

Paris, February 20th 2024

2024 FIA-FIM WORLD RALLY-RAID CHAMPIONSHIP PAYBACK TIME

Key points:

- **5 days to go until the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge (ADDC), the second round of the 2024 W2RC season, running from 25 February to 2 March.**
- **Nasser Al Attiyah (Nasser Racing by Prodrive) and Yazeed Al Rajhi (Overdrive Racing) failed to finish the Dakar car race, but the reigning world champion and his runner-up did manage to score a few championship points. Al Attiyah will be racing with Édouard Boulanger in the right seat for the first time.**
- **Carlos Sainz (Audi Sport) leads Guillaume de Mevius and Guerlain Chicherit (Toyota Overdrive Racing) in the FIA ranking.**
- **Four of the top 5 overall crews in the Challenger and SSV classes are on the start list.**
- **In the Rally GP motorbike competition, Ross Branch (Hero MotoSports), who vied with Ricky Brabec (Monster Energy Honda) for the Dakar title, has his sights set on the championship lead.**
- **Ricky Brabec leads the FIM ranking ahead of Ross Branch and fellow Honda rider Adrien Van Beveren.**
- **The 2023 ADDC champion, Tobias Ebster, and his runner-up, Jean-Loup Lèpan, are the favourites going into the Rally 2 motorbike race. In the quad competition, the three-time reigning champion Abdulaziz Ahli is back on home soil.**
- **39 out of the hundred or so vehicles on the start line are W2RC entrants: 29 FIA cars — 15 Ultimate, 5 Challenger and 9 SSVs— and 10 FIA motorbikes and quads.**

FIA: AL ATTIYAH AND AL RAJHI UP FOR A REMATCH

The men who shut out the rest of the field in the 2023 season, **Al Attiyah** (3 victories) and **Al Rajhi** (2 victories), flunked their first test in the Dakar. The Saudi did a barrel roll in the Empty Quarter and was unable to start the following stage due to a damaged roll cage, although he did take his car to the *parc fermé* in Yanbu for the finale. Meanwhile, the Qatari succumbed to a mechanical a couple of days later, after stage 8. In accordance with the new regulations that came into force for 2024, their point hauls for finishing in the top 5 of stages were not wiped out. This change could not have come at a better time for the 2023 W2RC no. 1 and no. 2! **Al Attiyah** sits eighth overall with 18 points to his name, while **Al Rajhi** lies in twelfth place with 14, limiting the damage and fanning their hopes of clawing back into contention in the ADDC. It will be a full-blown rematch between the titans of the previous season.

It is also a new beginning for the two-time world champion. **Nasser Al Attiyah**, who had been racing with **Mathieu Baumel** as his right-hand man since 2014, will tackle his first outing with **Édouard Boulanger**, who used to navigate for **Stéphane Peterhansel**. The Qatari will not be the lone Hunter driver, as the **Baumgart Bros.** (X Rally Team Motorsports) will also be racing with Prodrive support, fighting at his side for the manufacturers' title.

Behind the overall leader, **Carlos Sainz** (76 points), two men hit the ground running in the inaugural round of the 2024 season: **Guillaume de Mevius** (58 points) and **Guerlain Chicherit** (56 points). Driving their Hiluxes adorned with references to the American TV show *The Fall Guy*, the Belgian and the Frenchman are second and third. The two brothers in arms will be looking to bolster their ranks and settle the score anew. By finishing the Dakar ahead of the two new Toyota Gazoo Racing (TGR) factory drivers, **Lucas Moraes** and **Seth Quintero**, whose seats they aspired to for this season, they proved that they had what it takes. **Moraes** (fourth with 40 points) and **Quintero** (nineteenth with 5 points) will be there too, again with TGR South Africa's whiz kid **Saood Variawa** (eleventh with 14 points) at their sides. **Juan Cruz Yacopini** (Overdrive Racing), third in the 2023 W2RC, clinched the first championship podium finish of his career in last year's ADDC. The Argentinian lies in fifteenth place with 11 points in the bag. **Denis Krotov** is behind the wheel of the fourth

highest-ranked Toyota, seventh overall with 27 points. A total of nine Hiluxes will fly the flag for Toyota, with **Lionel Baud** bringing up the rear.

Martin Prokop, sixth overall with 27 points, is again lining up with "Shrek", his trusty Ford Raptor (Orlen Benzina). The Czech came in second in the last two editions of the ADDC, right behind **Peterhansel** in 2022 and **Al Rajhi** last season. **Pau Navarro** will fight his corner for X-raid Mini JCW. Finally, **Aliyyah Koloc** (Buggyra ZM Racing) is entering the rally in her Red-Lined.

There are five lightweight prototypes on the Challenger start list, including drivers of the calibre of **Rokas Baciūška** (Can-Am Factory), second in the ranking with 68 points; **Marcelo Gastaldi** (BBR), third with 52; **Nicolás Cavigliasso** (Taurus Factory-Wevers), fourth with 50; **Austin Jones** (Can-Am Factory), fifth with 48; and **Dania Akeel** (Taurus Factory-Wevers), seventh with 22.

The top 3 of the SSV ranking have put their names down for the race. **Yasir Seidan** (Race World) has 91 points on his account, **Sara Price** (South Racing Can-Am) 74 and **João Ferreira** (Can-Am Factory) 73. **Sebastián Guayasamín** (FN Speed) is fifth, ahead of **Enrico Gaspari** (TH-Trucks) and **Ricardo Ramilo**. The regulars **Rebecca Busi** (OnlyFans Racing), **Antonio Cinotto** and **Claude Fournier** round out the field.

FIM: BRANCH CLEARED FOR TAKE-OFF

The Hero MotoSports works team has picked two of its Rally GP riders to defend the Indian maker's interests in the ADDC. **Sebastian Bühler**, who got injured last season while building up to the Emirati race and hurt his vertebrae last January, will be looking to get his own back in his return to competition after bowing out of the Dakar. Hero MotoSports are pinning their championship hopes on **Ross Branch**, the only rider who went the distance with **Ricky Brabec** in the Dakar. Second in the first round and, therefore, in the championship, the Botswanan has 30 points to the Honda rider's 38. The airline captain also came in fifth in last year's ADDC. **Branch** is the odds-on favourite and has a clear shot at turning the tables and seizing the championship lead after the second round.

Michael Docherty (SRG Motorsports) is a force to be reckoned with in the Rally 2 competition. He is lightning-fast on the dunes of the Emirates, his adoptive home. The South African won in his category in 2021 and went toe to toe with the pros in 2022, vaulting to the top of the standings after stage 1... only to crash out of the race the next day. The Saffa seems to have picked up a bad habit, as he also had to quit the Dakar in stage 2 last January. He will also be looking to turn his luck around in the ADDC. There are two main threats on his radar. One is his own teammate **Tobias Ebster**, who clinched the ADDC Rally 2 title last year. **Heinz Kinigadner's** nephew, who won the *malles moto* category and finished in the top 20 overall in the Dakar, has signed up for the entire championship in his bid to catch the eye of a factory team. The other one is **Jean-Loup Lèpan** (Duust Rally), who came in second in the ADDC Rally 2 race last season and went on to finish third in the championship. The Frenchman will again share his stable with **Konrad Dąbrowski**, another common sight on the Emirati dunes. **Jan Brabec** (Strojrent Racing) and **Jiri Broz** (SRG Motorsports) are the other championship entrants on the start list for this category.

Finally, the quad race is **Abdulaziz Ahli's** to lose. The three-time title holder scored a clean sweep in the ADDC last season. The Saudi **Hani Alnoumesi**, 7th in the last Dakar, will try to defy the odds.

Next up

- > **25 February**: administrative scrutineering, press conference, general briefing (Energy Center) and technical scrutineering (Nation Towers) in Abu Dhabi.
- > **26 February and 2 March**: prologue and five stages. The route starts and finishes in Abu Dhabi and will feature two bivouacs, one of which is brand new.

More information www.worldrallyraidchampionship.com/en/

List of FIM entries [HERE](#); FIA entries [HERE](#)

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