

FIA-FIM WORLD RALLY-RAID CHAMPIONSHIPS THE FRONT-RUNNERS PAD THEIR LEAD

Key points:

- The third stage of the Desafío Ruta 40 YPF followed a 460 km loop around Belén.
- The duel between Nasser Al Attiyah (Toyota Gazoo Racing) and Yazeed Al Rajhi (Overdrive Racing) heated up again in the car category, with the pendulum swinging in the world champion's favour by 1'41". What is more, the Toyota factory driver also put over 10 minutes into Yacopini (Overdrive Racing), greatly diminishing the threat posed by the Argentinian. The gap between the Qatari and the Albiceleste in the general standings exploded from 17" to 10'28". Al Rajhi clung on to third place, now 18'12" down.
- In T3, Mattias Ekström (South Racing Can-Am) was ready to rock and roll again, but he had to bail out of the stage due to a mechanical hiccup. Mitchell Guthrie (Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team USA) bagged another victory, this time ahead of his teammate Austin Jones and João Ferreira (X-raid Yamaha). Guthrie stretched his overall lead over his sidekick Seth Quintero to 7'27".
- Among the RallyGP motorbikes competing in the W2RC, Luciano Benavides (Husqvarna Factory Racing) took his second consecutive win over Ricky Brabec (Monster Energy Honda). Benavides now leads the W2RC standings ahead of the American, who in turn is just 4 seconds clear of Ross Branch (Hero MotoSports). Adrien Van Beveren (Monster Energy Honda) fell off the provisional podium. Sam Sunderland (Red Bull GasGas Factory Racing) withdrew from the race.
- Michael Docherty (BAS World KTM Racing) scooped up victory in the Rally2 stage by 1'25" over his teammate Bradley Cox. In the general standings, Cox defended his lead over the Duust riders Konrad Dąbrowski and Jean-Loup Lèpan. The world championship leader, Paolo Lucci, did not line up for the start this morning after crashing in the previous special.

AL ATTIYAH GETS SOME BREATHING ROOM

After the puncture-marred stage 2, regular service resumed with **Nasser Al Attiyah** and **Yazeed Al Rajhi** scrapping for seconds throughout the stage. It was the Qatari who came out on top today by 1'41" over the Saudi. Outdone yesterday by the local **Juan Cruz Yacopini**, the world champion, who held a measly 17-second margin over the driver from Mendoza in the overall, got some breathing space. The Argentinian clung on to second place in the ranking, where he now trails the leader by 10'28". **Al Rajhi**, still in third place, also closed in on the *Albiceleste*, but he now lags behind **Al Attiyah** by 18'12". **Sebastián Halpern** threw in the towel after succumbing to transmission issues. The withdrawal of the Mini of the two-time DR40 winner is likely to have two consequences at the finish in Salta. First, a new name will be added to the car honour roll. And second, Toyota will probably widen its gap in the manufacturers' championship and perhaps even pop some champagne for its second title in Salta, before the finale.

Mattias Ekström suffered the same fate as **Halpern**, but in T3. A busted front differential bearing knocked the Swede out of the special, clearing the way for **Mitchell Guthrie** to take his second stage win. **Austin Jones** finished 1'58" behind his teammate, a mere 4" ahead of **João Ferreira**. **Guthrie** increased his overall lead to 5'54" over his wingman, **Seth Quintero**, and 17'39" over **Cristina Gutiérrez** (Red Bull Can-Am Factory).

In T4, **Shinsuke Umeda** (Xtreme Plus) flew over from Japan to rake in some precious championship points. He is still in the game and hopes to make it to Salta to narrow as much as possible his deficit to the leader of the championship, **Rokas Baciuška** (Red Bull Can-Am Factory).

LUCIANO BENAVIDES PULLS AWAY

While **Tosha Schareina** (Honda) took his third win in a row, he is not eligible for W2RC points, so it was **Luciano Benavides**, **Ricky Brabec**, **Ross Branch** and **Toby Price** (Red Bull KTM Factory Racing) who put on a show in the W2RC. **Benavides** pushed his overall lead to 15'40" over **Brabec**, who feels the heat from **Branch** just 4 seconds behind him. **Adrien Van Beveren** is 17'39" down on **Benavides** after the American and the Botswanan dislodged him from the podium. **Sam Sunderland** was in pain when he exited the bivouac this morning. The reigning world champion decided to withdraw more than a hundred kilometres into the stage, feeling physically unable to ride safely. As per the rules, the GasGas no. 1 will not continue the race tomorrow. Coming after the exit of the KTM factory rider

Walkner yesterday, it was another crushing blow for the Austrian teams, now reduced to just two riders in contention: **Price**, who is over an hour behind the race leader due to a mechanical, and **Luciano Benavides**, Mattighofen's last hope of snatching the win in the DR40. This is in stark contrast with Honda, which still has all its riders in the game ahead of stage 4, boosting its prospects for victory in the race and in the manufacturers' championship. Two Honda works riders will be able to earn points, whereas only **Toby Price**, who is stuck in the doldrums, can score for the oranges, who currently top the manufacturer ranking.

Michael Docherty scooped up victory in the Rally2 stage by 1'25" over his teammate **Bradley Cox**. In the general standings, Cox now leads the Duust riders **Konrad Dąbrowski** and **Jean-Loup Lapan** by 24'12" and 31'53", respectively. **Romain Dumontier** (HT Rally Raid Husqvarna Racing) is fourth overall, within a minute of his countryman. **Paolo Lucci** (BAS World KTM Racing) did not show up for the start this morning after sustaining a nasty crash yesterday. The world championship front-runner leaves the door wide open for **Dumontier**, who trails him by only 3 points.

Manuel Andújar remained in control of the W2RC quad competition in the DR40. **Juraj Varga** stopped on the track for a mechanical problem and lost over an hour and a half to **Rodolfo Guillioi** today. The Guatemalan cut his overall deficit to the Slovak to 16 minutes.

TOMORROW'S STAGE

Stage 4 features the dunes of Fiambalá. The start will take place in a dried-up *río* with a lot of twists and turns to watch out for. A sector with off-road navigation in a sandy area with camel grass will come up next. All this will sap the strength of the competitors before they even get to the second part of the special, centred on the famous dunes of Fiambalá, which make up 60 to 70% of the latter half of the course. The dunes will be interspersed with plateaus decked with camel grass. A long road section stretching for about two and a half hours will bring down the curtain on yet another taxing stage.

TOMORROW'S PROGRAMME*:

- Stage 4: Belén – Belén
- Total: 581 km
- Road sections: 236 km (9 + 227)
- Special: 345 km
- Special start times:
 - first FIM start: 8:00 am
 - first FIA start: 9:45 am

Follow stage 4 [live HERE](#)

* Local time: GMT -3

Stage 3 results [HERE](#)

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