

Dammam, January 15th 2023

AL ATTIYAH AND LOEB DEADLOCKED AS KEVIN BENAVIDES GAINS AN EDGE

KEY POINTS:

- Just like last year, the Dakar inaugurated the World Rally-Raid Championship season and provided a first snapshot of where things stand, this time after 14 stages, but there are still 20 stages left on the new calendar for season 2. As soon as late February, the W2RC entrants will revisit the dunes, not far from the route of the Dakar, for the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge. In late April, they will discover the Mexican desert in the Sonora Rally. At the end of August, they will head to Argentina for the Desafío Ruta 40. And only in October will the Rallye du Maroc crown the new champions.
- In the car category, the world champion, Nasser Al Attiyah, and his runner-up, Sébastien Loeb, resumed their duel at the summit with renewed vigour. The supporting actors of season 2 have not been able to crash their party yet. In T3, the invincible "Chaleco" López and his main rivals in 2022, Quintero and Gutiérrez, from the Red Bull clan, succumbed to the wrath of a newcomer, as their teammate, last year's T4 winner, wasted no time in taking the title. The T4 race saw another first-timer get the best of the defending champion. Eryk Goczał pipped Rokas Baciuška on the line, followed by the other two Goczals. The truck race also went to a newcomer, as Janus van Kasteren beat the Czechs Martin Macík and Tomas Vratný.
- In the motorbike category, the world champion, Sam Sunderland, and his runner-up, Ricky Brabec, exited the Dakar in the first two stages, opening up a battle for succession at breakneck speed. Regular fixtures such as Kevin Benavides and Toby Price and the standard-bearer for a new generation, Skyler Howes, were quick to seize the opportunity to make amends for their 2022 season, which had got off to a bad start precisely in the previous Dakar.

CARS: AL ATTIYAH WINS, BUT LOEB COMES OUT AHEAD

Sébastien Loeb is not the type who needs to be told twice. Last year, after his hopes of Dakar victory went up in smoke, the Frenchman went on the hunt for high finishes in specials, which awarded from 5 to 1 points to the top 5 of each stage. His aim was to make up the 10 points separating the winner of the Dakar, who gets 50, from the runner-up. **Loeb** finished the Dakar in second place of the rally and of the championship, but just 1 point behind. It was more of the same this January. This time round, the Bahrain Raid X-treme driver did not beat around the bush, claiming six stages in a row up to the eve of the finish. While the Toyota Gazoo Racing driver was crowned Dakar champion again, this year it is **Loeb** who tops the provisional standings by 2 points! 87 to 85. **Martin Prokop** and his Ford Orlen Benzina, third among the W2RC participants in the Dakar, were also blown away by the stars of season 2. **Guerlain Chicherit** is third with 42 points, while Audi's **Mattias Ekström** has 32, one more than the Pole. **Peterhansel** and **Sainz** are going home empty-handed after withdrawing from the Dakar. Wei Han is the first Chinese driver to score championship points. Han and his SMG buggy sit in fifth place with 20 points. BRX also leads the constructors' standings by one point despite **Al Attiyah** driving his Hilux to victory. **Al Attiyah** (50 points) and **Al Rajhi** (15) have accumulated 65 points to **Loeb** (40) and **Chicherit's** (26) 66 points. X-raid Mini JCW is third with 50 points and BAIC ORV fourth with 40.

FIA DRIVERS/CO-DRIVERS:

1. **SÉBASTIEN LOEB** (FRA) / **FABIAN LURQUIN** ((BEL) BAHRAIN RAID XTREME (87 POINTS)
2. **NASSER AL ATTIYAH** (QAT) / **MATHIEU BAUMEL** (FRA) TOYOTA GAZOO RACING (85 POINTS)
3. **GUERLAIN CHICHERIT** (FRA) / **ALEX WINOCQ** (FRA) GCK RACING (42 POINTS)

FIA CONSTRUCTORS:

1. **BAHRAIN RAID XTREME** (66 POINTS)
2. **TOYOTA GAZOO RACING** (65 POINTS)
3. **X-RAID MINI JCW** (50 POINTS)

LIGHTWEIGHT PROTOTYPES / T3: AUSTIN JONES HAS GOT THE POWER

"**Chaleco**" López had won the 2021 Dakar in T4 before raising the stakes in T3 in the 2022 Dakar. Untouchable during the W2RC season despite the onslaught of his Red Bull teammates **Cristina Gutiérrez** and **Seth Quintero**, the reigning world champion shared their fate at the start of this season. It was **Austin Jones**, his own teammate, who mirrored his exploit by winning the Dakar after his victory in T4 last year. In the provisional standings of the category, the five crews of Red Bull Off-Road Junior USA by BFG and Red Bull Can-Am Factory swarm the first five places. **Jones**, with 83 points, is ahead of **Quintero** with 77. Just like last year, the young American was the most prolific points hunter in stages (37 for stages versus 40 for second place), enough to remain within striking distance of his compatriot. "**Chaleco**" is third with 54 points, **Cristina** fourth with 52 and **Mitch Guthrie** fifth with 51.

LIGHTWEIGHT PROTOTYPES:

1. **AUSTIN JONES** (USA) / **GUSTAVO GUGELMIN** (BRA) RED BULL OFF-ROAD JR TEAM USA BY BFG (83 POINTS)
2. **SETH QUINTERO** (USA) / **DENNIS ZENZ** (DEU) RED BULL OFF-ROAD JR TEAM USA BY BFG (77 POINTS)
3. **FRANCISCO LÓPEZ** (CHL) / **JUAN PABLO LATRACH VINAGRE** (CHL) RED BULL CAN-AM FACTORY (54 POINTS)

SSVS / T4: THE GOCZAŁ TRIPLE THREAT

The young defending champion, **Rokas Baciuška**, must have wiped his glasses clean a couple of times before believing his eyes. Not only were there three **Goczals** instead of two riding for Energylandia as the season got under way, but it was **Eryk**, an even more precocious driver aged just 18, who nabbed the Dakar in his first W2RC appearance! The last stage turned the race on its head, but the result is clear: the young Pole (86 points) is ahead of Red Bull Can-Am Factory's Lithuanian (79). His father, **Marek** (67 points), and his uncle, **Michał** (47), are not far behind! It is worth noting that nine out of the top ten vehicles are Can-Ams tuned by South Racing.

T4 :

1. **ERYK GOCZAŁ** (POL) / **ORIOLE MENA** (ESP) ENERGYLANDIA RALLY TEAM (86 POINTS)
2. **ROKAS BACIUŠKA** (LTU) / **ORIOLE VIDAL MONTIJANO** (ESP) RED BULL CAN-AM FACTORY TEAM (79 POINTS)
3. **MAREK GOCZAŁ** (POL) / **MACIEJ MARTON** (POL) ENERGYLANDIA RALLY TEAM (67 POINTS)

TRUCKS / T5: THE NETHERLANDS — WELCOME TO (THE OTHER) TRUCKLAND

Martin Macík always seems to be thwarted by opponents from the land of tulips, cheese... and trucks! Last year, it was **Kees Koolen** who got the best of him. This time round, he started the first leg with a new Dutch sparring partner, **Janus van Kasteren**. The Boss Machinery driver won the Dakar and wrote a new page for the **De Rooy** clan by ending the Kamaz hegemony. The Dutchman has pocketed 113 points. "MM", second in the Dakar at the wheel of another Iveco, is not far behind with 102 points. Another Czech W2RC regular, **Tomáš Vratný**, sits in third place with 66.

TRUCKS:

1. **JANUS VAN KASTEREN** (NED) / **DAREK RODEWALD** (POL) / **MARCEL SNIJDERS** (NED) BOSS MACHINERY TEAM DE ROOY IVECO (113 POINTS)
2. **MARTIN MACÍK** (CZE) / **FRANTIŠEK TOMÁŠEK** (CZE) / **DAVID ŠVANDA** (CZE) MM TECHNOLOGY (102 POINTS)
3. **TOMAS VRATNÝ** (CZE) / **JAROMÍR MARTINEC** (CZE) / **BARTŁOMIEJ BOBA** (POL) FESH FESH GROUP (66 POINTS)

MOTORBIKES/QUADS: IT ALL ADDS UP FOR KEVIN

Kevin Benavides got his own back after scoring zero points in the previous Dakar due to a broken engine. He finished the Dakar with 38 points, whereas the world champion, **Sam Sunderland**, and his runner-up, **Ricky Brabec**, are going home empty-handed after crashing out of the inaugural round. **Toby Price** did not do well last season, landing a tiny haul in the 2022 Dakar and crashing out of the Rallye du Maroc. Now, his second place in the Dakar puts him in contention for the W2RC with 30 points. KTM, which claimed their 19th Dakar, also did well in the constructors' standings, with a 1-2 that earned them 68 points. **Skyler Howes**, third in the Dakar with 24 points, bumps Husqvarna up to second in the constructors' ranking, helped by the sixth place of the younger **Benavides**. HVA picked up 39 points. Behind the podium of the riders who defined this Dakar, the "red riders" found strength in numbers, as usual. **Quintanilla** is fourth with 20 points and **Van Beveren** fifth with 17, allowing Honda, the reigning world champion of constructors, to stay in contact with Husqvarna with 37 points. GasGas had to settle for the 14 points that came with **Daniel Sanders's** seventh place after losing its champion. **Cornejo** is eighth with 12 points. The three Hero MotoSports bikers who managed to finish the Dakar bring up the rear of the RallyGP riders: **Franco Caimi** is ninth with 11 points, **Sebastian Bühler** tenth with 9 and Ross Branch eleventh with 8.

In Rally2, the runner-up to **Mason Klein**, who left for the big league of RallyGP but came out of the Dakar rattled, proved that he had what it takes to succeed the American. **Romain Dumontier** finished fourteenth overall in the Dakar and seized the provisional lead in his category (38 points) ahead of his teammate from the HT Rally Raid Husqvarna Racing team, **Michael Docherty** (30). **Jean-Loup Lèpan**, riding for the French Nomade Racing team, the top junior of this Dakar, is third (20).

In the quad classification, the American **Pablo Copetti** leads **Juraj Varga** and **Laisvydas Kancius**.

BIKERS:

1. **KEVIN BENAVIDES** (ARG) RED BULL KTM FACTORY RACING (38 POINTS)
2. **TOBY PRICE** (AUS) RED BULL KTM FACTORY RACING (30 POINTS)
3. **SKYLER HOWES** (USA) HUSQVARNA FACTORY RACING (24 POINTS)

MOTORBIKE CONSTRUCTORS:

1. **RED BULL KTM FACTORY RACING** (68 POINTS)
2. **HUSQVARNA FACTORY RACING** (39 POINTS)
3. **MONSTER ENERGY HONDA** (37 POINTS)

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