

Belén, 31 August 2023

FIA-FIM WORLD RALLY-RAID CHAMPIONSHIPS THE LEADERS TAKE THE SPOILS WITH ONE DAY TO GO

Key points:

- The fourth stage of the Desafío Ruta 40 YPF took the field on another loop around Belén climaxing on the dunes of Fiambalá, which the Dakar made famous around the world.
- Nasser Al Attiyah (Toyota Gazoo Racing) won the car race with 2'14" in hand over Yazeed Al Rajhi (Overdrive Racing) and 4'14" over Juan Cruz Yacopini in the other Hilux. The Qatari also extended his overall lead to 15'42" over the rising star from Argentina and 20'26" over the Saudi.
- João Ferreira (X-raid Yamaha) claimed the T3 special by 1'50" over Mitch Guthrie (Red Bull Off-Road Jr Team USA) and 2'40" over "Chaleco" López (Red Bull Can-Am Factory). Seth Quintero had to retire from the stage and no longer poses a threat to Guthrie's title ambitions.
- Among the RallyGP motorbikes competing in the W2RC, Luciano Benavides (Husqvarna Factory Racing) prevailed over Ricky Brabec (Monster Energy Honda) and Toby Price (Red Bull KTM Factory Racing). Benavides now leads the W2RC standings by 17'26" over the American and 23'36" over Ross Branch (Hero MotoSports).
- Michael Docherty (BAS World KTM Racing) again scooped up victory in the Rally2 stage, finishing more than ten minutes ahead of his Bradley Cox but failed to loosen his teammate's iron grip on the lead in the category.

A TOYOTA HAT-TRICK

The dreaded Fiambalá stage failed to shake up the duel between the big kahunas of the W2RC, **Nasser Al Attiyah** and **Yazeed Al Rajhi**, who reached Belén with a difference of 2'14" in favour of the world champion. **Juan Cruz Yacopini** finished 4'14" down behind the wheel of the other Hilux. The Qatari also extended his overall lead to 15'42" over the rising star from Argentina and 20'26" over the Saudi. **Al Rajhi** slashed his deficit to the second place to 4'44" with one stage to go. The three Hiluxes registered for the constructor championship in the DR40 also top the board in the race.

Seth Quintero (Red Bull Off-Road Junior Team USA) started off on the wrong foot in T3. The W2RC leader, second overall in the DR40 this morning, had no choice but to head back to the bivouac after his intercooler broke down near the 10-kilometre mark. **João Ferreira** (X-raid Yamaha) claimed the special by 1'50" over **Mitch Guthrie** (Red Bull Off-Road Jr Team USA) and 2'40" over "**Chaleco**" **López** (Red Bull Can-Am Factory). **Quintero** no longer poses a threat to his teammate **Guthrie** in the fight for the title. **Cristina Gutiérrez** (Red Bull Can-Am Factory), 22'39" behind the leader, and **Austin Jones** (Red Bull Off-Road Jr Team USA), 32'02" off the pace, are now the closest pursuers of the American, who is likely to rocket up the ranking of the championship, where he now sits third, behind **Quintero** and **Jones**.

Shinsuke Umeda (Xtreme Plus) flipped and damaged his Polaris in T4. He will be able to continue the race after making it to the bivouac.

LUCIANO BENAVIDES CALLS THE SHOTS

Luciano Benavides put an end to **Tosha Schareina**'s three-win streak, romping home 36 seconds ahead of the Honda rider. In the battle for the W2RC, **Benavides** edged out **Ricky Brabec** in a repeat of yesterday's result. **Toby Price** came in third at 4'40". **Brabec** trails the Argentinian by 17'26" in the overall. **Ross Branch** defended his podium spot, now 6'10" down on the Honda factory rider, who padded his margin today. A mechanical knocked **Sebastian Bühler** (Hero MotoSports) out of the race near the finish, bringing the number of RallyGP riders still in contention to eight. The German's pain is **Price**'s gain. The Australian has been soldiering on following his mechanical troubles in stage 2 in a bid to grab every single championship point he can get his hands on. He now ranks seventh among the W2RC-registered RallyGP riders in the DR40. Although he landed in Argentina as the championship leader with 62 points, **Benavides** is in second place and within striking distance with 55 points. The FIM points scale (25, 20, 16, 13, 11, 10, 9...) will come into play in Salta tomorrow, where the Argentinian could rise to the top of the classification in front of his home crowds. If he pulls it off, the **Benavides** family will have a blast, as **Kevin** is also hosting a bash to celebrate his second Dakar triumph with his team!

In Rally2, **Michael Docherty** made a statement today by setting the fastest raw time —not counting bonuses— among all the Rally2 and RallyGP riders. The South African was 6 seconds quicker than **Benavides**, who took the lead in the final standings thanks to his opening bonus. **Bradley Cox** remains in command of the overall by 28 minutes over **Konrad Dąbrowski** (Duust Rally) and 39'14" over **Romain Dumontier** (HT Rally Raid Husqvarna Racing), who knocked fellow Frenchman **Jean-Loup Lepan** (Duust Rally) from the provisional podium of the DR40.

Rally3 is the on-ramp to the championship for riders who want to test themselves against the champions on a budget with a simple enduro motorbike equipped with a larger tank. **Ardit Kurtaj** is an Austrian of Albanian origins who got into rally raids in 2018. He raced in Europe before jumping into the W2RC pool in 2022 in the Rally of Morocco in Rally2 with the HT Rally Raid Husqvarna Racing team. **Kurtaj** has since set his sights on winning the top title in Rally3 to prepare his Dakar debut, which would be a dream come true. There were three Rally3 riders in the Sonora Rally, the first of the three rounds on their calendar. They are again three in the DR40. As in Mexico, where he won, **Kurtaj** rules the roost in his category. If **Kurtaj** were to take part in the Dakar, he claims he would be the first Albanian to do so.

Manuel Andújar remained comfortably in control of the W2RC quad competition in the DR40. A mechanical took **Juraj Varga** out of the special. **Rodolfo Guillioli** moved up to second overall, well out of reach of the Slovak, who received stage penalties.

TOMORROW'S STAGE

The finale will take the DR40 caravan due north to Salta. The special will kick off with an off-track section in the Santa María river, which has been as popular as Fiambalá in the Dakar and the DR40. Competitors will have to stay on high alert as they alternate between dry and wet areas in this mosaic of flat *ríos* packed with sand. The first part of the special will feel like a blur. Cafayate, a town famous for its wines, marks the end of this first part. The second one will set course for Quebrada de Las Flechas, a regional tourist attraction known for its canyons. The race will climb up to an altitude of 2,500 metres on WRC-style mountain tracks. This is where the special will be decided. The competitors will then feast their eyes on some of the most jaw-dropping landscapes in the region, in Cuesta del Obispo, which lies on the 123 km road section leading to Salta. The city where the Benavides brothers were born and bred has hosted the Dakar three times.

TOMORROW'S PROGRAMME*:

- Stage 5: Belén – Salta
- Total: 563 km
- Road sections: 305 km (182 + 123)
- Special: 258 km
- Special start times:
 - first FIM start: 8:00 am
 - first FIA start: 9:45 am

Follow stage 5 [live HERE](#)

* Local time: GMT -3

Stage 4 results [HERE](#)

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