

AIUla, January 2nd 2023

DAKAR 2023: STAGE 2 THE KID, THE BARON AND THE LOSERS OF ALULA

FOCUS

After leaving the Sea Camp where the Dakar had been based for a long weekend, the riders, drivers and crews headed into the inner reaches of Saudi Arabia, where they were confronted with the morning coolness and terrain that was still damp. The day's expedition included a part that was synonymous with racing in the mountains, requiring the competitors to tackle narrow tracks and climb up to an altitude of 1,300 metres through a pass at the midway point of the stage. Even though the weather conditions modified the expected nature of the ground under the wheels, making it stonier and trickier, a young man who is growing up quickly, **Mason Klein**, won in the bike category where many more experienced competitors in the car category, such as **Loeb**, **Chicherit** and **Peterhansel** encountered problems, though not **Al Attiyah**, the day's winner.

OUTLINE

Most visitors go to AIUla with lightness in their heart, certain to find the wonders they have come to admire. However, it was a different scenario that preoccupied the leading lights of the Dakar on the second stage heading towards the region of archaeological sites and Nabatean temples. When it came to avoiding stones, American **Mason Klein**, who came very close to victory yesterday, kept his cool and at the rather tender age of 21 years claimed his first victory on the event, even though he has only recently joined the Rally GP category (see stat of the day). The new boss of the race self-assuredly dominated the general standings ahead of several references in the discipline, namely **Toby Price** and **Joan Barreda**, who nonetheless managed to stay in the reckoning. The challenge was all the more delicate for the cars, with the risks of punctures almost constant. Perhaps this threat was not suitably assessed by the Hunter BRX drivers, who had been so convincing on the first stage? In any case, **Guerlain Chicherit**, **Sébastien Loeb** and **Orlando Terranova** found themselves without spare wheels after each suffered three punctures and were forced to reach the finishing line at a slower pace, which has probably put paid to their hopes of outright victory (see a crushing blow). Meanwhile, **Nasser Al Attiyah** adopted a cautiously conquering attitude, seizing the opportunity to attack only when the terrain in front of him authorised it. Ahead of him, **Carlos Sainz** had chosen boldness, with the presence of his son acting like the protection of a lucky charm. The Spaniard passed through the rocks unharmed but was unable to prevent **Al Attiyah** from gaining five minutes over him to grab a 45th special victory on the Dakar. Now the duel is set to rage... In the T3 category, **Mitch Guthrie** was victorious ahead of "**Chaleco**" **López**, still the leader of the category, whilst in the T4 class, the **Goczał** saga continued. Following the victory of **Eryk** on his arrival in the world of rally-raid yesterday, it was his father **Marek** who proved to be quickest today, also taking the lead in the general rankings. In the truck race, **Martin Macik** drove into trouble and the hour lost on the way to AIUla are likely to compromise his ambitions for triumph. He lost the lead to the man of the day and new leader of the general rankings **Aleš Loprais**, ahead of **Janus Van Kasteren**.

PERFORMANCE OF THE DAY

If **Mathieu Serradori** has been discreet this season, the answer is simple: he has not been seen on the W2RC behind the wheel of the Century buggy that he drove on the Dakar in 2019. There has been a good reason: with the South African constructor Century Racing, he has been working secretly to replace the 2WD V8 buggy by a 2.9 litre bi-turbo Audi RS4. Thanks to careful management of the stage, the leading privateer on the Dakar in 2022, with a 7th placed finish, completed the day in 3rd place, 11'29" behind the day's winner. The Frenchman savoured this place at the foot of the podium: "*We drove a good stage, using a good strategy by deflating the tyres when we knew that they were going to suffer and we knew they would today. This fourth place is almost like a stage victory*". The Frenchman, officially supported by Century Racing since this edition, now stands in provisional third position, less than 25 minutes behind **Sainz**. Three years ago, he already distinguished himself in Saudi Arabia by becoming the first privateer to win a special since **Guy Deladrière** in 1988. The promise is being fulfilled.

A CRUSHING BLOW

Sébastien Loeb's life on the Dakar is somewhat of a rollercoaster. He has won 16 stages and climbed onto the podium three times during his first six participations on the event, but has also experienced a premature exit, mechanical problems and navigational mistakes which have ruined his ambitions. Today, it was a series of punctures that meant his major goal is slipping through his fingers, because after a special on which he spent the major part without a spare wheel and therefore at a slow pace, he now trails **Carlos Sainz** by more than 1 hour and 20 minutes in the general rankings. The misfortune of flat tyres that struck the man from Alsace also affected the entire BRX team, in similar fashion. Indeed, for **Guerlain Chicherit**, the damage is even greater, because he had not yet reached AIUla by the time the sun had set. Compared to such mishaps, "**Orly**" **Terranova** limited the damage somewhat, with a gap of 1 hour and 8 minutes separating him from the leader. As a result, the Argentinean becomes the leader of the Hunters.

STAT OF THE DAY: 21

It has been six years since a privateer had last won a stage on the Dakar. It is necessary to go back to 2016 and veteran **Stefan Svitko** to find such a performance. Today, it was **Mason Klein** at the rather tender age of 21 years for his third day of racing in the Rally GP category who achieved such a feat and took control of the summit of the general rankings ahead of the official riders. *"In souls nobly born, valour does not depend,"* wrote Corneille, though the kid from Agua Dulce who does not speak French is unlikely to have read it. He also ignored that his name means "small" in German, though this detail is not one that has escaped KTM, who have been wrapping their protégé in cotton wool in their satellite team since his emergence on the Rallye du Maroc in 2021 and who know that **Klein** is going to be a big deal. Winning a special and taking the lead in the Dakar general rankings at such a young age is unprecedented!

W2RC: LET THE HUNT BEGIN

With the misfortunes of the BRX team, **Loeb**, **Chicherit** and **Terranova** really do not have any other choice apart from going hell for leather until Dammam, which is their only hope to dream of seizing the opportunities that are bound to arise over the next twelve days of racing. It is also a strategy enabled by the W2RC which offers a second chance of success when fortune has not smiled upon you, because between 5 and 1 points will be available each day for the first 5 competitors on each stage. This is a game that **Sébastien Loeb** already played last year after a similar mishap distanced him from triumph, but which let him fill up on points and remain in contact with the winner of the Dakar **Nasser Al Attiyah**.

THE MAKINGS OF A CLASSIC

The **Galpin** couple are living the American dream on a daily basis through their automotive activities, which almost all revolve around their big V8 engine. The Nascar importers based in Europe who are behind the wheel of the Protruck previously driven by **Thierry Saby** have a goal for their second participation: to try and win the H3 category again, but also, if possible, to climb onto the podium for the general rankings, which they just missed out on last time. *"To achieve that, we'll have to start each day in the lead, which is an extra difficulty,"* was the analysis forthcoming from **Anne**, who is responsible for navigation. It can be said that following their victory yesterday and their start in pole position of the Classic caravan this morning, crew 701 are assuming their leadership position. With 4th and then 6th in the first two regularity sectors, they also triumphed in the navigation exercise before gobbling up the three last regularity tests (RT). The Dakar Classic 2023 has found the crew to be beaten. Their adversaries can hardly hope for mechanical problems: last year, for its first participation in the Classic, the Protruck did not encounter the slightest issue.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Sébastien Loeb: *"For me, there was absolutely no pleasure in the driving"*

"It was a really bad day for us. We lost a lot of time with 3 punctures. For me, there was absolutely no pleasure in the driving. It was really bad with a lot of stones. It was just a question of going very slow and trying to avoid a puncture. That was the only goal of the stage and in the end we had three. We had to try and repair one of the tyres and it took us a long time".

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PRESS CONTACT: pressedakar@aso.fr