



ROAD BOOK D2 THE LONG ROAD TO ZAGORA

Key points :

- In the bikes victory on the first stage, a particularly long one from Agadir to Zagora, went to Ross Branch (Hero MotoSports). In Rally2 it was Bradley Cox (BAS World KTM Racing) who took the honours while in Rally3 Cheikh-Yves Jacquemain (Africa Rallye Team) continues his winning streak. Victory in the quads went to Manuel Andujar (Drag'on Rally Team).
- In the car category, Nasser Al Attiyah (Toyota Gazoo Racing) took the victory and the overall lead. In T3, Eryk Goczal (Team BBR) won again while in T4 it was Enrico Gaspari (Xtreme Plus CST Polais) who was fastest, with Martin Macik (MM Technology) quickest in the trucks.

ON TRACK

Over at Hero their two rides were exactly that: Heros. Starting first this morning, **Sebastian Buhler** (Hero MotoSports) navigated faultlessly, opening the piste for the entire 311 kms of special stage. Behind him, opting to start 12th this morning, teammate **Ross Branch** went through every time check in first place to win the special 03'41 ahead of Monster Energy Honda Chilean **Pablo Quintanilla**, with Red Bull KTM Factory Racing's **Matthias Walkner** (at 04'18"). Long time second on the stage, yesterday's Prologue winner **Tosha Schareina** lost time looking for a waypoint at the end of the special to finally finish 10th. Also running into difficulty on the stage was **Sam Sunderland** who has pulled out complaining of blurred vision in his left eye. **Ricky Brabec** (Monster Energy Honda) also had a bad day and was finally pulled out of the Chegaga dunes by the organisers with battery problems. By contrast **Luciano Benavides** (Husqvarna Factory Racing) had an uneventful run to preserve his world championship lead, while his closest rival **Toby Price** (Red Bull KTM Factory Racing), only gave 1 minute away to the Argentinean, despite being in less than top form. In Rally2 longtime stage leader **Michael Docherty** (BAS World KTM Racing) was 'awarded' a 15 minute penalty for missing a waypoint at the end of the day to be finally classified 10th while W2RC championship contenders **Bradley Cox** (BAS World KTM Racing), **Romain Dumontier** (HT Rally Raid Husqvarna Racing) and **Konrad Dabrowski** (Duust Diverse Racing) finished first, second and third respectively.

Dust was on everyone's lips as the car drivers arrived in Zagora. **Nasser Al Attiyah**, who started 38th this morning, eat lots of his rivals' to make up his prologue deficit. In Zagora, the Qatari takes command of the Rallye du Maroc, where he is aiming for a seventh success. He has a lead of 2'19" over **Yazeed Al Rajhi** (Overdrive Racing) and 3'38" over **Sébastien Loeb** (Bahrain Raid Xtreme). **Carlos Sainz** (Audi Sport) is 4th at 3'55", **Guerlain Chicherit** (Overdrive Racing) is 5th at 6'51" and Mister Dakar **Peterhansel** (Audi Sport) is 6th at 9'19". In T3, **Eryk Goczal** continues to amaze. The youngest winner in the history of the Dakar, with his T4 victory at the age of 18, made a victorious debut yesterday in the Lightweight Prototypes. This Saturday, he confirmed his speed by winning the stage 0'29" ahead of **Seth Quintero** (Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team USA by BFG), the defending Moroccan champion. Overall, the Pole takes the lead, just 0'38" ahead of the American. In T4, it was also a newcomer to the category, moving from T3 to T4, who seemed destined for victory. Joao Ferreira, winner of yesterday's prologue in his new South Racing Can-Am, finally lost out to Italy's **Enrico Gaspari** and Spain's Juan **Manuel Mana** (Automode e).

STAT OF THE DAY 11 - 14

Stage 1 of this 24th Rallye du Maroc was the longest of the race with a grand total of 710 kilometres. A format reminiscent of a Dakar stage, with a 296-kilometre liaison between Agadir and Tata to start the day, which began at 4.10am with the distribution of the road book to the first motorcycle, 20 minutes before leaving bivouac. The competitors then had 5 hours to reach the start of the special stage. Sebastian Buhler was the first bike to start the 311 km special at 9.35am. The first riders were expected at the Zagora bivouac, after 101 kilometres of liaison, at around 3pm. That's just under 11 hours on the bike for the pros. The Rally3 bikers had an estimated time of 14 hours. Similar times were forecast for the cars. A big day!

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RADIO BIVOUC Gioele Meoni (son of Fabrizio Meoni)

"When I was a kid my Dad (Fabrizio Meoni) and I talked about riding the Dakar together as amateurs. After his passing I rode moto-x for a bit but then studies and work got in the way and I was only riding a couple of times a year for fun. Then in 2020 I met Andy and Aldo Winkler (father and son who raced the Dakar on bikes) and that reawaken the dream. Then last year just before I got married, I said to my wife, 'you have to take the whole package, me, my bike and my dream to do the Dakar'. I convinced my mum, which wasn't easy – I had to promise to not look at the leader board, just ride to get to the finish. Then KTM Italy and my Dad's old sponsors got behind the project. I knew the project would create some media interest, which I don't like so much, so I said OK I'll put this interest to good use and help raise finance and awareness for my family's foundation. We set up four schools in Senegal in my Dad's memory and so I created 'Dakar 4 Dakar' with the idea of selling my bike at the end of the race and donating the money to the foundation. The Rallye du Maroc is the first 'sporting' step of the project, my first rally, which I need finish to get my place on the Dakar!"

W2RC

Luciano Benavides and **Toby Price** are locked in a fierce battle for the FIM crown. The Argentinian holds a 9-point lead over the Australian in the ranking, but he is 10 seconds behind in the provisional rally standings. **Adrien Van Beveren**, the third rider in contention for the title, had a torrid time out there and now trails them by over 10 minutes. The Rally2 championship leader, **Romain Dumontier**, is 4'51" ahead of his closest rival, **Paolo Lucci**. The Frenchman sits second in the rally and can almost taste the title. **Ardit Kurtaj** also had a good day in Rally3, capitalising on **Massimo Camurri's** troubles to overtake him by 1h48'13". **Manuel Andújar** was a cut above the rest in the quad race, but the Lithuanian **Laisvydas Kancius** also came ahead today, pushing his two remaining title rivals, **Juraj Varga** and **Rodolfo Guillioli**, to 8'28" and 28'41" down, respectively.

The two W2RC FIA leaders, **Nasser Al Attiyah** and **Yazeed Al Rajhi**, were their usual selves, with a dominant performance that saw them top the special and the overall. **Sébastien Loeb** (third) is ahead of **Juan Cruz Yacopini** (eighth), but he needs to make up an 8-point deficit to bump the Argentinian from third place in the championship. As it stands, the Frenchman would leapfrog the *Albiceleste*, who needs to get his act together if he wants to save his podium spot. **Seth Quintero** is piling the pressure on the T3 championship leader, **Mitch Guthrie**, just 9 points ahead. He is one place higher (second versus third) and 5'08" clear in the rally. The third man in contention for the title, **Austin Jones**, was the big loser of the day and is now 13'34" down on **Quintero**. **Rebecca Busi** was a solid second in T4. If she can keep it up all the way to the finish, she will strip **Eryk Goczał** of third place in the championship. The silver medal will go to **Shinzuke Umeda**, third today. **Martin Macík**, the top-ranked W2RC entrant in T5, outgunned the championship leader, **Janus van Kasteren**. The Czech trucker is hell-bent on erasing his 11-point deficit to the Dutchman in the final round of the series!

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ANALYSIS by KEVIN BENAVIDES

On the sidelines with an injured wrist, the 2023 Dakar winner is closely following the race from the bivouac and gives us his daily analysis of the motorcycle race:

"Buhler did a good job, because he opened up the whole stage. Ross Branch set the pace, leading the times throughout the special. Ricky and Tosha were very close but they both had a problem at the end of the stage. Pablo also did a good job. Matthias made up several minutes over the second half of the stage. Toby is ill but despite that he achieved a good result. My brother also did a good job, he was very consistent and did the job - to ride intelligently and maintain the W2RC leader position. For my brother, it's a good way to start the first day. More generally, I think that today the riders discovered the road book philosophy that David Castera wanted to be different this year. At the briefing, he warned them that he had designed the road

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book himself with a view to returning to a less surgical navigation. I think they've had to adapt to that. Tomorrow we'll be able to see more clearly who's at ease with it and there will also be the introduction of bonuses for the openers, which will change things a bit."

QUOTES

Ross Branch (Hero MotoSports): "A long day, 700 kays but I enjoyed it. I went out and put my head down. Then I caught up with a couple of the guys and we rode together to the end. Its good for us as a team to see that we're taking the steps in the right direction. We needed a stage race here before Dakar. I'm super happy for the team. Everybody has put so much work in. I think we're in a good place now. Tomorrow's going to be a long day opening but its good practice and hopefully I can stay out front for a while and pick up some bonus points."

Pablo Quintanilla (Monster Energy Honda) : "It was a really difficult day, but a good one for me. I felt good on the bike and I've been missing that feeling. It was important to get a good position today so that I could take advantage of the bonuses on offer tomorrow. I like the spirit of the road book for this edition. It's a return to the old Dakar where you had to rely more on intuition and try to understand the direction of the race. Sometimes there aren't many indications, or the route is confirmed a few kilometres later. You have to have more of a feel for the terrain, sometimes you have to slow down to interpret two boxes and make sure you're going in the right direction, but I like that. I like these changes of pace and terrain and I felt very comfortable."

Nasser Al Attiyah (Toyota Gazoo Racing): "If anyone could complain about the dust today, it's me! There was a lot of it at the start but that was the situation we had to deal with. We passed twenty-one cars. After about 200 kilometres, things settled down and we were able to make good speed for the last 100 kilometres. I'm pretty happy. Tomorrow, we're going to get out in front and try to attack, then we'll see what we come can do."

Sébastien Loeb (Bahrain Raid Xtreme): "It was a clean stage, with no mistakes and no punctures. The start wasn't easy. We started in 12th position and there was a lot of dust. I quickly caught up with Terranova but I had no trouble overtaking him because he had a puncture. Then I got up to Peterhansel who was driving quite fast and I stayed behind him for a long time without being able to overtake him. I finally succeeded but he caught up with me in the dunes. Our third position tomorrow won't be bad, we'll have less dust. The two in front were very fast today and will certainly be again tomorrow. We'll try to do another good stage."

Eryk Goczal (Team BBR): "It is great to be back racing. Since the Dakar I haven't been able to do any races 'cos of school. Now I just did a couple days at university and came out here – fortunately they're supportive of my passion. It was a good result today but I think the guys fighting for the championship have a bit more pressure. Next year the plan is to do the whole championship in T3."

THE PROGRAMME*

- > October 15: Stage 2 - Zagora-Zagora (Liaison: 100 km / Special: 296 km / Total: 396 km)
- > October 16: Stage 3 - Zagora-Zagora (Liaison: 108 km / Special stage: 333 km / Total: 441 km)
- > October 17: Stage 4 - Zagora-Merzouga (Liaison: 78 km / Special stage: 343 km / Total: 421 km)
- > October 18: Stage 5 - Merzouga-Merzouga (Liaison: 3 km / Special stage: 152 km / Total: 155km)
- > 18 October evening: Rallye du Maroc and W2RC prize-giving ceremonies

*GMT +1

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