

FIA-FIM WORLD RALLY-RAID CHAMPIONSHIPS HIT THE ROAD!

Key points:

- The 15 FIA crews and 24 FIM riders who are taking part in the W2RC in the fourth round of the championship were all cleared to start the eleventh edition of the Desafío Ruta 40 YPF at the end of the morning after going through the administrative and technical scrutineering.
- The show will get on the road with a 9 km prologue starting at 3 pm local time. This evening, the ten fastest FIA and FIM competitors in this selective section will get to choose their starting order for the first stage.
- The W2RC entrants, international competitors and locals cleared to take the start make up a 95-strong field. They are all itching to explore Argentina again following a five-year hiatus from this rally!

AL ATTIYAH READY TO BLAZE THROUGH ARGENTINA

The capital of La Rioja, the first of the three provinces to host the Desafío Ruta 40 YPF, is slowly bringing back the buzz and fun of the Dakar in Latin America. **Nasser Al Attiyah**, the reigning world champion and current leader of the FIA championship, remains every bit as popular as he was in the second chapter of the Dakar nearly a decade ago, when he clinched three victories on the continent (2011, 2015 and 2019). Despite five years without DR40 or the Dakar in Argentina, the driver who went on to become a five-time winner of the Dakar has managed to keep his fans. 80% of them are still on the continent (see his quote)... including one who offered to fly the Qatari and his co-driver **Mathieu Baumel** to the bivouac in the Estadio Superdomo by helicopter the day before yesterday! A great way for the Toyota Gazoo Racing factory competitors to warm up their audience, who have been stopping them around the town and at the bivouac ever since they arrived to take pictures with them. What better way to thrill **Nasser Al Attiyah** than to give them a show by announcing his daring bet of winning the championship before the final, right here in Argentina? That is one of the challenges that he has set himself after winning two rounds of the championship (Dakar and Sonora Rally), not least because **Sébastien Loeb** and his BRX team are sitting out this leg. **Yazeed Al Rajhi** is nipping at his heels, 30 points adrift in the standings. To be crowned in Salta, **Al Attiyah** will have to pocket at least 25 points more than the Saudi to increase his lead to 55 points after four rounds. In this scenario, even if **Al Rajhi** managed to win the final event and its five stages in October, the current leader of the championship could go wild in the Rallye du Maroc. In fact, even a blank slate would give him a tie in points, with the edge going to the Qatari because he has won more rounds. More than enough to make the crowd want to come and cheer on the reigning world champion! For now, one thing is certain: the four Hiluxes entered in the championship by Toyota Gazoo Racing and Overdrive Racing enjoy numerical superiority over the Mini T1+ X-raid JCW of the Argentinian title holder **Sebastián Halpern** (2016 and 2018) and his co-driver **Ronnie Graue**, another two-time winner (2015 and 2017). In T3, the seven vehicles entered in W2RC by South Racing are also evenly matched with the X-raid Yamaha Supported Team driven by **João Ferreira** and the Can-Am by BBR driven by **Claude Fournier**. In T4, **Shinuke Umeda's** Polaris Xtreme Plus is the only vehicle not facing the combined might of an armada.

GENERATION ARGENTINA

The W2RC riders first came together two days ago on the private test track that gives the riders a chance to fine-tune their machines before the prologue on a dedicated course located at a similar altitude to the start of the race. You could feel the pure thrill of the RallyGP pros to be back in Argentina. Most of the ten factory riders on the grid tasted the Dakar on South American soil, and the majority belong to that generation. **Toby Price** (Red Bull KTM Factory Racing), the leader of the championship, won his two Dakars on the continent (2016 and 2019), while **Sam Sunderland** (Red Bull GasGas Factory Racing), the reigning world champion, landed his first Dakar win in Buenos Aires in 2017. **Matthias Walkner** (Red Bull KTM Factory Racing) etched his name in 2018 during the last stop of the race in Argentina. **Kevin Benavides** (Red Bull KTM Factory Racing), the two-time Argentinian winner of the Dakar in Saudi Arabia (2021 and 2023), dreamed of going back to his winning ways on home turf but, for the second time this season, he hurt himself in a crash shortly before a championship round. Back in early August, when a press conference was held in Salta to present the eleventh edition of the Desafío Ruta 40 YPF, the older **Benavides** broke down when he mentioned that he would miss out on "his" race. The two-time winner of the DR40 (2016 and 2017) headed to the private test to lend a hand to the Austrian teams with his remaining good arm. There was no way he was just going to watch the race on TV. The *Albiceleste* will spend the entire week in the DR40 as his brother's biggest fan. Rumours abound under the KTM tent that the **Benavides** family has already planned to celebrate the Dakar title conquered by **Kevin** last January with them as soon as the race finishes in Salta. When you know how

wild it got in the home town of the first South American rider to win the Dakar when he returned home in 2021, there is no doubt about how epic it will be for Austrian crews and how it will light up the W2RC caravan. And if **Luciano Benavides**, currently second in the championship, were to nab his first win in the race, it would be even more awesome! However, the Honda clan will do their best to hang on to the title won by the late **Paulo Gonçalves** in the last edition, back in 2018. The Chileans **Pablo Quintanilla** and **Nacho Cornejo** feel pretty much at home, while **Adrien Van Beveren** has had a special connection with the Argentinian crowds since 2011, way before his Dakar debut here in 2016 and a spill in 2018 that knocked him out of race while he was topping the leader board. The Frenchman is hell-bent on soaring back to the summit of the standings in stage 2 from La Rioja to Belén, which will take place in a few days (see his quote).

Back on the road to cherish old W2RC memories and make new ones!

Quotes:

Nasser Al Attiyah (Toyota Gazoo Racing — 1st in the FIA driver standings with 136 points): "It's my first time here at the Ruta 40, but not my first time in La Rioja. We came here several times with the Dakar. I'm mostly stoked to see the Argentinian public again because, aside from my Dakar victories in Argentina [2011 and 2015], 80% of the people who follow me on social media are from South America and we have a lot of supporters here who haven't forgotten us. It also gives local racers a shot at a round of the world championship. We're going to try and win, but we're also going to keep in mind the championship, which would be really nice to clinch as early as this round so we can go all-out in Morocco. For that, we need to leave Salta with at least 25 points more than Yazeed Al Rajhi, who trails me by 30 points right now. There are 55 points up for grabs in Morocco: 30 for the overall plus 25 for five stage wins."

Mathieu Baumel (Toyota Gazoo Racing — 1st in the FIA co-driver standings with 136 points): "I started with Nasser in 2015, so I wasn't with him for his first Dakar victory in 2011, but it's still a fond memory because we started our Dakar partnership on a high note by winning it. We don't know the Ruta 40, but we've already been through these places. It feels great to be back in Argentina. We might even secure the title here. It's going to be tricky, but it's possible, at least on paper. That's our goal. It's not a must for us, but it would be awesome."

Yazeed Al Rajhi (Toyota Overdrive — 2nd in the FIA co-driver standings with 106 points): "The first race I entered as a driver was in Argentina, back in the 2008 WRC. It was also the starting point of my rally-raid career. I made my debut there at the wheel of a Toyota Hilux in the 2015 Dakar. It's a great memory, although my engine gave up the ghost with two days to go, when I had been sitting in third overall for most of the race. It was also the year I took my first Dakar stage win. My last experience in Argentina dates back to the 2018 Dakar, where I drove an X-raid Mini. I'm really excited to come back here and I can say that I'm clued up on this terrain, on which I raced four consecutive editions of the Dakar driving two different cars."

Ronnie Graue (X-raid Mini JCW — 4th in the FIA co-driver standings with 74 points): "I got to participate in every Dakar held in Latin America from 2010 onwards. My first experience in the Ruta 40 goes back to 2012 in an SSV in which I finished second. I then entered and won the race twice as a co-driver with Orly Terranova in the X-raid Mini, in 2015 and 2017. The track, the crew, the crowd who rooted for us everywhere we hit, it was epic."

Toby Price (Red Bull KTM Factory Racing — 1st in the FIM standings with 62 points): "This is where I nailed my first Dakar in Buenos Aires in 2016 before bagging the second one in Peru in 2019. It's good to be back in Argentina. Last time, the 2018 Dakar, went pretty well [third overall]. I think I've already done the Ruta 40, but to be honest, I'm not entirely sure, it all gets a bit blurry with the Dakar years [Price finished second overall in 2018, six seconds behind the defending champion, Paulo Gonçalves]."

Luciano Benavides (Husqvarna Factory Racing — 2nd in the FIM standings with 55 points): "I've done the Ruta 40 twice. In 2017, it was my first rally raid, even though it only lasted a day because I broke my collarbone. The second time was in 2018, for the last edition, where I came in sixth. But today I have more pace, experience and confidence and I'm battling for the world championship, it's a completely different story. I've never raced in La Rioja before, but the further north we go, the closer we'll be to my home. I'm stoked to be here and I'll give it my all for Argentina."

Adrien Van Beveren (Monster Energy Honda — 3rd in the FIM standings with 53 points): "I started coming to Argentina in 2011 to ride in the Enduro del Verano. I hadn't even turned twenty at the time. I won that race in 2013 and again in 2015. That race made me discover Argentina. I love this country. I feel good here. I've often thought that I'll come and live here someday. For now, I'm cool in Andorra. They also speak Spanish and there are loads of Argentinians. Besides, my girlfriend is Argentinian. I did my first Dakar here in 2016 [sixth overall], then we came back in 2017 [fourth overall] and 2018, when I suffered a crash I won't be forgetting any time soon because my dream

seemed within reach. By the way, I know we'll be racing really close to the place where I hit the ground in the 2018 Dakar. I already took part in the Desafío Ruta 40 in 2017, nominally, at least. An electronic problem sent me home after a single stage. I know that the navigation is devilish here. The pace is going to be sky-high again, the championship is really close, there are two races to go and Toby Price, Luciano Benavides and yours truly are very evenly matched. It's all up in the air. I'm sure we'll all be thinking of that."

Manuel Andújar (7240 Team – back in the W2RC after withdrawing from round 1): "I've only participated in the Ruta 40 once, back in 2018, when I also made my Dakar debut. I cooked the engine on the third day, but I also grabbed my first rally-raid stage here, so I'll always remember the Ruta 40 for this. Our team is also fielding Juraj Varga and our plan is to help him to score points to fight for the championship. I'm also going to focus on my own race and try to win it before heading to the finale in Morocco."

PROGRAMME*:

- 27 August:
 - 9 km prologue at Dique Los Sauces at 3 pm
 - Choice of starting order by the top 10 in the prologue at the Estadio Superdomo de La Rioja at 6:30 pm
 - Ceremonial start at the Estadio Superdomo de La Rioja from 7:30 to 8:30 pm
- 28 August: stage 1 - La Rioja–Belén (road section: 362 km / special: 334 km / total: 696 km)
- 29 August: stage 2 - Belén–Belén (road section: 121 km / special: 339 km / total: 460 km)
- 30 August: stage 3 - Belén–Belén (road section: 196 km / special: 268 km / total: 464 km)
- 31 August: stage 4 - Belén–Belén (road section: 236 km / special: 348 km / total: 584 km)
- 1 September: stage 5 - Belén–Salta (road section: 304 km / special: 257 km / total: 561 km)
 - Finish of the first competitors at 2 pm
 - Finish podium ceremony at the Centro de Convenciones de Salta from 5 to 6 pm

* Local time: GMT -3

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List of FIM riders authorised to start [HERE](#); FIA crews authorised to start [HERE](#)

Desafío Ruta 40 official website [here](#)

W2RC official website [here](#)

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