

Riyadh, January 9th 2023

DAKAR 2023: REST DAY FOR THE DAKAR WITH THE EMPTY QUARTER ON THE HORIZON

Key points:

- The riders, drivers and crews have reached the rest day in Riyadh after eight demanding stages disrupted by difficult weather conditions, which gave rise to surprises in almost all of the categories. Between changes to the routes and torrential rain, the competitors have covered three thousand kilometres against the clock (FIM: 2794 km / FIA: 3092 km). They still have 1214 km over which to do battle before the finish in Dammam, but before then they will have the formidable task of tackling the dunes in the Empty Quarter.
- Nasser Al Attiyah has established himself as the master of the car category, whilst the Audis driven by Peterhansel, Sainz and Ekström all suffered mishaps fatal to their ambitions for outright triumph, and Sébastien Loeb finds himself in the position of hunting for time gains behind the three Toyotas monopolising the provisional podium.
- Far from the 1:20'22" cushion on which Al Attiyah is sat, American Skyler Howes leads a trio of bikes that is 370 times tighter, with an advantage of only 13" over Kevin Benavides and Mason Klein, the young phenomenon laying claim for victory, while eight different riders have won the eight specials contested!
- Last year's winner Alexandre Giroud in the quad race, challenger Guillaume de Mevius in the T3 category, W2RC world champion Rokas Baciūška in the T4 race and the heir of the Czech tradition Aleš Loprais in the truck category all find themselves in leads of varying proportions with a view to overall triumph.

CARS: A DEMONSTRATION OF FORCE FROM AL ATTIYAH

It is often said that the Dakar can be won due to others' mistakes. There is nothing final about the verdict so far, but the scenario of the first week is a perfect illustration of this adage, with the expected rivals of **Nasser Al Attiyah** having hit considerable stumbling blocks, prohibitively so for the Audis, but still with a certain amount of promise among the Hunters of the BRX team. To begin with, the quest for the title was looking good for the RS Q e-tron E2, with victories by **Mattias Ekström** on the prologue and Carlos **Sainz** the next day. The Spaniard was even keeping pace with **Al Attiyah**, while **Stéphane Peterhansel** got back on track after initial problems due to a series of punctures. However, it was on stage 6 and precisely after 212 km, that the Audis' hopes of victory were blown away, or rather crushed, at the foot of a dune, leading to the premature exit from the rally of **Stéphane Peterhansel** and his co-pilot **Edouard Boulanger**, who injured a vertebra in the impact, whilst **Sainz'** damaged car had to wait for several hours before the team's assistance truck was able to reach it. **Ekström** suffered an equally unenviable fate the next day due to breaking his suspension: the Swedish driver is more than seven hours behind **Nasser**.

The start to the rally seemed equally discouraging for the four Hunters racing for the Prodrive stable, which suffered due to the harshness of the Saudi terrain with an avalanche of punctures, relegating **Loeb**, **Terranova**, **Chicherit** and **Zala** to more than one hour from the summit of the general rankings on the evening of stage 2. Since then, despite rolling his car and problems with the power-steering, **Sébastien Loeb** has set off on a quest to regain ground, which, following two stage victories, has put him back into fourth place in the race hierarchy, with the bottom step of the podium in his sights, about half an hour away.

For the moment, **Nasser Al Attiyah** seems untouchable, having calmly and successfully overcome all the obstacles in his way. Neither the stones with edges like razors, nor the steepest of dunes, nor the finer subtleties of navigation have shaken the duo he forms with **Mathieu Baumel**. Yet, they have not been holding back, as shown by three stage victories they have picked up on the way to Riyadh. In the general rankings, **Nasser's** cushion has become as thick as 1 hour and 3 minutes over his nearest pursuer, **Henk Lategan**. Without jumping to any hasty conclusions, a glance at the archives allows us to appreciate the work done by the king of the sand: during his four previous victories (in 2011, 2015, 2019 and 2022), he had never reached the rest day with a lead of more than 50 minutes. Last year, it was **Yazeed Al Rajhi** who was following him at a reasonable distance. The Saudi driver is the only major asset of Toyota not to have lived up to expectations, even if he did pocket a stage win. For the rest, all the other Toyotas, regardless of the stable they belong to, have met the challenge of the Dakar in 2023 with no uncertain class. Behind Nasser, the podium is currently occupied by his two team-mates, Henk Lategan and newcomer **Lucas Moraes** (1 hour 20 minutes

behind), whilst **Giniel de Villiers** (in 5th) and **Romain Dumas** (in 6th) are helping to make sure the elite is densely dominated by the Hiluxes.

BIKES: AN AMERICAN DREAM

Just like the first days of the car race, the rally in the bike category started with two favourites crashing out: firstly, title holder **Sam Sunderland** on stage 1, then the third day it was the turn of **Ricky Brabec**, Dakar winner in 2020, whilst leading the general rankings. However, there is no need for the USA to fly its flags at half-mast. The other Californian, 21-year-old **Mason Klein**, on his first steps in the RallyGP category, picked up the torch the next day to dominate the rally hierarchy with youthful energy before in turn witnessing “**Chucky**” **Sanders** take control. The Australian, who is taking part in his third Dakar, led the general rankings for two days before falling ill. The last official rider enrolled by the teams of the Austrian clan, **Skyler Howes**, took over the summit of the rally for four consecutive days. On the rest day, the American leader may well hide his smile behind his retro moustache worn as a tribute to his grandfather, but there has indeed been a takeover by the emerging generation that has wrung out its opponents in among the rains that have fallen during this first week.

However, when initially taking stock in Riyadh, the rankings that put **Skyler Howes** ahead of **Kevin Benavides** and **Mason Klein** are less revealing than the seconds that separate them on the provisional podium. After more than 30 hours 34 minutes and 16 seconds against the clock, the Husqvarna rider only boasts a lead of 13” over the official KTM rider and the BAS World KTM Racing privateer who are literally neck and neck, an unprecedented situation at this point in the race! **Toby Price**, **Pablo Quintanilla** and **Adrien Van Beveren** behind them are less than three minutes from the leader’s position. With the top 6 within three minutes of each other, there promises to be plot twists in the Empty Quarter, this giant sand pit where everyone is waiting to see if the young generation can continue to lead the battle.

In the Rally2 class, a similar scenario to the RallyGP race witnessed an early exit by **Alfie Cox** and **Camille Chapelière** after falls from their machines. Rookie **Michael Docherty** almost did likewise but managed to remain in the race. As a result, two riders have dominated the contest, but not without exploits from the South African, such as his most recent on the latest stage. In Riyadh, however, **Romain Dumontier**, the runner-up to **Mason Klein** in the 2022 W2RC season has not made the slightest mistake and dominates the category. **Paolo Lucci**, the team-mate of **Klein** et **Cox**, resisted well enough before having an off day, but the Italian is only 16’25” behind. Third position is occupied by another Frenchman, young **Jean-Loup Lèpan** riding for Nomade Racing, who has taken advantage of his consistency to place himself within a little more than an hour of his countryman. In the unassisted bikers’ category, South African **Charan Moore**, the revelation of the Dakar in 2022 in this category, has taken the lead in the rankings ahead of Spaniard **Javi Vega** by a slight cushion of 15’26”. Experienced rider **Mario Patrao** occupies third place, almost one and a half hours behind. 18 riders are still in the Original by Motul category.

TRUCKS: LEADER LOPRAIS UNDER PRESSURE

Is it time for destiny to tip in favour of **Aleš Loprais**, 17 years after his first participation on the Dakar as navigator for his uncle **Karel**, one of the category’s genuine legends, with six wins behind the wheel of his Tatra truck? His nephew finished 3rd on the last Dakar in Africa in 2007, but has never regained this level, even if he has finished in respectable positions behind the Russian and Dutch armadas (5th in 2019 and 2021, for example). This year, the absence of the title holders has made it possible to witness a confrontation between the differences of the Czech and Dutch schools. The contest has been dominated by **Aleš Loprais**, who took the lead at the rally’s summit following his victory on the second stage. He will have to be watchful, however, because the heir to his uncle has not yet got rid of the many threats that could disrupt his plans for outright victory. **Martin van den Brink** lies only 16 minutes behind, which is nothing in the truck category. There is also a change in the guard in this category, with emerging generations coming through. For the Czechs, **Martin Macík** boasts the status of having the largest number of wins on specials on this edition of the Dakar (3 stages and the prologue), even if he only occupies 5th place in the general rankings. **Van den Brink** junior, namely **Mitch**, has, at the tender age of 20 years, become the youngest stage winner in the category, while **Janus Van Kasteren**, the shining hope of the De Rooy team, has also joined the club of stage winners and occupies 3rd position on the rest day. The young upstarts are making one hell of a splash!

LIGHTWEIGHT PROTOTYPES: DISCREETLY DOES IT FOR DE MEVIUS

In spite of a nightmarish first participation which ended up with a premature exit last year, **Guillaume de Mevius** nevertheless showed his potential by winning a stage. Admittedly, he was no way near as dominant as his team-mate at the time **Seth Quintero**, but the Belgian has learned from this experience. **De Mevius** only boasts a single victory so far this year, but he has focused on consistency. With seven finishes in the top 5 since the prologue, he leads the general rankings. Naturally, **de Mevius** has also taken advantage of the misfortunes met by his adversaries, starting with “**Chaleco**” **López**, the title holder. Luck has most definitely not smiled on the Chilean this year. A flooded and impassable river on stage 3 held him up considerably and **Cristina Gutiérrez** also fell into the same trap. As for

Quintero, who on form should have blown everyone away, he heavily paid the price of a lost wheel. Mitch Guthrie has also encountered his fair share of mishaps. For the moment, only **Austin Jones**, who won in the SSV category in 2022, is managing to fly the flag for the Red Bull clan, because he trails **de Mevius** by only three minutes. Outright victory could well be played out between these two pretenders.

SSV: BACIUŠKA IS HOLDING STEADY... FOR THE MOMENT

Rokas Baciūška, the current rally-raid world champion in the SSV category, is defending his crown on this edition of the Dakar and the least that can be said is that there are plenty of pretenders who want to snatch it from him, among whom feature three representatives of the **Goczał** family: brothers **Michał** and **Marek**, plus the latter's son, **Eryk**. As early on as stage 1, **Eryk Goczał** became the youngest stage winner on the Dakar, taking this honour from **Seth Quintero**. To show that it was not beginners' luck, he repeated the feat on stage 4. As for **Marek**, he has tasted victory twice on a special. Yet, once again, victories are not the be all and end all of this rally, where consistency is the key. In the race against the clock, **Rodrigo Luppi De Oliveira** has been one of the most skilful, leading the general standings from stage 3 to 6 before misfortune led him to losing more than 40 minutes. This twist of fate distinctly tightened the rankings by the evening of stage 7, with the top 5 within 20 minutes of each other. On the rest day, **Baciūška** still leads the dance, but everything is still to play for. In the meantime, none other than **Gerard Farrés**, runner-up to **Austin Jones** in the category last year, is slowly making his way to the top. As the saying goes, slow and steady wins the race... and with the experience of 16 editions of the Dakar (including this one), the Spaniard is only too well aware of this.

QUADS: NICE AND EASY FOR GIROUD

In the quad race, all eyes were on the rematch between **Alexandre Giroud** and **Manuel Andújar**. Last year, the Argentinean, who was defending his title, left the race early due to an injury, leaving the Frenchman to take his trophy. The struggle that began with the rally did not last. The winner of the Dakar in 2021 saw his hopes blown to pieces on stage 3 of the Dakar, allowing the title holder to soar away, with his consistency leaving little doubt over his chances of adding to his roll of honour. After 8 stages, **Giroud** possesses a lead of 1:41'37. For **Andújar**, second place is not yet a sure thing. **Pablo Copetti**, who shared the podium with Andújar in 2021, is less than one minute behind the Argentinean for his 11th edition of the Dakar. What's more, **Francisco Moreno Flores** is less than ten minutes from the podium places, which should be hotly disputed.

CLASSIC: LONG LIVE SPAIN

Technical scrutineering already set the tone for this third edition of the Dakar Classic. The romanticism of previous editions with competitors in vehicles sometimes as barely prepared as those of the first years of the Paris-Dakar are long gone. The European specialists of regularity have invested Saudi Arabia and the top echelons of the rankings. The Spaniards are so far dominating the Italians and Belgians after eight stages. **Juan Morena** and his wife Lidia Ruba on the one hand and **Carlos Santaolalla** and **Aran Sol I Juanola** on the other hand are comfortably installed in the lead in the general rankings, with a significant lead for the couple driving Toyota HDJ 80 number 778. Belgians **Erik Qvick** and **Jean-Marie Lurquin** as well as their countrymen **Dirk Van Rompuy** and **Christiaan Michel Goris** are doing their best to resist and can even hope to regain ground on the Catalan crew. Title holders **Serge Mogno** and **Florent Drulhon** occupy 7th position, with triple the amount of points as the leaders. The French performed metronomically last year, but do not seem able to follow the pace set by the Iberians: competitiveness has well and truly made its way into the ranks of the Dakar Classic.

[Access to the media area](#)

More information on www.dakar.com

PRESS CONTACT: pressedakar@aso.fr