

La Rioja, 27 August 2023

FIA-FIM WORLD RALLY-RAID CHAMPIONSHIPS AL ATTIYAH AND VAN BEVEREN POUNCE FIRST

Key points:

- The engines roared as the eleventh Desafío Ruta 40 YPF, the fourth round of the W2RC, got under way this afternoon with a 9 km prologue just outside La Rioja.
- Nasser Al Attiyah (Toyota Gazoo Racing) stormed to victory in the car race ahead of Yazeed Al Rajhi (Overdrive Racing) and Sebastián Halpern (X-raid Mini JCW). In T3, among the W2RC entrants, Mitch Guthrie Jr. (Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team USA) edged out Mattias Ekström (South Racing Can-Am) and João Ferreira (X-raid Yamaha).
- Adrien Van Beveren (Monster Energy Honda) took the win in the RallyGP category for pro riders, ahead of Luciano Benavides (Husqvarna Factory Racing) and Ricky Brabec (Monster Energy Honda). In Rally2, the South Africans Michael Docherty and Bradley Cox (BAS World KTM Racing) waltzed to victory ahead of Konrad Dąbrowski (Duust Diverse Rally). Manuel Andújar (7240 Team) was the fastest W2RC quad rider.
- At the ceremony to pick the starting order for tomorrow's stage 1, the motorbike leader Adrien Van Beveren chose to start in tenth position, hot on the heels of Luciano Benavides, Matthias Walkner and the championship leader Toby Price (Red Bull KTM Factory Racing) in seventh place. Among the FIA entrants, Al Attiyah opted to start fourth. Yazeed Al Rajhi, his rival in the championship, will open the road.
- Tomorrow, the first of five stages will take the competitors due south on a route starting and ending in La Rioja. 362 km of road sections and a 334 km special are on tap for this loop course.

AL ATTIYAH BRINGS DOWN THE HAMMER

Nasser Al Attiyah backed up his words with action in the prologue! Before the scrutineering, the Qatari, who loves to talk big, refused to rule out the dream scenario that would see him clinch the title in Salta before the end of the championship. To achieve that, he needs to win with flair, and that is exactly what he did in the prologue by clocking the fastest FIA time with 6'33". Yazeed Al Rajhi, his main rival in the championship, came in second in 6'41". The DR40 reigning champion, Sebastián Halpern, fourth in the championship, grabbed third place in 6'53". In their Hiluxes, Juan Cruz Yacopini and Denis Krotov finished fourth and fifth in the prologue in 7'06" and 7'09", respectively. During the ceremony to pick the starting order for tomorrow's stage 1, the Toyota Gazoo Racing crew of Al Attiyah and Baumel opted to start in fourth position. Ahead of them will be Yacopini in his Hilux, local hero Halpern in his Mini and Al Rajhi opening the road in the other Toyota. "Mathieu gets to decide, he's the navigator, I'm just the cabbie", quipped Al Attiyah. Mathieu Baumel explained their choice plainly: "Dust is what bugs us most in cars. We can't risk starting tenth and having to overtake six side-by-sides, it's too tricky. What we're going to do here is play with the cars that run more or less at our pace. We know that the two drivers ahead, Juan Cruz Yacopini and Sebastián Halpern, should be quite easy to overtake in the sense that they are nice and yield when you activate the Sentinel. That'll leave us a big gap to chase down Yazeed, who'll be taking the fight to us. He's opening the road, so we might gain some time on him tomorrow and be in a position to drive conservatively in the following stages, which look more difficult."

In T3, Mitch Guthrie Jr. (Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team USA) scooped up the win in 6'50" ahead of the South Racing / Can-Am of Mattias Ekström, second in 6'54". João Ferreira clinched third in his X-raid Yamaha in a time of 7'00". "Chaleco" López (Red Bull Can-Am Factory) finished in 7'05", Seth Quintero (Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team USA) in 7'08" and Cristina Gutiérrez (Red Bull Can-Am Factory) in 7'10". Austin Jones (Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team USA) was a bit off the pace with a time of 7'16". The world championship leader and the provisional runner-up, Quintero, will lead the charge in stage 1. Mitch Guthrie, third in the championship ranking, will open the road.

VAN BEVEREN GETS OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT

In the RallyGP category for pro riders, Adrien Van Beveren (Monster Energy Honda) snatched the win in 6'48", one second quicker than Luciano Benavides (Husqvarna Factory Racing) and two seconds faster than Ricky Brabec (Monster Energy Honda). Toby Price (Red Bull KTM Factory Racing), the leader of the championship, grabbed fifth place behind his teammate Matthias Walkner. The top 3 in the provisional standings of the W2RC cracked the top 5

today. In the game of picking the starting order for stage 1, they got a lot of leeway to position themselves for tomorrow. The places at the back were the most sought after, and **VBA**, who chose last, went for tenth position, right behind **Luciano Benavides**, the man ahead of him in the championship, and the KTM duo of **Matthias Walkner** and **Toby Price**. The Frenchman, whose triumph in the prologue earned him the right to have the pick of the crop, gave a sharp analysis of his choice: "Starting tenth is ideal because, in eleventh position, the gap at the start of the special with the rider in front is only two minutes instead of the three minutes between successive riders in the first ten. That's why I didn't pick eleventh place. I'll be starting behind Luciano, who knows this place and rides fast. At least on paper, this means that I shouldn't have any dust and I should be able to capitalise on good tracks ahead. I shouldn't catch him, that's not my plan. Being so close in the championship makes this position even more ideal. Everything has fallen into place. For me, there was no point in choosing to start with a teammate because the dust here in Argentina doesn't let you ride as a group."

In Rally2, the South African teammates **Michael Docherty** and **Bradley Cox** (BAS World KTM Racing) were the fastest W2RC entrants, with 7'11" and 7'13", respectively. **Konrad Dąbrowski** (Duust Diverse Rally) wrapped up the race in 7'21". The top three overall in the world championship —**Lucci**, **Lepan** and **Dumontier**— followed this trio.

TOMORROW'S STAGE

Stage 1, a loop to the south of La Rioja, will take the field to Olta, the ultimate destination for off-road racing fans visiting the area. Not even the DR40 can resist its magnetic pull. The special will get under way on a riverbed before venturing onto narrow WRC-style gravel tracks, where an up-and-down challenge awaits the field in the mountains. Olta will host the refuelling neutralisation about 200 km into the special. The return trip to La Rioja will be more of the same. The course of the special explores a part of the province that the Dakar never got around to visiting.

TOMORROW'S PROGRAMME*:

- Stage 1: La Rioja – La Rioja
- Total: 696 km
- Road sections: 362 km (118 + 244)
- Special: 334 km
- Special start times:
 - first FIM start: 8:00 am
 - first FIA start: 9:45 am

Follow stage 1 [live HERE](#)

* Local time: GMT -3

Results of the prologue [HERE](#)

Follow the W2RC social media on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Youtube](#)

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