

Yanbu, January 18th 2024

BRABEC AND SAINZ SHOW WHO'S BOSS

FOCUS

The terrain proves decisive! With more than 4,700 kilometres of specials over two weeks of racing, it is still possible to predict where the victory will be won. The dunes of the Empty Quarter definitely played an important role, while the volcanic stones on the first stage also played a part. Indeed, we could list the damage recorded on each of the stages in one category or another. However, there was no escaping that the journey from AlUla to Yanbu was a significant step, the moment of truth for the pretenders to the crown. Over the 420 kilometres against the clock, the leaders were intent on holding strong and their pursuers were determined to attack. **Ricky Brabec** was equal to the task, still unshakeable despite **Ross Branch's** stage victory, and **Carlos Sainz** was able to take advantage of **Sébastien Loeb's** setbacks.

OUTLINE

Everything was still possible... but only relatively speaking in the bike category, in which the Monster Energy Honda Team had locked up the leader's position for **Ricky Brabec**. With the pact accepted by all the reds, there was still the issue of second place to be settled, a place accessible to **Adrien Van Beveren**, who is on top form, or also **Nacho Cornejo**, both of whom started the day less than 4 minutes behind **Ross Branch**. The Chilean's case was settled after 111 km, where he had to struggle with his bike to solve a fuel pump problem. In the meantime, the South African Hero rider, who was the fifth biker to start, took advantage to climb up the stage rankings and grab his second win of the week, while gaining a little on **Brabec**, skilfully protecting his second place in the general rankings. **Adrien Van Beveren** also kept hold of his third place, despite a major fright when an unexpected encounter with a herd of dromedaries ended with a heavy tumble. There were no more twists in the tale on two wheels, but the plot developments in the Ultimate class of the car category were even more spectacular, with the duel between **Sainz** and **Loeb** causing live tracking addicts to break out in cold sweats throughout the day. As **Loeb's** adventures unfolded (see A crushing blow), the race scenarios changed several times. The BRX driver was able to save his place on the podium but owes this chiefly to the first major setback experienced on the Dakar by **Lucas Moraes**. With a time loss of more than two hours, the Brazilian came down to earth with a bang, from 3rd place to 9th place in the race hierarchy, to be precise. On the contrary, **Guerlain Chicherit**, still demonstrating fine pace at the end of this edition of the Dakar, continued to climb up the rankings and has now reached 4th place thanks to a second consecutive stage success won as an opener. To climb onto the podium tomorrow, he will have to gain 7 minutes over 175 kilometres from **Sébastien Loeb**, while opening once again, which is far from a simple equation.

In the Challenger class, it is very unlikely that **Mitch Guthrie** will fall from the top of the category thanks to his 25-minute lead over **Cristina Gutiérrez**, but the couple formed by **Nicolás Cavigliasso** and **Valentina Pertegarini** will be looking for a hat-trick tomorrow after winning a second consecutive stage (See performance of the day). However, **Xavier de Soultrait** will have to keep a very close eye on his nearest pursuer in the SSV race hierarchy, namely **Jérôme de Sadeleer**, who is 2'49" behind the Frenchman. In the truck race, despite the 10th stage win of his career, **Aleš Loprais** has still not managed to bring the time between himself and **Martin Macík** to below two hours. The latter will have the honour of flying the Czech flag at the top of the final general rankings and proudly draping himself in its folds on the podium in Yanbu tomorrow evening.

PERFORMANCE OF THE DAY

To play a major role on the Dakar, **Nicolás Cavigliasso** would have had to have begun his demonstration a little earlier in the race, quite like he did when he made his debut in the quad category and finished 2nd on his first participation in 2018, before majestically winning the following year. Many observers remember the podium ceremony in Lima, when the Argentinean proposed to a young lady, **Valentina**, who insisted on keeping her maiden name of **Pertegarini**, is now sat in the co-pilot seat of the Challenger driven by Nicolás. This was already the case last year, but the two newcomers to the class suffered too many technical problems to reach the finish in the official rankings. However, this year they are setting the record straight with panache. Admittedly they are some way down the general rankings, but they have managed to win two times in a row, which is a first for a crew bound by the oath of marriage!

A CRUSHING BLOW

Sébastien Loeb has experienced sufficient joys and sorrows on the Dakar to fill an adventure novel. The French driver has enhanced his roll of honour with plenty of stage wins and has envisioned himself winning the race as many times as he has actually lost it. The tracks to Yanbu became another of his roads to ruin on which his chances of victory were crushed, the day after he amazingly breathed new life into his battle with **Carlos Sainz**. This morning, with 13 minutes to make up on risky terrain, **Loeb** had an opportunity to pressure his rival into a mistake. Despite the puncture problems he encountered on the first and tenth stage, the hunter did not hesitate in going on all-out attack to Hoover up the bunches of seconds he required. It was not the tyres that put paid to his hopes, however, but too brutal a landing after a jump, which broke his front-wheel axle unit after 132 km. Without any immediate solution, the man from Alsace seemed condemned to wait for his assistance team and lose a number of hours as a result. Providence arrived, nevertheless, in the form of the Hunter driven by Chinese driver **Yungang Zi**, who was kind enough to give up the part that allowed the former WRC champion to try and keep his place on the podium. To do so, he had to reach the finishing line without delay and avoid punctures. In the end, **Loeb** stopped three times and completed the stage with his wheels in a terrible state, but did enough to save his third place, leaving him 7 minutes ahead of **Guerlain Chicherit**.

STAT OF THE DAY

36. After 4260 kilometres against the clock for the bikers, general rankings leader **Ricky Brabec** is now the rider who has spent the most time opening the way, either alone or accompanied. The American has spent 1530 kilometres physically out in front, which amounts to 36% of the timed sections, followed by **Nacho Cornejo**, with 1435 kilometres (34%) and **Adrien Van Beveren**, with 1137 kilometres (27%). It is the same Honda trio, but this time in a different order, for the amount of kilometres spent alone opening the way. For this exercise, **Van Beveren** has spent the most time in front alone, with 619 kilometres, ahead of **Brabec** (526 km) and **Cornejo** (398 km). The HRC bikers have literally been the leading men when it comes to opening on this edition of the Dakar. By way of comparison, **Ross Branch** has opened for 284 kilometres (7%) and only 41 kilometres alone, which is 15 times less than his rival for second place, **Van Beveren**, or 13 times less than **Brabec**.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Ross Branch: "Ricky is riding an amazing race".

Ross Branch won his 2nd stage of the year after his victory on stage 1. He has finished ahead of Brabec and Van Beveren, the other two strong men of this year's race, but was unable to make any significant inroads on Brabec, while staying clear of Van Beveren. *"It was way better than last year's same stage. I enjoyed it, it was good fun. For sure, it was a tough stage and really, really rocky all the time, but I enjoyed it and tried to put the hammer down. I think I've left it a little bit too late. Ricky is riding an amazing race and he deserves to be where he is. We've just got to keep on fighting and see what we can do for tomorrow, for the last day. I definitely lost time in the camel grass. I've got a bit of work to do*

in the camel grass and the off-piste stuff. I'm just not confident and fast enough there. I know where I've lost it and it gives me motivation to go home and I'll have another year to work on it. First thing on the list is going to find some camel grass and doing some training there. It's always good knowing you've got somebody behind you with the same bike, if there's something that you need then they're there quickly, but I don't think it changed the race, I don't think it changed the strategy. We just gave it our best all day, every day and I'm proud of the team, they've worked so hard. Just to finish is going to be a big bonus for us. If we can get on that podium that will be really cool for all of us. They've worked really hard and I take my hat off to them, with the endless hours they've done. I've also worked hard and to everybody back home, for all the support, it's been incredible. There's one more day to go, 180 km of the Dakar 2024, so let's enjoy it. I'm not too sure of the times, I'm not too sure of what happened to Nacho. You know, we don't get on the bike to finish second. So, we'll give it our all and hope for the best".

THE MAKINGS OF CLASSIC

Lorenzo Traglio and his Nissan Pathfinder, decked out in Tecnosport colours, perhaps pulled off a masterstroke today. With 797 points to **Carlos Santaolalla** Milla's 791 this morning, the Italian managed to draw close up to the strong man of the first week. This evening, on the shores of the Red Sea, a single point separates the two crews, for whom the last stage tomorrow will be nothing like a mere parade on the shores of Lac Rose, like when the race was contested in Africa. At the time, there was a saying that the Dakar was never won before reaching Dakar. Tomorrow, to pay the tribute he dreams of paying to his father **Maurizio**, head of Tecnosport in the 1990s, **Lorenzo** will have to get hold of more than one point before reaching Yanbu.

WORLD RALLY-RAID CHAMPIONSHIP

Brabec and Honda aim for the top

Ricky Brabec and Honda can take the upper hand in the FIM rankings tomorrow. On the W2RC, the American was already runner-up in 2022, before 9th place last season. For **Ross Branch**, who is aiming for 2nd place in the general rankings tomorrow, it will be an unprecedented position, after 4th in 2023 following 13th in 2022. However, for **Adrien Van Beveren**, the 3rd place which seems to be promised to him is exactly the same position that the Frenchman picked up on the last two seasons. As it stands, Honda will take the lead in the constructors' championship, thanks to the combined performances of **Brabec** and **Van Beveren**, which will give the brand 62 points. The sole rider left competing for Hero MotoSports will put the Indian brand in second place with 30 points.

[Access to the media area](#) / Photos for an editorial use only.

More information: www.dakar.com

PRESS CONTACT: pressedakar@aso.fr