy back at the top of the World Rally Championship, thank you for the spectacle of this fantastic adventure, thank you for sharing your pride and joy, unique to the world of racing, and the fellowship of world-class riders. Congratulations from us all!