

La Rioja, 6 June 2024

# 2024 DESAFÍO RUTA 40 YPF INFINIA FIA-FIM WORLD RALLY-RAID CHAMPIONSHIPS TRADING SECONDS ALL THE WAY TO CÓRDOBA

## Key points:

- Stage 4 of the 12<sup>th</sup> edition of the Desafío Ruta 40 YPF INFINIA, stretching from San Juan to La Rioja, brought the W2RC caravan to the bivouac at Súper Domo, which hosted the start in 2023.
- Among the Rally GP riders, the Monster Energy Honda brothers in arms Ricky Brabec and Tosha Schareina clashed once again, with the title holder in Argentina prevailing by 7 seconds. Overall, the American remains 1'27" clear of the Spaniard.
- Romain Dumontier (Team Honda) claimed his third consecutive Rally 2 stage win ahead of Bradley Cox (BAS World KTM Racing) and bolstered his lead over the reigning champion. In Rally 3, Fernando Hernández (MED Racing) crashed out, handing the lead to John Medina (Xraids Experience). Manuel Andújar remains unbeaten in guads and firmly in control overall.
- Nasser Al Attiyah (Nasser Racing by Prodrive) secured his second victory, after the prologue.
   Once at the bivouac, he was handed down a penalty for breaching the regulations in the previous stage. Yazeed Al Rajhi (Overdrive Racing) maintained his overall lead by 13 seconds.
   The outcome of this epic duel between the world nos. 1 and 2 is up in the air.
- Rokas Baciuška extended his undefeated streak among the W2RC entrants in the Challenger class. The Can-Am Factory driver holds a 9-minute overall lead over Nicolás Cavigliasso (Taurus Factory by Wevers). In SSV, Ricardo Ramilo (Ramilo Scuderia) won for the third time. The Spaniard leads Rebecca Busi (OnlyFans Racing) overall after Enrico Gaspari (TH-Trucks) ran into mechanical trouble.
- Tomorrow's stage 5 between La Rioja and Córdoba will span 519 km, including 218 km against the clock.

## FIM: SCHAREINA NOT GOING DOWN WITHOUT A FIGHT

Ricky Brabec and Tosha Schareina have been locked in a battle of seconds since the start of the rally! On Sunday, the Spaniard won the prologue by 2 seconds over the American, who hit back the very next day, taking stage 1 by just under a second. That was also the gap separating them today at the km 370 time check, the last before the finish. The rider from Valencia eventually won by 7 seconds over the Californian, who retained the overall rally lead. Brabec will start the final special with an advantage of 1'27" over Schareina and 4'28"over Adrien Van Beveren, third on the day and overall. Their teammate Skyler Howes remains fourth at 9'01", with Ross Branch fifth as the top non-Honda rider astride his Hero. The Botswanan is 12'26" back and will keep his Rally GP championship lead tomorrow if he stays in this position. Even so, his margin would shrink to only 9 points on Brabec and 16 on VBA. High-octane drama!

Unbeaten for three days in Rally 2, **Romain Dumontier** drove the nail home by prevailing in La Rioja and doubling his advantage over **Bradley Cox**, now 7 minutes adrift. **Jiří Brož** (BAS World KTM Racing), third, can almost touch the first W2RC podium of his career.

The Rally 3 race saw a change of leader after **Fernando Hernández** crashed out of the rally. The Chilean **John Medina** took over and is charging towards a victory that would also hand him the championship lead. The Argentinian **Eduardo Alan** inherited the runner-up's spot.

**Manuel Andújar** remained in a league of his own in the quad race, scooping up yet another victory and increasing his lead over **Kamil Wiśniewski** (Orlen Team) to 1 h 42'40". The Bolivian **Suany Martinez** shored up her third place, 28 seconds ahead of her father, **Leonardo**.



#### FIA: AL ATTIYAH AND AL RAJHI GO DOWN TO THE WIRE

Trailing Yazeed Al Rajhi by 2'21" in the overall standings this morning, Nasser Al Attiyah pulled out all the stops in the stage that everyone knew would be decisive before tomorrow's traditionally shorter return to Córdoba. By the end of the special, the Hunter factory driver had done more than just make up his deficit, as the Qatari put 3'08" into his rival in the Hilux, building up a 47-second lead in the overall on the eve of the finish. However, his advantage turned into a deficit at the bivouac after the Qatari collected a penalty for failing to secure his crew safety equipment in accordance with the regulations. As a result, Al Rajhi held on to his lead by 13 seconds over the reigning champion. Al Attiyah faces the unenviable task of opening the road tomorrow ahead of the Saudi, who will be gunning for his first win of the season after taking second at the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge and fifth at the BP Ultimate Rally-Raid Portugal. Lucas Moraes (Toyota Gazoo Racing), third overall this morning, stopped at km 81 with a mechanical issue and dropped over an hour. Sebastián Halpern (X-Raid Mini JCW) pounced on the opening to claim third on the day in Ultimate and move up to that same position overall. The Argentinian has nearly 16 minutes in hand over his closest rival, Denis Krotov (Overdrive Racing), and ought to finish on the podium of his national race.

In Challenger, **Rokas Baciuška** prevailed over his main championship rival, with Nicolás Cavigliasso 3'28" adrift of the Lithuanian. **Dania Akeel** placed her Taurus BBR third on the day, 5'21" back. Overall, the Can-Am Factory driver extended his lead to 9'23" over the Argentinian, while the Saudi made a great move by overhauling her Brazilian teammate **Marcelo Gastaldi** for third, although by only 45 seconds. Tomorrow will see the decisive fight for the final podium spot between the French squad's drivers.

In SSV, Ricardo Ramilo saw his main threat for the win evaporate when Enrico Gaspari (TH-Trucks), a little over 4 minutes behind the Spaniard overall this morning, was hit by a mechanical and exited the special. Sebastián Guayasamín (BE Racing) also had an off day, shipping 11'25" to the stage winner. Rebecca Busi avoided mistakes and scored her best result of the week. The Italian rose to second overall, jumping two places in one go. Tomorrow, Busi will have to keep her wits about her, as the Ecuadorian is just 50 seconds behind her South Racing Can-Am and eager to garner championship points. Guayasamín lies second in the class and aims to make the most of the withdrawal of the leader, Yasir Seaidan (MMP), to regain ground before the Moroccan finale.

## FIM STAT: HISTORIC DOUBLE ON THE CARDS

**Tosha Schareina** took his second win of the week today, but there are other reasons why number 2 is in the spotlight. Two Honda riders lead the FIM standings of the Desafío Ruta 40 YPF INFINIA on the eve of the finish: **Ricky Brabec** (Rally GP) and **Romain Dumontier** (Rally 2). HRC, which has just backed the Frenchman in that category, will not regret their choice. Barring any last-minute surprises, Honda will seal their first ever Rally GP/Rally 2 double in Córdoba. Only one manufacturer has pulled off this feat before: KTM at the 2023 Rally of Morocco, won by **Toby Price** in Rally GP and **Bradley Cox** in Rally 2.

## FIA STAT: SMASHING THAT GLASS CEILING

Female competitors had a field day. **Dania Akeel** leapfrogged her teammate **Marcelo Gastaldi** and is now third overall in the Challenger class, although the Italian remains a distinct threat at just 47 seconds. **Rebecca Busi** went one better in SSV, rising two places from fourth to second. Sebastián Guayasamín is not far back (+50") but, beyond him, **Claude Fournier** (MMP) trails the Italian by over an hour. The two women are therefore poised to repeat their performance in the **Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge**, where they both made the podium: **Akeel** third in Challenger and **Busi** third in SSV. The first woman to blaze that trail was **Cristina Gutiérrez**, the second W2RC Challenger since the launch of the championship at the 2022 Dakar.

### DID YOU KNOW? Three titles in one

Firmly in command of the quad race, **Manúel Andujar** is on course for a second consecutive Ruta 40 victory. The Argentinian, who turned 28 this week, could score a double by also winning the Ibero-American championship, held at this single event. Even more importantly, everything seems to be falling into place for

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him to clinch the W2RC World Cup one round before the finale in Morocco. **Andújar** started the rally with a 17-point lead over the Saudi **Hani Alnoumesi**, currently sixth among the W2RC entrants. **Andújar** will be mathematically assured of the crown if he wins and **Alnoumesi** finishes lower than second. The day of glory appears to have arrived for the 2024 Dakar champion, who would close the quad chapter of his career in Córdoba with a hat-trick before his anticipated switch to Challenger or SSV.

### THE LOWDOWN ON TOMORROW'S STAGE FROM THE RACE DIRECTOR, PABLO ELI:

"The final special has the same profile as stage 1. We'll see typical rally tracks where proper handling technique will again be key."

## **Programme:**

• 7 June — stage 5: La Rioja-Córdoba (road section: 301 km / special: 218 km / total: 519 km)

Local time: GMT-3

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