

Belén, 29 August 2023

## FIA-FIM WORLD RALLY-RAID CHAMPIONSHIPS YACOPINI BREAKS THE ICE AS WALKNER SAVES PRICE

### Key points:

- Stretching for almost 460 km, stage 2 of the Desafío Ruta 40 YPF took the W2RC caravan from La Rioja to the bivouac in Belén, going over the dunes that the Dakar got to know and love after visiting the area three times.
- In the car category, Juan Cruz Yacopini (Overdrive Racing) clinched his first ever W2RC stage win. The youngster from Mendoza left Nasser Al Attiyah (Toyota Gazoo Racing) in the dust as the reigning world champion suffered puncture after puncture. Al Attiyah managed to hang on to the overall lead by just 17" over Yacopini, who rocketed up the standings. In contrast, Yazeed Al Rajhi (Overdrive Racing) slipped to third, 16'31" down on the leader, also due to recurring punctures.
- In T3, Mattias Ekström (South Racing Can-Am) won the special by 1'45" over Mitchell Guthrie (Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team USA). The American remains perched at the top of the standings with 2'31" in hand over the Swede.
- Among the RallyGP motorbikes competing in the W2RC, Luciano Benavides (Husqvarna Factory Racing) took a new win, this time edging out Ricky Brabec and his Honda. Benavides expanded his lead in the W2RC standings to 8'37" over Adrien Van Beveren (Monster Energy Honda) and 9'55" over Ross Branch (Hero MotoSports).
- Toby Price, who stood on the overall podium yesterday, broke his shock absorber. Matthias Walkner sacrificed his own ambitions and gave him the part he needed on the track. The Aussie leader of the championship lost over an hour and went "down under" in the overall, while his Austrian teammate had to quit the race.
- A mechanical prevented Michael Docherty (BAS World KTM Racing) from finishing the Rally2 stage, leaving his compatriot and stablemate Bradley Cox to claim the stage and seize the overall lead.

### YACOPINI TAKES HIS MAIDEN W2RC STAGE WIN

The special looked set to come down to a new duel between **Nasser Al Attiyah** and **Yazeed Al Rajhi** as the two stars traded places at the top of the intermediate standings within a handful of seconds. However, the impossible seemed to transpire in the live coverage of the race on the W2RC site when **Al Attiyah**, **Al Rajhi** and **Halpern** (X-raid Mini JCW) all managed to get stuck again and again. The Qatari limped across the finish line with a broken rear shock absorber and the after-effects of five punctures, while the Saudi had to jump out of his car four times to patch up his tyres! It all played into the hands of **Juan Cruz Yacopini** (Overdrive Racing), who put the pedal to the metal and romped home in first place. The Argentinian was visibly delighted to have claimed his first ever stage win in a W2RC round: "I'm stoked to have taken my first stage win in a W2RC round. It was a hell of a stage for us, but we sorted it out, while the others messed up and ran into trouble. I'm over the win to claim this victory in my country. I've been working all season long to share a joyful moment like this with my family, my team and my fans. We'll carry on with the race and we hope to wrap it up in style. We have to open the road tomorrow. It's going to be a hard job, but sometimes you have to do it. It will be the first time tomorrow for us with my co-driver Dani, we hope everything will work out."

**Yacopini** trounced **Al Attiyah** by 10'42", **Al Rajhi** by 26'04" and **Halpern** by 55'52"! The leader of the W2RC, **Al Attiyah**, saw his lead in the DR40 shrink to just 17 seconds over **Yacopini**. **Al Rajhi** is now third at 16'31". **Halpern** is just outside the podium at 49'29". The winner of the day, who came seventh in the Dakar last January and sits fifth in the world championship with 71 points, is hot on the heels of his compatriot **Halpern**, who has 77 points. Knowing that **Sébastien Loeb**, third in the provisional championship standings with 101 points, is out of the picture, the two Argentinian racers have a real shot at climbing on the W2RC podium in Salta. The driver from Mendoza took a quantum leap towards this goal today!

South Racing's **Mattias Ekström** bounced back from yesterday's puncture-marred stage to grab the T3 special by 15 seconds over the two Red Bull Off-Road Jr Team brothers in arms, **Mitch Guthrie** and **Seth Quintero**, who finished 1'45" and 3'43" down, respectively. **Guthrie Jr.** remains perched at the top of the standings with 2'31" in hand over the stage winner. **Seth Quintero** is 5'54" back.

### TOBY PRICE LIVES TO FIGHT ANOTHER DAY

The three leading riders in the provisional W2RC standings, **Toby Price** (62 points), **Luciano Benavides** (55 points) and **Adrien Van Beveren** (53 points), were neck and neck at the front of the DR40 after stage 1. But that was then, and this is now. **Toby Price** broke his shock absorber bang in the middle of the special and had to wait for his teammate **Matthias Walkner**, who gave up his own part to the world championship leader without a second thought. The Australian took a one-hour hit, but he is still in the race, unlike his saviour, in accordance with the regulations. As for his main rivals for the championship, **Luciano Benavides** outgunned **VBA** today. The Argentinian was the fastest behind **Tosha Schareina**, the Honda rider not registered for the W2RC who won the stage once again. The Frenchman had to settle for sixth in the special. **Benavides** expanded his lead in the W2RC standings to 8'37" over **VBA** and 9'55" over **Ross Branch**. Price is still in the top 10 at 1 h 08'30".

In Rally2, **Michael Docherty** (BAS World KTM Racing) hit a mechanical snag in the special and failed to make it to the finish. His troubles left the door wide open for his teammate and fellow South African **Bradley Cox** to win the Rally2 stage and climb to the top of the overall. **Romain Dumontier** (HT Rally Raid Husqvarna Racing) finished within a minute of the victor, whereas Duust Rally's Konrad Dąbrowski and Jean-Loup Lèpan floundered at over 11 minutes down and Paolo Lucci (BAS World KTM Racing) conceded over 17 minutes. "**Dudu**" slashed his deficit in the overall to **Lucci** (whom he trails by 3 points in the world championship) by 16 minutes, which also happens to be the time he lost as a result of penalties for changing his engine after the prologue (15 minutes) and speeding in yesterday's special (1 minute). The two Rally2 title contenders are almost back to square one, with the Italian leader of the championship holding on to a razor-thin 4-minute margin.

**Manuel Andújar** once again crushed the opposition in the fight for the quad W2RC. The *Albiceleste* now leads the DR40 by 27'33" over **Juraj Varga**, who competes under his aegis, and 1 h 25'42" over **Rodolfo Guillioi**.

### TOMORROW'S STAGE

Stage 3, a loop around Belén, will head north to the Pie de Medano area, which the Dakar visited more than once. The first part will take place to the east of Ruta 40, while the second part will intersect with it and jump to the west of this strip of asphalt. Sand will be the name of the game here. Sandy tracks, dunes and navigation will be on the menu. Halfway through the first part of the special, the highest dunes since the race got under way will peak at 2,600 metres above sea level, the ceiling of this edition. The second part of the special, coming after the refuelling stop at km 164, will be more of the same, with a combo of sandy tracks and dunes. A gruelling stage in true Dakar style.

#### TOMORROW'S PROGRAMME\*:

- Stage 3: Belén – Belén
- Total: 466 km
- Road sections: 198 km (95 + 103)
- Special: 268 km
- Special start times:
  - first FIM start: 8:00 am
  - first FIA start: 9:45 am

Follow stage 3 [live HERE](#)

\* Local time: GMT -3

Stage 2 results [HERE](#)

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Desafío Ruta 40 official website [here](#)

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#### Press contacts

**W2RC**  
Thida Vuillaume  
[pressedakar@aso.fr](mailto:pressedakar@aso.fr)

**FIM:**  
Isabelle Larivière  
[isabelle.lariviere@fim.ch](mailto:isabelle.lariviere@fim.ch)

**FIA**  
[press@fia.com](mailto:press@fia.com)