

Grândola, 6 April 2024

2024 BP Ultimate Rally-Raid Portugal FIA-FIM WORLD RALLY-RAID CHAMPIONSHIPS

SCHAREINA AND AL ATTIYAH PLAY IT SAFE

Key points:

- Stage 4 of the BP Ultimate Rally-Raid Portugal brought the field from the Spanish city of Badajoz back to the main Portuguese bivouac in Grândola. Massive crowds will watch on as the next stage brings down the curtain on the rally on Sunday.
- Monster Energy Honda again locked out the podium among the W2RC entrants in the Rally GP class. Adrien Van Beveren beat Skyler Howes and Tosha Schareina to grab his first stage win of the week. The Spaniard defended his overall lead.
- Bradley Cox (BAS World KTM Racing) scooped up his third stage win on the bounce among the W2RC entrants in the Rally 2 race and built up his overall lead over his teammate Mathieu Dovèze and Romain Dumontier (Dumontier Racing). Gonçalo Amaral edged out his brother Salvador to clinch the Rally 3 special and keep the overall lead.
- In the quad race, mechanical disaster struck Manuel Andújar, clearing the way for Kamil Wiśniewski to win the stage. The Pole now leads CFMoto's Antanas Kanopkinas and Gaëtan Martinez in the ranking.
- Toyota again swept the podium in the Ultimate class. Yazeed Al Rajhi (Overdrive Racing) nabbed his first stage ahead of Seth Quintero (Toyota Gazoo Racing) and Guillaume de Mévius (Overdrive Racing). Nasser Al Attiyah (Nasser Racing by Prodrive) conceded some time to João Ferreira and Carlos Sainz (Mini JCW) but still leads the rally by 2'41" over the Portuguese driver with one stage to go.
- Austin Jones (Can-Am Factory) opened his account in the Challenger W2RC ranking, followed by his teammate Rokas Baciuška, who remains ensconced in the lead. Ricardo Ramilo (Ramilo Scuderia) won the SSV special and added to his lead over Rebecca Busi (OnlyFans Racing).

"SURVIVAL MODE"

Once at the bivouac, the entire field was in agreement: the name of the game today was keeping the rear tyre safe to survive extreme wear in the second half of the special and make it to the finish. The overall leader, **Tosha Schareina**, dubbed it "survival mode". The Spaniard set the pace on home turf for a good chunk of the day before dialling it back on the throttle. Better to play it safe and keep the top spot than to risk it all on a blunder. As a result, he handed today's W2RC win to his teammate **Adrien Van Beveren**, who had the edge in the final sprint. The Frenchman clinched his first win of the week, leading home his teammates **Skyler Howes** by 2'05" and **Schareina** by 2'20". Even so, it was a good day for the Spaniard, who put another 49 seconds into his closest pursuer, **Sebastian Bühler** (Hero MotoSports). The German is now 4'33" behind **Schareina**, who has almost got the title in the bag. **Van Beveren** is still fourth, but now just 1'29" behind **Howes** and with a legitimate shot at the podium. **VBA** matched the record for the most FIM specials won in W2RC (12) today, tying with **Luciano Benavides**. The championship leader, **Ross Branch** (Hero MotoSports), is still fifth, trailing by 18'53", doing damage control on the Portuguese terrain, better suited to his rivals.

Bradley Cox dominated the Rally 2 stage from A to Z among the W2RC entrants, bagging his fourth win of the week and third on the bounce. He got the better of the Frenchmen **Romain Dumontier** at 5'17", **Mathieu Dovèze** at 5'37" and **Jean-Loup Lepan** (Duust Rally) at 7'15". The South African further solidified his grip on the overall, now with 5'14" in hand over Dovèze and 6'03" to spare over **Dumontier**. The two Frenchmen are neck and neck, with only 49 seconds separating them in the tussle for the runner-up's spot. **Lepan** leapfrogged his teammate **Konrad Dąbrowski** to snatch fourth, a move that plays into his championship aspirations. If the pecking order holds firm tomorrow, the man from Picardy will depart Portugal with a margin of 2 points over **Cox** and 3 over "**Dudu**".

No gifts between the **Amaral** Bros in Rally 3! After being upstaged by **Salvador** yesterday, **Gonçalo** bounced back today, echoing his earlier successes in the prologue and the first two stages. The duo kept

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fans on the edge of their seats, swapping the lead twice during the stage. **Gonçalo** sealed the deal by 43 seconds and beefed up his overall lead to 10'48". Third on the day, **John Medina** (Xraids Experience) stepped onto the provisional podium, pushing **Pedro Bianchi Prata** down to fourth. 5'07" separate the Chilean and the Portuguese.

Rally raids are a bit like the wheel of fortune, and the quad special stage drove that home for anyone thinking Manuel Andújar had it in the bag. The Argentinian had been untouchable, bagging every stage and leading the charge at every time check since day one. However, a rear-end glitch forced him to pull over and play mechanic at km 198 today. Once back in action, the championship leader brought down the hammer to recoup lost ground... but he came a cropper. He lost a staggering 38 minutes to Kamil Wiśniewski, who claimed the W2RC stage and vaulted into the overall lead. The Pole has got a target on his back, though, with CFMoto's Gaëtan Martinez and Antanas Kanopkinas hot on his heels at 2'28". Now 16'10" back, it looks like Andújar will have to settle for fourth place.

AL ATTIYAH UNFAZED BY FERREIRA

Nasser AI Attiyah, the first man on the road by virtue of his victory yesterday, was a bit extra cautious today. Three Toyota drivers traded blows at the top of each intermediate time check. The duel between Yazeed AI Rajhi —who did a barrel roll yesterday— and Guillaume de Mévius lit up the entire stage. Both the Saudi and the Belgian had seen their podium prospects wrecked by mechanical troubles at the beginning of the rally, so they were both chasing the championship points awarded to the five fastest drivers in each stage in a bid to salvage something and stay close to their rivals. AI Rajhi came out on top, with Seth Quintero (+ 25") pipping De Mévius (+ 36") at the post. Carlos Sainz (+ 1'54") and João Ferreira (+ 2'47") drove their Minis into the top 5 of the stage. AI Attiyah came in seventh, dropping 1'58" to his title rival Ferreira. The Qatari has a 2'41" buffer going into the finale, relatively short at about 100 km. The back-to-back reigning world champion is eyeing his second championship round in a row, after his triumph in the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge last month. Carlos Sainz is third overall at 3'40", but Lucas Moraes (Toyota Gazoo Racing), just 8 seconds behind him, looms ominously in his rear-view mirror! Every point will count tomorrow evening, as AI Attiyah and Sainz are just 5 points apart in the championship at the moment.

Among the W2RC entrants in the Challenger class, **Austin Jones** outgunned his teammate **Rokas Baciuška** by 1'01" and **Nicolás Cavigliasso** (Taurus Factory by Wevers) by 2'34". The Lithuanian brought his overall lead to 10'16" over **Ricardo Porém** and 11'36" over **Nicolás Cavigliasso**. **Baciuška** already won the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge and looks set to beef up his lead in the championship, where he has topped the leader board since last month. After two back-to-back wins in the SSV category, his dream of scoring a hat-trick in the same season he was promoted to Challenger is starting to take shape.

Among the W2RC entrants in SSV, the championship leader, **Yasir Seaidan** (MMP), failed to complete the special for the second consecutive day. As a result, the Saudi is out of the race, spelling the end of a victorious W2RC streak that began in the Dakar. **Ricardo Ramilo** claimed the stage and is now perched at the top of the ranking with about 45 minutes in hand over **Rebecca Busi**.

Programme

7 April: Stage 5: Grândola–Grândola (total: 147 km / SS: 105 km)

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Official BP Ultimate Rally-Raid Portugal website here

PRESS CONTACTS

FIA press@fia.com

FIM
Isabelle Larivière
isabelle.lariviere@fim.ch

W2RC w2rc@aso.fr