

Agadir, 13 October 2023

## FIA-FIM WORLD RALLY-RAID CHAMPIONSHIPS MATCH POINTS!

### Key points:

- 236 vehicles were cleared to start the 24<sup>th</sup> edition of the Rallye du Maroc following the usual technical and administrative scrutineering. 33 FIA crews and 39 FIM riders registered for the W2RC will be taking part in the fifth and last round of the season.
- In the car category, Nasser Al Attiyah holds a cushy lead over Yazeed Al Rajhi going into the championship finale. Juan Cruz Yacopini and Sébastien Loeb will get into a scrap for a spot on the championship podium, while M-Sport NWM Ford and Audi Sport are expected to spice up the fight at the front.
- In the motorbike category, the suspense is so thick you could cut it with a knife. Luciano Benavides is feeling the heat from Toby Price and Adrien van Beveren, with a mere 14 points separating the three rivals. The other nail-biters are the clash between Honda and KTM for the constructor championship and the duel between Romain Dumontier and Paolo Lucci in Rally2.
- A 19-kilometre loop prologue near Agadir will get the show on the road on Friday, followed by five stages in which the organisers have strived to throw "all the ingredients of rally raids" into the mix.

### FIA: EVERY DAY COUNTS!

The winner of the Dakar, the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge and the Desafio Ruta 40, **Nasser Al Attiyah** (Toyota Gazoo Racing), is on the verge of clinching the W2RC title, with a 51-point buffer over **Yazeed Al Rajhi** (Overdrive Racing), who emerged victorious from the Sonora Rally. Even so, with 55 points up for grabs in Morocco (see the points scale below), the Qatari is not mathematically assured of the championship yet... and in rally raids, you can never say never! However, every stage is a match point now. **Al Rajhi** needs to score a total of 52 points in Morocco to even have a shot at the crown. He must win the race outright *and* perform at a high level in every single special, where points are at stake. For instance, if the Saudi does not finish in the top 4 of the opening stage, **Al Attiyah** will be champion. The Qatari would love to seal the deal in style by winning his seventh Rallye du Maroc.

Further back, **Juan Cruz Yacopini** (Overdrive Racing) and **Sébastien Loeb** (Bahrain Raid Xtreme) will be locked in a ferocious battle for the last step of the podium. The Frenchman is just 8 points behind his rival despite earning no points in the two American races. Both men are also in a position to snatch the runner-up's spot if **Al Rajhi**, who leads them by 29 and 37 points, were to hit a snag. There are plenty of good reasons to push for the win! The race for glory also includes drivers who, for various reasons, are no longer in contention for the championship. **Guerlain Chicherit**, the title holder in Morocco, is eager to double down in his first race with Hilux Overdrive Racing. Team Audi Sport, back in full force for the first time since the Dakar, with **Stéphane Peterhansel**, **Carlos Sainz** and **Mattias Ekström**, are determined to thwart his plans.

Come 18 October, a driver from Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team USA will stand atop the T3 podium in Merzouga. The question is which one, with the whole field on tenterhooks: just 9 points separate the top three crews! **Mitch Guthrie** seized the lead by winning the DR40, but his fellow American **Austin Jones**, the winner of the Dakar in this category, is a mere 3 points behind. **Seth Quintero**, the victor of Abu Dhabi, is 9 points down. Meanwhile, the T4 champion, **Rokas Baciūška** (Red Bull Can-Am Factory Team), will take the fight to the big guns of T3. His absence from his favourite category opens the door to a potential new winner in Morocco. Keep an eye on **João Ferreira**, who is testing himself in T4 in a Can-Am from South Racing. But also on **Shinsuke Umeda**, the only driver to have completed all the races so far with his Polaris RZR Pro R. The Japanese driver's tenacity has earned him second place in the provisional overall standings. The Italian driver **Rebecca Busi** (FN Speed Team), who finished second on the Sonora Rally, can still claim a place on the final W2RC podium if she manages to perform well in Morocco.

Sparks will fly in the truck race too, with just 11 points separating the Dakar champion, **Janus van Kasteren** (Boss Machinery Team De Rooy), from his closest rival, **Martin Macík** (MM Technology).

### FIM: AND THEN THERE WERE THREE

By winning on home turf in Argentina back in early September, **Luciano Benavides** (Husqvarna Factory Racing) became the third different leader of the W2RC this year, after his brother, **Kevin Benavides** (Red Bull KTM Factory Racing), and the Australian **Toby Price** (Red Bull KTM Factory Racing). Price is 9 points behind the Argentinian going into the start in Morocco. **Adrien Van Beveren** (Monster Energy Honda Team) is the third—and last— rider in contention, but he has a deficit of 5 points to **Price** and 14 to **Benavides**. The Frenchman, racing in his first competition on the new Honda, will have a very narrow path to victory unless he can win the race outright. He also needs to do well to secure the world constructor title for Honda. The Japanese maker is 6 points clear of KTM. **VBA** is the leader of a red squadron consisting of **José Ignacio Cornejo**, **Pablo Quintanilla**, **Ricky Brabec** and fresh recruit **Skyler Howes**. The American is the defending champion in Morocco and keen on starting his adventure at HRC in style. In the orange camp, only **Matthias Walkner** (Red Bull KTM Factory Racing) will be there to support **Price**, while **Howes's** transfer leaves **Luciano Benavides** as Husqvarna's sole

factory rider. Same story for Red Bull GasGas Factory Racing's **Sam Sunderland**, who will step down from the world champion's throne in a few days. **Hero MotoSports Rally Team** was counting on its entire roster, but **Sebastian Bühler** and **Ross Branch** will have to do without **Joaquim Rodrigues**. The Portuguese will be a no-show after hurting his shoulder the day before yesterday.

As in RallyGP, there is a new sheriff in town in Rally2. The withdrawal of **Paolo Lucci** (BAS World KTM Racing) in Argentina played into the hands of **Romain Dumontier** (HT Rally Raid Husqvarna Racing), who took over the reins of the category. The Italian is 13 points behind "**Dudu**", but he is not going down without a fight. He will also have to keep an eye on his rear-view mirror, with another Frenchman, **Jean-Loup Lèpan** (Duust Rally Team), 8 points behind him.

The race for Rally3, a category in which the riders compete on enduro bikes, is a toss-up between **Massimo Camurri** and **Ardit Kurtaj** (Xraids Expérience). The Italian clinched the Sonora Rally, where his Albanian-born rival finished second before storming to victory in the DR40 with **Camurri** watching from the sidelines. This means that **Kurtaj** has a 20-point edge heading into the finale.

The name of **Alexandre Giroud's** successor in the quad championship is still anyone's guess. Although he skipped the Argentinian round, **Laisvydas Kancius** stayed on top of the ranking thanks to his podium finishes in the Dakar (third), Abu Dhabi (second) and the Sonora Rally (first). **Rodolfo Guilloli** is 16 points down and **Juraj Varga** 21. **Manuel Andújar** has no path to the title, but he will put up a real fight for the Rallye du Maroc.

#### POINTS SCALE: calculators at the ready!

Almost all the titles are still undecided in Morocco, so it is worth revisiting the number of points on offer in the Kingdom.

The FIA races award points to the top 15 crews overall (30, 25, 20, 17, 15, 13, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3 and 2) and the top 5 in every stage (5, 4, 3, 2 and 1). In other words, the biggest possible haul is 55 points. One caveat applies: stage points will only count if the crew in question finishes the entire rally! A competitor who has won the first four specials will still go home empty-handed if he withdraws from the fifth one. This means that the calculations made during the race will always be provisional.

Unlike the car drivers, the bikers will only score points based on the final standings of the Rallye du Maroc. The top 15 will get points (25, 20, 16, 13, 11, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1).

The constructor standings come from adding up the results of the two best riders of each maker out of the three previously selected. This holds true for both the FIA and the FIM championships.

#### ROUTE: an intense affair

2,232 kilometres separate the start line in Agadir from the finish line in Merzouga. Two thirds of the route will be specials (1,456 km) and the rest road sections (776 km). A mosaic of terrains awaits the competitors, as **David Castera's** organising team strived to throw "all the ingredients of rally raid" into the mix. This will include "varied terrains, changes of pace and the risk of getting lost". To make it to the end, the field will have to overcome rocky sections "typical of Morocco", the dunes of M'Hamid, an "incredible area of camel grass" stretching for about ten kilometres between Zagora and Merzouga, and almost 40 kilometres of dunes around Merzouga on the last day.

There will also be quite a few navigational curveballs. "Nowadays, we have reached such a level of precision that navigation is almost too easy, so we are trying to go back slowly to be less helpful. We wanted to toughen up the navigation a bit", warned **David Castera**. Another factor will be the heat, "especially intense this year". The mercury is expected to hit 35 degrees when the 19 km prologue (109 km counting the road sections) near Agadir kicks off on Friday. It will be "fast, rolling and sandy". As the rule goes, the top 10 will get to choose their starting order for stage 1 on the next day.

#### QUOTES:

**Nasser Al Attiyah (Toyota Gazoo Racing - 1<sup>st</sup> in the overall FIA driver standings with 189 pts)** : *"It's very nice to compete at this race because it's one of the best race to make development, to test new things and to get ready for the Dakar. I'm quite happy with our performance this year, now we need to have a good point here in order to win the championship."*

**Yazeed Al Rajhi (Overdrive Racing – 2<sup>nd</sup> in the overall FIA driver standings with 138 pts)** : *"We're doing a lot of races, we're getting more experience and I feel I grew up every race. For us it's not easy to catch Nasser, I think the idea is to secure our second position, to fight, take experience and prepare for Dakar. It's a very good race, there are a lot of good drivers... I think seven or eight drivers can win stages ! It's not easy to even stay in the Top 5."*

**Sébastien Loeb (Bahrain Raid Xtreme – 4<sup>th</sup> in the overall FIA driver standings with 101 pts)** : *"I didn't had the opportunity to race (in rally-raid) since Mexico, so it's been a long time. For sure we don't work a lot together with Fabian (Lurquin) so we have to restart a bit, but we are confident. The car is still good and we'll try to do a good job. The goal is also to take some experience in order to prepare the Dakar, as we didn't raced a lot and we'll now have a few days. The goal is to try to reach the finish line and avoid the problems, that's the base of our approach. And if we feel well, we'll push."*

**Mitch Guthrie (Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team USA by BFG – 1<sup>st</sup> in the overall FIA T3 driver standings with 174 pts)**: *"I feel good, I'm excited about this race. It's been a long season, we have had ups and downs. Finishing in Argentina gaining the lead of the championship is awesome. I would not say that I'm feeling pressure, it's more that I'm excited to race ! When you're racing, you have to act in that way : to not feel the pressure, but just to feel good doing what you're supposed to do."*

**Luciano Benavides (Husqvarna Factory Racing – 1<sup>st</sup> in the overall FIM standings with 80 pts) :** *"It has been a great year for me so far, with many stages wins that gave me a lot of confidence. I don't feel pressure. We are still really far of the finish line and it's a long race, one of the toughest of the calendar. I will ride as in the other races: I'll do my best and we'll see at the end."*

**Adrien van Beveren (Monster Energy Honda – 3<sup>rd</sup> in the overall FIM standings with 66 pts) :** *"That's a really challenging race. I've never been fighting for the championship until the last round. The Rallye du Maroc is the last big preparation before the Dakar, everybody wants to go fast and do the best of it. That's my goal. Luciano is leading the championship so I think all the pressure remains on his shoulders ! (laughs) But in terms of points it's still possible. I will do my best, because by doing that, at the end of the race you don't have any regret. When you race so fast, every single decimal of second counts, you have to be so focus, every mistake can be really bad... so I can't imagine myself riding and thinking about the race and the championship at the same time !"*

**Romain Dumontier (HT Rally Raid Husqvarna Racing – 1<sup>st</sup> in the overall FIM Rally2 standings with 79 pts):** *"I want to approach the race like the other races. I don't want to think too much about the championship, I just want to ride like I know and be with the RallyGP riders. I want to try to have a good race, also to train for Dakar. Maybe I'll think about the final result of the race after Sunday, but at the beginning I will just ride normally."*

**PROGRAMME:\***

- 13 October: prologue — Agadir (road section: 90 km / special: 19 km / total: 109 km) / Tony Parker visit to the bivouac / Free concert
  - 9:05 am: first FIM start
  - 12:08 pm: first FIA start
  - 7:30 pm: publication of the FIM starting order for stage 1 (8:30 pm for the FIA starting order)
- 14 October: stage 1 — Agadir–Zagora (road section: 397 km / special: 313 km / total: 710 km)
- 15 October: stage 2 — Zagora–Zagora (road section: 100 km / special: 296 km / total: 396 km)
- 16 October: stage 3 — Zagora–Zagora (road section: 108 km / special: 333 km / total: 441 km)
- 17 October: stage 4 — Zagora–Merzouga (road section: 78 km / special: 343 km / total: 421 km)
- 18 October: stage 5 — Zagora–Merzouga (road section: 3 km / special: 152 km / total: 155 km)
- Evening of 18 October: Rallye du Maroc and W2RC prize award ceremony

\* Local time: GMT+1

**Follow the race LIVE [HERE](#)**List of FIM entrants cleared to start [here](#); FIA entrants cleared to start [here](#)Official Rallye du Maroc website [here](#)Official W2RC website [here](#)**Press contacts****W2RC**Thida Vuillaume  
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