

Ha'il, January 4<sup>th</sup> 2023

## DAKAR 2023: STAGE 4 BARREDA AND LOEB ON THE HUNT

### FOCUS

The fourth stage of the Dakar took place at altitude, with a profile that never dropped below 800 metres and sometimes climbed up to 1,300 metres. The cool weather accompanied the riders, drivers and crews on this 425 km long loop to the west of Ha'il. The previous day's rain significantly changed the nature of the terrain, but not the beauty of the canyons and plateaux visited by the route of the day's special. Tricky navigation in places was one of the challenges as were the dunes that made a plentiful appearance on the day's programme. They were expertly managed by **Joan Barreda**, while **Sébastien Loeb** won by a whisker ahead of **Stéphane Peterhansel** in the car category.

### OUTLINE

The hunt for stage victories is a speciality that requires, if not luck, then at least opportunism. The scenario throughout the day's stage indeed seemed to point towards **Mason Klein**, who has been impressive since the beginning of this 45<sup>th</sup> edition and lived up to his phenomenal potential during most of the day. Spending a long time as one of the openers, the kid performed the task like a battle-hardened pro, picking up the best intermediate times with authority and without complex. However, approximately fifty kilometres from the finishing line, the American was hindered by a fuel pump problem. This setback prevented Klein from picking up his second stage victory, but his tenth placed finish on the day was not detrimental to his still advantageous position in the general rankings: 6<sup>th</sup>, but only 10'05" behind **Daniel Sanders**, who still leads the rally. The misfortune of some makes for the happiness of others and **Joan "Bang Bang" Barreda**, even with a broken big toe, grabbed the 29<sup>th</sup> special of his career, as he lies in wait ready to pounce and obtain a place on the final podium for the very first time... But he still has to negotiate 10 stages. It is not often the case for the Spanish biker, but this year he is proving to be more consistent than **Sébastien Loeb**. The French driver has the talent to blow away any of his rivals in the car category. What he needed today were superhuman biceps to ensure his 17<sup>th</sup> stage victory once his power-steering had given up the ghost during the last twenty kilometres. Due to this bad luck, the man from Alsace was only able to win by 13" in front of **Stéphane Peterhansel**, the unquestionable leader of the Audi clan, and two minutes ahead of general rankings leader **Nasser Al Attiyah**. However, at full speed and in a world without mechanical problems, does **Loeb** have the necessary resources and chutzpah to claw back 93 minutes over the remaining ten stages and almost 3,000 kilometres? This slightly crazy challenge is worth a try, while a more classic duel between the last two title holders, **Al Attiyah** (2022) and "**Peter**" (2021) is taking shape. While the recital in the quad race by **Alexandre Giroud** continues, with a third consecutive stage victory and a lead of more than 47 minutes over **Francisco Moreno** in the general rankings, the situation is much more eventful in the T3 category. After the problems encountered by "**Chaleco**" yesterday, it was **Seth Quintero** who lost a wheel and looks set to slide down the race hierarchy, while **Mitch Guthrie** and **Guillaume de Mevius**, the two quickest drivers on the first loop around Ha'il, are also engaged in a duel in the general rankings. In the T4 race, the youngest competitor on the Dakar, **Eryk Goczał**, picked up his second success on the rally by beating **Gerard Farrés** (see performance of the day), and now occupies 2<sup>nd</sup> position in the general rankings, less than a quarter of an hour behind Brazilian Brésilien **Rodrigo Luppi de Oliveira**. The boy is very much in the reckoning. In the truck race, **Martin Macík** won a third special of the year, but did not disrupt the progress of his countryman **Aleš Loprais** at the top of the general rankings.

### PERFORMANCE OF THE DAY

There was little doubt about it, but **Eryk Goczał** was not satisfied with becoming the youngest stage winner in the history of the Dakar on stage 1. At the tender age of 18 years and 2 months, the Polish driver today obtained his second success and deservedly climbed to 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the general rankings, less than a quarter of an hour behind the leader. Since their arrival on the Dakar in 2021, **Marek** et **Michał Goczał**, respectively the prodigy's father and uncle, have not stopped repeating that when Eryk obtained his driving licence, the best member of the family would be the youngest, and they were not bluffing! This evening, his father has to face up to the misfortune that saw him collide in the dunes with South Racing's Argentinean driver **David Zille**, relegating him to almost 37 minutes behind the leader of the category. With **Michał** trailing by half an hour, it is now on **Eryk's** shoulders that the family's honour rests, a family which gobbled up 8 stages out of 12 last year. For the moment and thanks to the young lad, the **Goczał** clan have taken 3 stages out of 5. The slightly crazy goal of all three of them climbing onto the final podium in Dammam remains alive.

### A CRUSHING BLOW

**Joaquim Rodrigues** was taking part in his 7<sup>th</sup> consecutive Dakar rally. We are obliged to use the past tense, because the Hero Motosports rider exited the Dakar prematurely with a fractured leg after 90 km of the day's special, making it his third withdrawal since 2017. **J-Rod** was the hero of the Indian constructor, the man who ensured the brand their first victory on the Dakar on stage 3. This was not the only mishap for Hero, because **Sebastian Bühler**

ran out of fuel before **Ross Branch** got bogged down with unending mechanical repairs. Only **Franco Caimi** managed to emerge unscathed, finishing 17<sup>th</sup>, a little less than twenty minutes behind **Joan Barreda**. The Argentinean is 13<sup>th</sup> in the general rankings, 48 minutes behind the race leader and the last chance for the team to shine in the overall race hierarchy.

### STAT OF THE DAY: 35

Even if he is behind in the general rankings since suffering brake problems on stage 2, **Martin Macík** is displaying his fine level of performance on the 45<sup>th</sup> edition of the Dakar, and won his fourth stage of the year today, in addition to the three successes previously acquired during his first eight participations as a driver. The Czech nation is in rude health in the category, confirmed by the display of **Aleš Loprais**, who is dominating the general rankings and also has a stage win in the bag, from stage 2. In total, Czech drivers have won 35 stages in the history of the Dakar. The biggest share of this score will remain for some time with **Karel Loprais**, who boasts a little less than half of this amount alone (16), as well as six titles on his roll of honour.

### W2RC: LOEB ON A CRUSADE

Like last year, GasGas can only count on one of its riders alone to win the first leg in 2023. This year, it is **Daniel Sanders** and, despite a day when he was less consistent than the others, he still leads the general rankings. In the Rally 2 class, the race to succeed **Mason Klein** seems to be a duel between his runner-up last year **Romain Dumontier** (HT Rally Husqvarna Racing) and **Paolo Lucci** (BAS World KTM Racing) since **Bradley Cox** exited the rally early due to injury. The Italian triumphed today, but the Frenchman remains in charge of the general rankings ahead of the Italian. In the quad race, the arrival this season of **Manuel Andújar**, who won the Dakar in 2021, is sowing seeds of doubt in the protagonists of season 1, namely **Laisvydas Kancius** and **Pablo Copetti**. The Argentinean currently leads the W2RC rankings. In the car category, following **Guerlain Chicherit's** victory yesterday, it was the turn of **Sébastien Loeb** to bounce back. While his success is no form of consolation for time missed out in the lead on the Dakar, it will perhaps offer him the possibility of 5 points in Dammam, which could make the difference. **Peterhansel** and **Sainz**, both on the day's podium, are also gleaning points for stage wins that could be a game-changer when it comes to the crunch. In the T3 category, the five crews of the Red Bull dream team are taking over, as they occupy the first five places in the general rankings. In the T4 race, world number one **Rokas Baciūška** is for the moment under threat but remains on the provisional podium, behind **Rodrigo Luppi de Oliveira** and **Eryk Goczał**. In the truck category, **Martin Macík** launched his comeback. The Czech driver regained twelve minutes on his direct rival in the championship **Janus Van Kasteren** who only leads by 26 minutes. There are still 30 days of racing in the 2023 championship, so it is all to play for!

### THE MAKINGS OF A CLASSIC

**Juan Morera** and **Lidia Ruba** should not regret giving up their Fiat Panda from last year and switching to a Toyota HDJ80 for their second participation in the Dakar Classic. The Spaniards remain in the lead ahead of three Belgian crews, also equipped with Japanese 4x4s in H3, for vehicles with the highest average. Tomorrow morning, the competitors in the lesser H0 and H1 categories, in often less recent and therefore lower performing vehicles, will tackle two faster regularity tests in which they will have a better chance of expressing themselves. In the afternoon, they will return to the bivouac to take a breather and restore their vehicles to health if they so wish, while the H2 and H3 vehicles will have to deal with two 40 km "dune tests", which will be the biggest portion that awaits them between now and Dammam. Two programmes at opposite ends of the spectrum!

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

**Stéphane Peterhansel: "It's like fighting for four hours"**

*"Today it was the first day without technical problems, without punctures and also no dust or cars to overtake with the dust. It was perfect conditions. There were a lot of dunes and camel grass. If we wanted to get a good time we had to push and take a lot of impacts on the car as well as the body, so you need to be ready for that. We know this, but it's always a surprise just how hard it is inside the car. So, it's like fighting for four hours or something like that. But we did it and I think it's a good result".*

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**PRESS CONTACT:** [pressedakar@aso.fr](mailto:pressedakar@aso.fr)