

Abu Dhabi, February 25th 2024

2024 Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge
FIA-FIM WORLD RALLY-RAID CHAMPIONSHIP
DO THE (RE-)SHUFFLE!

Key points:

- *Scrutineering for the 33rd edition of the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge (ADDC), the second round of the season, is done and dusted. 91 vehicles have been cleared to start the prologue tomorrow. There are 41 W2RC entrants, consisting of 28 Ultimate, Challenger and SSV crews in the FIA classes and 13 motorbike and quad riders in the FIM ones.*
- *In the FIA Ultimate race, Nasser Al Attiyah (Nasser Racing by Prodrive) is teaming up with Édouard Boulanger for the first time, racing for a revamped team behind the wheel of an overhauled Hunter. Both the Qatari and Yazeed Al Rajhi (Overdrive Racing) hope to finish a round for the first time this season.*
- *Rokas Baciūška and Austin Jones (Can-Am Factory), now in the FIA Challenger class, managed to crack the top 10 last year. Yasir Seaidan (MMP) and João Ferreira (Can-Am Factory), racing in SSV, have a legitimate shot at repeating their exploit this season.*
- *In the FIM competition, Ross Branch (Hero MotoSports) is tackling his first rally as the man to beat. He will face his newly recruited teammate Aaron Mare, the SRG Motorsports duo of Michael Docherty and Tobias Ebster, and Duust Rally's Jean-Loup Lèpan and Konrad Dąbrowski.*
- *Tomorrow, the ADDC caravan will roll out of the capital, Abu Dhabi, and head to the scene of the prologue in Al Dhannah.*

FIA: A FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING

The season 3 favourites have shaken up their strategies in the weeks since the Dakar wound to a close. Photographers jostled to take a snapshot of the duo of the moment as the 15 Ultimate crews went through scrutineering in the Energy Center. **Nasser Al Attiyah** and **Édouard Boulanger** have sealed the deal in Abu Dhabi! After a disappointing performance that ended in a premature exit from the Dakar, Al Attiyah hopes to reverse his fortune in the rest of the season, racing for a revamped team, behind the wheel of an overhauled Hunter and with **Peterhansel's** former navigator in the right seat (see quote).

Yazeed Al Rajhi, on the other hand, is still driving a Hilux Overdrive Racing with **Timo Gottschalk** as his right-hand man, but the 2023 ADDC champion also has a hearty serving of novelty on his plate (see quote). As it is, the Saudi started the season in a Hilux T1+ Evo, a new and upgraded version of his Toyota that is wider and has increased suspension travel. The Japanese pick-up truck's new rear shock absorbers have yet to prove their worth. The other Toyota Gazoo Racing drivers and **Guerlain Chicherit** are in the same boat.

In fact, the French stuntman, paired with **Guillaume de Mevius** this season, has taken uncertainty to a whole new level by testing and developing new tyres. The Hiluxes nos. 201 and 202 went through technical scrutineering in Nation Towers equipped with Toyo Open Country tyres. **Chicherit** has known these tyres since his buggy driver career, and they could deliver a substantial traction boost on dunes if the carcass of the American tyres is more amenable to crushing under deflation than that of the newly reinforced BF Goodrich KDR3 tyres used by their rivals. On dunes, the greater the surface in contact with the ground, the greater the load-bearing capacity of the vehicle and the less it sinks into the sand. **De Mevius**, second overall in the W2RC ranking ahead of **Chicherit**, is also set to tackle his first ADDC in the Ultimate class following his experiences in a lightweight prototype in 2021 and 2022 (see quote).

Rokas Baciūška and **Austin Jones** are among the 5 lightweight prototype drivers on the Challenger start list. The two Can-Am Factory drivers cracked the top 10 last year, with the Lithuanian finishing seventh overall in an SSV, followed by the American in a T3.

Sara Price has been unable to make it, leaving **Yasir Seaidan** and **João Ferreira** as the front-runners among the 8 drivers on the SSV start list.

Nasser Al Attiyah: "After the Dakar, I got the team to change 25% of the parts of the vehicle and make them sturdier. They rebuilt the car from the ground up. It's all new for Abu Dhabi. I also got them to hire a new engineer, Daniel Gratacós, from Audi. Yesterday, we drove for 60 kilometres with Édouard for the first time. I was surprised by his performance and the way he thinks. I don't feel like I need to find my bearings again. It was my choice too. We were lucky to be able to put all the pieces of the puzzle together in no time, I'm happy."

Yazeed Al Rajhi: "Our goal here is to attack and win. The ADDC isn't an easy challenge, so we need to be smart and have a clean race to score as many points as possible. But we also need to be careful with compression because our car has still got a rear suspension issue that needs to be fixed. We've got our work cut out for us. The team needs to iron out the kinks of this Evo upgrade."

Guillaume de Mevius: "What we did in the Dakar was incredible, but I know I'm still a fledgling in this discipline. We need to be realistic and build up our championship bid. We could even be in the mix for the title because we have quite a big points haul. But I don't want to put pressure on myself. This is my first year in Ultimate, so I don't need to prove that I can win races, but rather that I can go the distance. This is my goal and my strategy."

FIM: BRANCH THE ODDS-ON FAVOURITE

Ross Branch walked into the Energy Center as the second rider in the W2RC overall ranking. The highest-ranked entrant has his sights set on his maiden win in a W2RC round (see quote). The Botswanan will be racing alongside **Aaron Mare**, brought in at a moment's notice to replace **Sebastian Bühler**, who is still recovering from his crash in the Dakar. **Michael Docherty** (SRG Motorsports), second overall in the 2021 ADDC and leader in stage 1 of the 2022 edition before crashing out of the race, has always been in his element here, but the Emirate-based South African still crashes out of races way too often, a bad habit he hopes to break. **Tobias Ebster**, who clinched the ADDC Rally 2 title last year, struck gold in the Dakar by winning the classification for riders racing without support and is now chasing loftier goals (see quote). **Jean-Loup Lèpan**, the runner-up in the Rally 2 race in last year's ADDC and third in the 2023 W2RC in his class, also feels at home in the dunes after clocking up training miles in the neighbouring Emirate of Dubai together with his teammate **Konrad Dąbrowski**.

In the end, there will be three W2RC entrants in the quad race: the three-time title holder, **Abdulaziz Ahli**, the Saudi **Hani Alnoumesi** and the Pole **Kamil Wiśniewski**, who is returning to the rally after finishing fourth in 2015 and second in 2017.

Ross Branch: "Vying for victory in the Dakar, a goal I'd been chasing for such a long time, came as a huge relief. Now, there are a few sticking points I need to improve to do even better. I'm taking it one race at a time. The guys are really fast here, anything can happen in the dunes and it's a tough race from A to Z. I need to keep my feet firmly on the ground to make it to the finish and score as many championship points as possible, but I'm going to give it my best shot."

Tobias Ebster: "I think I achieved more than I was hoping to in just one year, taking the Road to Dakar and the Rally 2 race in last season's ADDC before going on to win the Dakar category for riders without support, finishing as top rookie and cracking the top 20. I'm stoked to be back here and try to move up the overall. I'm here with SRG Motorsports, like last year, so I'll be able to take things differently, without having to worry about working on my bike every evening, although my scaphoid still hurts a bit. But hey, I'm here and ecstatic to keep trying to improve stage after stage."

PROGRAMME :

- 26 February: Prologue - ADNOC Oasis (Total: 19 km / Special: 5 km)
- 27 February: Stage 1 - Ruler's Representative Court in Al Dhafrah Region (Total: 374 km / Special: 248 km)
- 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)

List of FIM competitors authorised to start [here](#)

List of FIA crews authorised to start [here](#)

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