

Paris, 1 December 2022

2023 DAKAR: LIKE A BOSS

Key points:

- The details of the 45th edition of the Dakar, which will take place for the fourth time in Saudi Arabia from 31st December 2022 to 15th January 2023, have been unveiled in a presentation programme (which can be viewed on Dakar.com) in which Sébastien Loeb and Adrien Van Beveren took part, at the invitation of Race Director David Castera.
- The two pretenders for a first title on the Dakar were able to discover the ample sporting challenge awaiting them and give their reactions to a route between two seas, made up of 15 days of racing, including a four-day excursion into the Empty Quarter, taking the total distance to be covered to 8,549 km, of which 4,706 km will be raced against the clock. 365 vehicles are expected at the starting line set up on a Red Sea beach.
- On the fringes of the battles for the titles between the leading lights of the rally-raid discipline tackling a second season of the W2RC, the bivouacs will also play host to around one hundred vehicles as part of the Dakar Classic, the race for consistency reserved for vehicles from the 1980s and 1990s, whose patron this year is Jacky Ickx.

Excitement is building as the big challenge approaches, which is also likely to give the riders, drivers, co-pilots and crews some butterflies in the stomach. To quote a famous film poster, "Be Afraid" seems to be the message of the route for the 2023 Dakar, in light of the programme compiled for a total of fifteen days, including **fourteen real stages preceded by a prologue** contested around the **Sea Camp**, the first new feature of the rally's day-to-day life. Although they have already encountered the shores of the Red Sea since 2020, for the first time the competitors will be brought together for the entire period of scrutineering on an XXL bivouac, in what promises to be a friendly atmosphere. They will then get their teeth in to the sporting challenge as they acquaint themselves with the already familiar sites of **AlUla**, **Ha'il** or **Riyadh**, before spending, as far as they are concerned, four days in the as yet unexplored desert of the **Empty Quarter**: "*this gigantic zone in which sand is king, especially in its most majestic form: dunes,*" insists **David Castera**. Sand will well and truly be the dominant ingredient on the menu, the dessert of which will be served on a beach, in **Dammam**, but this time on the shores of the Arabian Gulf.

Throughout this tour of Saudi Arabia, the leading lights of the discipline will be striving to get the better of each other thanks to their driving skills on the fastest sections but also due to their navigational talents and, even more than usual, their aptitude for extreme endurance, **since a marathon stage is scheduled towards the very end of the rally** (stages 11-12). It is likely that at the end of this testing and tricky exercise the final race hierarchy will have been decided: between the **KTMs** ridden by **Kevin Benavides** and **Matthias Walkner**, the **GasGas** bikes of title holder **Sam Sunderland** and his team-mate **Dany Sanders**, the **Hondas** of **Adrien Van Beveren**, **Ricky Brabec** or **Pablo Quintanilla**, or even the **Husqvarna** ridden by **Skyler Howes** or the **Sherco** of **Lorenzo Santolino**. In the car category, it will also be a test of truth for the hybrid drive **Audis** driven by **Stéphane Peterhansel**, **Carlos Sainz** and **Mattias Ekström**, all determined to go after the title that will be defended by **Nasser Al-Attiyah**, the **Toyota** team leader accompanied by **Yazeed Al-Rajhi** and **Giniel De Villiers**, whilst the **BRXs** driven by **Sébastien Loeb**, **Guerlain Chicherit** and **Orly Terranova** also seem equipped to do battle at the summit of the general rankings.

The struggle between the discipline's heavyweights will be all the more crucial, given that it kicks off the **second season of the World Rally-Raid Championships**, the new world championship format, which in 2022, gave rise to an enthralling duel between **Al-Attiyah** and **Loeb** and a demonstration by **Sam Sunderland** on two wheels. In the other categories, there will also be positions up for grabs for the titles in 2023 for the first year's winners such as **Kees Koolen** in the truck category, **Alexandre Giroud** on his quad, "**Chaleco**" **López** in T3 or young Lithuanian **Rokias Baciūška** in T4. For the first act, the curtain raises at Sea Camp on 31st December...

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