

Al Dhannah, February 27th 2024

2024 FIA-FIM WORLD RALLY-RAID CHAMPIONSHIP
Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge 2024
AL ATTIYAH ON THE DOUBLE, BRANCH IN TROUBLE

Key points

- **Stage 1 of the 33rd edition of the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge was a roller coaster ride for the favourites in each category, mirroring the dunes of the day.**
- **The motorbike race saw Ross Branch (Hero MotoSports) lose nearly half an hour due to a mechanical. Michael Docherty (SRG Motorsports) bagged the stage ahead of fellow South African Aaron Mare (Hero MotoSports).**
- **Abdulaziz Ahli trounced the competition in the quad special and already has more than an hour in hand over Kamil Wiśniewski (Orlen) and nearly twice as much over Hani Alnoumesi.**
- **Nasser Al Attiyah (Nasser Racing by Prodrive) picked up his second win in a row in the car competition. Guillaume de Mevius and Juan Cruz Yacopini (Overdrive Racing) put their Hiluxes right behind the world champion. Their brother in arms, Guerlain Chicherit, conceded almost 20 minutes after leading the stage.**
- **The Can-Am Factory Team scored a clean sweep of the Challenger and SSV classes, with Austin Jones and Rokas Baciūška topping the leader board among the lightweight prototypes and João Ferreira prevailing in the SSV race.**

FIM: TWO SPRINGBOKS IN THE LAND OF THE ORYX

Ross Branch had a nerve-fraying experience today, but the consummate airline pilot scrupulously followed the emergency checklist to get out of a tight spot and keep his Hero in one piece. No-one was able to match his pace in the first part of the special, but strange noises coming from his engine forced the Botswanan to ease up before the halfway point. In the end, he limped across the finish line with a deficit of more than 28 minutes to the stage winner. Once in the bivouac, Hero decided to change his engine despite knowing that it would add a 15-minute penalty to his woes. The Dakar runner-up can still recover from this, but he has no more room for error in the fight for the title. **Michael Docherty** pounced on the opportunity to seize the stage and the overall lead after stage 1, echoing his last appearance in the ADDC, back in 2022. Aaron Mare finished a shade under 3 minutes behind his compatriot to cap a South African one-two. The junior driver **Konrad Dąbrowski** (Duust Rally) dropped almost 8 minutes to the leader, one less than **Tobias Ebster** (SRG Motorsports). **Jean-Loup Lèpan** (Duust Rally) is now a tad over 15 minutes from the leader after a tentative start. **Ross Branch** is sixth overall at 28'18".

The three-time champion and current title holder, **Abdulaziz Ahli**, turned the tables on the Pole **Kamil Wiśniewski** in the quad race. The local hero put 1 h 09 into the winner of the prologue and 1 h 55 into his Saudi neighbour **Hani Alnoumesi**.

FIA: AL ATTIYAH SOARS AS CHICHERIT SINKS

Nasser Al Attiyah was not looking great for the stage win after he got stuck at the top of a dune near the start of the special. Meanwhile, **Guerlain Chicherit** took control of the race, surfing the dunes with the same grace he used to display on the snow during his previous life as a world champion in freeriding (2000, 2002, 2006 and 2007). However, the boot was on the other foot by the end of the special. **Nasser** went "**Al Attack**" and rocketed up the standings in one of his classic surges. He even blasted past **Chicherit**, who lost focus in the seemingly never-ending dune fields and got stuck at the top of a dune. **Al Attiyah** crossed the finish line with more than 3 minutes in hand over **Guillaume de Mevius**, who repeated his performance in the prologue as the runner-up to the Qatari. **Juan Cruz Yacopini**, the thirtieth driver out of the gates this morning, came in third, a shade over 5 minutes down on the winner. Third was also his overall place in last year's ADDC, his first podium finish in a W2RC event. **Lucas Moraes** (Toyota Gazoo Racing) is now fourth at 6'32", **Martin Prokop** (Orlen Jipocar) fifth at 9'25" and **Denis Krotov** (Overdrive Racing) sixth at 9'25". The 2023 ADDC

champion, **Yazeed Al Rajhi** (Overdrive Racing), is struggling a fair bit more than **Al Attiyah**. The Saudi is sixth at 10'03". **Chicherit** finished sixteenth at 19'57".

The Can-Am Factory Team made short work of its rivals in Challenger and SSV. **Austin Jones** and **Rokas Baciūška** secured a one-two in the lightweight prototype class, with a gap of 2'44" between the two men. **Nicolás Cavigliasso** (Taurus Factory Wevers) was the third W2RC entrant, 4'55" behind the American. **João Ferreira** was head and shoulders above the rest in the SSV class. His W2RC rivals **Yasir Seidan** (MMP) and **Sebastián Guayasamín** (FN Speed) could only watch from afar at 6'23" and 10'14" down, respectively.

FIA start list stage 2 [here](#).

FIM start list stage 2 [here](#).

Next up

28 February: Stage 2: ADNOC Distribution (total: 327 km / special: 239 km)

29 February: Stage 3: Abu Dhabi Sports Council (total: 414 km / special: 251 km)

1 March: Stage 4: Al Futtaim-Toyota (total: 345 km / special: 231 km)

2 March: Stage 5: Abu Dhabi Aviation (total: 423 km / special: 205 km)

More information www.worldrallyraidchampionship.com/en/

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