

Ha'il, January 5th 2023

DAKAR 2023: Van Beveren surges forth, Al Attiyah calmly collects

FOCUS

The exploration of the region around Ha'il continued with a journey south of the city, following a route for a special that was 100% sand, where long stretches of off-road driving forced the competitors to use their navigational skills. Their prowess in reading the roadbook also came into play when selecting choices of direction made tricky by the recent rain on the terrain. **Adrien Van Beveren's** stage win was precisely built on such qualities, whilst **Nasser Al Attiyah** especially focused on his driving skill on sand to taste victory, perhaps the two keys to success on the Dakar!

OUTLINE

Another round is underway, but the cull has hardly begun in the bike category, with the exception of a few favourites who have left the race via the sick bay. On the second loop around Ha'il, a first major navigational challenge faced the bikers. **Adrien Van Beveren** soon proved himself to be a master at this game, with the riders ahead of him on the tracks lacking instinct, starting with opener **Joan Barreda** who was the first to face the difficulties. In any case, whilst the other riders were trying to find the right route, the man from northern France who grew up on the sands of Le Touquet rode solo to a stage victory that puts him back in the hunt for the title. With this first success acquired on the Dakar behind the handlebars of a Honda, the 100th for the Japanese constructor (see stat of the day), **Van Beveren** gained three positions in the general rankings to place himself 4'22" behind **Skyler Howes**, the new rally leader, whilst **Daniel Sanders** had an off day (see a crushing blow). However, the situation is not set in stone, with the first seven riders all within a ten-minute time bracket after 2,000 kilometres of specials. The leader of the pack in the car category can boast a more comfortable cushion on completion of the rally's stay in Ha'il. As the fourth driver to start this morning, **Nasser Al Attiyah** accelerated without forcing the pace, leaving **Stéphane Peterhansel** and **Carlos Sainz** to deal with the tricky navigation and avoiding the camel grass that got in their way. At the finishing line, he achieved the day's best time for the 46th occasion in his career to strengthen his place at the summit of the race hierarchy. **Seth Quintero** can possibly fantasise about figures like this, at the rate he is entering into the statistical record books. The American won his first stage this year in the lightweight prototypes, moving his total up to 19, but it was **Guillaume de Mevius** who took the lead in the general rankings, with an advantage of 7'20" over **Austin Jones**, who dropped back slightly, whilst **Mitch Guthrie** plummeted down the leader board. In the T4 category, **Rokas Baciūška** won the day's stage and closes in on second place in the general rankings, which are still dominated by Brazilian **Rodrigo Luzzi de Oliveira** ahead of **Eryk Goczał**. At the summit of the quad category, **Alexandre Giroud** was not troubled by the success of Francisco Moreno, with the Argentinean now standing in second position 39 minutes behind. **Aleš Loprais** can afford to display the same serenity with a lead of a quarter of an hour over **Martin van den Brink**, who he beat by just 16 seconds over the route of stage 5.

PERFORMANCE OF THE DAY

The return of **Guillaume de Mevius** to the Dakar seems like a quiet form of revenge, after a first participation that saw him shine only occasionally, winning the only stage that his team-mate at the time, **Seth Quintero**, had not gobbled up. However, the Belgian driver was not able to reach the finish among the Red Bull clan. During the year, he accepted the challenge to take on the OT3 to develop, alongside his GRallyTeam, a vehicle likely to be able to go the distance. The story so far is fairly flattering after five stages: even though he has only won one of the specials contested since the start of the rally, he nonetheless sits on top of the general rankings with a slim lead of 7'20" over **Austin Jones**, but already more than an hour's advantage over third-placed **Seth Quintero**. The duel is therefore taking shape with the T4 title holder who has switched to T3 and **De Mevius** seems to have already managed to not mix up speed and haste.

A CRUSHING BLOW

Daniel Sanders had already given the warning, the day before the start at Sea Camp, that he was arriving on his second Dakar at 50% of his physical capacities, following six different operations in 2022 that were required to sufficiently repair his damaged elbow. Sanders was preparing to experience the hardest race of his life. Sitting in 5th in the general rankings on stages 1 and 2, "Chucky" started to scare his rivals by taking control of the rally during the following two stages. However, this morning, the Red Bull GasGas Factory Racing rider woke up in less than top form. He suffered throughout the day and finished almost 27 minutes behind the winner. At the end of the day, Sanders dropped down to 8th place in the provisional general standings and trails **Skyler Howes** by 13'19". Whether it was due to tiredness, a virus or the cold, Daniel underwent examination by the medical team on arrival at the bivouac.

STAT OF THE DAY: 100

With his 3rd stage victory on the Dakar the day after his 32nd birthday, **Adrien Van Beveren** has offered Honda a fine gift for his first Dakar in red: the winged brand's 100th victory on a special. As a result, AVB becomes the 13th

Frenchman to distinguish himself for Honda. France thus enhances its status as the most prolific nation for the constructor, ahead of 5 Italians. It was **Christian Desnoyers** in 1979 who kicked off proceedings for the country where the race was born, by winning the prologue in Monthéry on the first Paris-Dakar. In individual terms, the record holder is **Joan Barreda** who yesterday raised his score in Honda's colours to 21, far ahead of the 9 stage wins for **Brabec**, the 8 by **Neveu** and the 7 by **Lalay** or **Vassard**. There still remain 40 successes to be obtained for Honda in order to equal the 140 victories accomplished by Yamaha and 130 to join KTM with its 230 victories acquired to date.

W2RC: STEADY AS IT GOES FOR CHAMPION AL ATTIYAH

The hierarchy installed in the W2RC is already under dispute after only five stages of the first leg. Indeed, only **Nasser Al Attiyah** seems to be in control of the situation. However, the world champion is already seeing double. **Peterhansel** and **Sainz** have replaced his usual rival **Loeb**. In the T3 category, **Austin Jones** will have no regrets about joining this category because in the provisional rankings he leads his team-mates in the Red Bull Off-Road Jr Team and Red Bull Can-Am Factory. In the T4 category, Rodrigo Luppi de Oliveira from South Racing Can-Am can start to believe in his dream of dancing the samba in Dammam, but his two pursuers **Eryk Goczał** and **Rokas Baciuška** are hot on his heels. In the truck category, the battle between **Janus Van Kasteren** and **Martin Macík** is now in the favour of the Dutchman who has regained six minutes over the Czech driver. In the bike category, **Skyler Howes** seems to be building on the momentum of his impeccable end to last season, yet there are ten riders who can also dream of success, ten within ten minutes within the top 10. In the Rally2 class, the fall suffered by HT Rally Raid Husqvarna Racing's **Paolo Lucci** has given breathing space to the runner-up in the 2022 season. BAS World KTM Racing's **Romain Dumontier** has regained the provisional lead in the championship. As for the quads, the illustrious newcomer **Manuel Andújar** is bearing the consequences of the consistency shown by **Laysvidas Kancius** and **Pablo Copetti**.

THE MAKINGS OF A CLASSIC

The French who like to tease their friends across the borders will tell you it is a Belgian tale. Today, the Classic lost the 3rd placed crew in the general rankings due to a broken crankshaft, which takes the biscuit for advocates of 100% Toyota parts who only swear by Japanese reliability. The father and son team of the **Clayes** had returned to the rally to get rid of bad luck that had previously haunted them. A puncture several kilometres from the finishing line saw them drop from the top 20 to a final 34th place last year. Their return aimed to rid them of this bitter taste that their experience left them with, still with the same vehicle, but with a new engine; a 100% original engine, but this time with a turbo. *"We'd checked everything, from the internal pressure through to the con rods. We've driven 4,000 km here without the oil level even moving"*. But there you have it, if it is not broken, do not fix it... Vehicle 745 had to be towed home this evening. **Tom**, the son, was the most disappointed, whilst his father **Eric** remained more philosophical: *"There's nothing to say, things happen, that's just how it is,"* he said, climbing out of his Toyota without the slightest regret.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Stéphane Peterhansel: "It was one of the hardest stages in my life"

"For me, it was one of the hardest stages in my life. I don't know why. Because the car was so hard with the suspension yesterday, we changed the suspension, so maybe the shocks were not good, or the rain in the sand made it harder than normally, but something about it was really not nice. We took a lot of impacts on the back of our necks, so it was not an easy stage for sure".

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