

Ithra – Dammam, January 15<sup>th</sup> 2023

## 2023 DAKAR: A BUMPER CROP OF RECORDS

### KEY POINTS

- The 45<sup>th</sup> edition of the Dakar has come to an end in Dammam after 14 stages that saw dramatic turnarounds in every category. Nasser Al Attiyah's victorious campaign did not come as a surprise, but his first successful title defence earned him the fifth triumph of his career and the distinction of winning by the widest margin seen in the car race in 20 years. Second at 1 h 20, Sébastien Loeb bent the knee to the Qatari, but he also added his name to the Dakar record books with a string of six consecutive stage wins (seven in total). The scenario that unfolded in the motorbike race was even crazier. In a first for the category, Kevin Benavides seized the lead on the very last day, knocking Toby Price from the top of the general standings to prevail by 43 seconds, the narrowest winning margin ever in the Dakar.
- Similarly, in the SSVs, the youngest Dakar entrant ever benefited from a massive plot twist in the last stage, as the leader, Rokas Baciūška, surrendered the top spot to the 18-year-old Pole Eryk Goczał, who will share the podium with his father, Marek, in third place. A family that races together stays together.
- In T3, victory went to Austin Jones, who had already brought the T4 trophy home last year, while the truck title went to Janus van Kasteren, the first Dutch winner of the race since Gerard de Rooy in 2016.
- The winners and all the other competitors who showed their resolve to complete this gruelling route will be feted this evening at the podium ceremony in Ithra, at the cultural centre built by Aramco to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the company, which joined the Dakar as a major partner this year.
- 235 of the 355 vehicles that started the 2023 Dakar have made it to the finish: 80 motorbikes (out of 121), 10 quads (18), 46 T1 and T2 cars (67), 38 lightweight prototypes (47), 39 SSVs (45) and all 22 trucks, along with 80 out of 88 crews in the third edition of the Dakar Classic, the regularity race for 20<sup>th</sup>-century vehicles.

### Cars: Quiet aplomb carries the day for Al Attiyah

Scoring 5/20 is usually very bad news, but in the case of **Nasser Al Attiyah**, who claimed his fifth Bedouin trophy in his twentieth Dakar start (including the 2008 edition, as the bivouac is wont to do), his track record shows that he is one of the most keen-sighted and visionary competitors in the world of rally raids. The lean, mean winning machine really got going in 2011, in a Volkswagen Touareg with **Timo Gottschalk** in the right seat. He has since given the lie to his reputation as a car-smasher, and his partnership with the navigator **Mathieu Baumel** since 2015 has yielded another four victories: in 2015 in a Mini and in 2019, 2022 and 2023 behind the wheel of a Toyota Hilux. The duo produced a masterpiece on the sands of Saudi Arabia, taking the lead without haste on the evening of stage 3 before going on to reach the rest day 1 h 20 ahead of the rest after the harsh terrain dashed the hopes of all the challengers. Prodrive's Hunters were knocked out of contention by a flurry of punctures in stage 2,

while the Audis of **Stéphane Peterhansel** and **Carlos Sainz** lost all hope of success at the foot of a dune in stage 6. The sweet taste of victory will have to wait for the electric RS Q e-tron cars, of which only one unit, with **Mattias Ekström** at the wheel, made it to the finish a fortnight after winning the prologue around the Sea Camp.

**Sébastien Loeb**, the only one of Toyota's rivals to avoid certain doom, embarked on an ultimately futile yet gutsy pursuit ahead of the Empty Quarter and all the way to the finish in Dammam. On his heroic ride through the desert, the nine-time WRC world champion racked up one stage win after another, taming the dunes like never before and producing an impeccable performance that made him go down in history with a streak of six stage wins in a row, beating **Ari Vatanen's** five in 1989. **Nasser**, jumping to warp speed with aplomb, refused to engage on these terms and cruised to Dammam, where his lead over **Loeb**, also his runner-up last year, was not a minute less than 1 h 20. **Al Attiyah's** fifth success also puts into perspective the talent of the great Finnish master, who won the Dakar "only" four times, but in just five starts. Looking ahead, his 2023 harvest also brings the Qatari closer to **Vatanen's** record of 50 stage wins, with 47 so far, as well as **Stéphane Peterhansel's** eight car titles.

The Toyota clan has a lot of reasons to celebrate, as the bottom step of the podium went to a newcomer to both the team and the Dakar. The Brazilian Lucas Moraes is the first rookie to crack the top 3 of the car race since **Juha Kankkunen** won in 1988. Another two Hilux drivers round out the top 5: the ever-consistent **Giniel de Villiers**, in his fifteenth finish in this select club, and fellow South African **Henk Lategan**, who will try to repeat his mentor's exploit with a win in the future. Faced with this display of shock and awe, **Martin Prokop's** sixth place is much more than a consolation prize, while **Wei Han** achieved the highest finish ever for a Chinese driver in eighth place. **Sebastián Halpern**, ninth in Team X-raid's brand-new T1+, will tap his optimism to interpret this as a sign to keep going, as will **Guerlain Chicherit**, whose haul of two stage wins—including the finale—, nine top 5 finishes and place in the top 10 overall proved that he can go toe to toe with the heavy hitters.

### Motorbikes: A fistful of seconds

Never before had a biker lost the lead of the Dakar in the last special. And never before had the winner and the runner-up been so evenly matched. An unprecedented scenario that came on the back of another historic first, namely, the mere 12 seconds separating KTM's **Toby Price** and **Kevin Benavides** on the eve of the finale. The longest Dakar held in Saudi Arabia came down to a sprint, an exercise that both former enduro riders excel in. **Price** kicked off the 45<sup>th</sup> edition by winning the prologue before flying under the radar near the front of the race, like the Argentinian, who only came out of the woods to win stage 13 and swoop down on the Australian. The finish was like a hurdling contest in which every checkpoint was a hurdle. In his own words, **Price** lost the Dakar by stumbling twice. **Kevin** confessed that he had to backtrack once to validate a waypoint, but **Toby** did it three times. At the finish, the Argentinian joined the club of two-time Dakar winners (2021 and 2023), 43 seconds ahead of his new peer (2016 and 2019). He joined the ranks of **Auriol, Rahier, Meoni, Price** himself and **Sunderland**. 100<sup>th</sup> last year due to a broken engine, the new winner, signed by KTM after his success on a Honda, puts an end to three years in which the Dakar was painted red. After two victories for Honda and one for GasGas last year, the orange brand from **Mattighofen** retook the throne with its nineteenth triumph. **Skyler Howes**, who rides for their sister team Husqvarna, will stand next to them on the podium, although he deserved so much more in his fifth Dakar. The American wore the leader's mantle for six days before being pipped at the post, but he is pumped and proud to clamber onto the podium for the first time—the fifth for an American biker.

The 2023 Dakar tasted like sweet revenge for the big losers of the previous edition, when **Price** lost big time from the beginning and was unable to finish higher than tenth, his worst result at the finish, while **Howes** crashed out and **Kevin Benavides's** motorbike gave up the ghost. This time, the Dakar did not smile on the majority of the 2022 headliners. The race ended prematurely for half of last year's top 10, and not just the minnows. **Sunderland**, the defending champion, called it quits in stage 1. The next day, it was **Brabec** who also fell, followed by **Barreda** in stage 8. **Mason Klein**, the top rookie in Jeddah in ninth place, who had seized the lead in stage 2 of this Dakar, threw in the towel in stage 13, while **Walkner**, on the podium last year, crashed on the eve of the finish. Three other works riders found

themselves on the receiving end of the Dakar's ruthlessness. Hero's **Joaquim Rodrigues** and Sherco's **Harith Noah** were added to the casualty list in stage 4. The Indian's teammate, **Rui Gonçalves**, retired in stage 6. In this war of attrition, Honda placed three of its four factory riders in the top 10. **Quintanilla** finished just outside the podium, ahead of **Van Beveren**, while **Cornejo** was eighth. **Luciano Benavides** (HVA), the most prolific stage hunter of this edition, with three, came in sixth. **Daniel Sanders**, who again lit up the start of the race before his physical condition took its toll, was seventh. **Lorenzo Santolino**, eleventh last year, patiently played for time on his Sherco to move up to ninth and retake his place in the top 10 after 2021 (sixth). **Franco Caimi** (Hero) rounded it the first ten, ensuring that all six factory teams in the 45<sup>th</sup> edition are represented near the top.

Rally2: "**Dudu**" fast and solid

After **Bradley Cox**'s premature exit following a fall, the contenders for the Rally2 category quickly stepped to the fore. **Paolo Lucci** and the rookie **Michael Docherty** pounced first while the flu-struck **Romain Dumontier** bided his time. Both the Italian and the South African made mistakes, crashing one after the other on the first few days and leaving the French steamroller to pulverise every pitfall before him at a pace that often saw him match the RallyGP bikers. "**Dudu**" clinched his maiden win in stage 4, took over the reins of the classification the next day and never looked back. Only his teammate **Docherty**, who lives in the Emirates, subsequently challenged him for two specials in the Empty Quarter, his adoptive stomping ground. The three men ended up fourteenth through sixteenth. Sixteenth overall, **Docherty** was also the top rookie of this edition. In the Original by Motul race, for riders without assistance in the bivouac, the South African Charan Moore was the favourite to win the category after finishing fourth in his debut last year. He took the spoils after an epic duel with the Spaniard **Javi Vega**, on whom he gained the upper hand in the second-last special. The veteran **Mário Patrão**, a Legend status holder, completed the podium. 15 Original by Motul riders survived the toughest Dakar in the Saudi saga, including **Kirsten Landman**, a woman. The compatriot of the winner of the category finished second in the women's classification, which went to **Mirjam Pol** from the Netherlands. The winners of the Rally2, Original by Motul, women's and top rookie competitions all ride for HT Rally Raid Husqvarna Racing. A clean sweep for **Henk Hellegers**'s team of private riders who shine in public! Only the top junior classification escaped his clutches. The Frenchman **Jean-Loup Lèpan**, riding for Nomade Racing, took the competition after finishing fourth in Rally2 and seventeenth overall.

### Quads: Giroud restores French honour

In 2022, **Manuel Andújar**'s title defence campaign ended not with a whimper, but a bang, as the Argentinian crashed out of the race in stage 6. This time round, he was out for revenge on **Alexandre Giroud**, who had pounced on the opportunity to usurp his throne. Coming a few weeks after the football World Cup final between France and Argentina, the duel between the last two winners of the Dakar doubled as a rematch! But once again, Messi's compatriot did not reach the goal. First, mechanical troubles in stage 3 sent him careening down the standings, and then his quad's engine received a red card in stage 11. **Francisco Moreno Flores** became Argentina's lead striker, but time was not in his favour, as the Frenchman's sizeable lead allowed him to play defensively. The Brazilian **Marcelo Medeiros**, racing to defend his honour after withdrawing from a stage and becoming ineligible for the overall, claimed four wins. **Alexandre Giroud** retained his crown. The Yamaha man, clad in blue, is the second rider to score back-to-back wins, after the Argentinian **Alejandro Patronelli** in 2011 and 2012.

### Lightweight prototypes: Jones scores a double whammy

When "**Chaleco**" **López**, the defending champion of the T3 category, got the ball rolling for the 45<sup>th</sup> Dakar on the Sea Camp, everyone expected a rematch between the Chilean and **Seth Quintero**, the driver who had won virtually every stage of the previous edition. But one prologue does not a Dakar winner make. **Cristina Gutiérrez** took the opener ahead of **Quintero**, with no reason to suspect that **Austin Jones**'s twelfth place was his first step towards victory in Dammam. Yet that is exactly what happened. **Gutiérrez**, **López** and **Quintero** played a game of musical chairs at the top of the general standings until disaster struck each of them in turn, with snafus such as getting stuck in a flooded river in stage 3 or losing a wheel along the way. **Mitch Guthrie** was also hit by a mechanical in stage 5, leaving **Guillaume de Mevius** in the lead with Jones hot on his heels. The Belgian thought it was his for a long time, at least until km 41 of stage 11, when a mechanical in the desert cost him and his co-

driver **François Cazalet** more than an hour and a half. From then on, the race was **Jones's** to lose. It was all over but the shouting. A series of victories by **Guthrie**, **Quintero** and even the new Yamaha prototypes driven by **João Ferreira** and **Ricardo Porem** failed to rattle the ever-consistent Jones, who only finished five times outside the top 5. The American, who had already won the SSV race last year, grabbed the T3 title on his first attempt.

### SSV: The boss baby

Following **Austin Jones's** promotion to T3, logic dictated that the title would come down to a clash between the Goczał brothers, Marek and Michał, who had hoovered up eight stage wins between them last year; the W2RC champion in the SSV category, **Rokas Baciuška**; or even the 2022 runner-up, the experienced Gerard Farrés. But the real threat came from left field, namely from a rookie by the name of **Eryk Goczał** —**Marek's** son. At the tender age of 18, the Pole became the youngest Dakar stage winner on the second day, breaking **Seth Quintero's** record. Some might have put it down to beginner's luck, but the latest scion of the **Goczał** family did not rest on his laurels. His tour de force in stage 4 positioned him among the pretenders to the crown, alongside his father and **Rodrigo Luppi de Oliveira**, who was a paragon of consistency in the first half of the event before losing over 40 minutes and slipping out of contention. Lady Luck also frowned on other big names: **Baciuška**, **Marek**, **Eryk**... There was something for everyone, but it did have the beneficial consequence of tightening the race. **Baciuška** seized the lead and managed to defend a narrow gap until the evening of the penultimate stage. With a bit over three minutes separating the Lithuanian and **Eryk Goczał**, the title was still up for grabs. While the finale was widely seen as little more than a walk in the park, this was definitely not the case for **Baciuška**, who lost around twenty minutes due to a broken suspension arm. **Eryk Goczał**, more determined than ever, took his maiden Dakar win after all. It was an exploit for the ages for the family, as **Marek** also succeeded in defending his third place overall. **Baciuška**, second, finished one rung higher than in 2022, but it will no doubt leave a bitter taste in his mouth. Over 53 h of racing in the SSV category with a twist at the end.

### Trucks: Van Kasteren blasts into the history books

**Janus van Kasteren** ended six years of undisputed Russian hegemony to add his name in the annals and bring Iveco's total to three Dakar victories. As usual in the most prestigious rally raid on Earth, it's consistency wot won it. **Martin Macík** did his best, winning the first two specials, but a brake problem in stage 2 cost him the lead. **Van Kasteren**, driving with **Darek Rodewald** and **Marcel Snijders** in the cockpit, was among the speediest in the race against the clock, although stage 4 kicked some sand in his gears and threatened to ruin it all. He lost nearly an hour that day and tumbled to fifth place in the standings, at the time led by the even more consistent **Aleš Loprais**. The Czech did not pursue stage wins at all costs, instead profiting from his rivals' blunders and misfortunes. The Tatra driver seemed destined for victory, but he had to retire ahead of stage 10 due to his involvement in an accident that claimed the life of an Italian spectator. **Van Kasteren** then inherited first place. The first driver not in a Kamaz last year, he managed to dodge the pitfalls in certain specials to power away, beyond the reach of his opponents. Neither **Martin van den Brink**, nor his son **Mitchel**, who became the youngest special winner in the truck race in stage 6, nor **Macík** managed to crack **Van Kasteren**, who wrapped up the 45<sup>th</sup> Dakar with three stage wins under his belt.

### QUOTES OF THE DAY

#### Nasser Al Attiyah: "I always want to win more and more"

"It was a difficult Dakar for everyone. It's crazy to manage to defend my title. I'm very happy to win five times, and Mathieu four... Sorry, Mathieu! I respect Ari enormously, he's still my idol. I always want to win more and more, now I want to defend my world champion's title. We didn't have to attack like crazy. We managed to get through the second week and win the Dakar at the end, that's what really matters."

#### Austin Jones: "Look at us, back to back, huh?"

"The last stage was pretty tough. There was a lot of mud, but we made it through to the finish. This has been the toughest Dakar that I have ever done. We've had ups and downs, but we just stayed consistent, did our thing and look at us, back to back, huh? We're super happy, big shout-out to all the team, my

navigator, Gustavo, did a good job. It was a nice little road trip around Saudi Arabia. I can't think about next year now, but I'll be back."

**Eryk Goczał: "The emotion is incredible"**

"I'm finishing my first Dakar. Big shout-out to my family... Two days ago, we made the decision to attack at all costs because the final victory was within reach. That's what I did without calculating... There were a lot of people in front of us, but I gave it my all... The emotion is incredible, I'd never experienced something like this in my whole life..."

**Janus van Kasteren: "You need to go full gas all the time"**

"Winning isn't easy. You need to go full gas all the time. Everybody had some problems during the rally, and so did we. We lost fifteen minutes because we ran out of fuel. We managed it until the end and we're really happy with that. We made the difference three days before the end, when we won by 30 minutes."

**Kevin Benavides: "A completely crazy Dakar"**

"This morning, my head was empty except for each kilometre of the stage, from 0 to 136. It's incredible to pull off the win at the end of this completely crazy Dakar, and with such a small gap."

**Alexandre Giroud: "It's a crazy day"**

"It's a crazy day. To win two times the Dakar makes it a crazy day. I'm very happy. Thanks to my family, my partner and my mechanic, who did a great job."

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