

Ha'il, January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2023

## DAKAR 2023: Sanders and Chicherit, highway to Ha'il

### FOCUS

Today, the Dakar navigated through lands steeped in history, setting off from one of the centres of Nabatean civilisation on the way to Ha'il, which was a crossroads of commercial routes linking Europe to Asia. For the Dakar riders, drivers and crews, who had to tackle sometimes torrential weather conditions through the majestic canyons surrounding the sandy and sometimes rocky tracks, the challenge also involved having the capacity to focus on navigation where many criss-crossing tracks made it easy to get confused. **Daniel Sanders** proved to be a master at this game, displaying perfect regularity to win a fourth stage on the Dakar, just like **Guerlain Chicherit**, who began his roll of honour in 2006! Heavy rain shortened the stage to 377 kilometres for many of the riders, drivers and crews.

### OUTLINE

It may be obvious, but fighting to win the title on the Dakar first and foremost requires thoughtfulness. It is not sure that **Ricky Brabec** forgot this major rule, but the American had an encounter with misfortune and joined the list of major favourites who have exited the race prematurely. The Honda rider fell after 274 km. With painful cervical vertebrae, he was transported to hospital, both conscious and able to move, in Ha'il for further medical examinations. Following **Sam Sunderland**, within the space of three days, the rally has lost two of its former winners. Nevertheless, the pretenders for the crown continue to take their place, starting with **Daniel Sanders**, who posted the best intermediate times throughout the special before winning for the fourth time in his career on a stage of the Dakar, also taking the lead in the rally. The Australian's lead in the general rankings was limited by the efforts of young **Mason Klein**, who benefited from the new rules awarding bonuses to the openers, to limit the damage and allow them to have a chance at outright victory (see stat of the day). Whilst the leaders in the bike race were relatively spared by the rain and hail which swept through the region, the weather conditions forced the organisers to shorten the special in order to preserve the emergency intervention capacities. The eternal lesson about speed and haste once again applied to **Carlos Sainz**, who was the race leader this morning, but was dethroned and washed out on his arrival at CP 3 (after 377 km). **Nasser Al Attiyah**, who acquired a certain sense of caution long before his 20<sup>th</sup> participation on the Dakar, enjoyed a good day without forcing the issue and took the lead in the rally, ahead of **Yazeed Al Rajhi** (13'20" behind) and **Stéphane Peterhansel** (20'45" behind). The quickest driver on the special was nonetheless **Guerlain Chicherit**, who can take consolation for his downfall yesterday by winning the fourth special of his career, ten years since his last success in Argentina in Tucuman. In the quad race, **Alexandre Giroud** took advantage of the mishaps suffered by his main rival, Argentinean **Manuel Andújar**, to open up a gap in the general rankings. The situation is much less certain in the T3 race, where **Austin Jones** won his first special in the category, which also witnessed a major loser with the disappearance from the respectable places of "**Chaleco**" **López**. The general rankings are now dominated by **Seth Quintero**, who holds a one-minute lead over **Guillaume de Mévius**. In the T4 class, **Marek Goczał** picked up a second consecutive stage victory and sits on top of a provisional podium on which his son **Eryk**, the youngest competitor on the Dakar, occupies 3<sup>rd</sup> place. In the truck race, **Martin Macík** won a third special on this 45<sup>th</sup> edition of the rally, but the time he lost yesterday means his countryman **Aleš Loprais** retains the lead of the general rankings.

### PERFORMANCE OF THE DAY

**Yazeed Al Rajhi** may well be racing against the clock on the Dakar, but the saying that the West has the watch and the East has the time may well illustrate the Saudi driver's rise to prominence since his debut in 2015. In the shadow of stars such as **Al Attiyah** and **Loeb**, **Yazeed** produced a 2022 season that was indicative of his determination and ambitions. The Overdrive Racing driver, third on the Dakar, third in the W2RC and the recent winner of the bajas world cup, also began the 45<sup>th</sup> edition of the Dakar with third position in the general rankings on stage 1, less than two minutes behind the leader. With 12<sup>th</sup> place on yesterday's stage, which saw plenty of pretenders to the crown fall by the wayside, he contented himself with taking it smoothly and accepting a small drop to 6<sup>th</sup> place in the general rankings, a little less than 28 minutes behind **Carlos Sainz**. With second place on the day's special and the stage's leading Toyota driver, he has climbed back up the general rankings to 2<sup>nd</sup> position, 13'20" behind the first place occupied by his team-mate and title holder. The route is still long to Dammam and **Yazeed**, as a local boy knows this better than anyone in the caravan, but he can count on the reliability of his Toyota from which he draws his inspiration year upon year.

### A CRUSHING BLOW

On the Dakar – and this is no secret – it can all go wrong very quickly. One day you are leading the general rankings and believe in your chances of getting your hands on the title, but the next day you make big losses in a matter of seconds, especially when you are a little too greedy. **Carlos Sainz**, among the most experienced competitors in the discipline, knows this only too well, having come unstuck five times in a row between 2013 and 2017. Today,

he narrowly escaped a harsh outcome. It had all started so well for “El Matador” who was battling for the provisional podium at the beginning of the stage until after 213 km. Due to problems with a rear left suspension cup, **Sainz** and his co-pilot **Lucas Cruz** had to grind to a halt and carry out repairs. The result was a time loss of 45 minutes. The Audi RS Q e-tron E2 was able to continue the race, but the minutes seemed to be slipping away from them. Fortunately, Sainz was not forced to exit the race prematurely this time, but his hopes of finishing on the highest step of the final podium are disappearing into the distance. However, the Dakar can sometimes prove to be uncompromising and nobody is safe from a mishap, including his rivals.

#### STAT OF THE DAY: 5'52"

After winning the first special of his career on the Dakar at the age of 21 years, **Mason Klein** never ceases to amaze his elders. By opening the way, he set off on a 2WD version of Pacman until the refuelling point, gobbling up all the bonuses available for the first time to reward the riders opening the way for their colleagues. Out in front alone, the kid was first through all the way points and collected all the 5'52" of bonuses on offer until refuelling after 240 km, after which there were no more points. At this phase of the race, **Mason** had gained more bonus points than the time he had lost to **Daniel Sanders**. A positive points balance of 7" allowed him to limit the damage, which was the spirit of this reform. Skyler Howes, his friend and mentor, who was the third rider to set off this morning, accomplished a similar feat. At the finish of the stage after approximately 450 km, **Klein** was still opening the special and had managed to navigate faultlessly. Finishing only 6'59" behind the day's winner, he declared: *I like opening. I love it, I don't know why. I prefer it. I feel I make less mistakes*". This contrasts with the opinions of his peers, for whom it resembles a punishment! This kid is quite unlike the other riders. This evening, he lost the lead in the general rankings to Sanders but remains 2<sup>nd</sup> on the Dakar, scarcely more than 4 minutes behind.

#### W2RC: A WASH OUT FOR SOME, A STRAIGHT FLUSH FOR OTHERS

Following current FIM title holder **Sam Sunderland** two days ago, it was the turn of his runner-up **Ricky Brabec** to leave the Dakar prematurely and miss out on the biggest potential harvest of points in the season. There has been a distinct reshuffling of the pack after only three stages of the championship. On the contrary, in the car category, **Nasser Al Attiyah** and **Yazeed Al Rajhi**, the two spearheads of the Toyota team who won their constructor the trophy in 2022, currently sit solidly in the lead on the first leg. Thanks to his victory today, **Guerlain Chicherit** has begun to collect stage victory points, which could pay off when it comes time to the crunch, as there are still 11 stages to go before the final finishing line!

#### THE MAKINGS OF A CLASSIC

The Classic did not escape the rain that soaked the Dakar today. After the first two regularity tests occurred without any nasty effects from the weather, the level of water in the river beds took on proportions that incited the race management to decide to halt the race at CP1 after 318 km. However, there was somewhat of a great escape for the **Galpins**, winners in 2022, who had already set off for the next part of the programme! It was possible to recover both of them and they had the privilege of leading the caravan convoy to the bivouac, in the great tradition of the race, accustomed to this kind of strategic retreat which is also part of its history.

#### QUOTE OF THE DAY

**Mason Klein:** *"I prefer opening, I feel I make less mistakes"*

*"It was really good to open, I enjoyed every second of it. It's so nice making all your own decisions. I felt really in control. I don't know if I've ever navigated any better. This is a really good day for me. I like opening. I love it, I don't know why. I prefer it. I feel I make less mistakes. I'm doing the work and it's nice. The bonuses are nice. It's been really great so far. The terrain was amazing. Not so rocky as yesterday. It was just a really good ride, I guess. Really nice views and I actually got to have a good look around today. The weather was perfect for riding, I think. It wasn't too cold, it was amazing, a perfect day".*

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