

Shaybah, January 13rd 2023

DAKAR 2023: LOEB IS A SERIAL WINNER

FOCUS

The Empty Quarter continues to reveal its identity. The immense desert that plays host to most of the oil deposits exploited in Saudi Arabia is also a special playground for rally-raid riders and drivers to express themselves. The expanses of dunes discovered by the Dakar this year have few equivalents on the surface of the planet. However, the 185-km programme for the special was not restricted to the tricky exercise of overcoming the dunes, because when the route crossed the chotts it allowed the competitors to push the pace of their vehicles to the limits. It was certainly thanks to his technique acquired in the dunes of the Atacama Desert in Chile that **Nacho Cornejo** achieved the day's victory on his bike. **Sébastien Loeb**, who put in another faultless performance among the mountains of sand made the difference thanks to his great strength: he goes for it like nobody else.

OUTLINE

The pressure has been cranked up a notch. After a long stay by **Skyler Howes** on top of the general rankings, in a scenario which briefly also saw **Mason Klein** dominate the category, now one of the "old hands" has taken command of the Dakar. **Toby Price** has not progressed as quietly as it seems since the start, given that he won the prologue at Sea Camp. Nonetheless, the Australian has remained calmly ready to pounce until it was time to take over, a task which he carried out without a fanfare, thanks to the third best time on the day's special, though such understatement should not disturb him too much since he has proved himself to be an ultra-credible winner with three days to go. **Price** will need all his experience and composure to successfully complete this rush towards Dammam, with a lead of only 28" over **Skyler Howes** and 2'40" over his team-mate **Kevin Benavides**. The taste of victory is becoming more distinct for KTM, which had not placed an orange bike on top of the podium since **Price's** victory in 2019. The Honda team will have savoured the taste of stage success enjoyed by **Nacho Cornejo** on the way back to Shaybah, but it will no doubt be somewhat bittersweet in light of the slump by **Adrien Van Beveren** (to 5th, more than 16 minutes from the lead), even if provisional 4th place went to his team-mate **Pablo Quintanilla**, who trails the leader by 14'54".

In the car category, it is not a matter of seconds, but instead dozens of minutes, especially in the Toyota of **Nasser Al Attiyah** and **Mathieu Baumel**, whose vision is impeccable but who can barely make out the silhouette of a BRX Hunter in their rear-view mirror, timed at 1 hour 27 minutes behind. Nevertheless, **Sébastien Loeb** showed panache to take second place in the general rankings (see stat of the day). With his sixth stage victory this year, he sauntered past Brazilian **Lucas Moraes**, who is now third in the Dakar car hierarchy for his first participation, which is worthy of a fine festival of samba and caipirinha on his return to Rio if he can hold on to his position until Sunday. In the T3 category, **Austin Jones** can look towards Dammam with the same serenity as **Nasser Al Attiyah**, because he also has a lead of more than an hour over his team-mate **Seth Quintero**. **Alexandre Giroud** is another competitor taking it easy, focused on defending his title with a margin of 59 minutes. However, there is still a match to be fought in the T4 race between **Eryk Goczał** and **Rokas Baciūška**. The Lithuanian world number one increased his lead in the general rankings to 8 minutes, but the newcomer from the Polish clan could still take inspiration from his uncle **Michał** who won the day's special (see performance of the day). In the truck race, the general rankings leader **Janus Van Kasteren** took care to increase the gap he possesses over **Martin van den Brink**. In the Dutch duel, the Team De Rooy driver may have scored decisive points and can look to the horizon of the Arabian Gulf with a lead of 33 minutes.

PERFORMANCE OF THE DAY

With eight victories between them last year, **Marek** and **Michał** had already demonstrated that the **Goczał** clan were a force to be reckoned with. However, several minor mistakes deprived them of a final podium finish. As a result, they decided to do it all over again for the 45th edition of the Dakar with the firm intention of doing better and succeeding **Austin Jones** on the throne of the SSV category. To stack the odds in their favour, they enlisted another family member, **Marek's** son **Eryk**. It only took two specials for the youngest of the three drivers to triumph and break the record for youngest stage winner held until then by **Seth Quintero**. **Marek** won the following day and the two Poles soon became the main rivals for **Rokas Baciūška** in the fight for the title. As for **Michał**, he had a rockier ride, meeting with misfortune on several occasions, but that did not dampen his thirst for victory, because today he picked up his first stage success of the year. As a result, not one, not two, but three members of the **Goczał** family have climbed onto the highest step of the podium on this 45th edition of the Dakar, which is unprecedented. It just goes to show that Friday the 13th can be lucky for some, even in Poland.

A CRUSHING BLOW

For his second Dakar, there were great expectations for **Mason Klein**, who was the best rookie in 2022 with a 9th-placed finish at the tender age of 20-years-old. For his debut in the RallyGP class this year, the BAS World KTM Racing privateer rider, who is the Austrian's protégé, left his mark by taking command of the general rankings on stage one. Some observers could already sense a phenomenon who was going to defy all the statistics concerning precociousness on the race. At the rest day, the kid was in 3rd place in the general rankings, forcing other onlookers who had only seen him as a flash in the pan to adjust their opinions. However, the start of the second week of racing

brought the prodigy back to earth with a bump, and quite literally: **Mason** fell twice on stage 9. The entrance into the Empty Quarter went untroubled the following day, but over the last two days it has, quite like the lie of the land, been ups and downs for **Mason**, as the dunes have given his neck a rough time. An X-ray at the bivouac on completion of the marathon stages did not reveal anything abnormal with the kid, but the ocean of sand plunged rider number 9 into 42nd place on the day. This evening, **Klein** is 10th in the general rankings. He has taken the decision to tackle the sea of dunes again tomorrow, despite the stormy outcome for him, in order to reach the Arabian Gulf, as he experiences the first bump in the road on his meteoric rise.

STAT OF THE DAY: 5

The strength of **Sébastien Loeb** is no secret. It is difficult to compete with the nine times winner of the WRC in terms of pure speed. When everything is on song, the BRX driver is unbeatable. However, the Frenchman is also renowned for being too greedy at times, which pushes him a bit too often into committing mistakes. Something has changed this year. The faultless performance by the **Loeb-Lurquin** duo has now extended over five consecutive days (admittedly around the rest day in Riyadh), with five stage victories in a row: such a series has only previously been achieved by **Ari Vatanen** among the elite car drivers, on the Dakar in 1989. It is also the Frenchman's sixth success on a special in 2023 and his 22nd in total, part of a collection he commenced in 2016, which now puts him above **Pierre Lartigue**. Even though he opened the way for the cars today, Loeb quite simply left his rivals in his wake, with his nearest pursuer, **Mattias Ekström**, beaten by more than three minutes. To reach the finishing line, the crew of Hunter # 201 took a little more than 1 hour and 56 minutes at an average speed of 95 kmph, almost 9 kmph more than his "prey" on the day, namely **Lucas Moraes**, from whom he snatched second place in the general rankings.

W2RC: MORE HASTE, LESS SPEED

Today, **Sébastien Loeb** equalled the record for consecutive stage victories previously held by **Ari Vatanen** (see stat of the day), a distraction from the fact that in the W2RC classification he is only 1 point behind **Nasser Al Attiyah**... with two stages still to go. Tomorrow, the Frenchman could beat the Finnish driver's record and write another page in the history of the Dakar. This would also be a way for the Frenchman to settle the score he has with **Nasser Al Attiyah** in the world championship. "More haste, less speed," is an adage from Jean de la Fontaine's fables that is taught to all children in France's schools. **Loeb** is preparing to apply this lesson to the letter, though given his recent performances to pick up the points, both parts of the saying could be said to be true!

THE MAKINGS OF A CLASSIC

In 1984, for the 5th edition of the Paris-Dakar, Porsche was the first constructor to develop a car especially designed for victory, the legendary 911 type 953, with three models enrolled, two aiming for victory in the hands of **Ickx** and **Metge** and a third for the rapid assistance team driven by engineer **Roland Kussmaul**. On the Dakar Classic, a replica of the victorious Porsche is taking part with the Logistic Rallye team. A second Porsche inspired by the Martini version from the East Safari years, the historical copy of the 953 to be precise, is taking part alongside. A Peugeot 504, a Cox and a Strakit buggy are also present. What do the team's cars have in common? They are all 2WD! As in the old days, **Rudy Verdaguer**, head of the French structure, is driving a fast assistance vehicle himself, a 4x4 to come to the aid of those marooned on two wheels if necessary, but not just any old 4X4: a VW Transporter T3, commonly known as the "Combi", to stay in the spirit of his team and his personal tastes. The darling of the beatniks of the early Paris-Dakar era has become the darling of this third edition of the Dakar Classic, drawing plenty of admiration!

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Toby Price: "Tomorrow, I'll try and push really hard"

"The Empty Quarter has delivered what they said it was going to do. There was a lot of sand and a lot of nothing out here. All in all, it's been a good day. I think the stage has been good for us. At the moment we're second, so I'm not sure who has won, it could be Daniel who has won the stage. I was just trying to keep a good smooth consistent pace and now it's just two days to go, so there's not long. I'm not sure if I've caught up time on Skyler. I just felt that I pushed where I was comfortable and it's going to be what it's going to be. At the end of the day, if it works out in my favour, that's all well and good, if it doesn't then I guess we'll just wait and see what unfolds for the race. I think that trying to have a strategy for the race at this point in time is completely out of the window. I've just got to stay on two wheels and stay healthy. Tomorrow, I'll try and push really hard, because on the last day it's a reverse grid. We need to try and see if we can make some really good time tomorrow, but then again you don't want to push too crazily and risk an injury or being out of the race completely this close to the finishing line. But other than that, the body feels good, the bike feels good. It's been a long two weeks".

[Access to the media area](#)

More information on www.dakar.com

PRESS CONTACT : pressedakar@aso.fr